

LICENSING OF THE RAYLEIGH WINDMILL FOR CIVIL CEREMONIES

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Members with information regarding the potential of staging civil ceremonies at the Rayleigh Windmill and gaining Members' agreement to apply for a wedding licence for this venue.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 Since the inception of the former Windmill Sub-Committee in 2003/04, options for future usage of the Windmill have been discussed and explored by Members and at the Sub-Committee's meeting of 22 November 2005, it was agreed that the option for licensing of the Windmill for weddings should be investigated.
- 2.2 Initial enquiries for licensing indicated that the minimum requirements for venue size required a room that would accommodate 25 people, with a second room available for interviewing of the couple. However, from the risk assessment carried out for use of the Windmill by the Council's Contingency Planning & Health & Safety Officer, the indication was that capacity of the ground floor was only 18 people and, therefore, ruled out the possibility of weddings being held.

3 FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

- 3.1 Following these initial conclusions further discussion has taken place with Essex County Council Officers which has resulted in the option of holding weddings/civil ceremonies at the Windmill now being a live possibility again.
- 3.2 Currently many existing licensed venues tend to be hotels, country houses, golf clubs etc but all these types of venue provide in-house catering facilities and normally cater for, and require, larger parties.
- 3.3 Essex County Council Officers have noted a significant rise in the number of smaller ceremonies, and, the subsequent increase in demand for smaller venues for these events without necessarily the requirement for full reception facilities. This view was also confirmed during their attendance at a wedding fayre in London where they had received a number of enquires regarding smaller venues.
- 3.4 As a result of this information, a meeting was held at the Rayleigh Windmill with the appropriate Officer from the County Council to obtain views on the suitability of the venue and of the likelihood of obtaining a licence for the Windmill. The outcome of this meeting was very positive with the suggestion that the result of a licence application could well be successful.
- 3.5 If a licence application was submitted and proved to be successful, there would be a number of issues that would need to be considered and would

have to be addressed in order to hold the ceremonies. These include the following:-

- Hire cost of the venue for licensed events
- Booking arrangements
- Risk management arrangements, including insurance cover
- Staffing for the opening of the Windmill – on the day of the event and preparation visits
- New decor and appropriate furniture including potential storage arrangements
- Increased maintenance and especially cleaning
- Publicity for the venue and advertising options for a publicity brochure
- Potential partnership arrangements with local facilities as part of a package, including Virgin Active at the Mill Arts & Event Centre

- 3.6 Research has been undertaken to look at the costs of similar venues across the country and into how they are operated. From this research, only two other windmills have been found that have been licensed but there are a number of different “small Venues” that also stage these ceremonies. From this research, it would be quite reasonable for the Council to be able to charge between £350 - £400 for a wedding or other ceremony.
- 3.7 In taking bookings, care would need to be taken to not clash with other events already being staged at the Windmill and, therefore, it is suggested that the Council's Leisure Development Team should initially deal with enquires and bookings. This would also provide a link into the Windmill Management Group but it should be noted that this arrangement would only be possible up to a certain level of demand and would need to be monitored and reviewed on an ongoing basis. If demand for the venue grew, it may be necessary to employ an extra member of staff on a part-time basis to deal with the bookings/enquiries.
- 3.8 In considering the Windmill as a venue, there would be a need to provide and store suitable furniture, ie chairs (approximate 20) and tables. Similarly, there would be the need to provide a slightly different environment internally that would be more appropriate for civil ceremonies which could be done either by providing curtain backdrops or removable panel backdrops. Additional allowance will also be required for cleaning the Windmill for every booking, both before and after a ceremony.
- 3.9 Publicity would be a key issue for this aspect of the service and initially reliance would be placed on the venue being advertised on the County Council Website and in their wedding venue brochure. However, there would

be a need to produce a professionally produced brochure/booking pack for the Windmill that would show the set-up, what facilities exist, how it is booked etc. We would also use the Council's own Website.

- 3.10 In producing this brochure, there are options that could be considered and further work needs to be done on this if a licence is obtained. The brochure could contain advertisements for other wedding services, reception venues etc which would help to pay for this item. A package deal could also be explored with Virgin Active with regard to their reception facilities at the Mill Arts & Events Centre.

4 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 If the Windmill is licensed as a venue for civil ceremonies, it would be imperative that all aspects of the service are carried out to a very high standard appropriate to the nature of the event. Failure to achieve this and potentially affecting somebody's "big day" would create extremely negative publicity for the Council.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 As mentioned in Section 3 of this report, there are a number of developments required prior to staging civil ceremonies, many of which have an initial one-off or on-going costs attached. These are detailed below:-
- Wedding Licence - £1,400 for three years payable to Essex County Council
 - Furniture and appropriate decor - £6,000 (one-off capital cost)
 - Publicity – brochure/booking pack - £2,000 (one-off capital cost)
 - Revenue costs per wedding:-
 - booking arrangements – no cost initially due to using existing staff
 - staffing on wedding day - £75.00 (when extra part-time person required)
 - Additional cleaning - £40.00 per event
- 5.2 If Members agree to applying for a licence, consideration could be given to setting up a joint expenditure and income code that offsets on an on-going basis the costs of each wedding and the licence fee with the booking fees that are generated. In addition, the £1,400 Licence Fee could be spread over three years at £467.00 per year.
- 5.3 The capital costs for furniture, decor and publicity material of approximately £8,000 would need to be met initially from the Council's Capital Expenditure budget but as popularity grew for the venue, the booking fees would, in time,

offset this initial expenditure. Officers will monitor the recovery of costs over time.

6 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 If successful in getting a licence, the operation of the venue will have to meet all legal requirements associated with this licence.

7 RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1 It is proposed that the Executive Board **RESOLVES**

- (1) Whether to apply to Essex County Council for the wedding licence for the Rayleigh Windmill at the cost of £1,400 for three years.
- (2) To fund the furniture, decor and publicity material from this year's Capital Expenditure up to £8,000 budget and to use the booking fees to off-set against the set up and ongoing costs.

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Background Papers:-

None

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