

Purpose and Scope

This policy sets out conditions for the use of small, unmanned aircraft (SUA) – most commonly referred to as ‘drones’ – on and over Trust properties. It covers drones, radio-controlled airplanes, radio-controlled multi-rotor copters, model rockets, and all other portable aerial craft and vehicles.

The Trust welcomes responsible drone operators and encourages a spirit of goodwill and cooperation to ensure the safe enjoyment of our precious places.

Drone operators, both commercial and recreational, accessing the Trust’s sites have a responsibility to ensure the safety of our people, wildlife, and places at all times. Working together, we can manage drone usage effectively to protect our sensitive animals and plants, historic properties and landscapes, and the safety and enjoyment of our visitors.

Permission must always be requested in advance to launch or land drones on Trust land. The Trust also asks that permission is sought in advance to fly over Trust sites to ensure that there are no safety conflicts or considerations such as special events, or nesting and/or breeding wildlife. Please remember that disturbing protected species is a crime.

Recreational drone users should contact the site(s) they wish to fly at directly to seek permission, while commercial operators should contact the Filming Manager. Further details are below.

All drone operators should follow the guidance outlined below.

1. Introduction

The National Trust for Scotland (Trust) cares for a wide variety of places and landscapes and recognises that the use of small unmanned aircraft (SUAs) can be a useful way of exploring Trust properties. The safe use of these aircraft (also known as Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) – most commonly referred to as ‘drones’ – can enable visitors to learn more about our sites, to explore and enjoy their scale, and can also provide a means of enhanced access for visitors. In addition, drones are an important conservation tool for use by Trust staff and contractors. Using drones safely can help more people learn about and enjoy our Trust places, but their use must not interfere with or endanger wildlife, other visitors’ experiences, or risk damage to our priceless built and natural heritage.

The Trust has a responsibility to care for and protect our sites as part of Scotland's heritage. To help us manage the risks of drone use, we ask that all users, both commercial and recreational, ask permission well in advance (giving at least five working days' notice) before proceeding with flights at any of our sites. In most cases we will seek to reduce the impact on other visitors by permitting flights before 10:00 am and after 4:00 pm when visitor numbers are fewer and less disturbance will be caused. Recreational drone operators should contact the site(s) at which they wish to fly directly by email. Contact details for each Trust site can be found on the 'Planning your visit' tab of the relevant property [on our website](#). Proof of having Public Liability Insurance of £2 million GBP minimum, regardless of the size and weight of the drone, must be submitted along with your request to launch and/or land at any of our sites. The relevant site manager will decide if the proposed flight(s) may go ahead, with input from the Trust's Filming Manager if required, and will respond with a decision or a suggested alternative within five working days. Commercial drone operators should contact the Trust's Filming Manager directly by email at filming@nts.org.uk to discuss the proposed arrangements and relevant fees.

Please wait until the appropriate authorisation has been received before proceeding with any flights, and understand that not all proposed flights may be possible. This is to ensure that flights can be scheduled at times that will not disrupt wildlife or conflict with events such as weddings or commercial film projects. Helping us to manage the number of drones on-site will provide a better flying experience for all drone users, as well as ensuring that drones are only being used during quieter times to manage other visitors' experiences, to keep our sensitive wildlife from being disturbed (especially during the critical nesting and breeding seasons, which can be a legal offence), and to protect our buildings and landscapes from any accidental damage.

Due to the small footprint of and wildlife considerations at some of our sites, it may not be possible to allow requests to fly. For example, permission will not be given to film at St Kilda due to the environmental sensitivity of the site. Signage may indicate that drones are not suitable for use at certain places. Drone users should adhere to any signage at properties outlining no-fly zones, wildlife considerations, guidance for operators, etc. There may be times when filming cannot be permitted at certain properties, and we ask that drone users are respectful of our decisions, which are always made with safety in mind. To ensure the safety of our people, wildlife, and places, we will request operators not practicing safe and appropriate use of drones to leave our sites.

