

FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES

SUBJECT:	Hospitality Consultancy Report and Hospitality Manager Recruitment
REPORT BY:	Matthew Gleadell

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 On the basis of the content of the report that the Town Clerk in consultation with the Leader, Chair of Finance and General Purposes Committee and Chair of Personnel Committee be given devolved authority to conduct an appropriate recruitment process for a hospitality manager and make an appointment as soon as reasonably possible provided that any appointment made is within allocated budget provision available.

2. Background

- 2.1 The hospitality consultant report is now received and largely speaks for itself. It is attached as Appendix 1. The fundamental summary is that the Town Hall offer is considered by the consultant to offer sufficient financial potential to justify the recruitment of a dedicated hospitality manager whose role will be to develop the offer and maximise the use of the Town Hall and increase the revenue streams from those bookings.

- 2.2 Please note that the potential costs for a hospitality manager set out in the report include pension and national insurance on costs which have been budgeted for.

- 2.2 The report identifies various investment needs in the building, some of which are already being pursued / considered and were included in the recent schedule of works for the Councils wider estate for example safety issues for the balcony to guard against glasses being accidentally dropped over the balcony.

There are other potential capital investment needs which are identified which include creation of a focused bridal room, improving the drinks ordering processes, the acquisition of on trend wedding chairs and other cosmetic/functional improvements. All of these elements will be assessed, costed and subject to ordinary procurement and governance structures which, where required, will involve obtaining a member backed decision. The figures provided by the consultant are indicative only.

- 2.3 Marketing and promotion will be a critical factor in taking the Town Hall offer forward. A hospitality manager with strong marketing skills will be essential.

Members are asked to note that the Clerk will, ahead of any appointment, begin to investigate the provision of a separate dedicated venue website and secure a suite of appropriate marketing materials. The Clerk is also mindful that creating a dedicated brand for the Town Hall may also be advantageous which allows it to visually sit as an entity in its own right that is distinct from the Town Council. The wedding market is very image focused and developing a strong brand identity will be key. It is suggested that the follow up meeting with the consultant be used to explore the benefits of developing a separate Town Hall brand.

- 2.4 Members will note that as part of the Consultancy there is opportunity for a 1 hour follow up meeting with the consultant. The Clerk will organise a date and time for this and invite members to attend. This will be a virtual meeting. Members unable to attend are welcome to submit questions they would like to have asked of the consultant and the Clerk will feedback to all members.

3.0 Financial, Legal, Equality, Environmental & Risk Issues

3.1 **Financial** – The principal cost of recruiting a hospitality manager has been budgeted for in the current financial year.

Risk Issues – The principal risk is that the venue fails to meet the revenue expectations and forecasts set out in the report. This may necessitate the need to review the hospitality manager role in the future if despite best efforts the offer does not deliver as hoped.

Background Papers:	Working papers
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NEWARK TOWN COUNCIL - WEDDING CONSULTING WEDDING AND PRIVATE EVENT VIABILITY CONSULTANCY

On-site visit with Matthew Gleadell: 5th March 2024

Report date: 25th March 2024

DESIRED OUTCOME OF THE CONSULTANCY

To ascertain if and what realistic potential the Georgian Town Hall has within the fast-evolving wedding and special events market. What investments are needed, what the likely expected returns are so that you consider if this is a commercial revenue stream that is worth pressing ahead with. A budget is potentially available to employ a Hospitality Manager to generate and manage this commercial activity (which to date has been reactive and ad hoc) as well as some financial investment in infrastructure and marketing to support. The consultancy is to help guide the decision to proceed with this recruitment or to raise commercial revenue from this source in other ways/third parties.

WEDDING MARKET STATISTICS AND BACKGROUND DATA

Size of market

There are approximately 250,000 weddings annually in the UK (Office of National Statistics Data 253,112 in 2019). 7% of those weddings (17,500) take place in the East Midlands with an average overall budget in this region of £16,888.

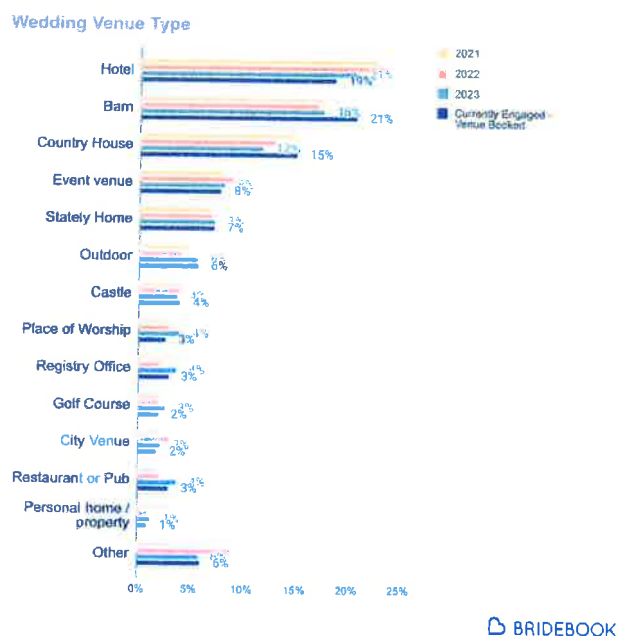
Budget and Spend

Generally around 50% of budget goes towards venue hire and food and drink combined, roughly 25% towards venue hire, and another 25% towards food. For an “average” wedding this would therefore mean approximately £4,000 is spent on venue hire and £4,000 on food and drink. This roughly aligns with typical costs at a venue such as Kelham House Hotel that is an example of a popular mainstream wedding venue in your area. A typical 2024 wedding hosts 89 day guests. We will look at your specific ideal client profile later on.

