

REPORT TO ASSETS AND OPERATIONS COMMITTEE

CEMETERY CHAPEL WEDDING LICENCE

Report Reference A-20-09
Meeting Date 8th March 2021
Agenda Item 8
Prepared by Town Clerk



1.0 BACKGROUND

The committee has previously noted the potential to licence the cemetery chapel for civil marriages/civil partnerships. This aligns with the council's objective of seeing the cemetery chapel in active use and makes it a facility which could be part of users' lives at different stages. The chapel would particularly appeal to those who have a loved one at rest in the cemetery; who seek the architectural style of chapels/churches but a non-religious ceremony and those who generally seek a small civil ceremony in an attractive building. The cemetery chapel is not consecrated.

The chapel would be a small venue, accommodating approximately 40-50 guests for a ceremony. It would be impractical to host a reception at the chapel due to there only being one room so most likely that a ceremony would be held with a reception held at another venue.

The location of the chapel in the centre of a cemetery may put off some potential customers (conversely it may also attract some, albeit likely in smaller order) though it is noted that most churches are at the centre of a graveyard.

There are currently three licenced wedding venues within Knutsford itself: Cottons Hotel, Larkspur Lodge and the Courthouse Hotel. Slightly outside Knutsford there is also Tabley House, Tatton Park, The Mere, The Roebuck Inn and Owen House Barn.

2.0 DELIVERING WEDDINGS AT THE CHAPEL

2.1 DESIGNATION AS AN APPROVED PREMISE

For a marriage or civil partnership to take place in the chapel, it must be formally approved by the Cheshire East Registration Service. The chapel has been visited by the Cheshire East Council Registration department who have confirmed it would be suitable for civil ceremonies.

Approval lasts for three years and the application costs £1,800 plus £100 for the public notice (both non-refundable in the event an application is refused). Once processed the application is advertised and there is an opportunity for objections to be raised on the grounds that the building is not suitable for ceremonies.

2.2 OPERATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

There must be a designated Responsible Person for the venue; this would be the Town Clerk. There may also be assigned Deputy Responsible Persons. The Responsible Person or their Deputy must be at the premises one hour before and throughout a ceremony. The Personnel Committee will need to

give consideration to this staffing implication, but the fees proposed in 2.3 presume a payment is made to staff outside their contracted hours for facilitating a ceremony.

2.3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

As stated, the upfront application cost is £1,900; the approval lasts three years and the council would need to raise on average £633 per year to cover this cost.

It is suggested that initially the council have a simple fee structure of £450 for a weekday ceremony and £600 for a weekend ceremony; this would be for a four-hour booking period.

These costs would be inclusive of VAT making a net receipt of £375 and £500 respectively. Presuming a staffing cost of approximately £165 per ceremony (inclusive of caretaker room preparation and responsible person attendance) the council would need to operate a minimum of three weekday or two weekend ceremonies per year to cover the approval cost.

3.0 DECISION REQUIRED

The committee should consider seeking the licensing of the chapel as an approved wedding venue as outlined.