



Putting the Air Ambulance at the heart of Yelverton...night and day.

Toby Russell, Community Landing Sites Development Officer

Background

Devon Air Ambulance (DAA) now operates until 2am every day and our vision is to provide our service 24 hours a day.

Operating and landing in towns and villages during the hours of darkness is different to how we operate during daylight. To support 'night' operations, DAA are working with communities to create a network of Community Landing Sites which are open spaces with either existing or newly installed floodlighting that we can operate remotely. The development of these sites is part-funded and managed by local communities. Using sites like this when it's dark means we can land in the heart of a community and reach patients much quicker and safer than if we had to land in a 'dark field'.

There are currently 164 operational Community Landing Sites in towns and villages throughout Devon, with approximately a further 60 sites at various stages of development.

What makes a good night landing site?

A night landing site could be a green, sports pitch or playing field. It needs to be a flat area of at least 50m x 50m, to provide maximum operational benefit and safety and have pedestrian and vehicle access nearby.

Floodlighting is an essential component of a community landing site as it illuminates the site during landing and take-off as well as helping the assessment and safe carry and loading of a patient into the helicopter. The lighting is remotely controlled meaning DAA can turn the lights on/off in an emergency (i.e. they are only operated when needed).

What are the benefits to local people?

Advances in pre-hospital critical care now mean our service is able to provide an increasing range of life saving treatment and interventions at the scene of an incident that traditionally were only able to be delivered inside a hospital emergency department or theatres. Working in collaboration with the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust to ensure patients receive the right care they need, DAA has invested significantly in the education and training of our team so that they can deliver these highly specialist critical care interventions.

DAA is working with Buckland Monachorum Parish Council to ensure its helicopters are able to land quickly in the community when it is dark, so that we can provide patients with the very best chance of a successful outcome.

Proposal to establish a community landing site in Yelverton

DAA has reviewed the potential for several sites in Yelverton (as the largest village in the area) to become a community landing site and we believe the Yelverton War Memorial Recreation Field offers an excellent location – meeting DAA requirements, offering good access to the community and nearby roads and with parking nearby.

DAA Operations staff have visited the site and completed an initial survey of the landing area. In due course DAA will complete a full survey, when the site characteristics and any potential hazards are mapped and recorded, and that info will be passed onto the pilots and air crew. Having this info ensures our pilots can quickly assess a landing site on arrival, speeding up the time it takes to land and get medical teams onto the ground (potentially saving around 15mins) and to a patient.

The main requirement for DAA to be able to land at night at Yelverton Recreation Field is the installation of two 150-watt LED lights which could be secured to two existing lighting columns which currently illuminate the tennis courts (i.e. one LED on each of two columns). The two LED lights would be fed by an electrical supply from Yelverton Tennis Club, where the GSM switch (operated by a mobile phone SIM card to remotely control the lights) would be located.

In practice, once Devon Air Ambulance has been tasked to a patient, the lighting will be activated by telephone call from the Helicopter Emergency Medical Services dispatch team, prior to the aircraft arriving at the site. Once the emergency is over, the lighting will be de-activated using another call.



Photo: Shows the community landing site at Yelverton Recreation Field; the yellow dots indicate the two new floodlights (secured to the existing columns by the tennis courts) and 'H' the area used for night operations (N.B. no markings are required at the night landing site).

Establishing the night landing site – fundraising & next steps:

- Devon Air Ambulance is very grateful to Buckland Monachorum Parish Council, Yelverton Tennis Club and Yelverton War Memorial Recreation Field for their support. Thanks in particular go to Yelverton Tennis Club who have readily supported this project and enabled new lighting to be installed for the benefit of the whole community.
- Access & management: The Recreation Field can be managed exactly as it is now, there are no changes required or additional management required. A simple system is in place to close the site temporarily (e.g. during events) if needed. The lighting system is designed to be low-cost requiring little electricity or ongoing management.
- DAA is delighted to be able to provide a grant of £2,275.08 (from the Bank LIBOR) towards the new lighting etc.
- The community project costs involved are £1,638.09. The Parish Council, who are driving the project locally, have launched an appeal for support and if you would like to donate to the project please contact: Katharine Griffiths (Parish Clerk) on clerk@bmpc.info / 01822 855889.
- When the funding has been secured the lighting is installed over 1-2 days and the site becomes available for Devon Air Ambulance night operations.
- For any further information please contact Toby Russell, Devon Air Ambulance on t.russell@daat.org / 07943 207673.

Thank you for supporting the Yelverton night landing site project