Inappropriate or unsafe operation of drones can cause damage to built heritage and gardens; can disturb wildlife, habitats, and livestock; can disrupt scheduled events and filming activities; and can negatively impact visitor enjoyment. These risks may be more or less prevalent at different properties, and at different times of the year: for example, the risk of drones causing detriment to wildlife is much higher at St Abb's Head, especially during nesting and breeding season. Permission must be sought for each time you intend to fly a drone, even if you have visited the same site previously.

All users must follow the CAA restrictions and guidance for drone usage including adherence to its [Drone and Model Aircraft Code](#) and acquiring the appropriate licenses

and insurance. While some small drones may be of a size that falls outwith legislative requirements (e.g. those weighing 250g or less), in the interests of safety and the protection of our heritage assets we request that all drone operators (recreational and commercial) flying on or over our properties comply with these as well. We require proof of Public Liability Insurance of £2 million GBP minimum, regardless of the drone size and weight, to be submitted along with your request to launch and/or land at any of our sites. To protect our sites, permission to launch and/or land at any of our sites will not be granted without having this valid insurance in place.

Our use of drones

The use of drones can be valuable to the Trust's conservation activities: for example, drones can be used to carry out survey work that would otherwise be difficult to attempt, compile 3D mapping of historic sites, enable us to carry out wildlife counts, and allow us to get a better understanding of large sites. We use drones in our work, both directly by trained members of staff and indirectly by licensed contractors, and will hold ourselves to the same standards that we ask of external drone users, for example using drones at times designed to minimise visitor impact (e.g. before 10:00 am and after 4:00 pm whenever possible) and adhering to the CAA Drone Code.

2. Policy Statement

The Trust welcomes the responsible use of drones but has a duty to protect the natural and built heritage it is entrusted with and will only permit drone operators to launch and land drones where this will not damage built heritage, the natural environment, or negatively impact wildlife or the visitor experience.

All recreational drone users must seek permission to launch and land drones at Trust properties from the site(s) they wish to visit directly by email in advance. The Trust also asks that advance permission is sought to fly over our sites. The Trust asks that drone users give site(s) at least five working days' notice, especially during peak visitor periods, and that users wait until they have received permission before proceeding with any flights. The contact details for each of the Trust's sites can be found [on the Trust website under the 'Planning your visit' tab for each location](#). Applicants should expect to wait at least five working days for a response.

Short-notice applications may not be considered in time so please ensure that adequate time is allowed to process any request. Applicants should not proceed to fly without having the appropriate authorisation in place.

If permission is granted to launch or land a drone at a Trust property, please ensure that all instructions are followed, including any special conditions. These will be detailed in the Trust's response. Please consider making a donation to the Trust to help us fund the ongoing care and protection of the places that you are visiting us to enjoy. You can donate directly on our website at: www.nts.org.uk/support-us/donate.

3. Policy Guidance

Guidance for recreational users

Do	Do not
Ask permission in advance – make sure you have received our authorisation before you fly	Fly without our permission – there may be site-specific reason(s) that flying can't go ahead, such as a wedding or other special event, or nesting/breeding wildlife
Adhere to any signage at properties outlining 'no fly zones,' wildlife considerations, etc	Fly in busy or crowded areas where you are likely to disturb people
Follow the Drone and Model Aircraft Code and other CAA requirements and legislation (please see the full list in Appendix 1)	Fly too close to buildings, vehicles, wildlife, livestock, play parks, or people – remember that drones weighing 250g or more cannot fly within 50m of people or buildings
Hold the appropriate license(s)* – to protect our people, visitors, and built heritage, the Trust may request proof of training and/or licensing: find out more at CAA Requirements for flying in the open category	Fly over people, especially a crowd – as the CAA Drone Code notes: "Remember, you must never put people in danger. Even small drones and model aircraft could injure people if you don't fly them safely."
Have the correct insurance* – to protect our people, visitors, and built heritage, the Trust requires that operators hold £2m minimum Public Liability insurance and proof of this will be required before flights are permitted	Record people if they ask you not to – other visitors' experiences should not be compromised
As per the CAA Drone Code, ensure that your drone is fully charged, in good operating condition, and you are able to operate safely	Proceed if your drone is not safely operable or if weather conditions are not suitable – make sure a pre-flight check has been carried out
Tag us when you share your authorised footage on social media or other forums (blogs, etc), including the line 'Permission granted by National Trust for Scotland' if you have been granted permission to fly.	Lose sight of your drone – as per the CAA Drone Code, visual contact with the aircraft must be maintained at all times.
Notify a member of staff if a drone has become lost or stuck – including its last known location.	Lose your drone – we are unable to assist with retrieval or recovery.