Type of venues

City venues such as Town Halls make up approximately 2% of the market of weddings, with 3% being Registry Offices; there is some blurring here of course but this should give you an idea of where the Town Hall fits within the overall wedding venue landscape. Barn venues are now with 21% market share the most popular type of wedding venue, with hotels at 19% and country houses at 15%. It is by far the large majority of couples who choose an “all in one” venue that can host ceremony and full celebration, with wedding breakfast and evening party.

Data: Bridebook UK Wedding Market Report 2024



Seasonality and Timeframes

An average engagement length is 20 months with the venue searching part tending to happen within the first month or two of that time period.

Whilst engagements and venue searching happens year round there are 2 annual peaks – the first running from Christmas Day to Valentine’s Day and the second in late summer, September, post summer holidays. As such, peaks for bookings for those hosting weddings are Jan-Mar and then Sep-Oct. These are the times to have marketing & sales efforts focussed.

With the average engagement length, bookings are invariably well ahead of time for a mainstream wedding although I would anticipate shorter planning timeframes for your ideal client, probably running from 2 months-9 months more typically. 50% of couples book their venue within 2 weeks of initial contact so a slick, attentive process is required to capture, impress, reassure and secure customers in the wedding market.

Days of Week

52% of weddings take place on Saturdays but leaving a large market of couples who will consider a non-Saturday. Friday is the second most popular but weekdays have been on the up year on year for couples. There is almost always an expectation and desire for a cost saving associated with those mid week weddings. This can be easier for some venues to achieve where a permanent team is employed and economies of scale apply, for others it’s more challenging to offer the sort of cost discounts sought.

As an average a mid-week venue hire achieves approximately 60% of the weekday full rate.

Demographic of couple

The average age of a wedding couple is 32 years of age meaning that the predominant generational group are millennials but this is shifting

with now 24% of couples being from Gen Z – meaning they are born 1997 or after. Couples plan their weddings with far less parental influence in 2024 than ever before.

Modern Customer Demands

Privacy and Exclusivity of Venue – is highly important to almost all wedding customers irrespective of price point and overall budget. There has been a year on year shift towards this over the past 10-20 years with more and more exclusive-use venues joining the scene and hotels carefully managing their wedding business to give privacy. Whilst total privacy and exclusivity is often the reserve of a luxury budget, all couples are particularly sensitive towards multiple weddings and other couples sharing the same space, something that I explored early within you ascertaining that the Town Hall is not Newark's primary location for the Registration of Marriages on one day. Having multiple couples using the space on the same day very much limits commercial value and desirability.



High Levels of Customer Experience/Service – wedding couples are rather unique in terms of the potential expectations of a wedding day and importantly the booking and planning experience that runs towards the day. There is a “once in a lifetime” approach to their day, different to other events, with multiple family stakeholders to keep happy, it can sometimes be the biggest spend they will make on an item for one day, plus the emotional impact of a big life-changing decision. All of these factors singly and combined mean that expectations of genuine customer service are VERY high. It is critical that whoever are the points of contact from your side from early stage through to delivery are hospitality, service and people-passionate individuals and understanding of the customer painpoints, challenges and desires.

Digitally Savvy

The current generation of wedding customers are most definitely digital natives. They have very high expectations of the customer process in terms of it being easy for them to access 24/7, easy to obtain information in particular with things like transparent pricing. As a customer group they are very image led so aspects like a well-designed “brand”, website, social media content are key. The wedding industry is very visual with high quality professional imagery being key – aspects like styled photo shoots for inspiration are now a very usual way for venues to promote and attract their ideal couples who increasingly expect to see and experience their wedding before they will buy. The days of offering a location for them to do the full work and bring it to life are over with couples expecting venues to showcase the possibilities much more before they will buy.

CREATING THE OFFER – EXPLORING ALL THE POSSIBILITIES OF YOUR TOWN HALL OFFERING

Having reviewed the Town Hall in great detail via a thorough walk-through, I believe you have the many key physical ingredients of a core classic and potentially popular wedding package/offering. You also have potential for future further developments that have scope for increased

add-on revenue or alternative audiences should a dedicated Hospitality Manager be in place to develop and I will explain below.

Ideal Customer

It is important to you that as a Town Hall serving the local community and tax payer that you are accessible to as many people as possible and achievable so are not exploring a luxury market. As such it is important that the price point is reasonable whilst being profitable and I recommend this is achieved by creating a Core Venue Hire but with some upgrades and add-on room hires which are optional and flexible to budgets.

I believe that having a choice of caterer at different style and price point will assist with this which is explained below.

I see your ideal customer:

- Living locally and wanting the benefit of a local town centre wedding for convenience and local connection
- Wanting the wow factor of an attractive/historical building
- Slightly above average wedding age, possibly not wanting all the “fuss” of a hotel/country house wedding
- Wanting a more budget option, perhaps they already have children or are second-time marriage or similar – I don’t see you as the obvious choice for the “fairytale” wedding couple and that’s fine, there are many locations for them.

Core Wedding Offering

Summary: you have a very good, exclusive use offering. Excellent commercial kitchen and toilets, well stocked bar, attractive function spaces which flow well into each other and can accommodate good capacities with multi locations and options.

