

<b>Committee(s):</b>		<b>Date(s):</b>
Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee	For Information	2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2014
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee	For Decision	9 <sup>th</sup> June 2014
<b>Subject:</b> Weddings and Civil Partnerships at the Hill Garden and Pergola		<b>Public</b>
<b>Report of:</b> Superintendent of Hampstead Heath		<b>For Information</b>
<p><b>Summary</b></p> <p>A licence has been granted by the London Borough of Camden to establish the Hill Garden and Pergola as a licenced venue for marriages and civil partnerships. As well as making this wonderful location available for such ceremonies, this will provide opportunities to generate additional income.</p> <p>This Report sets out the proposals for how such ceremonies will be managed in order to protect the site and minimise disruption to visitors, while providing a unique location for couples wishing to book the venue.</p> <p><b>Recommendation(s)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That the Hampstead Heath Consultative views be received on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The proposals for the management of ceremonies.</li> <li>•The charging structure, policy, and Terms and Conditions for bookings.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• That the views of the Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee are conveyed to the Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queen's Park Committee.</li> </ul>		

## Main Report

### **Background**

1. As part of the Hampstead Heath Management Plan "Towards a Plan for the Heath" 2007-2017, the feasibility of using the Hill Garden and Pergola for marriage ceremonies was proposed.
2. At the time the criteria for obtaining a licence meant that this would have been very difficult to achieve, without making a number of changes to the infrastructure of the site.

3. Given that the venue is very unusual, in that it is not a self-contained building but an Open Space with fixed structures that will enable ceremonies to take place within it, it would only be possible to offer the venue for wedding/civil partnership ceremonies and not for receptions.
4. It may however be possible to offer a limited range of drinks and canapés following a ceremony, as noted below.

### **Current Position**

5. The London Borough of Camden made a direct approach to the Superintendent of Hampstead Heath, encouraging an application for the site to be granted a licence. The Business Manager met with the Superintendent Registrar from the London Borough of Camden, who was satisfied that the venue met the necessary criteria, and a licence was granted in September 2013.
6. In addition to booking the venue, each couple must make a booking with the Registrar. They will need to satisfy the legal criteria and will also have to pay the relevant fee for the Registrar to attend the venue to carry out their service.
7. There has already been an encouraging level of interest from couples wishing to receive further information and hopefully book the site for their ceremony.
8. Areas for storage and the necessary infrastructure adjustments have been identified and investigated, with assistance from the City Surveyors Department. These include storage for chairs and the desk required by the Registrar, an area for the Registrar to meet the couple (either individually or together) and the provision of toilet facilities. All these requirements can be accommodated from the current on-site provision, with just some minor adjustments. Provision of the service will be kept under constant review and a formal review will be brought back to Committee in the spring of 2015 if these initial proposals proceed.
9. A detailed policy, together with the Booking Terms and Conditions appended to this Report (Appendix 1), will be discussed with all prospective couples to ensure they fully understand the basis on which the site is offered. This will ensure that there is clarity for those who wish to book and use the venue, so that each event runs smoothly and is a success for the couple, their guests and the City.
10. Although the law now states that ceremonies can take place at any time, the prescribed opening times of the park are from 7.30am to dusk, with 4.30pm being the earliest winter closing time. The proposed 10am to 3pm period for ceremonies would therefore provide a booking window suitable for all times of the year. The terms of the venue licence state that the marriage licence must be displayed at least one hour prior to the ceremony and during the proceedings.
11. Given the high level of interest already expressed in the venue and that bookings for such ceremonies are made a long way in advance, a bookings diary will need to be opened as soon as proposals are agreed and the Terms and Conditions are in place. The Hill Garden and Pergola represents a unique venue and the level of bookings is consequently difficult to predict.

