

|  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| <b>Committee(s):</b>   | <b>Date(s):</b>     |
| Culture, Heritage & Libraries                                  | 27 January 2014     |
| <b>Subject:</b><br>Weddings at Keats House                     | <b>Public</b>       |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Director of Culture, Heritage & Libraries | <b>For Decision</b> |

### **Summary**

This Report has been prepared in response to the decision by your Committee of October 2013, that in order to enable a balanced decision to be taken on whether or not to proceed to obtain a Weddings Licence and implement wedding ceremonies at Keats House, officers should undertake a feasibility assessment of alternative fund raising plans suggested by residents.

A summary is provided of the progress which has been made in discussions with a small group of neighbours of Keats House representing those who strongly object to the proposal to hold wedding ceremonies. These meetings focussed on how additional annual income could be generated to offset some of the operational costs of running the House.

The Visitor Development and Services Director and the Principal Curator of Keats House, having attended meetings with the residents on two separate occasions, received a positive impression of their commitment and ability to deliver a programme of fundraising activities which could potentially produce a substantial annually recurring income for Keats House. In making the recommendations below the officers were conscious of the Corporate policy priority of supporting London's communities.

The report provides a positive initial assessment of the feasibility of alternative fund raising plans and places the issue in the context of the Keats House charitable scheme and the City's duty as trustee of the charity.

### **Recommendation(s)**

Members are asked to agree:

- To note the positive initial assessment of the potential feasibility of raising funds by initiatives and events other than weddings
- To the Principal Curator obtaining a Weddings Licence for Keats House as a fee of £1000 has already been committed
- To not hold wedding ceremonies at Keats House in financial year 2014/15
- To the Principal Curator working in collaboration with the residents group to raise substantial funds for Keats House; and
- To receive a report on the success of the fundraising efforts in early 2015.

## Main Report

### **Background**

1. Keats House is a charity which has as its object “to preserve and maintain and restore for the education and benefit of the public the land with the buildings thereon as a museum and live memorial to John Keats as a literary meeting place and centre”. The over-riding duty of the City as trustee is to act in the best interests of the charity.
2. At your October 2013 meeting your Committee received a report prepared by the Principal Curator of Keats House seeking guidance on the best route forward in respect of proposals to hold wedding ceremonies at Keats House.
3. One of the initial objectives for the new Principal Curator on appointment in February 2013 was to implement weddings and civil ceremonies at Keats House to generate additional income to help offset the operational costs and provide additional income to support the events and educational programmes at the House, in order to meet and further the objects of the charity.
4. The application for a weddings licence to the London Borough of Camden had however resulted in objections being received from local residents, in particular some of those whose properties adjoin the grounds of Keats House. Although the Chief Registrar had advised that none of the objections submitted would prevent a Weddings Licence being approved and issued, it was considered appropriate in the light of the objections to hold this in abeyance to allow further consultation with residents to be undertaken.
5. The proposal to hold weddings received the support of the Keats House Consultative Committee at their meeting on 18 October 2013 but at a special meeting of residents on 23 October 2013 there had been strong feeling against the proposals from a small group. It was noted however that several of those in attendance took a neutral position including representatives from the neighbouring Keats Community Library.
6. At both meetings, officers explained the City’s position in making proposals to facilitate weddings based partly on a sense that Keats House is an obvious venue for weddings which some people would consider a magical setting, and partly on the opportunity for some modest but not insignificant income generation. It was emphasised that the financial position of Keats House is not strong at present, as its operating costs have been significantly exceeding its available budget for several years and it currently generates only a small percentage of those costs as earned income.
7. It was emphasised that the original concept for weddings had been scaled down in response to the concerns of residents and would comprise ceremonies only with a celebratory glass or two of Champagne but no receptions. The arrangements would be kept to a modest scale, in time slots of no more than two hours and there would be no amplified music or marquees. Even with these significant concessions some residents believed that to hold weddings at Keats House would be detrimental to the quality of the local environment.