Access and Arrival

Whilst the market place and entrance to the Town Hall is clearly busy and a public space with limited vehicle access, the positive is that the glass entrance to the staircase can quite easily be privatised with

security, leading to an attractive staircase therefore giving way to a private space on an event day.

Consideration does need to be given to how a bridal car can arrive at the front (I understand special access can be given with notice). Across the wedding market however the popularity of traditional bridal cars has declined as more couples make their vows in an “all in one” location and more couples or bride’s certainly choose to make their final prep/get ready on site so not making the big arrival by car. Offering a bridal prep space is therefore a priority.

Car parking – it’s not unusual for guests arriving at a city centre venue to expect to make their own arrangements for parking but any kind of discounted special arrangement that can be made is a bonus and helpful towards selling.

Council Chamber Room + Balcony

This is the obvious “gathering” space pre wedding breakfast or pre evening reception/ buffet space or most suitable wedding ceremony space for the sort of guest size I’d advise you focus on – approx. 100.



The Balcony is a vital component to this room as you are otherwise lacking in outdoor space. Weddings in particular (but to some extent all private special events) desire outside space and customers will decline a venue often on the lack of outdoor private space. Photography is a key component of a wedding and creating memories and it's known that photography in natural light outdoors is key to the quality of this, especially important to young couples who are very photo/social media savvy.

As such I recommend making relevant updates and changes to your current Balcony such that having doors open and allowing a limited number of guests outside is do-able. Installing clear Perspex screens at the balcony edges which allow the light to come through and views to be enjoyed but prevent glassware and debris from accidentally dropping and damaging or potentially causing damage to the Market Square below is a workable solution and one I would strongly advise investing in as a key selling point to any potential wedding offering.

In addition work to minimise impact of pigeon habitation underneath the Balcony columns is recommended as much as is practical. No bride (or indeed guest of any sort) wants to fall victim to a pigeon emptying their bowels!

Also, lighting should be considered in terms of making the Balcony attractive to spend time on after dark (albeit in a managed way).

I would advise as a balanced use of the Balcony that it be “managed” carefully on a wedding day, so it could be utilised only for bridal party photos/key family groups etc rather than a general reception space. This would mean a member of staff “policing” that. Said member of staff would best also be available to hold a tray for drinks to be deposited whilst photos are being taken should you wish to avoid locating poseur tables outside. I would suggest a handful of poseur tables however are made available inside the Council Chamber to provide perching spaces for all guests to place drinks. This will minimise drinks being put on windowsills and on the floor where they are more likely to be knocked over and spilled. There is a certain reality of wear and tear on a building by opening for commercial events.

As for décor in the Council Room, for maximum popularity to a wider and more mainstream audience rather than those with say a close affiliate to the Mayor’s work, I would refrain from overloading with too much artwork. Ultimately the more “neutral” and “blank canvas” a space is (within the wedding sector) generally the wider appeal and you have the natural heritage features of windows, ceilings, doorways which make a naturally appealing space.

Pickens Room

This is an ideal “extra” room that I would see best promoted for a few main uses:

Either a quiet “snug” room for older folk to sit quietly – would need soft furnishings to enable this.

An empty space for entertainers to bring in items for larger numbers of children

A quiet space for the couple and their bridal party to have a few moments – would need soft furnishings such as sofas/coffee table.

A prep space for bride and her bridal party for hair, make up. If so this would need tressle tables, chairs and some sofa seating, floor length mirrors, table top mirrors.

Bar Area

The bar area is generally well stocked and functional and it's noted that you have a bar team who regularly work the bar for other events.

The availability of only one till is a challenge particularly for wedding events where you will have certain time points with very high demand.

It is customary to minimise demand on bar team and avoid reports of poor service to insist that wedding couples pre-buy certain amounts of alcohol with their package which also guarantees your profit.

It's normal to agree a drinks package that would include:

1-2 drinks post ceremony and before wedding breakfast – these can therefore be pre-poured and tray served.

½ bottle wine with the meal (opened and self serve on the table would be acceptable I would say for your target audience)

1 glass with speeches/toast (pre-poured and served to tables)

Beyond this the bar itself would be utilised most heavily post wedding meal and into the evening – a second till should ideally be installed.

It is also a good idea to investigate the technology of guests ordering drinks using an app from their phones to be able to order from the convenience of their table and avoid queues at the bar.

Ballroom Itself

A stunning space and the immediate draw to the Town Hall overall of course.

I can see the comfortable capacity for 120 guests seated for dinner and dance which you are catered for in terms of furniture also but you could be open to larger capacities.

This will work well with the overspill to the Council Chamber for evening food/quieter space plus also the Bar area, making the entire floor a very well flowing, private and exclusive space, covering many of the logistical factors.

You have tressle/long tables as well as round tables for up to 120 guests from what I could see so this is a feature worth promoting and offering choice on to couples as it's not always customary to have table choices so this is a "bonus" so to speak in terms of how you sell it.

You have 120 what I call standard banqueting chairs. They are a natural fit for white chaircovers to make a more traditional wedding offering. As a trend, chaircovers have fallen out of favour however across the wedding market, certainly at the more mainstream and luxury ends they are no longer in use, in favour instead of chivari chairs as the standard. Your existing chair will no doubt win on comfort but one thing to be very mindful of is that for your regular wedding customer they are often just as focussed on the look and the creation of photography as they are with comfort.

That said, I do think for the level of venue hire you're offering and your wish and need to be accessible to all, you can proceed with the chaircovers but I would advise including them in your package price to be comparable to other venues or if budget allows (and storage) I would invest in chivari chairs for maximum appeal.

