

Committee(s):		Date(s):
Hampstead Heath, Highgate Wood and Queens Park Management Committee	For Decision	21 September 2015
Hampstead Heath Consultative Committee	For information	9 November 2015
Subject:		Public
Weddings and Civil Partnerships at the Hill Garden and Pergola - Update		
Report of:		For Information
Superintendent of Hampstead Heath		
Summary		
<p>On 9 June 2014 Committee approval was given for marriage and civil partnership ceremonies to take place at the Hill Garden and Pergola. A licence was obtained from London Borough of Camden to establish them as licenced venues.</p> <p>This Report gives an overview of the first year of bookings and details the costs involved in providing this service.</p>		
Recommendation(s)		
It is recommended that:-		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members note the contents of this Report; and • the increase in permitted maximum numbers to 120 guests at the Hill Garden Shelter, 25 guests at Belvedere, and 50 guests at the Rotunda be approved; and • the introduction of a £120 charge for the facilitation of facilities to drink a toast following ceremonies be approved . 		

Main Report

Background

1. The use of the Hill Garden and Pergola as a venue for weddings was proposed as a means of generating income for Hampstead Heath, as a charity.
2. Following Committee approval in June 2014, we contacted couples who had expressed an interest in using the Hill Garden and Pergola as a venue for their wedding/civil partnership ceremony. The first viewings of the venue took place on Friday 13 June, of which two were converted into bookings.
3. The first ceremony took place on Saturday 26 July 2014 and the second the following Saturday. The feedback from both couples was very positive.
4. To date, 21 ceremonies have taken place, with a further 2 booked for 2015/16 and 10 for 2016/17

Current Position

Approach

5. The 'soft opening' approach for 2014/15 provided valuable experience of managing the ceremonies, which are very different from the events usually taking place within Open Spaces. Each is obviously a very personal occasion and needs to be managed as such, with the couple made to feel they are the only ones who have ever been married here.
6. From the events that have already taken place and the feedback from couples received, it has become clear that the service provided is critical to the success of the venue. Feedback and thanks received from couples has included:
 - "This was a dream come true"
 - "Everything was dealt with professionalism yet we felt it was laid back and there was absolutely no stress."
 - "Thank your team for making our day so special. The entire day: organisation, venue, service and communication were completely perfect."
7. A feedback form is sent to couples 4 weeks after the ceremony and the ratings given in response have been 97% Excellent and 3% Very Good.
8. The viewing meeting carried out before a booking is taken has proved to be a very important part of the process, as it provides clarity from the start and manages expectations.
9. The Registrars who have visited the site to perform ceremonies have been very happy with the way the facility is managed and the support with which they are provided.

Operational details

10. The target of 10 weddings for the pilot year of 2015/16 has been exceeded, with 19 bookings received. One of these subsequently cancelled, due to a change of venue, though their deposit was retained.
11. With availability restricted to two Saturdays in any one month, these days have been booked very quickly, with Saturdays in July and August 2016 already booked by May 2015. Couples remain keen to use the venue and are therefore booking Fridays or other weekdays as an alternative.
12. Although receptions cannot be held at the venue, couples have requested the opportunity to drink a toast following their ceremony, and have brought their own drinks and plastic flutes for this purpose. We have provided a table to facilitate this activity; so far, this has not been charged for this service, but as this is clearly a service which is required and the introduction of a fee therefore seems appropriate and a charge of £120 is suggested.
13. Initial discussions to involve the Golders Hill Café's licensed caterer with ceremonies produced a range of logistical issues to prevent this working. This option has therefore not been developed.
14. Most couples have been happy with the necessary restrictions at the venue. Where they have had specific requests, the Hampstead Heath Business Manager has endeavoured to work with the couple to provide a service that

meets their requirements. The main concern remains the preservation and respect for the site and this is at the forefront of any considerations.

15. The 2-hour hire period for the venue has worked effectively in most cases. Occasionally guests have arrived very early, so the team is keen to ensure that the set-up is in place well ahead of time.
16. There has been a level of interest from members of the public when ceremonies are set-up. Signs are placed on site the day before an event, providing advance notice of access restrictions. On the actual day, signs explaining that the area is designated for a wedding are placed adjacent to the location. There have been a limited number of members of the public who have not been happy with the restricted access, but an explanation of the arrangements has been provided and alternative routes given to access the Hill Garden and Pergola, which in most cases has resolved the concerns.
17. There has been one written complaint from a resident of Inverforth Close, who had an issue with a guest bringing their car into the private road, despite it being made clear to couples that this is not permitted. A response was sent explaining the arrangements and providing reassurance that this would be reiterated to couples at every opportunity. An offer to meet the resident was also made, but this was not taken up.
18. Storage facilities for the items required for the events, such as chairs, tables, barriers and signs, have been found at Golders Hill Park. This area is secure, dry and convenient for the staff to load and unload on the day. Use of this space has been achieved with a minimum of disruption and no cost.
19. Towards the end of 2015, the Superintendent will conduct a review involving all staff who have been involved in supporting the ceremonies to ensure that lessons learned during the soft launch and pilot year have been applied effectively. Following the review the terms and conditions for ceremonies will be updated.
20. A range of photographs from events is contained in Appendix 1.

