

Committee(s):	Date(s):
Port Health and Environmental Services	4th July 2012
Subject: Interim Position on Vehicle Access Permit Charges	Public
Report of: Director of Open Spaces	For Decision
<u>Summary</u>	
<p>Vehicle access into the cemetery is recognised as a significant risk that has been managed by the operation of a free vehicle access permit scheme since 2006 and in its current format since May 2007. The scheme provides over 6000 permits.</p> <p>Last year the cemetery service was required to identify £192,000 in savings, which included the deletion of several operational posts. During consultation with staff regarding measures to avoid, reduce or mitigate planned redundancies it was suggested that by applying a charge for vehicle access there would be potential to generate additional income and it was decided to investigate this proposal.</p> <p>Charging for vehicles to gain access to the cemetery does have the potential to produce income but the risks of introducing such a charge need to be carefully considered. In order to gain a better understanding of support for, or resistance to such a charge, it is imperative that the service consults with cemetery users, before any decision is made.</p> <p>Using the services of a marketing consultant gives the cemetery an opportunity to consult with stakeholders on this and wider issues of fees and charges, volunteers, the development of a Friends Group and other factors that will help to shape the future of the service. Initial meetings have been held with consultants and the report includes their proposed approach.</p> <p>Recommendations</p> <p>That your Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • approves the appointment of Marketing Assistance Ltd at a cost of £9,800 to undertake consultations and research to identify public perception towards the introduction of a charge for permits and other opportunities to generate income, to support future management of the Cemetery. • receives a detailed report on the outcome of the consultation undertaken by Marketing Assistance Ltd., including the matter of charging for vehicle access into the site. 	

Main Report

Background

1. The City of London Cemetery and Crematorium is the largest municipal cemetery in the country and covers an area of 200 acres. The site has seven miles of roadways and extends to over two miles around the perimeter.
2. The high number and speed of vehicles entering the grounds in conjunction with the shared access between drivers and pedestrians is a recognised risk to the health and safety of visitors. In March 2005 your Committee agreed to

introduce a pilot scheme banning private cars from entering the grounds at weekends, if not part of a funeral procession. A mini-bus service was introduced to assist cemetery users gain access to graves and dedications within the site.

3. This policy was extremely unpopular, receiving hundreds of complaints and was reviewed in January 2006 when a further pilot scheme was introduced allowing vehicular access to the site for those visitors who applied for a free permit. The vehicle access permit scheme was reviewed again in March 2007 and has remained in place free of charge ever since. There are now around 6000 permits with no expiry dates.
4. Provision was made to review the scheme after three years operation in 2010 but this requirement was not actioned as the scheme was working satisfactorily.
5. In 2011 the cemetery was required to highlight £192,000 of savings and management engaged in consultation meetings with staff on measures to avoid reduce or mitigate planned redundancies. At those meetings it was suggested that by applying a charge for vehicle access there would be potential to generate additional income.
6. This matter was raised in a report to your Committee in November 2011 when it was agreed that a further report would be produced setting out the consultation process and that this would need to be agreed, before any consultation on the introduction of a charge for car permits would be considered.

Current Position

7. The cemetery service carries out over 2,500 cremations each year and approximately 1,000 burials and in 2011/12 produced income in excess of £3.95million. The strategy for the setting of fees and charges has been to keep prices affordable whilst maximising income as the service is in competition with several local private companies. Therefore, whilst there is clearly a possible income stream to be generated by charging for vehicle permits the service would not wish to jeopardise its current market position over a decision that would be particularly unpopular, affect business or cause negative PR for the City of London.
8. As a result of the above concerns, two marketing consultancies have been approached regarding the possibility of independently carrying out quantitative and qualitative research, to assess the general level of support for charging for vehicle access to enter the cemetery grounds by car.
9. Using the services of a marketing consultant gives the cemetery management an opportunity to consult with stakeholders on much wider issues including fees and charges, the use of volunteers, the development of a Friends Group and other matters that will help to shape the future of the service. The full remit of the proposed market research is to consider the following;
 - establishment of a Friends Organisation
 - development of Guided Tours
 - further development of the Newsletter

- public perception on current fees and charges
 - charging for vehicle access permits
 - enhancement of current facilities
 - establishment of new facilities
10. Two companies were invited to submit proposals, DJS Research and Marketing Assistance Ltd; both were given identical information regarding the requirements and specific details of the research, both submitted proposals with Marketing Assistance Ltd being considered as offering a more professionally presented and robust approach, the best value for money, a choice of options including two costing options. (Attached as an appendix)
11. The proposal involves three stages of consultations, two are qualitative and require in-depth interviews with stakeholders combined with two focus groups to explore the key issues listed in paragraph 9. The third stage is quantitative and requires face to face interviews with cemetery users.

