

Admission charge changes for Non-Leeds residents at Kirkstall Abbey, May 2022

Date: 10/05/2022

Report of: David Hopes, Head of Service, Leeds Museums & Galleries

Report to: Eve Roodhouse, Chief Officer, Culture & Economy

Will the decision be open for call in? Yes No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? Yes No

What is this report about?

Including how it contributes to the city's and council's ambitions

- This report is about seeking authorisation to introduce an admission charge to Kirkstall Abbey for Non-Leeds residents from 10th May 2022.
- From this date, Leeds residents will be required to show proof of address to enter the Abbey for free.
- This change is driven by an effort to help address the Council's financial challenge as well as a need to improve the visitor experience for all at the Abbey.
- The decision follows six weeks of consultation with the public and elected members.
- The targeted nature of charging and site improvements will contribute to the Best City Ambition by allowing the museums service to raise more income stimulating local **inclusive economic growth** by increasing the attractiveness of the heritage offer, increasing local jobs, while maintaining free access for local people.
- These changes will also facilitate local employment and thereby help to combat inequality in Leeds.
- Through an enhanced visitor experience these changes will also improve the **health and wellbeing** of visitors and local people.
- These changes will not discourage local visitation but may initially have a slightly negative effect on Non-Leeds residents travelling to the site so may therefore help the Council achieve its **net carbon zero** target by 2030.

Recommendations

The Chief Officer for Culture & Economy is recommended to agree to the following:

- The introduction of an admission charge for Non-Leeds residents to Kirkstall Abbey from 10th May 2022.
- The requirement that Leeds residents show proof of address to gain free entry from 10th May 2022.
- Progress registering the Kirkstall Abbey Trust (which owns the site) with the Charity Commission.

Why is the proposal being put forward?

1. Kirkstall Abbey (KA) is one of nine sites managed by Leeds Museums & Galleries, LCC's museums service.
2. KA is one of the most complete examples of a medieval Cistercian abbey in Britain. Set in wonderful parkland along the banks of the River Aire, Kirkstall Abbey boasts historic architecture amid a haven of wildlife and greenery.
3. The Abbey was originally conveyed by way of a deed of gift to the Mayor Burgesses and Alderman of Leeds as a public park for the purposes of the Recreation Grounds Act 1859 (RGA 1859) and is held by the Council as sole trustee.
4. Pre-Covid, KA attracted an average of 215,000 visitors per year, 72% of whom came from Leeds. Currently, admission is free for all.
5. Like many councils, Leeds City Council is facing significant challenges with budgets. This is due to the impact of coronavirus and also reductions in funding from central government. Leeds City Council faces a financial gap of £126m between 22/23 and 24/25.
6. Leeds Museums & Galleries is tasked with raising an additional £160k in 2022/23, and increasing that to raise £250k in 2023/24 and 2024/25.
7. The introduction of an admission charge for Non-Leeds residents to the Abbey is anticipated to raise £160k additional income in FY 2022-23 (and the relocation of the café from Abbey House Museum is expected to raise an additional £90k in the following two years).
8. Following the approval of a service review proposal (CD SR 22-24 3) by the Executive Board on 15 December 2021, six weeks of public consultation on the admissions proposals took place in January and February 2022.
9. The consultation demonstrated that while the introduction of an admission fee to a free site was not altogether popular, support grew when the price-point was lower and when it was pointed out that a ticket would permit entry for 12 months. The consensus on price-point was £5 or less, with affordable rates for families.
10. There was also some concern about evidencing proof of address. There is however a precedent for this at Leeds Industrial Museum where local people (on providing proof of address) pay £1 for admission. There have been no issues reported following this change at LIM.

11. After analysis of the consultation findings it has been decided to proceed with the admission charge for Non-Leeds residents. Instead of the proposed £8 fee for adults, this will be set at £5 with concessions and family prices set proportionately, in line with other LMG sites. Residents of Leeds will remain free. Leeds residents will be classified by the postcodes that pay their council tax to LCC and will be asked to show a driving license, recent utility bill, or equivalent.

What impact will this proposal have?

Wards Affected: All

Have ward members been consulted?

Yes

No

What consultation and engagement has taken place?

12. Consultation with the Executive Board member for Economy, Culture and Education has been ongoing since the proposal was first suggested on 6th September 2021. A meeting was held at Abbey House Museum with the three local elected members, Councillors Illingworth and Venner, on 10th December 2021 and Councillor Bithell (who could not attend) sent feedback via email.
13. A workshop was held with Kirkstall Abbey and Abbey House Museum staff on 21st October 2021.
14. As noted above, public consultation on the proposal started on Your Voice on 6th January 2022 and lasted for six weeks.
15. This proposal was also discussed at the Strategy and Resources Scrutiny committee on 24th January 2022.
16. There has also been extensive discussions with colleagues in Legal and Finance. An external barrister who specialises in local authorities and charity law was appointed to look at the particular circumstances of the Abbey with a view to charging.