Costings

21. The Report to this Committee on 9 June 2014 projected income from wedding and civil partnership ceremonies at an estimated sum of £2,000 for the 2014/15 limited soft opening, and a sum in the region of £10,000-£13,000 for 2015/16. The table below sets out the net income for 2014/15 & 2015/16, along with the costs which were necessary in order to establish this venture.

22. The costs for operating these events has been calculated as shown in the table below:

Year	Number of Weddings	Income ex VAT (£)	Equipment Purchase	Net income	Underlying Staff Costs @ £450 per ceremony*
		£	£	£	£
2014/15	6	5875.00	4115.00	1760.00	2700.00
2015/16	18	26830.00	1150.00	25680.00	8100.00

Table 1 – Summary of costs and income

* These are staff rostered to work (i.e. not additional staff or overtime), assuming an average total of 16 hours per ceremony and based on the use of Management and Keeper Staff before, during and after the event. Please note this figure includes time spent by the Business Manager (or her delegate) in conducting initial viewings, not all of which convert into actual bookings.

19. The majority of the equipment required for these events was purchased in 2014/15, and the income generated that year (£5,875.00) reflects the cost of their initial purchase. As these items will be used for every future event, the ongoing costs are limited and will probably involve only replacement items or additions to stock such as chairs, to cater to larger weddings, which were purchased in 2015/16.

The charging schedule, see table 2, was agreed in November 2014 by this committee. The proposed charges commencing April 2017 will be presented to Members in November 2015.

Wedding and Civil Ceremonies	Soft opening charges 2014/15 (£)	Pilot year charges 2015/16 (£)	Agreed Charges from 1/1/2016 (£)
Hill Garden Shelter			
• Monday – Thursday	1,250.00	1,800.00	2,000.00
• Friday	1,250.00	2,100.00	2,400.00
• Weekends	1,250.00	2,400.00	2,800.00
Pergola			
• Monday - Thursday	1,000.00	1,500.00	1,800.00
• Friday	1,000.00	1,620.00	2,000.00
• Weekends	1,000.00	1,800.00	2,200.00

Table 2 – Schedule of Charges

Recommendations

23. The guest limits for the venues detailed in the Report of 9 June 2014 have now been tested and, as a result, we recommend the maximum number that can be accommodated at each location be increased, as follows:
 - 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 120 guests (originally 100).
 - b. Belvedere, which is at the western end of the Pergola. This is a small area, which would accommodate a maximum of 25 guests (originally 10-15).
 - c. The Rotunda, which is located east along the Pergola, towards Inverforth House. This area could accommodate a maximum of 50 guests, depending on the set-up selected by the couple (originally 25-30 guests).
 - d. A charge for the provision of facilities for a toast to be taken following the ceremony be introduced.

At each ceremony, the priority remains the comfort, health and safety of guests and we are confident these revised numbers are in tune with this.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

24. 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.
25. 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”*.
26. 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.”*
27. 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.”*

Conclusions

28. The income generated supports the Service Based Review savings delivery and due to the positive outcomes as a result of the soft launch and pilot years an additional £10,000 income target has been committed for 2016/17 and 2017/18.

29. The venture has proved very successful, with the number of bookings and income generated exceeding the targets set. This has also encouraged cross-working across the Division, with various members of staff providing support with the set-up and break-down on the day.
30. Most of the guests attending ceremonies are not familiar with the venue. Showcasing the site in this way has introduced more people to Hampstead Heath.
31. The positive feedback from couples and guests has been very encouraging. Despite the offer being limited, in that the site is only available for the actual ceremonies, this has not put couples off - they have been happy to arrange their reception at a separate venue and in many cases, this aspect has helped them with their planning and deciding on the number of guests to be invited.
32. The model used and experience gained at The Hill Garden and Pergola has been shared with colleagues across the Department. The Queen Elizabeth Hunting Lodge at Epping and the bandstand at Queen's Park will now also be holding ceremonies.
33. Enquires are already being received for 2017, and bookings will be considered from January 2016.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Photographs of events and set ups.

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Appendix 1



The Rotunda



Hill Garden Shelter



Belvedere