

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest and Commons	12 January 2015
Subject: Epping Forest Permission to operate Civil Marriages and Partnerships at the Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest SEF 01/15	For Decision

Summary

This report outlines the opportunity to utilise the licensing regime under the Marriages Regulations 1995 to generate future income by permitting the use of Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge (QEHL) for Marriages and Civil Partnership ceremonies. The significant heritage of the listed building and the idyllic surroundings of the Forest make the building very desirable as a venue for these ceremonies.

The Visitor Services Team at Epping Forest currently host a number of private hire events at QEHL. It is possible for the Team to host ceremonies at this desired venue, whilst still providing daily access to public visitors, by restricting the number of ceremonies and carefully managing the booking process.

In order to use QEHL as a venue for ceremonies a licence must be granted by the local authority, London Borough of Waltham Forest (LBWF), at a cost of £600 for a 3 year licence, together with appropriate public advertising costing £1,000.

The estimated net income over the 3 year period (2015 – 2018) is £57,800.

An update report will be brought to your January 2016 Committee to review the hosting of ceremonies at QEHL.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Approve submission of an application to London Borough of Waltham Forest to licence Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge to host for marriage and civil partnership ceremonies.
- Approve the use of QEHL for marriage and civil partnership ceremonies, for the licence period of 36 months.
- Review the use of QEHL for marriage and civil partnership ceremonies at your January 2016 meeting.

Main Report

Background

1. It is proposed to use Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge (QEHL) for marriages and civil partnerships, both as a source of income and to raise the profile of this building.
2. QEHL is a Grade II* Listed building and one of the last remaining Tudor hunting stands in the country. This combined with the idyllic surroundings of the forest, makes the building very desirable as a venue for Marriages and Civil Partnerships ceremonies.
3. Annually, the UK wedding industry is worth £10 billion. In 2012, the average cost of a wedding was in the region of £12,000. Venue hire accounts, on average, for approximately 12% or £1,440, of this spend. (Source: Hitched.co.uk)
4. This is an opportunity to generate income and attract more visitors to the Epping Forest Gateway hub (QEHL, The View & Butler's Retreat).

Current Position

5. QEHL is both a free public visitor attraction and a venue for hire for an array of events from learning sessions to private tours. It is open between 10am and 5pm daily, with the exception of Christmas Day and advertised closures for pre-booked private hire or educational group use.
6. Private hire bookings are currently charged at £500 per hour. Income from private hire has totalled £6,000 in the last 24 months.
7. The building has 3 floors; ground, first and second. Due to the infrastructure of the lodge, it is not possible to install an appropriate aid to make the building fully accessible for disabled visitors. Disabled access to the first and second floors is not provided.
8. QEHL itself has no public toilets but The View, adjacent, offers modern suitable public conveniences.
9. When hired for exclusive use, the building has been used successfully for externally catered events. These have included sit down meals, drinks/canapé service and wine tasting events.
10. QEHL has previously hosted Citizenship Ceremonies but is not currently licenced to undertake wedding or civil partnerships.
11. In addition to numerous in-person enquiries, Epping Forest members of staff have received in excess of 20 written requests for ceremonies to be carried out at QEHL, in the past 24 months.

Options

12. **Option 1** – Approve the outlined proposal to request a licence and, subject to the licence being granted by LBWF, to use QEHL as a wedding and civil ceremony venue to generate income for Epping Forest. **This option is recommended.**

13. **Option 2** – Do not approve the application or use of QEHL for ceremonies therefore preventing income generation for Epping Forest. **This option is not recommended.**

Proposals

14. Option 1 seeks to gain approval from your Committee to apply to the local authority, LBWF, for a licence to hold weddings and civil partnership ceremonies at QEHL. The location, aesthetics and history of the building make it desirable as a licenced wedding venue.
15. If granted, the licence would be for an initial period of three years.
16. It is proposed that the licence be sought to cover all three rooms of QEHL. This allows for maximum flexibility when hiring the venue, for example ground floor ceremonies to accommodate disabled hirers or guests.
17. Ceremonies would be recommended to take place on the second floor, with the first floor being used as a post-ceremony refreshment area for the couple and their guests.
18. The conditions of the venue licence include an assessment on accessibility, fire risk and health & safety. A review of the existing building documentation would be required in preparation for a licence application submission.
19. The building's nature and structure means it is only suitable for ceremonies or small reception celebrations, held before 5pm, with less than 40 people. However, travelling between ceremony and reception venues is common and the proximity of both Butler's Retreat/Royal Forest Hotel adds to the attraction of QEHL as a venue.
20. To ensure the building remains as a free historic visitor attraction, ceremonies will be capped at a maximum of 36 per annum. This comprises one weekend (Fri-Sun) and two mid-week (Mon-Thurs) ceremonies per month. No bookings would be permitted on Bank Holidays.
21. Each ceremony will be 2 hours in duration. This allows time for guest arrival, the marriage/civil partnership vows, post-ceremony refreshments and photography, in and around the building. Assuming for an adequate event preparation/set down, at least 2 hours public access would remain either before or after the ceremony.
22. Planned closures of QEHL, as a result of a ceremony, would be advertised, in advance, both at QEHL and online as is the case with current private hire arrangements.
23. An additional member of staff would be required for the duration of the booking to ensure the smooth running of the venue hire.
24. A non-refundable deposit of 20% will deter people from cancelling booked dates. This will prevent both inconveniencing public visitors and potential loss of income from another hirer. Bookings will only be confirmed once the deposit has been received and the terms and conditions agreed by both the hirer and City of London.