Example website of chivari chairs, not a specific supplier recommendation.

customary for a wedding customer to hire in separately for this across the market, the only exceptions to this being in temporary built venues such as tents and marquees. Cost factors need to be built in here as to whether the cost of heating would make it worthwhile operating in the coldest months. As such I have weighted the financials towards maximising the summer months for this market.

Storage Space Next to Ballroom – this is a room without windows but great proximity to the ballroom. I would suggest this is a clear as possible and used much as it is as a storage place for gifts and items in use during the day.

Museum with 3 Gallery Rooms – I would not see this as part of the core offering, but potentially offered as part of the appeal/sales process and to booked couples that a guided tour of the museum could be included as part of a wedding day for example during a drinks reception – this happens in several country houses I work with where there are collections and small extra fees can be chargeable here.

Thin Rooms – Upstairs and Downstairs – potentially could be converted to bridal spaces although both were rather small with not too much natural light. They would not be immediately suitable for bridal preparation due to size (there are often 4-6 people present helping a bride and lot of kit) plus also lack of closeby private bathroom facilities seems an issue. Other spaces would be better.

Committee Room / Twinning Room – this is a good size space and I would recommend it be promoted as an optional flexible space that might be used for supervised children's entertainment for example. It could be utilised potentially for hair/make up preparation space for a bride that really wanted it, albeit this would require some moving around of furniture and staffing to enable that plus probably bringing in a couple of full length and table top mirrors to make this space useable.

Mayor's Parlour

I do not see this having a private hire/wedding use, other than if included in any private tour as mentioned above.

For Consideration and Later Development but Not Stage 1

Accommodation in the courtyard – accommodation across the wedding market is a huge draw, with approximately 40% of couples looking for pre/post night accommodation for themselves and their guests. The Town Hall has various storage areas upstairs and downstairs leading to the courtyard, currently a very large bin store. Self catering accommodation here would be very desirable in my opinion both to support pre and post wedding/private events but also private stays across the year for leisure visitors although clearly this would require much larger investment than getting the existing building wedding hosting ready so I have not focussed on it in detail.

Former Buttermarket

This is a fantastic space and I can see highly popular for stylistic reasons. When I look across the wedding market as a whole, spaces like this (stone, open to light, orangery style) are highly popular. However it is not a functional space currently and would require kitchen facilities and bar set up to be brought in for each function as well as there would be a need to obtain permission to use District Council toilets to service. In addition all furnishings and specialist lighting, sound etc would need to be brought in making it a costly project.

My experience across the wedding market and what I believe is your target market is that the additional logistics and costs would not be achievable for your typical one off wedding customer. They might like the idea of the Buttermarket for their dancing and party which it would look fantastic for but they would likely need the rest of the building for the other aspects of their day as most weddings have the flow of ceremony, drinks, dinner and dancing requiring at least 2 spaces. The costs to bring it to life for a one-off event would I believe be prohibitive to most.

Instead I would suggest that any Hospitality Manager explore the possibilities for Christmas party nights potentially taking place here. A specific Christmas party operator may well be interested in taking on a series of evening dates across Nov-Dec and selling the party nights to

local businesses etc. I would envisage this as a stand up drinks, bowl food, food stalls type event rather than formal dining with effective Christmas lighting, DJ and live music. The downside of course to this space is that the set up would need to be installed each night due to it needing to be open to the public before 5pm; this will make it again costly to an operator so may mean it's not of appeal. A solution may be to use one or both of the rented units (Glass Extension Space and Glass Atrium Extension Space) either side for temporary kitchens/bar set up for a seasonal use so that set up each night in the actual Buttermarket is minimal.



District Council Gallery

We briefly viewed this space. I can't see this particular space having huge appeal to a classic wedding or special private events audience. The comments on lack of logistics and ability to set up kitchens and other infrastructure for dining events being a concern. I imagine this space

might already be utilised for temporary pop up exhibition type events that don't require water, power, catering etc and I would advise continuing on this basis in this first phase at least.

WEDDING BUSINESS MODEL AND PACKAGE

I see your best avenue for developing revenue from hosting weddings & private events as being the one where you retain control and employ your own Hospitality Manager to create the offering, market, sell and manage it, with the support of external caterers.

I suggest that you promote Weddings at Newark Town Hall by giving one Main Wedding Hire Package with some additional add-ons so extra room hire options according to needs. This keeps it flexible but covers a core base of key components of a wedding and ensures a minimum level of venue hire to protect profit.

So I propose the core option includes:

Entrance Ways/Stairways, Council Chamber and Balcony, Ballroom, Bar Area and Toilets, Storage Area by Ballroom.

Year Round Weekend Date: **£2,200 inc VAT**

Year Round Midweek Date: **£1,520 inc VAT**

I have not reduced winters/created seasons. You may wish to do this at a later stage but because winters are more costly for you not less (with heating elements) I would not encourage those at this early stage with price.

Extras:

Pickens Room – **£200**

Committee Room – **£200**

Museum with Guide – **£200**

Catering and Bar

I suggest that you create a small approved list of caterers who are interested in catering to this market. I would garner interest of a number of local caterers by sharing the goal/plan with them and get them to

pitch to you with the idea of creating a small (3 ish) number of packages suitable to the venue that you can present to couples in the early stages of selling as the catering goes hand in hand with venue choice. You would typically want 3 approved caterers on your list who cater to a classic audience perhaps increasing that to 5 or 6 to include an Asian caterer/kosher caterer for example if you feel that would be needed.