8. On a constructive note these residents have suggested that we should work with them to develop alternative strategies for income generation and they had offered to help in establishing fundraising initiatives which they claimed would have greater income potential than the weddings proposal.
9. In considering this issue the City must balance its duty to act prudently and ensure the charity is solvent against the potential reputational risk to the charity that could arise from pursuing a controversial fund-raising initiative and generating negative publicity, without first exploring alternatives. The City must also be mindful that the charity's objects are for the benefit of the wider public and therefore its activities must not be determined by or for local residents but at the same time it is important to seek to maintain positive relations with that community and to harness their goodwill, as the House is located in the middle of a residential area.
10. In light of the above, your Committee resolved that officers be tasked to undertake a feasibility assessment of alternative fundraising plans suggested by local residents and report back to the Committee at the first meeting of the New Year; and that the decision regarding whether to hold wedding ceremonies at Keats House be delayed pending the above mentioned report.

#### **Current Position**

11. Although there was limited time available to arrange meetings to hear and assess the fund raising proposals, the Visitor Development and Services Director and the Principal Curator have been able to have two meetings with the residents. At the first meeting on 8 November four residents attended and at the follow-up meeting on 12 December 2013 three were present.
12. The meetings were conducted in an open, honest and friendly atmosphere focussing on the benefits of working in collaboration and pooling available resources. They were of necessity constructive and practical in view of the limited time available and the following key principles were agreed.
  - a) As the fundraising proposals were heavily dependent on the individual residents' personal and professional networks the Group would take responsibility for proposing and promoting the events/activities.
  - b) Assistance would be provided by the staff of Keats House and the wider Visitor Development and Services Division insofar as this can be accommodated within existing resources.
  - c) All activities would be held under the auspices of the Keats House Charity.
  - d) The Group would work in co-operation with the Keats Foundation Charity which would need to be satisfied that the activities were in the best interests of the charity and did not compromise the objects of the charity.
13. A wide range of ideas were mooted at the first meeting but after discussion these were distilled down to the following list which was based on previous experience of some of the residents in raising funds for other organisations such as the Dulwich Picture Gallery:
  - Invite patrons/Champions.
  - Create Fellowships.

- Organise fundraising dinners/events.
  - Organise raffles/silent auctions.
  - Involve local celebrations.
  - Engage the services of a professional fundraiser.
14. A practical plan which is attached as Appendix 1 outlining the ideas in more detail and indicating the potential funds which could be raised was prepared and presented at the second meeting.
  15. In view of the positive energy, professional experience and desire to work collaboratively displayed by the residents, the officers consider that a positive initial assessment of the potential feasibility of alternatives should be reported to your Committee and that the Keats Foundation should be advised of developments for their interest at their January 2014 meeting.

### **Options**

16. In the circumstances the following alternatives need to be considered:
  - a) Proceeding to obtain a Weddings Licence and marketing Keats House as a venue for weddings and civil ceremonies commencing in April 2014, in accordance with the Principal Curator's original recommendation; or
  - b) To approve and implement the alternative fund raising activities detailed in Appendix 1, emanating from meetings with residents, in accordance with the principles set out in paragraph 12 (a) to (d) of this report,

### **Proposals**

17. Going ahead with the original proposal to implement Weddings and Civil Ceremonies at Keats House would assist the financial position of the charity by raising funds to help promote the charitable objects. However, to pursue this without further exploring alternatives would draw negative responses from some neighbours and could affect the reputation of the charity or the City Corporation through the risk of complaints and possible legal action to delay and frustrate our plans.
18. On a practical level managing the workload involved in organising weddings was always going to be challenging for the Principal Curator with the limited staff resources at Keats House. Operating in an environment with active opposition from local residents would increase the level of service (staffing) required and introduce the possibility of problems impacting on wedding clients. This could lead to bad publicity and damage to the Corporation's image.
19. The option of obtaining the Licence but not implementing weddings at Keats House from April 2014 would afford the Principal Curator and her staff the opportunity to work in collaboration with the local residents group with the objective of raising substantial funds on an annually recurring basis. Having support and meaningful involvement with the local community should be a satisfying and hopefully productive experience which it would be unwise to decline.

