

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Epping Forest and Commons	3 July 2017
Subject: Review of Epping Forest Wedding and Civil Partnership Event Hire at the Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge between 2015-16 (SEF 14/17)	Public
Report of: Superintendent of Epping Forest	For Decision

Summary

This report highlights the success of the decision to provide facilities for marriages and civil partnerships at The Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge between 2015 and 2016. Reflecting public demand, the report makes proposals to increase the frequency and scale of weddings to generate further income ranging between £36,000 to £62,200 for re-investment in to Epping Forest local risk budget.

The report makes proposals to balance public access to the Hunting Lodge, while meeting increasing demand for ceremonies at weekends by offering more weekend opportunities and an extension of the value chain facilitating the staging of receptions on site by erecting a marquee within the under-utilised courtyard at 'The View'.

In order to meet potential demand for receptions it is proposed to obtain a full Premises Licence from the local authority.

Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Approve the proposal of an increase in fee associated with marriage and civil ceremonies at the Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge.
- Approve an increase to the number of ceremonies that can take place on a Friday or Saturday and an overall increase in number of ceremonies that are held on an annual basis.
- Approve the use of The View courtyard, exterior space and community room to host evening receptions and authorise the Superintendent to apply for the necessary Premises Licence.

Main Report

Background

1. At your committee of 12 January 2015, it was agreed to approve the use of The Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge (QEHL) for marriage and civil partnership ceremonies for a period of 36 months.
2. The maximum number of ceremonies was capped at 36 events per year with one weekend (Friday-Sunday) and two mid-week bookings per month.
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)

Current Position

4. QEHL has been licenced to hold weddings since April 2015 when the licence was approved by the Local Authority – the London Borough of Waltham Forest. Bookings were then able to be taken for 2016 (as most weddings are planned one year in advance). Initially, interest was low and a decrease in the charges that were agreed at committee was agreed under delegated powers to help establish the new venue.
5. Ceremonies are currently charged at £400.00 plus 20% VAT for a 2 hour hire Monday – Thursday and £550 plus 20% VAT for Friday and Saturday hire. These charges were set purposely at the lower end of comparable sites as a means of penetration marketing to introduce the new business.
6. A total of 5 ceremonies were held in 2016 with an income of £4651.96 A total of 12 bookings have been taken for 2017, utilising the full capacity of weekend ceremonies with a total projected income of £8300
7. Only one wedding can be held on any one day due to the limits of the building and opening hours. On the same day as any wedding held, the building is still opened to the public for a minimum of one hour.
8. The Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge has three floors, all of which are licenced for ceremonies. All ceremonies to date have taken place on the top floor of the lodge with hirers hosting a drinks reception on the middle floor.
9. Any potential hire enquiries receive a detailed host email with background information on the building, pricing and an invitation for a personal tour. To date there have been 30 enquiries made and 19 ceremonies booked, which represents a 63% success rate. Of those enquiries that have not chosen to book with us, the feedback has been that the venue was not big enough to host the number of guests or that a venue that housed both the ceremony and reception had been selected.
10. In addition to enquiries made for ceremonies at QEHL there are an increasing number of requests to hold a combined ceremony plus reception on site.

Options

11. **Option 1** – Increase the maximum number of ceremonies that may be held at QEHL annually on a weekend (Friday- Saturday) from 12 to 48; increasing from one per month to a maximum of 4 per month. In addition, offer The View courtyard as a reception area, with marquee from 5pm – 11pm and increase charges as outlined in the report. This option has the potential to greatly increase income from wedding hire with minimal outlay, risk or impact on regular users. **This option is recommended.**
12. **Option 2** – Increase the fees as proposed and introduce the use of the View for receptions but do not increase the current arrangement of 36 ceremonies per year, with a maximum of 12 of these falling on a Friday or Saturday. Revenue would increase but would be capped as the most popular times for weddings are at weekends. **This option is not recommended.**
13. **Option 3** – Do not approve the increase in fees or the increase in the number of ceremonies to take place from 2018 or approve the use of The View for receptions. This will mean there is minimal increase in income from wedding hire. **This option is not recommended.**

Proposals

14. It is proposed to increase the number of weddings and civil ceremonies annually, with an increase from 36 to 48 per year, but with no restriction on the proportion of these that can be held at the weekend (Friday and Saturday). This would be managed by allowing a maximum of up to two closures per week in summer months (June, July, August) and the remainder of the year capped at one closure per week.
15. The primary purpose of the QEHL is as a heritage building of public interest. To maintain this, wedding bookings will not be accepted on a Sunday as this is the most popular day for public visitors to QEHL and the View:

Average weekly footfall QEHL and View	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
	146	310	416

16. An average of just under 60% of visitors attending the View also visit the QEHL and this percentage is skewed by the number of events held in QEHL that increases the footfall. Therefore visits specifically for QEHL are a much smaller fraction of the figures above. Many of these visits are repeat visits and the weddings themselves would bring a (mainly new) audience of 5760 annually (based on one day a week).
17. Mondays will continue to be prioritised for schools visits when the QEHL currently closes to the public.
18. After extensive benchmarking with comparable venues in and around the Forest, an increase in hire charge by 37% is proposed to bring the charging in line with competitors. The hire of QEHL for ceremonies only will rise from £400.00 (Mon-Thurs) to £550.00 and from £550 (Fri – Sat) to £750 all subject to Value Added Tax (VAT) at 20%. This is less than proposed pricing in the 2015 report but still brings existing pricing back up to the market comparators.

