



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Parks and Leisure Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Proposed event: Halloween Ghost Tours at Balmoral Cemetery
<b>Date:</b>	14 October 2010
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
<b>Contact Officers:</b>	Lynne McCreery, Park Manager

### Purpose of Report

To seek Committee approval for a series of Halloween Ghost tours to take place in Balmoral Cemetery.

### Relevant Background Information

The Committee is asked to note that the Council has recently received (September 2010) a request from Allens Tours working in partnership with Living History Tours and Hidden Dublin Walks to hold 36 ghost tours in Balmoral Cemetery. It is proposed to hold these tours between Saturday 16 October and Tuesday 2 November 2010 inclusive. It is intended to hold two tours each night, a family event starting at 6.30pm followed by an adult only tour starting at 7.30pm.

During each tour participants will hear stories of ghosts that have haunted the streets of Belfast, appropriate to the audience. Participants will be offered the opportunity to take a haunted walk through Balmoral Cemetery itself. Plans include meeting the ghost of Sir Arthur Chichester, who will guide them around the cemetery where they will meet various spirits along the way. An artist will portray a grave robber who taught the famous Edinburgh grave robbers Burke and Haire everything they knew. Another artist will portray a spirit who went down with the Titanic and hear his tales of haunting at sea.

### Key Issues

The Committee will be aware that Officers are keen to support a wide range of events in our parks open spaces. However, there are a number of issues to be considered with regards to holding these tours in Balmoral Cemetery.

- Balmoral graveyard is still a functional cemetery therefore sensitivity issues need to be considered as well as the sanctity of a cemetery itself; This event may well cause concern to any living relatives and could attract adverse publicity;
- The location and the nature of the site can not cater for large groups, as the paths are narrow, it is dark, there are grave surrounds and other obstacles and there are resulting Health and Safety issues that need addressed.

- Other tour operators recently have been informed that due to the short notice of their request and Committee approval being essential that their Halloween tours would not proceed.
- A commercial venture under normal circumstances would have to go through some form of procurement for expressions of interest.
- The limited amount of time for Council officers to complete all appropriate documentation for this event to ensure it may safely proceed.
- In recent years other tour operators have hosted Halloween tours in Friars Bush Cemetery. The Parks Department previously receiving an income of £1.00 per participant attending.
- The organisers would have to ensure that the tours do not cause a nuisance or inconvenience to local residents.

However the event holders have partly put arrangements in place to hold the event

- The commercial venture has been advertised on several websites since August 2010, albeit without Council approval.
- Tickets are on sale; a family of four will cost £50.00 or £18.00 per adult and £12.00 per child. Discounted prices would also be available for groups of 10 or more – again without Council approval
- To date approximately 300 participants have confirmed an interest in attending.

Should the event be given approval to proceed:

- Depending on demand the maximum number of participants throughout the 18 nights will be 2,160 people.
- The Belfast Bus Ghost Tours could potentially generate a turnover of over £30,000 for the event organisers and £2,000 for the Council in facility hire.
- The tour organisers are confident that the Halloween tours would attract visitors into the city centre and also provide a diversionary activity for young people during the dark evenings.
- The event organisers would consider reduced rates for community groups.

It should be noted that should the committee give approval for the event the decision would not be ratified by the Council prior to the tours taking place.

### **Resource Implications**

#### Financial

Hire charge for the use of the cemetery would be approximately £2,000.

#### Human Resources

There are no additional human resource implications

#### Asset and Other Implications

None.

### **Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to consider the report and the issues as set out above and within this context it is recommended that approval is not granted to this event.

<b>Decision Tracking</b>
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The Park Manager will be responsible for communicating the decision of the committee by 15 October 2010.
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<b>Key to Abbreviations</b>
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None.
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<b>Documents Attached</b>
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Appendix 1: Recent website material.
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