What are the resource implications?

17. A series of improvements are being made to the site through Arts Council England investment, including; new interpretation, audio tour and possible AR experiences, as well as some small retail changes. A new route through the visitor centre is being made to accommodate taking admission.
18. Online ticketing will be implemented to improve customer experience, help in marketing to outside of Leeds and data gathering for future relationship building, including investment to Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) to encourage increased coach visit.
19. There will be a small change in working patterns in the Kirkstall Abbey visitor centre in order to engage with all visitors to determine admissions 'status'. A DDR and DDN has been submitted to the Chief Officer Operations and Active Leeds (after consultation with union colleagues) for 2 x 15 hour seasonal posts (to be in post and trained before the start of school summer holidays) until the end October 2022. Depending upon the length of the recruitment process and any notices required likely to cost in the region of £5,346 + on costs. This option will allow us to

analyse the effect of charging non-Leeds residents for admission to the abbey ruins on daily operations to inform future long-term staffing requirements.

What are the legal implications?

20. The legal rights to charge an admission have been considered in line with the original bequest of ownership to LCC and in regards to the HLF funding given in 2004. It is the opinion of the LCC legal team that although the local authority has the power to charge admission fees, charging via the trust which owns the Abbey will be the most beneficial financially.

What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

21. There is a reputational risk around a change of this nature, both among Leeds residents and non-residents. A communications plan has been prepared but this could not be implemented during purdah (election on 5th May 2022). Therefore, communications will commence on 9th May and there will be a 'soft opening' whereby the entry requirements will be introduced gradually to avoid adverse reactions particularly among local people. From June, all visitors will be expected to either produce proof of residence or pay admission if not resident in the Leeds Council Tax area.
22. Another main risk is that there will not be sufficient numbers to justify the charge changes or that a visit will not be regarded as 'value for money'. To mitigate this risk, as noted in 15 (above) improvements have been made to the visitor experience for all, and a marketing campaign will seek to reinvigorate the Abbey's image.
23. Finally, the legal status of the Abbey's ownership is unusual and the move to levy a charge has asked questions of how the local authority does this. Legal opinion has been sought from a specialist barrister and from within the LCC legal team providing some reassurance that whilst the local authority can charge it is more advantageous to register the trust with the Charity Commission and to charge as a charity.

Does this proposal support the council's 3 Key Pillars?

Inclusive Growth

Health and Wellbeing

Climate Emergency

24. Inclusive growth: tackling poverty, helping everyone benefit from the economy to their full potential. The enhanced visitor experience will help stimulate the local economy and may lead to job growth both directly and indirectly by attracting more visitors into the area.
25. Health and wellbeing: reducing health inequalities and supporting active lifestyles with an improved visitor experience at KA.
26. Climate emergency: as noted above, these changes, may initially have a slightly negative effect on Non-Leeds residents travelling to the site so could help the Council achieve its **net carbon zero** target by 2030.

Options, timescales and measuring success

a) What other options were considered?

27. That the Abbey could continue to be free to all. This might have meant that other charging sites needed to increase their costs and these would affect all (not just Non-Leeds residents).

28. Other income generating options are in the pipeline but the Kirkstall Abbey change required little investment and could be implemented relatively quickly, unlike the other options.

b) How will success be measured?

29. By monitoring visitor numbers, income and expenditure, feedback from visitors, and the site's Visit England (VAQAS) rating.

c) What is the timetable for implementation?

30. To begin charging Non-Leeds residents and requiring residents to provide proof of address to gain free entry, from 10th May 2022.

Appendices

31. Appendix 1: new admissions prices from 10th May 2022.

Background papers

32. None.

Appendix 1: new admissions prices from 10th May 2022

All tickets to last 12 months from date of purchase

Concessions based on AH model

Admission is free for all Leeds residents (who pay or have an exemption to pay their council tax to Leeds City Council), members of the Leeds Art Fund, Friends of Leeds City Museums, Max Card holders, disabled users and carers, the Museums Association, National Museum Directors Council and the National Arts Collection Fund.

Free entry will be granted to the above on production of evidence of a qualifying address e.g. driving license, utility bill (paper or online), bank statement etc. A full list of acceptable ID is currently being considered.

Ticket Type	Price	Notes
Adult	£5.00	
Concession	£4.00	
Child	£2.50	
Family	£11.25	
Group	£4.00	
Leeds Card Adult	£4.00	Equal to 20% discount on adult price
Breeze Card Child	£2.00	Equal to 20% discount on child price
Leeds Card Family	£9.00	
Leeds Card Extra	£3.00	Equal to 40% on adult price