19. In response to latent demand and to capitalise on potential income it is proposed to hire the courtyard at The View to host evening receptions, operating out of opening hours with the use of a framed marquee. The marquee will hold a maximum number of 120 guests. A package price will include ceremony and reception based at The View during the hours of 3pm – 11pm. The reception facility will only be able to hire alongside a ceremony and the number will therefore be capped at the proposed 48.
20. Ceremony only hire can take place between 10am and 6pm and allows a maximum of 2 hours hire including vows, post-ceremony refreshments and photography, in and around the building.
21. For ceremony *plus* reception packages, time slots will be agreed from 4pm – 5pm for a ceremony itself, hosted by Waltham Forest Registrars, followed by the arrival of guests at 5pm to the marquee for an evening hire.
22. Planned closures of The Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge, as a result of a ceremony, will be advertised in advance at the venue itself and on the website.
23. Events and receptions can currently be accommodated through a Temporary Event Notice licence. However the number of these is capped each year and it will be necessary to apply for a Premises Licence in order to hold the number of potential receptions at the View. This is an annual licence obtainable from London Borough of Waltham Forest and will allow for entertainment and the sale of alcohol. The sale of alcohol also requires the attendance of a Designated Premises Supervisor (DPS). This is usually provided by the bar supplier however the Visitor Operations Manager is also a licenced DPS.
24. A minimum of one member of staff will be provided at all weddings to act as caretaker, fire warden and to ensure the smooth running of the event. Two members of staff will be required for evening hire.
25. The existing agreed terms and conditions will continue to apply.
26. A tour of the building, prior to hire, ensures hirers fully understand the complexities of hiring a Grade II* listed building.
27. Vehicles will be permitted to use the car park in front of The View and additional parking will be permitted in City of London car parks.
28. Ceremonies and reception packages will be for the exclusive hire of the Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge and a fully erected marquee inside the courtyard of The View, however access to public toilets and rear of the visitor centre will be maintained during View opening hours which will remain unaffected.
29. All additional services, such as catering, floral dressing, bar hire, additional furniture and music will be subject to additional agreement and charges to the hirer using approved suppliers.
30. It is the responsibility of the hirer to arrange the legal formalities of the ceremony. Arranging the registrar, to conduct the ceremony, therefore would **not** be included in the venue hire.

31. These arrangements would remain in place for up to 36 months from the date of this report and would be brought back to your committee for review at that point.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

32. Open Spaces Business Plan (2014-17): This proposal links to the Open Spaces Business Plan 'Embed financial sustainability across our activities by delivering identified programmes and projects and continuously developing income generating endeavours.'

Financial Implications

33. – Proposed charges

Description	Fee
Monday – Thursday Wedding ONLY (2 hour hire)	£550 + VAT
Friday – Saturday Wedding ONLY (2 hour hire)	£750 + VAT
Weekday Wedding & Reception (3– 11pm – 8 Hours)	£3050 + VAT (£3660) - Basic *Not including Tables/Chairs/Catering/DJ/Bar
Weekend Wedding & Reception (3– 11pm – 8 Hours)	£3,250 + VAT (£3,900) - Basic *Not including Tables/Chairs/Catering/DJ/Bar

33. Marquee hire and installation for each reception will cost £1,505.00 which would be recouped back within the package price. Package prices for a Monday to Thursday ceremony and reception will start at £3,050 to include staffing, cleaning, venue hire, administration and marquee hire. Additional catering and drinks reception and other services will be charged in addition.
34. Potential gross income for the year from ceremony hire only will range from £26,400 to £36,000 based on the maximum number of hires. Income from full package hire will be from £62,200 once marquee hire and staffing costs are deducted. However it is not expected that maximum bookings will be achieved and income over the next few years, until marketing is increased and makes a greater impact, will be unlikely to reach more than one third of these amounts.
35. The Premises Licence has an initial application fee of £635 with a maximum annual fee of £350.
36. **Legal** –Section 8 of the Epping Forest Act 1878 states that “Queen Elizabeth’s Lodge, with the garden thereof, is hereby vested in the Conservators, for all the estate and interest of the Crown therein, and shall be preserved and maintained by them as an object of public and antiquarian interest”.
37. The Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005 allow civil marriages and civil partnership ceremonies to take place in hotels, stately homes, civic halls and similar seemly and dignified venues.
38. Section 76(1) of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907 (as amended) empowers the Conservators to provide and maintain buildings and pavilions and to charge for admission. It allows the Conservators to set apart an area

of the Forest for private recreation and to charge reasonable sums for such use. It also allows the Conservators to provide and maintain refreshment rooms.

39. 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.
40. **HR** – One additional staff member is employed throughout a ceremony and two additional staff for an evening reception. This will be undertaken by existing part time staff as an additional hour's payment or by casual staff. All staff will be fully trained and the cost of staffing is built in to hire charges.
41. **Property** - A significant increase in visitor numbers and movement of furniture (to create a wedding ceremonial area) may cause extra wear and tear to the Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge. Additional repair costs for damage will need to be met through insurance and damage deposit levied on hirers.

Conclusion

42. The Queen Elizabeth's Hunting Lodge has proved to be a desirable venue for weddings and civil partnerships and offers the opportunity to generate vital income for reinvestment in the management of Epping Forest. By adding an additional service of receptions, there is potential to increase the value chain from the basic fee of £550 weekday and £750 weekend to a minimum fee of £3,050 plus vat at 20% for a wedding package comprising a 2 hour hire from 3pm to 11pm
43. 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.
44. The income from venue hire would be credited to the Epping Forest local risk budget for re-investment in to the Forest, in particular visitor services.
45. There is an evident latent demand for ceremonies. To increase our wedding offer will bring new audiences to the Forest and raise the profile of the Forest, its heritage and relevance to the people of London.

Appendices

- Site Plan x 3

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