Guidance for commercial drone operators

For commercial drone operators, pilots must hold a valid Permission for Commercial Operations or a CAA Operational Authorisation. Pilots must also hold a valid General Visual Line of Sight Certificate. Copies of each must be supplied to the Trust in advance of filming.

Commercial operators must also have in place public liability insurance of £2 million and agree to follow the guidance, regulations and legislation set out in Appendix 1. A copy must be supplied to the Trust in advance of filming.

To arrange commercial drone flights, contact the Trust's Filming Manager by email at filming@nts.org.uk to discuss the proposed project and our fee structure.

Guidance for staff when determining whether to allow drone usage on site

When a request to fly a drone recreationally is received by a site, site management staff will be able to decide whether to allow the flight to proceed as planned, or whether an alternative date or time could be suggested. Support can be sought from the Trust's Filming Manager for guidance if required. In determining whether or not to permit a drone to launch or land on Trust property, consideration should be given to:

- 1) The potential impact on –
 - a. The conservation of the heritage in the Trust's care, including wildlife which may be disturbed by these operations, especially during at nesting and breeding times, and fragile built heritage
 - b. The visitor enjoyment of Trust properties, including expectations of tranquility and privacy
- 2) If the property is situated in or near a restricted space (e.g. military practice and exercise areas)
- 3) If the property is situated in a sensitive area, such as a National Park, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or RAMSAR site
- 4) If any works or events are taking place at the property, and if the proposed drone activity would impact on these
- 5) Any other pre-scheduled drone activity including commercial or contractor visits – consult with the Trust's Filming Manager
- 6) We require all commercial drone operators to have in place public liability insurance of £2 million. Whilst obtaining insurance is a choice for most recreational drone operators, it is our preference that operators at our sites do obtain insurance coverage to help protect the heritage sites in our care at which they are choosing to fly. NTS site staff may ask to see proof of insurance before agreeing to a proposed flight, or whilst drone operators are on site.

Where there are potential impacts on natural or cultural heritage, site staff should seek advice from the Filming Manager and the Trust's relevant conservation experts on the nature and seriousness of these to inform their decision.

Where properties are situated in sensitive areas, site staff should seek advice from the

Filming Manager, who may also wish to consult the appropriate Park Authorities and NatureScot to understand any potential negative impacts to the natural environment.

4. Compliance

The majority of drone operators who visit our sites are respectful of our policy, which is designed to protect our people, wildlife, properties, and places and the Trust shares its thanks for your consideration.

However, a small number of operators may need a polite reminder that abusive or aggressive language or behaviour is not acceptable and will not be tolerated.

The Trust reserves the right to ask anyone operating a drone on any of our sites to evidence their permission to do so.

The Trust reserves the right to request any operator flying in an unsafe manner or not fully complying with the guidance to land and cease their activities as safely and quickly as possible.

The Trust reserves the right to ask those who do not comply to leave the premises. In cases of aggressive or abusive behaviour, the Police may be called.

5. Fees

The Trust does not currently charge a fee for recreational users to fly drones at our properties, however donations are always welcomed. Commercial drone operators should contact the Trust's Filming Manager at filming@nts.org.uk to discuss project proposals and our fee structure.

6. Recovery and retrieval

Use of any drone on the Trust's property is at the owner and/or operator's own risk. The Trust cannot be responsible for any loss or damage that occurs to or by any drone, owner, or user and Trust staff are not responsible for retrieving any drones that become lost in or on our sites (for example, drones that fall into rivers or become stuck in trees.) Lost drones that are later recovered will be disposed of.