## **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

20. The recommendations in this report support the City of London Corporation's Corporate Plan key policy priorities of increasing the impact of the City's cultural and heritage offer on the life of London and the nation(KPP5) and of maximising the opportunities and benefits afforded by our role in supporting London's communities(KPP4).

## **Implications**

21. The income potential projected by the Principal Curator from facilitating weddings and civil ceremonies at Keats House is for year 2014/15 : £8,000 - £11,500 and for year 2015/16 : £16,000 – £19,000. These figures may be reduced if additional costs are incurred in more closely managing events.
22. The income potential arising from the proposals in the prospectus from the Residents Group contained in the appendix cannot be accurately estimated but is likely to exceed £20,000 per annum.

## **Conclusion**

23. Having considered all of the issues involved I recommend your Committee shows faith in the Residents Group by deferring the implementation of weddings at Keats House for financial year 2014/15. This will enable the residents fundraising proposals to be tested and for a further Report to be brought to your Committee at the first meeting of 2015. The Weddings Licence should however be obtained as a fee of £1000 has already been committed.
24. This is in accordance with the Corporate Key Policy Priority of maximising the opportunities and benefits afforded by our role in supporting London's communities.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 - Keats House Fundraising Ideas

## **David Wight**

Visitor Development & Services Director

T: 020 7332 1791

E :david.wight@cityoflondon.gov.uk

## KEATS HOUSE FUNDRAISING IDEAS

- 1 Appointment of Patrons and Fellows:
  - 1.1 Patrons would require a donation of a 4 figure sum – say 10 Patrons at £1,750 per head – say £17,500.00. Their names would appear on the notepaper and the website (if and when we get one); they would be entitled to attend all events at the House free for say 5 years.
  - 1.2 Fellows would be entitled to attend all events at the house at half price and to 4 free entries for themselves and their Families and would pay a sum of £350.00 for 2 years – say initially 20 Fellows – say £7,000.00.
  - 1.3 Champions / Honorary Fellows would be offered the position if they have contributed something positive to the fundraising events.
  - 1.4 International Fellows – to be discussed.
  - 1.5 We should establish a notice board alongside the House on which to inscribe the names of Patrons, Fellows and Champions permanently.
- 2 A prestige dinner for say 200 people at a City location which venue would not cost anything. One or more Celebrity speakers would appear. At a ticket cost of say £175 each and a food and wine cost of say £75 maximum this could by itself raise £20,000.00 profit plus; the dinner could have a raffle and auction which would raise further funds. We would like to aim to hold the dinner around mid-summer in June.
- 3 Drinks Parties at City venues or at the House: at charge of £25 per person with a Celebrity speaker who would not charge. Allowing for a cost in food and wine of say £10 per person, 50 people could raise £750.00 for each event.
- 4 Concerts of Chamber Music at the House: young talented musicians do not cost a lot £400 and would be glad of the

exposure; ticket prices say 40 at £25 could ensure a profit of say £600;

- 5 We would like to find a way of using the Keats Foundation Conference on 2-4 May to attract more Patrons and Fellows and to publicise the dinner
- 6 We should start a Legacy Campaign in Hampstead and farther afield.
- 7 We can arrange a session with fund-raiser from 3FF, to explore further fund-raising avenues.
- 8 We should explore inks with:
  - 8.1 University English Faculties here and in the USA;
  - 8.2 Charitable Foundations;
  - 8.3 Japanese, Chinese and Italian Embassies.
- 9 We need to explore how to incorporate these efforts into a website which is the most obvious place that a potential supporter will look at.