The caterers are generally vetted and checked beforehand in terms of health and hygiene certification, health and safety and working practises as well as fit to the location. I suggest that each caterer is invited to visit to ensure they are entirely clear on the kitchens, what they would need to bring in or supply or not so that they can quote accurately for each job to make this easier for customers to get quotes simply for their needs.

The easier and more "joined up" you can make it for the customer the easier to sell.

It's typical for event specialist caterers to bring in linens, crockery, cutlery, glassware for their event needs and build that into their per person cost for catering along with staffing. Caterer staffing for the entire event day is important to know about which for a wedding is often longer than a usual function due to ceremony and typical event format which might make a wedding day more like 1pm-midnight.



It is customary within the wedding space that if couples wish to use a caterer "off list" that there is an additional fee chargeable to cover any lost revenue of commission to the venue and it is also essential that said caterer commit to a site visit in advance of the event to avoid any unknown elements on the day.

Bar and Drinks Packages

I suggest you continue to stock, run and manage your own bar but also add to this with a wedding specific 'Drinks Package' for pre-purchasing.

That package would typically include 1-2 drinks for a reception, ½ bottle of wine during dinner, 1 glass for toasts.

I suggest your Hospitality Manager work with local drinks supplier Ann a Vin you suggested to put together the key ingredients of a per person drinks package and it's customary to have 3 options at differing price points with more 'luxé' options and a greater quantity of drinks included.

Average drinks package: £20 x 80 guests - £1,600

Average post dinner bar spend: £1,500

Total: £3,100

You suggested offering local Newark residents a discounted rate. I believe offering an incentive/reward is great but I would advise offering a complimentary upgrade or add-on instead of a discount to continue to cover revenue levels, so for example throw in the Guided tour or throw in the Committee Room for bridal prep or offer a complimentary glass of prosecco for evening guests as these things cost you very little but are valued.

I noted your bar was well stocked with spirits, mixers etc. There is potential for developing enticing options such as a bespoke cocktail (pre poured and easily done on volume being key) such as passion fruit and espresso martinis – these can attract a premium and hugely increase your bar spend – I have estimated £1,300 but it's not unusual for bar spends of £3,000 + for an average wedding.

Catering is the biggest priority but I also advise that your Hospitality Manager build up a recommended list of other wedding focussed suppliers to give to couples, more on an optional basis:

Florists
Photographers
Cake designers
Furniture Suppliers
Prop Hire – lit up letters
DJ
Live Musicians
Celebrants

Commissions / Extra Revenue

Commissions can be a more complex in the wedding/private events arena when selling Business to Consumer than in the B2B space.

In the main, it's quite customary for venues to charge caterers a commission on final Food and Beverage spend per job or a kitchen fee depending on lots of factors. I would suggest a commission and this can range from 8-15% with 10% being the sensible average. You may wish to look at the lower end of the scale since you are managing your own bar

and making the profit from bar spend. For many caterers the bar is where they make their bigger slice of profit, so food only can be more challenging particularly in 2024 environments with high cost of food, staff and transport. The flip side is that you seem to have a very well kitted out kitchen which is a help to any commercial caterer and not always a given and should allow them to hire in minimal kit per job.

As for commission with other wedding professionals, my advice would be not to rely on this or push this. Most wedding professionals such as florists, cake designers tend to be small owner led businesses and spend is not huge per job for them. My experience is that you would do better to utilise their skills in promoting the Town Hall and working with you on things like photo shoots, wedding open days and marketing collaborations than rely on small amounts of commission. That's clearly one to watch over time but only a handful of venues (often only the large scale high budget London ones) apply commission to many of the suppliers.

Estimated commission revenue: catering spend: £60 x 80 - £4,800 x 10% = £480 per job.

Approximate revenue per wedding:

£2,200 Venue Hire (average: weekend rate but no additional rooms)

£3,100 – Bar revenue

£480 – caterer commission

Total: £5,780

Third Parties /Dry Hire Instead of Recruitment

I have considered the option of an entire hand over of any event operation to a third party instead of recruiting a dedicated team member. I do not believe it's the best option for you with the information I've been given for now. Here is more explanation as to why:

In some cases venues will hire in freelance resource for different components such as the marketing aspect, however this is often to supplement an already strong in-house operational offering and may cost £1,500-£2,000 a month on its own as a guide price.

Another area that can be outsourced is the management of sales, bookings, coordination and on the day delivery. This can be outsourced on a job by job basis to the likes of a small independent wedding planner who is building their own portfolio and would like the consistency of pre-booked weddings. However freelance rates would typically be at the £2000-£3000 per job rate which would take a sizeable amount of profit. Ultimately people who work in the wedding sphere know that couples can take up significant amounts of time in the planning; we have to bear in mind that this is an inexperienced audience who have never hired a venue before so need hand-holding.

Some larger catering companies take on a sales and event co-ordination aspect effectively operating as an in-house resource for some venues, however my experience is that this is only really do-able for the much larger caterers who have team for this. As a result they will only entertain it if there is a lot of ability for them to control the spaces of your venue, fix with fixtures and fittings for ease of set up, sell large volumes of dates quickly and at a minimum price point. I believe that this will be higher than you will want it to be bearing in mind the need to keep accessible to as many of your community as possible and I believe since the Town Hall has lots of other uses the set up and take-over that they would need would be beyond what you're willing to give.

