

St Giles will charge all visitors after drop in donations

St Giles Cathedral will begin charging visitors to enter for the first time in its 900 year history, following a drop in donations.

Edinburgh's High Kirk currently allows the public free access on weekdays, however this will end soon in a bid to raise funds for the upkeep of the church.

The Kirk Session, which maintains the building, required approval from city councillors to introduce a charge for non worshipping visitors, and that was granted earlier this week.

One councillor pointed out it was "convention across most of Europe" to have to pay to enter attractions like St Giles.

However questions were raised over how the new system would "discreetly differentiate" between non-worshipping visitors and those attending services.

It is not yet known how much visitors will be charged upon entry.

The medieval collegiate church is steeped in rich history and played a central role in the Scottish Reformation, with its former ministers who included John Knox.

More recently, the Queen's coffin lay at rest at St Giles last summer.

The funeral of firefighter Barry Martin was held there last month after he died from injuries sustained while tackling the blaze at the former Jenners building in January.



St Giles Cathedral. Photo: Martin P. McAdam
www.martinmcadam.com

However a report said the Kirk Session is “increasingly unable to adequately maintain the fabric of the building”.

It states the cathedral “has relied heavily on voluntary donations, mainly from visitors and tourists to assist with the upkeep and maintenance of the building” but added these have reduced due to the impact of the pandemic on footfall.

Labour city centre councillor Margaret Graham told Edinburgh’s full council meeting on Thursday: “When considering the notion of charging for entry the arguments put forward are sound.

“Costs of maintaining the building are increasing and donations have not kept pace with this cost. The current suggested donation is £5 and a 45 minute audio tour can be

purchased for £5.50 so there are mechanisms for voluntary contributions and paid services at present.

“I do however have two concerns. The precedent for charging entry into some of our historic buildings is now unfortunately widely accepted. With budget constraints ongoing, will the charging for our outstanding city museums be the next step we are asked to consider?”

“The other concern however is how the continued access for Edinburgh residents will be safeguarded for worship and the opportunity to access this calm, tranquil space when in need of solace.”

She asked: “How will the new system discreetly differentiate between paying tourists, Edinburgh residents non-worshipping and Edinburgh residents worshipping when entering is requested and what methods will be deployed to collect monies that will not deter Edinburgh residents from gaining access to St Giles as their right under the terms of the Edinburgh Borough church scheme.”

Councillors called on officers to provide them with clarity on the points raised by Cllr Graham.

Jo Mowat, Tory Edinburgh city centre councillor, said: “It is very common for churches to ask for donations to pay for the upkeep of the buildings – they are expensive buildings to upkeep.

“The convention across most of Europe is that if you are accessing full worship – there will be areas for locals to access full worship – you can go in for free.”

She said if people are coming in to visit they pay to enter like other attractions.

He said: “If we want to maintain these buildings we have to be realistic about how those spaces can be maintained,

upkept, safe and secure.”

by Donald Turvill, Local Democracy Reporter.

The Local Democracy Reporting Service (LDRS) is a public service news agency. It is funded by the BBC, provided by the local news sector (in Edinburgh that is Reach plc (the publisher behind Edinburgh Live and The Daily Record) and used by many qualifying partners. Local Democracy Reporters cover news about top-tier local authorities and other public service organisations.



The roof at St Giles. ©2023 The Edinburgh Reporter