



## - Community Helipads -

*enabling the air ambulance to reach your community day and night*

The Devon Air Ambulance Trust are working hard to develop all the different elements needed for the charity to extend its service until midnight each day from this October. One essential part of this work is helping local communities across Devon develop their own night landing sites.

A **community helipad** is a pre-surveyed floodlit landing site which will enable us to bring a life-saving service into the heart of communities when it is dark. Each helipad is *funded* and *managed* by the local community. Key points when considering potential sites in your community:

- a helipad could be located on a green, playing field, farmer's field, park or other open space
- it needs to be a flat area of at least 50m x 50m and could be on grass, tarmac or concrete
- the site needs pedestrian and vehicle access close by
- a nearby power source for lighting is useful although not essential
- tall trees or power lines within the site might be a hazard, however if they are on the periphery they may not cause a problem.

Communities are encouraged to consider *all* potential sites in their local area (i.e. not just those we have landed at during the day) as each site may have different pro's and con's for night landing.

Potential sites will be formally surveyed by DAAT when we will collect info on the site characteristics, potential hazards etc. so we know what to expect when we land there (saving time needed for a site recce). At that time we will also advise the community on lighting requirements, any site improvements (e.g. access) and ongoing management of the helipad.

### **Helipad lighting:**

Floodlighting is an essential component of a community helipad for both safety and practical reasons – it will illuminate the site during landing and take-off and will help when loading a patient in the aircraft or during transfer between a land / air ambulance.

A community may be able to adapt existing lighting (e.g. a sports pitch) or use the side of a building or pole to support new lighting. Where there are no existing lights or infrastructure a 'typical' lighting system would consist of a 10m high column secured to a concrete base with a set of 2 LED panel lights. This could be powered by mains electricity supply (240v standard home wiring) or solar power (using two panels and a set of batteries). The cost of installing new lighting will vary from around £1,000 to adapt existing lighting to around £10,000 for a solar powered system.

Each lighting system will incorporate an integral mobile phone SMS control box which will enable the lights to be turned on/off remotely by the Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) dispatch team, meaning no-one needs to be on-hand when we fly into a community.

### **Addressing any concerns...**

Some people in the community might be worried about the potential impact of noise or light from their local helipad.

The lighting system has been designed to minimise disturbance – the lights are operated remotely and will be angled to illuminate the landing spot, not surrounding area, and will only be used when we are attending an emergency. DAAT has a mobile lighting unit which we can bring to a community to demonstrate how the lighting system works and show people what to expect.

Helicopters do make a noise although for cost reasons alone the engines are switched off very quickly after landing and are started up only when the crew are ready to depart. In terms of planning requirements we are advising all communities to seek advice from their local planning team and keep them involved with any development.

### **Managing a helipad:**

Each community will need to put in place a system to monitor their helipad and report to DAAT on any site changes or when the site might not be available (e.g. if the area is used for an event). This is not arduous but means that the site is looked after properly and rubbish or other potential hazards are kept free from the landing area.

We expect the costs of running each helipad to be low - the SMS mobile system which operates the lighting is run on a 'pay as you go' tariff and the costs to run the lighting is minimal at a few pence per hour. Basically the helipad will only start costing the community money when it is being used.

### **The process of developing your own community helipad:**

- Please get in touch with Toby Russell, DAAT Community Helipads Development Officer
- If you are able to propose any sites in your community we can quickly carry out an initial screening process before advising on which site(s) would be most suitable for night landing
- The best site(s) are then surveyed by DAAT
- We work with your community & preferred lighting supplier, MAT Electrics (based in Exeter) to get a quote for the helipad lighting
- The community then knows a) which site(s) are suitable for night-landing and b) how much it would cost to develop the lighting solution(s)
- The community raises funds for their helipad – we can help support bid or grant applications
- The community employs MAT Electrics to install the lighting or they can use their own contractors or volunteers to carry out much of the work themselves (apart from final fix and commissioning of system)
- The helipad is completed, signed-off for use and is ready for night landing...

**To start developing your community helipad please contact  
Toby Russell on: [t.russell@daat.org](mailto:t.russell@daat.org) or 07943 207673**