All in this is why I believe you will have the most control over the offering and growing it in a way that works for the Town Hall by employing your own dedicated resource to market, sell, co-ordinate and then operate part of the day with the support of your existing bar team plus external approved caterer list of choice.



Investments Needed

Full time Hospitality Manager - £55,000
 Balcony Screen Improvements - £3,000
 Balcony Lighting/Remedial - £5,000
 Furniture – Poseur tables x for Balcony - £1,000
 Chair covering/décor or chair replace - £6,000
 Sofas/Lounge Seating for Committee Room - £4,000
 Mirrors for Creating Bridal Prep Areas - £500
 Additional items for bridal prep room - £500
 Security Team /set up team by Stairs to Private Spaces from event set up to midnight finish (approx 17 hours per event)
 Morning Event Management x 1 person – from get ready/bridal arrival to end of wedding breakfast. (approx. 10 hours) – Hosp Manager
 Evening Team – Bar Manager from opening of bar 1pm to midnight finish and clear plus bar team
 Sales Software – Client Relationship Management Software/Planning Software – approx. £150 per month = £1,800 annually
 Marketing – dedicated website pages/branding, photo shoot to create visuals, third party directory listings – approximately 5-10% of desired revenue to be spent on marketing. Realistically I would suggest allocating a budget of circa £8,000-£10,000 annually.
 Bar consumables/drinks

One-off costs total: £20,000

Annual: £66,800 plus per event costs such as security, bar team, drinks costs (estimated: £1,300 per event)

Not included: heating for winter dates

FINANCIALS – INCOME, EXPENSES AND ESTIMATED PROFITS

I understand current revenue and income from private hire has brought in £13,000 annually in the last year. There is a lot of scope for significant growth there, however you will almost certainly need to close access to the Museum quite regularly across many Saturday days and some midweeks to make the commercial revenue largely from weddings and private event hire.

Couples /private hires will want set up and preparation time prior to actual event timings and this is very customary within the wedding world. With typical ceremony times being around 1pm, it is not looking very do-able to have the Museum realistically open on event days.

I estimate that there is scope for building up to at least 1 weekly wedding event per week from April to October giving roughly 24 dates with a conservative estimate with the current planned resource of 1 x Hospitality Manager with security/bar team support. This is a conservative estimate and with a dedicated Hospitality Manager in situ for some time building this up, there is reason to believe that this could grow to substantially more.

Remainder of 2024 (from July 24 start)

Selling for 2025 dates in the main with perhaps 1-2 happening in 2024 although winter is more challenging so will largely be missed this year
Costs: $\text{£}66,800/2 = \text{£}33,400$ plus 33% of one-off set up costs ($\text{£}6,666$) = $\text{£}40,066$
Profit (loss): $-\text{£}40,066$

Estimated revenue Christmas parties: £10,000

2025

15 x weddings at £5,780 - £86,700

(mix of midweeks and weekend)

Total: £86,700

Costs: £66,800 plus 33% of one-off set up costs (£6,666) = £73,466

+ per event security/bar/drinks - 15 x £1,300 - £19,500 = £92,966

Profit (loss) - £6,266

Additional revenue from ticketed events - 6 x £3750 = £22,500

I have not included this in any profit calculations

2026

24 x weddings at £5,780 - £138,720

(mix of midweeks and weekends)

Total: £138,720

Costs: £66,800 plus 33% of one-off set up costs (£6,666) = £73,466

+ per event security/bar/drinks - 24 x £1300 - £31,200 = £104,666

Profit: £34,054

Additional revenue from ticketed events - 10 x £3750 - £37,500

I have not done profit calculations on this aspect

2027

40 x weddings at £5,780 - £231,200

(probably most Saturdays and some midweeks)

Please bear in mind that your Hospitality Manager would need additional resource/support by way of an assistant to manage up to 40 so this will effect costs

Total: £231,200

Costs: £66,800 + per event security/bar/drinks - 40 x £1300 - £52,000

+ £30,000 additional Hospitality Manager resource = £148,800

Profit: £82,400

Additional revenue from ticketed events - 10 x £3750 - £37,500

I have not done profit calculations on this aspect

2028

40 x weddings at £5,780 - £231,200

(probably most Saturdays and some midweeks)

Please bear in mind that your Hospitality Manager would need additional resource/support by way of an assistant to manage up to 40 so this will effect costs

Total: £231,200

Costs: £66,800 + per event security/bar/drinks - 40 x £1300 - £52,000

+ £30,000 additional Hospitality Manager resource - £148,800

Profit: £82,400

Additional revenue from ticketed events - 10 x £3750 - £37,500

I have not done profit calculations on this aspect

SUMMARY

As you can see, the years 24-25 will likely make a loss turning to a very small profit largely because of the need to invest up front to create for the future years. As you can see profit will start to be made in 2026, however larger profits will require private events around the 40 per year level and more which is realistically achievable for 2027 and 2028, possibly before depending on the success of the Hospitality Manager in building up the reputation and bookings.

Costs and figures provided are realistic estimates based on today's pricing but are likely to require some adjustment over time.

It is customary within the wedding world to take payment in stages, roughly:

25% upon confirmation/booking

50% - 6 months before the wedding

25% - one month before the wedding

All fees for pre-purchased venue hire/ food and drink are paid pre event. This can be helpful to ensure it is managed from a cash flow perspective.