25. A tour of the building, prior to hire, would ensure hirers fully understand the complexities of hiring a Grade II* listed building.
26. Vehicles have limited access to the site and exclusive car parking will not be provided. Sufficient parking at Barn Hoppit and Chingford Plain car parks is available.
27. The 2 hour exclusive hire ceremony packages will be charged at £1,500 (£1,800 inc. VAT) for weekday bookings and £2,000 (£2,400 inc. VAT) for weekends.
28. Packages include the exclusive use of QEHL, staff preparation and close down, use of facilities at the View and a licence to take photographs. The total cost would be subject to VAT.
29. Projected maximum gross income from weddings and civil partnership ceremonies per annum is £63,000 plus £12,600 VAT based on 18 mid-week ceremonies (£27,000) and 18 weekend ceremonies (£36,000).
30. In 2015, expectation is that six weddings/civil ceremonies will be performed at QEHL. It is anticipated that this will grow annually once the service is established.
31. The wedding and civil partnership venue licence fee is £600 for a three year licence.
32. LBWF stipulates that a three week Public Notice will be posted in a local newspaper, as part of the licence application, at cost to the applicant. It is expected that this will incur a cost of £1,000 to City of London.
33. Staffing cost is estimated at £100 per ceremony based on 5 hours at £20 per hour. Total staff cost projected in Year 1 is £600.
34. The estimated net income in Year 1 is of £8,300 (*based on 50/50 split of weekday and weekend ceremonies). Projections for Year 1 and future years are as follows;

	Estimated number of ceremonies*	Estimated venue hire income**	Estimated staff cost	Estimated expenditure (licence fee & advert)	Gross income generated
Year 1	6	£10,500	£600	£1,600	£8,300
Year 2	12	£21,000	£1,200	0	£19,800
Year 3	18	£31,500	£1,800	0	£29,700
	Total				£57,800

**estimates do not include potential additional income from catered ceremonies.

35. Refreshments, floral dressing and furniture hire are subject to additional agreement and charges to the hirer, at the agreed cost from approved suppliers with the exception of catering. Catering bookings must also use a City of London approved supplier and will incur an additional 10% commission fee.

36. It is the responsibility of the couple to arrange the legal formalities of the ceremony. Arranging the registrar, to conduct the ceremony, therefore would **not** be included in the venue hire.
37. Booking capacity and fees are to be reviewed annually by this Committee.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

38. Open Spaces Business Plan (2014-17): This proposal links to the Open Spaces Business Plan strategic objective (2014/15) to generate income. 'Improving our use of resources through increased income generation and improved procurement'

Implications

39. **Financial** - An initial outlay of £1,600 will be spent on licence application and associated advertising. Spend will be taken from local risk funding.
40. **Legal** -The Marriages (Approved Premises) Regulations 1995 allow civil marriages to take place regularly in hotels, stately homes, civic halls and similar premises without compromising the fundamental principles of English marriage law and Parliaments intention to maintain the solemnity of the occasion.
41. Section 8 of the Epping Forest Act 1878 Act states that "Queen Elizabeth Lodge, with the garden thereof, is hereby vested in the Conservators.....and shall be preserved and maintained by them as an object of public and antiquarian interest".
42. Section 76(1)(g) of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907 (applied to Epping Forest by Section 4 of the City of London (Various Powers) Act 1933) gives power "To provide and maintain anybuildings....and to charge for admission thereto".
43. The proposals do not offend the prohibition against alienation in section 7 of the 1878 Act, or any other requirements, subject to the arrangements, including the frequency of the events, being managed so as to preserve the primary purpose of QEHL as an object of public and antiquarian interest.
44. **HR** - Additional staffing requirement will utilise existing casual staff working at the Epping Forest Gateway hub. There are no other HR implications to report.
45. **Property** - A significant increase in visitor numbers and movement of furniture (to create a wedding ceremonial area) will cause extra wear and tear on the hunting lodge's structure, which may also have cost implications.
46. Therefore, the maintenance costs of the property will need to be closely monitored and if a significant increase is identified, there may be a need for some of the income to be used to be used to meet these additional costs.

Conclusion

47. QEHL is a desirable venue for weddings and civil partnerships and offers the opportunity to generate income from the building.
48. By carefully managing the booking arrangements it is possible to offer couples the opportunity to hold a ceremony in this special venue whilst avoiding a conflict of use with new and existing public visitors.
49. Income from venue hire will contribute to savings required as part of the service based review, with the initial outlay a fraction of the potential income weddings or civil ceremonies could generate for Epping Forest.
50. The demand for ceremonies has been frequent evidencing a desire and need for the service. To be able to offer this service will help promote our services and the City of London's Open Spaces as a whole.

Appendices

- None

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