7. Further Information

For further information please contact the Trust's Policy Team at policy@nts.org.uk or the Filming Manager at filming@nts.org.uk.

Appendix 1 – Compliance Requirements

All operators must agree to adhere to: CAA requirements, under the Civil Aviation Act 1982, the Air Navigation Order 2016 and subsequent 2018 and 2019 amendments; the Drone and Model Aircraft Code 2019; and other Trust guidance. Key points operators must abide by include:

- Operators must have a Flyer ID (unless you are operating a SUA weighing less than 250g), an Operator ID, and all SUAs must be marked with the Operator ID
- Operators must maintain direct, unaided visual contact with the aircraft sufficient to monitor its flight path in relation to other aircraft, persons, vehicles, vessels and structures for the purpose of avoiding collisions
- SUA must not exceed an altitude of 120m
- SUA must keep a minimum distance of 50m from people and property, such as vehicles and buildings, that are not under the control of the operator
- SUA must keep a minimum distance of 50m from people during take-off and landing
- SUA should not be flown directly above people
- SUA must keep a minimum distance of 150m from congested or built-up areas, or crowds of at least 1000 persons
- SUA must keep a minimum distance from airports and their flight restriction zones, unless permission is granted by the relevant Air Traffic Control
- Operators must not cause or permit any article or animal (whether or not attached to a parachute) to be dropped from a small SUA so as to endanger persons or property
- Operators may only fly the aircraft if reasonably satisfied that the flight can safely be made. This includes:
 - Checking for and abiding by local restrictions and temporary hazards
 - Making sure operators know how to fly the craft safely
 - Making sure SUAs are ready for flight (with full battery levels, latest software updates, etc)
 - Not flying if the weather could affect the flight
 - Making sure the operator is fit to fly
- Operators must respect other people and their privacy and making sure no data protection laws are broken
- Operators must make sure SUAs can be clearly seen by people on the ground
- Operators must keep photos and videos secure and consider peoples' right to privacy before sharing them so no GDPR breaches occur.

*SUA that weigh less than 250g are subject to slightly different CAA restrictions and guidance (for example regarding the proximity they can fly to people and buildings). However, the risks of inappropriate or unsafe flight to built heritage and gardens, wildlife, habitats, and livestock and visitor enjoyment exist regardless of the weight of the SUA.

For this reason, operators of SUA weighing under 250g must adhere to the same CAA requirements and guidance for licensing and insurance that apply to SUA weighing between 250g and 20kg when operating on Trust property. The only exception to this is the requirement for a Flyer ID, which operators of SUA under 250g are not required to have.

Appendix 2 – Related Documents

The Civil Aviation Authority [Introduction to drone flying and the UK rules A top level guide to flying drones and model aircraft in the UK](#)

The Civil Aviation Authority [Drone and Model Aircraft Code](#)

The Civil Aviation Authority [The Air Navigation Order 2016 and amendments made by The Air Navigation \(Amendment\) Order 2017](#)

The Civil Aviation Authority [CAP 2013: Air Navigation Order 2020 Amendment - Guidance for Unmanned Aircraft System users](#)

[Wildlife Crime – Wildlife Management – Gov.Scot](#)

The [Scottish Outdoor Access Code](#) – “Motorised activities, such as motor biking and scrambling, off-road driving, the use of any powered craft on water, microlighting, and **the use of powered model craft**. These activities still require the permission of the relevant owner or manager.”

Appendix 3 – Definitions

The Air Navigation Order 2016 refers to small unmanned aircraft as aircraft that is between 250g-20kg without its fuel but including any articles or equipment installed in or attached to the aircraft at the commence of its flight.

The Drones and Model Aircraft Code refers to drones, model airplanes, model helicopters and model gliders. In late 2020 the CAA released updated guidance to cover UAV under 250g ('C0' class).

The Trust has used the phrase 'small unmanned aircraft' in this Policy and Guidance. This will refer most commonly to drones with cameras and/or surveillance equipment that are being used for recreational or commercial purposes.