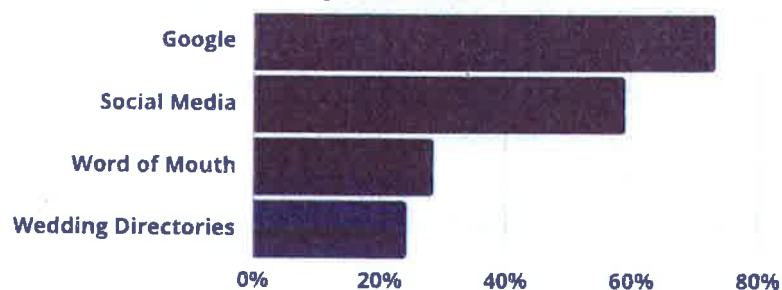
MARKETING STRATEGY AND TACTICS

Specifically marketing for weddings is important, not least because there is a short time window during which couples will be 'venue searching' (usually 2-4 weeks), competition is fierce and options are plentiful out there so it's important to stand out if you want to reach beyond a limited audience to whom the Town Hall is already known.

I am sharing below a summary slide from a very recently published industry report which illustrates marketing priorities well. This is taken from the WedPro by Wedding Dates Annual UK Wedding Market Report; the survey participants align well with what I believe to be your ideal client demographic so it's a survey that chimes well.

HOW DID YOU RESEARCH VENUES?

The top choices, with respondents able to select multiple options, were Google (**73%**), Social Media (**59%**), Word of Mouth (**29%**) and Wedding Directories (**24%**).



60% read reviews before booking or enquiring with a venue

Google

Being as present and highly ranked for your website/web pages on an internet search as possible is a key strategy to pay attention to broken down into 2 areas:

- Organic search which is generated by your work on SEO (Search Engine Optimisation) and how well your website pages are ranked by the crawling spiders of Google. This is an ongoing process for many commercial ventures, involving intricate keyword placement work to build authority and ultimately to become ranked more highly for different relevant search terms over time. It is quite usual for focussed wedding venues to engage an SEO agency to work with them initially over a period of perhaps 6 months on a campaign to build rankings or over a longer period of time on further content such as wedding relevant blogs and features to build on constantly updated content.
- Paid search or Pay by Click is a strategy not widely used by wedding venues but certainly used by those seeking a higher consistent level of bookings in the market. One to explore but possibly at a later stage of development and not in a first plan of marketing. It can be a costly marketing strategy although with good returns if managed well although better successes I'd suggest when the offering is more established and targeted so focus on organic first.

You will need an eye catching well-designed attractive webpages or ideally a separate website to stand out as a distinct location as opposed to linked to the Town Council work.

Social Media

With the average age of a wedding customer being 32, it's no surprise that social media ranks year on year more and more highly for where couples are seeking their venues and their inspiration.

In particular Instagram is the unofficial 'wedding' platform and the one I would suggest focussing efforts on and creating a dedicated private

events/wedding platform for the Town Hall to showcase this stream of activity. This needs to feature very high quality imagery, give a real flavour of weddings at the Town Hall and be utilised as a sales tool and portfolio in one. Ideally your Hospitality Manager would have a very good working knowledge of the latest in Instagram including the production of Reels, Stories, the use of Canva or similar for graphics, depending on how much input is available from your wider graphic design supplier across other activity in the Town Hall.

Other platforms to invest effort in are Pinterest and Tik Tok is up and coming. 31% of couples now use this regularly in their wedding planning, up 20% from 2022 surveys (also WedPro by Wedding Dates).

In the same way as for internet search, both options of organic and paid social media are widely used within the wedding booking space. My advice would initially be to focus on organic social media content which will involve a heavy element of time and look at boosting with paid advertising once a bank of content is building momentum and particularly to promote activity such as any open events/wedding fairs.



Word of Mouth

There are lots of ways to build this up and the wedding industry is very well connected and very collaborative.

Effort is advised in building up that networking of 'friends of' so caterers, florists, photographers and the like who are often unofficial promoters

of venues along the way. You have a very good cross-promotional opportunity with the Gilstrap being the central location for civil marriage and the opportunity there to share customer bases and refer to each other depending on client needs.

Word of Mouth will naturally travel from early wedding customers. Gathering testimonials and recommendations is key from as early as possible. Younger customers are particularly known for putting great emphasis on social proof and on peer recommendation from the likes of Google reviews, Facebook recommendations etc. An average couple looks at 37 reviews before contacting a venue – very high! So garnering positive words early is key and building that into any marketing.

Wedding Directories

An important marketing strategy and one that often new entrants to the market invest in for quicker returns than their own SEO and social media efforts.

There are 2 major directories that between them have major market share, those being Hitched and Bridebook. Both will offer free listings but realistically these have limited reach with a paid listing being the way to go to gain real results and leads. Many moderate venues will pick one or the other of these, monitoring return on investment over time. Whilst pricing varies, annual investment in one of these might well be £3,000 + so a sizeable part of any marketing budget.

There are other directories – Guides for Brides, Coco Wedding Venues which are very good and worth investigation and trialling – they generally do not have the reach of the above two and do not deliver volume of enquiries, however sometimes a better quality of lead. At the end of the day the enquiry in wedding world is just the beginning. Increasingly in 2024, an enquiry needs to be nurtured with a subtle relationship building campaign to move them along a sales pipeline to encourage them to visit/view.

By way of statistics, it's usual for around 10% of enquiries to convert to a viewing. It's usual for around 33% of viewings to convert to a booking so

getting people in is a major goal with a very good chance to securing a booking but effort and making the customer feel special has to be put in along the way.

