

Key Decision Required:	No	In the Forward Plan:	No
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CABINET

1 AUGUST 2014

REFERENCE REPORT FROM RURAL PROJECTS PANEL

A.2 CHINESE SKY LANTERNS AND THEIR EFFECT ON THE RURAL COMMUNITY

(Report prepared by Ian Ford and Lizzie Ridout)

BACKGROUND

In the light of a press statement issued by the Leader of the Council, a special meeting of the Rural Projects Panel was held on 16 July 2014 to discuss the subject of 'Chinese Sky Lanterns' and their impact on rural communities, especially farmers' crops.

Following discussion, the Panel decided to make recommendations to Cabinet, the text of which are set out below.

At the further request of the Panel, the Chairman of the Corporate Management Committee (Councillor Steady) was consulted and requested, as a matter of urgency and on behalf of that Committee, to endorse the Panel's recommendations to Cabinet. Councillor Steady gave that endorsement.

The National Farmers' Union is supporting the initiative and has provided the following quote:

"We are pleased to see Tendring District Council taking this stance on Chinese Lanterns. People who release them don't realise just how dangerous they can be - they can cause fires on an industrial scale and kill or injure farm animals. There is now a huge groundswell for something to be done. We are calling for them to be banned and we will continue to lobby Government until action is taken."

Essex County Fire and Rescue Service is also providing its support and Paul Hill, Assistant Chief Fire Officer said:

"Quite simply, Chinese lanterns have been known to cause fires, and some significant fires."

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS / COMMENTS TO CABINET

Cabinet is now asked to consider the recommendations of the Rural Projects Panel, as detailed below, and determine its response if any:

It is **RECOMMENDED** to **CABINET** that:

- (i) As a matter of urgency, the Council takes all necessary steps, including the making of by-laws, to ban the use or release of lighted Chinese sky lanterns (or similar) on all land owned by Tendring District Council and promotes the responsible use of such lanterns in general across the District;
- (ii) Parish and Town Councils in the District be requested to follow the example of Great Bentley Parish Council and prohibit the use or release of lighted Chinese sky lanterns on land in their respective ownerships; and

- (iii) The Licensing Committee be requested to consider the prohibition of the use or release of lighted Chinese sky lanterns at events licensed under the Licensing Act 2003, in pursuance of the Licensing Objectives for the Prevention of Public Nuisance and the Promotion of Public Safety.

PORTFOLIO HOLDER'S COMMENTS / RECOMMENDATIONS TO CABINET

Comments will be provided directly at the meeting.

APPENDICES

Appendix – Briefing note submitted to the special meeting of the Rural Projects Panel held on 16 July 2014.

BRIEFING NOTE ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE RURAL PROJECTS PANEL

SPECIAL MEETING - WEDNESDAY 16 JULY 2014

CHINESE LANTERNS – THE IMPACT ON RURAL COMMUNITIES

(Report prepared by Lizzie Ridout)

A Chinese or Sky Lantern is a collapsible paper lantern, typically around 100cm high and with a diameter of approximately 60cm, which consists of a candle or a fuel cell filled with paraffin wax suspended inside a frame of wire or bamboo. When lit, they float gently upwards and drift away, landing when the fuel has run out. They can reach up to 1000m in height and can drift for several miles depending on weather conditions. It is estimated that 200,000 lanterns are sold in the UK each year.

The lanterns are at their most dangerous in the summer because of drier conditions.

There is increasing concern about the possible impacts of lanterns on livestock and the environment as a whole. Since the lanterns contain a naked flame, there are concerns about the fire risk to buildings, property and crops from uncontrolled landing. Additional concerns include the perceived risks to animal welfare through ingestion of debris, litter in the countryside, the sea and on the coastline, risks to aviation and impacts on coastal rescue services.

These concerns have been expressed nationally by a wide range of stakeholders, including the farming and aviation sectors and the UK fire and rescue services.

Lanterns float up into the air and remain airborne for as long as they are filled with hot air. Therefore, they should only fall back to the ground when the fuel cell flame is extinguished. In practice, the evidence available suggests that this is not always the case, and lanterns sometimes drift back to land whilst still alight. This can be due to inherent design and construction weaknesses and/or to ineffective launching procedures or release in high winds.

The result is that the lantern could fall to the ground whilst still alight and could set fire to the canopy – particularly if the lantern is not made of flame retardant material. This could then become a significant fire hazard.

In 2013, the largest fire ever seen in the West Midlands (Smethwick) was thought to have been caused by a Chinese lantern. More than 200 firefighters attended the blaze at a recycling depot, and the damage caused was estimated to cost £6m.

In a nationwide survey in 2011, a third of Britain's fire brigades said they had received emergency callouts to extinguish lanterns. Damage caused included scorched gardens and roofs. Firefighters said they had experienced a number of false alarms as the lanterns had burned themselves out before they arrived.

Farmers' groups and animal charities have long pushed for the lanterns to be withdrawn from sale, arguing that animals can eat parts after they have landed. A number of firms in the UK offer what they describe as eco-friendly lanterns, where the frame is made from bamboo rather than wire, but the RSPCA argues these are still potentially harmful.