Options

12. Carry out no consultation before making a decision as to whether a charge is applied to vehicle access permits. Any decision made without consultation would rely on data from 2007 when a majority of cemetery users were opposed to a charge. If a charge were to be applied the decision would be difficult to defend as there had been no recent consultation on the subject and the only evidence available would suggest that the City was acting against the general opinion of users.

NOT RECOMMENDED

13. Carry out the lower cost consultation option. This option (set out on page 10 of the appendix) is priced at £4,900 and is exactly half the cost of the recommended option. This allows for five in-depth interviews, one focus group and 100 visitor interviews. Whilst this would provide the service with valuable information the level of statistical reliability is lower than the higher cost (preferred) option.

NOT RECOMMENDED

14. Carry out the higher cost consultation option. This is the preferred option as it offers a higher level of feedback and therefore a higher level of statistical reliability. The cost is £9,800 and includes ten in-depth interviews with stakeholders, two focus groups and four hundred visitor interviews. The consultation is expected to require approximately 13 weeks to complete and will provide the service with valuable information on a range of important issues. The cost of the market research can be met by the cemetery and crematorium local risk budget and whilst there is no specific budget for this project the marketing and promotions budget can be used and this would represent the majority of the allocated spend for 2012/13.

RECOMMENDED

Proposals

15. It is proposed that the cemetery and crematorium service appoint Marketing Assistance Ltd to carry out consultation as described in paragraphs 9 and 14 at a cost of £9,800 and for a further report to be presented to this Committee with findings and further recommendations regarding the car permit scheme and other options/initiatives developed from the survey.

Financial Implications

16. The financial implications of appointing a consultant to carry out market research are limited to the costs described in paragraph 14 and a small operational cost for providing refreshments to the focus groups. There is a wider financial implication should a decision be made to charge for vehicle access as there are operational administration and enforcement costs but this will form part of a further report, should such a recommendation be made.

Key Risks

17. There are very few risks associated with this report due to the fact that the only recommended action is to appoint a consultant and carry market testing and consultation in the areas highlighted in paragraph 9. Any reputational and business risks, if they exist, will be considered if a further report recommends the charging for vehicle access permits or other income generation proposals.

Legal Implications

18. The City of London has the power to charge for discretionary services under the Local Government Act 2003. Such income cannot exceed the costs of service provision although recoverable costs may include staff costs (including on-costs), an appropriate element of premises related cost as well as printing and stationary costs etc.

Property Implications

19. There are no property related implications associated with this report.

HR Implications

20. There are no HR implications associated with this report. Should a further report be brought to this Committee recommending a charge for vehicle access permits, all HR implications will be considered and addressed at that time.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

21. The efficient and effective management of the City of London Cemetery and Crematorium supports the local community and protects, promotes and enhances the local environment in accordance with the City of London Corporation's Community Strategy.
22. The Town Clerk, Chamberlain and Comptroller and City Solicitor have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

Conclusions

23. The recommendations set out in this report enables the cemetery and crematorium service to evaluate the public perceptions and strength of feeling towards the introduction of a charge for vehicle access permits, whilst gaining valuable information regarding service provision in other areas. The consultation will also be a very useful tool in the possible development of a Friends Group and a Volunteering Strategy.

Background Papers:

Port Health and Environmental Services Committee – Vehicle Access into the City of London Cemetery 17th November 2004

Port Health and Environmental Services Committee – Vehicle Access: Interim Report on Pilot Scheme 24th January 2006

Port Health and Environmental Services Committee – Public Vehicle Access into the City of London Cemetery 24th April 2007

Port Health and Environmental Services Committee – Cemetery and Crematorium Budget Reductions for 2012/13 8th November 2011

Appendices

Marketing Assistance Ltd Consultation and Research Proposal 28th March 2012

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