## Proposals

12. There are three licenced areas in which ceremonies can be held:
  - a. The Hill Garden Shelter, with the guests seated on the area outside the Shelter. This area would be the main offer, accommodating a maximum of 100 guests.
  - b. Belvedere, which is at the western end of the Pergola. This is a small area, which would accommodate 10-15 guests.
  - c. The Rotunda, which is located east along the Pergola, towards Inverforth House. This area could accommodate 25-30 guests, depending upon the set-up decided upon by the couple.
13. It is recognised that the offer of the site as such a venue is secondary to its primary role as an Open Space. With this in mind, and in order to maintain the exclusive and special status of such an unusual venue, it is proposed to limit the number of bookings that will be taken. Only one event per day can be booked, with a maximum of two bookings per week and of only two Friday and two weekend ceremonies in any one month, and none on Bank Holidays, capped to a maximum of 40 ceremonies per year, ensuring that the site remains primarily an Open Space.
14. Whilst it will not be possible or in keeping with the terms of the venue licence to close off the site completely during ceremonies, the relevant area will be roped off by means of stands and cords, such as those used in theatres. This will provide a defined area for the ceremony, while also allowing the site to remain accessible to the public. In addition a red carpet will be installed for the ceremony to form an aisle if required, following discussions with the couple, and will vary in location depending upon the desired set-up and number of guests attending, as the couple will each be able to make their entrance via a choice of routes into the venue.
15. Due to the nature of the site, vehicle access to the venue is not available. Instead, parking spaces will be made available in the nearby Jack Straw's car park, as part of the package offered to couples. A number of spaces will be included in the package, with further permits made available for an additional cost. For weddings, access for the Bride/Groom will be via the gated access off North End Way, supervised by a member of the Golders Hill Park Keeping team. There may also be the option of using one of the City's vehicles, such as a Bradshaw electric vehicle, to transport the Bride/Groom.
16. Subject to the availability of the Hill Garden Head Gardener, it may be possible to offer a tour of the Hill Garden to wedding and civil partnership guests. This opportunity would be discussed at the booking stage and could take place while the photographs are being taken. It would provide a valuable opportunity to promote the site, as well as having educational and entertainment value, and would represent added value for the couple.
17. There will be a need for staff to be on-site in order to prepare and take down the event space, as well as providing a presence to answer questions and direct guests. There are a number of experienced staff with a high level of customer care skills, who will be rostered to be on duty when ceremonies are taking place. Casual staff will be used if necessary to provide back-up cover for any other services that need to be carried out.

18. The licence issued by the London Borough of Camden is that of approved premises as a venue for marriages and civil partnerships. One of the conditions of approval is a requirement for a designated Responsible Person, who must be on-site at least one hour prior to and during the proceedings. It is necessary for this person to be a senior member of staff, who is in a position to ensure compliance with the conditions of the licence. In many cases this person will be the Business Manager, who is the named holder of the approval. A Deputy will be appointed from the Support Services team, while in the case of a weekend event, the Duty Site Manager will be in a position to step in if necessary.
19. As there are no directly comparable venues, it has been difficult to benchmark costs for venue hire. Below are the venue hire costs for a number of local sites of a similar nature:
  - Lauderdale House – £1,160 (3 hours, including set-up, cleaning, ceremony fee, 1 Steward)
  - Hylands Park – £1,200 (ceremony only)
  - Keats House – £2,000 (proposed figure)
  - Kenwood House – £3,500 (5 hours venue hire)
20. It is proposed to set the initial venue hire price at between £1,500 and £2,000 for the Hill Garden, depending upon the day of week. This will include the set-up and use of the venue for photographs, allowing 2 hours for the event, with set-up and dismantling time either side. The couple may wish to have their florist bring additional displays onto site, and this will also be accommodated in the price. Additional requirements which involve extra staff time and resources will be charged accordingly.
21. It is proposed to offer the smaller sites of Belvedere and The Rotunda at the hire price of between £1,200 and £1,500, depending upon the day of the week, as there will be less labour needed for the set-up, though the staff presence on-site is still a requirement.
22. Fees will be reviewed annually in the autumn, in line with the City of London's annual review of charges for Hampstead Heath, Queen's Park and Highgate Wood.
23. A non-refundable deposit of 20% of the hire fee is proposed, which will be payable at the time of booking. This is in recognition of the limited booking opportunities which will be available and to deter people from making a reservation that they later cancel, preventing that 'slot' from being offered to another couple. The proposed maximum cap of 40 ceremonies per year, together with the suggested limit of only two events per week and only two per month on Fridays and weekend days, will provide exclusivity and create demand for the venue.
24. This is a new project and although likely demands can be anticipated, it is not possible to know precisely what the uptake will be or what capacity this will require to administer. As weddings and civil ceremonies are often booked a long way in advance, the opportunities for 2014 may be limited. A target of three or four ceremonies is therefore proposed for this year, which will act as a 'soft opening' and provide an opportunity to gain further understanding of the operational requirements. In recognition of this, a reduced fee will be

charged for the venue hire during 2014, which will be £1,250 for the Hill Garden and £1,000 for the other spaces. For 2015, with the benefit of a clearer understanding of the requirements and procedures, the aim would be to increase this to ten bookings, which would act as a pilot with any charges being in line with the proposed structure.