Naturally the marketing of your offering is a large topic and is constantly evolving with market needs and updates. It's an area that I often provide specific advice or support on for teams at different stages of the journey so it may be something that's worth investing in once your Hospitality Manager is in situ depending on their level of wedding industry marketing knowledge.

Wedding Fairs etc - hosting or being part of a large wedding fair used to be a highly successful strategy for filling dates. The last 5 + years this has been a lot more challenging. In general I do not advise venues to participate as exhibitors in large external hosted fairs – it can be very hard to sell a venue space when not actually in that space – fairs can be more effective for creative products such as cakes and flowers and couples attending fairs tend to be looking for those things. This said many venues host their own Open Events which are often smaller but show the venue set up as per a wedding day, dressed with a smaller number of suppliers and this I would advise is a strategy to consider once you have your Hospitality Manager in place. I would advise looking at at least 2 per year – October and February ideally or close to.

WEDDING SALES AND CUSTOMER JOURNEY

I'm outlining the key steps of a wedding customer journey that is important to consider in preparing to launch into this market.

Marketing/Attracting the Right Customer – this is covered in the separate marketing section

Enquiry In – 98% (ish) will come via email/social media and not by phone. Sales Pipeline Management which might typically include a personalised enquiry response with info and price guidelines, follow ups via a mix of nurture email and phone calls, booking in for a viewing (around about

10% of enquiries convert to a visit to give you an idea of the volume needed for success in the wider mainstream market).

Viewing takes place (bearing in mind there is an expectation of there being evening and weekend options for this rather than Mon-Fri viewings).

Follow on question answering and contracting / paperwork to secure the booking.



Co-ordination – wedding customers require more than average hand-holding even with relatively small events due to the emotional nature and the fact that they aren't experienced event managers. There will invariably be questions and potential site visits needed with key suppliers like florists for dressing. Usually as the date approaches this incorporates a planning meeting in person or virtually (around 6 weeks before)

Day Management

A typical wedding customer will ideally expect their contact to be present on the day to oversee the set up, greet key suppliers, look after bridal party, ceremony set up, liaise with bridal party on photos, working with Front of House/ caterer through wedding breakfast before hand over to

evening team. Bar team might in some circumstances require additional staffing if evening food/management is needed. This is where a reliable/regular caterer will come into their own to ensure quality delivery here. Wedding days are longer than most other functions (roughly 10-11 hours ish) so planning to take into account those hours. It's quite customary for experienced hospitality professionals to work longer than usual office hours shifts; this can be manageable if events are only weekly or fortnightly and working hours adjusted across the Mon-Fri hours. (so giving Monday off, shorter working day mid week). My experience of this sector is that staff retention can become an issue when large volumes of back to back events become the norm, weekend work and evening work becomes constant and life/work balance becomes challenging.

HOSPITALITY MANAGER RECRUITMENT

Right Recruitment Fit

It will be very important to have the following in your dedicated Hospitality Manager:

- A candidate who is people-passionate – somebody with a yes attitude who finds solutions with ease and who genuinely enjoys being of service to others with a lead on softer skills; I cannot stress enough how key this is. Weddings (and other special events) are very important milestones in life and customers expect excellent service and attention to detail.
- A candidate who is practical, willing to get stuck in. Whilst there may be a wider caretaking team handling set up and furniture movement, this weddings manager will need to think on their feet and making things happen which might be setting up light décor, sorting bridal needs, last minute travel and whatever is thrown at them – you need a practical hands-on individual who isn't afraid of manual work as such where it's needed even if that's not their main job (sorting ill guests, cleaning up, directing traffic – all part of the role).
- A candidate who is commercially aware and not afraid to negotiate and ask for the sale. Weddings tend to attract a fair

number of people who thrive on the creative and that's all well and good and needed but raising revenue for the Town Hall is a commercial role and it's vital to be clear in any recruitment campaign that this is a sales and marketing role with event management rather than a wedding co-ordination role within an established setting and team. You need a self-starter who has done something similar I would suggest rather than somebody who has only worked within say a hotel with a fixed structure, supervision and a narrow role brief.

- A candidate who is aware of the potential required working hours which are likely to involve at least 20 Saturdays per year, some evenings also for viewings/showrounds. Consideration needs to be given to when viewings can take place as Mon-Fri 9-5pm are not the times that couples can generally view so weekend working is very much part of this role and needs to be clear from the off



OTHER EVENTS/TICKETED RATHER THAN PRIVATE HIRE

I do think with a Hospitality Manager in place it is absolutely possible to explore seasonal ticketed events open to the public. These throw up other considerations that private hire events don't, notably the risk of ticket sales which will often come as more last minute and unknown in terms of numbers v profit levels. However I do believe a programme of more

accessible public events will suit because this keeps your accessibility to the public where you may be taking away some Museum opening days. It also provides a very helpful marketing stream to allow customers to experience the Ballroom and venue which they may then consider for their own larger life milestone events such as big birthdays or a wedding.

Particularly popular events might be:

Valentine's Day Dinner

Mother's Day Afternoon Tea

Mid Summer/Solstice Soiree

Sip and Paint Evenings

Craft Workshops

Christmas Parties

I have avoided suggesting very family-based events, such as Easter egg hunts and Halloween events, just on the basis that this may be a step too far for the use of the heritage spaces.

I have included some estimations of these events in the Financial section but not covered this in detail within this wedding focused report.

Thank you for asking for my advice and consultancy related to this potential development. I look forward to answering any questions in the included 1 hour follow up session via Zoom.