25. As required by the conditions of the licence, all ceremonies will be supervised, with a senior member of staff who will be on duty at the site, along with two members of the Keeping team who will be on hand to assist. Additional staff costs of up to approximately £200 per ceremony may also be incurred, should overtime working be involved, for example.
26. For the soft opening in 2014, it is anticipated that the chairs will be hired, with the barriers, ropes and carpet being purchased. For the 2015 pilot season, an investment of approximately £2,000 will be required to purchase chairs; this could be met from local risk budgets, with the income generated from bookings during the soft opening phase potentially covering this expenditure.
27. Some provision for sheltering guests in the event of inclement weather would also be needed. Pop-up gazebos (3m x 6m) are available to hire at a cost of £110 each, including delivery and collection. The purchase cost of this item has been researched, which suggests a heavy-duty pop-up gazebo can be obtained for £260 – it may therefore prove more cost-effective to purchase two of these, which could be used for other events and therefore represent an investment. As guests are unlikely to be in the ceremony for long, heaters are thought to be unnecessary, but should they be required, there are heaters available within the division that could be used during the soft opening period. City of London umbrellas will also be available to lend to guests if needed and all the arrangements for adverse weather will be discussed with the couple during the booking meeting.
28. As the venue is an Open Space, it will only be possible to offer it for the ceremony and not as a venue for receptions. However a drinks and canapés package could be offered to couples, which would be provided by the Golders Hill Park Licenced caterer. The booking would be taken as part of the package and a 10% administrative charge added to the quote offered to the customer. In addition, as a Turnover Rent payment is part of the lease agreement, associated income for the City is likely to increase.
29. As enquires have already been received, there appears to be little need to market the venue on a wide scale as yet. To retain its exclusivity, the intention is to offer the venue via the Camden Registration Services brochure and website, as well as on the City's website and in the Hampstead Heath Diary, which should generate sufficient interest, at least for the initial phases. Approximate marketing costs of £500 per year are anticipated.
30. Couples will be given a tour of the venue in advance of any booking, so that they will be fully aware of the landscape of the site, as well as the access and parking arrangements.
31. Access for people with disabilities will be discussed with the couple and arrangements made where possible to assist them with access.
32. Projected net income from wedding and civil partnership ceremonies for the 2014/15 limited soft opening is estimated at £2,000, and a sum in the region of £10,000-£13,000 for 2015/16.

## Corporate & Strategic Implications

33. This proposal links to the Hampstead Heath Management Plan, and the objective to generate additional income, along with providing an additional use for a space within the site.
34. The proposed arrangements for weddings and civil partnerships at the Hill Garden and Pergola support the **Overriding Policy S1** in the **Hampstead Heath Management Plan Part 1 – Towards a Plan for the Heath 2007-2017**: *“Work collaboratively in maintaining and developing the existing ... facilities and activities in response to changing demands ensuring appropriate provision for all sections of the community”*.
35. The proposal also supports the **City of London Corporate Plan 2013 – 17: Key Policy Priorities (KPP2)** *“Maintaining the quality of our public services whilst reducing our expenditure and improving our efficiency”*, **KPP4** *“Maximising the opportunities and benefits afforded by our role in supporting London’s communities”*, and **KPP5** *“Increasing the impact of the City’s cultural and heritage offer on the life of London and the nation.”*
36. Under **Article 8 of the Greater London Parks and Open Spaces Order 1967** the City *“may let such grounds, open air facilities and attendant buildings as it thinks fit to any person on such terms and conditions as to payment or otherwise as it considers desirable.”*

## Implications

37. As the site is primarily an Open Space, the balance between its use as a venue for weddings and civil partnerships and as a tranquil space within Hampstead Heath is paramount. By limiting the number of bookings and ensuring that couples have a clear understanding of the unique nature of the venue, together with its limitations, the special nature of the site can be preserved.
38. The ceremonies will be controlled and restricted by means of the policy and Terms and Conditions of bookings. These will be clearly explained and clarified in advance, to ensure that there is total understanding before any booking is taken. This is critical, since this approach will underpin the way in which the venue is managed and thereby the Open Space protected.

## Conclusion

39. The provision of the Hill Garden and Pergola as a venue for the celebration of marriage and civil partnerships has been a long-term aspiration, and is contained in the Hampstead Heath Management Plan. By recognising that the venue is primarily an Open Space, and this fact being made clear to interested couples from the start, it will be possible to provide a very special ceremony and experience for all the participants. Restricting the number of bookings will ensure that the venue remains exclusive and in turn will protect the asset both physically and financially.
40. The policy and Terms and Conditions of booking will ensure that expectations are clear for all involved, avoiding disappointed couples or issues arising at an event. As the events will be managed by experienced staff, effective on-the-

spot decisions can be made in order to minimise disruption and resolve any issues. Every event will be individual, while each will be in keeping with the site and personal to the couple.

**Appendices:**

- Appendix 1 - Proposed Policy and Terms and Conditions for bookings
- Appendix 2 - Proposed Charging Policy

**Contacts:**

Bob Warnock | [bob.warnock@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:bob.warnock@cityoflondon.gov.uk) | 020 7332 3322

Yvette Hughes | [yvette.hughes@cityoflondon.gov.uk](mailto:yvette.hughes@cityoflondon.gov.uk) | 020 7332 3977