

Development of Memorials and Lease Options at Mansfield Crematorium

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report describes current progress and future proposals for renovating the Memorial Gardens at the Crematorium and the proposed improvements to the range and affordability of memorialisation through new lease options. It also addresses issues arising from unauthorised memorials being placed in the Crematorium Gardens. This report is to be read in conjunction with the Exempt Appendix 2a as attached to this report.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to agree to the following

- 2.1 Leasing space at the Crematorium for 5 or 10 years for a range of quality memorials and plaques which are available for purchase from the Council.
- 2.2 To continue with the current grounds improvements at the Crematorium to provide a sustainable quality location for leased memorials.
- 2.3 To the removal of unauthorised memorials following all reasonable attempts to get the families to remove them
- 2.4 To agree that the net required budget is met from general reserves in year 1.

3. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUES

Crematorium Garden Memorials

- 3.1 The Crematorium Memorial Gardens comprise different areas within an attractive woodland setting. (see appendix 1a) The gardens attract hundreds of visitors throughout the year, who come to pay their respects to their deceased loved ones in a tranquil attractive wooded and landscaped location, place flowers and to scatter cremated remains. Over time the desire to memorialise their loved one with an inscription on an attractive long lasting memorial in a specific location has become much more popular and staff have endeavoured to meet that need.
- 3.2 An existing plaque area in front of the main building and car park has been provided for memorials, on a leased basis. Over the years however this area has gradually ceased to attract interest, mainly due to the increasing choice of other memorial options available within the gardens themselves. The remainder of the unused area is proposed to be utilised alternatively, by developing the areas further to accommodate more up to date memorials. In terms of memorials for the gardens, the Council offers individual styles of memorials specific to each of the gardens. These vary in price from £26 in the Book of Remembrance through to £408 for a bench or tree memorial within the Gardens.

- 3.3 Refurbished paths have been provided in the gardens in the past to improve the visitor experience and provide a location for placing the granite kerb memorial plaques. This provides a consistent appearance and quality for the gardens. The use of granite plaques also addresses problems with older sandstone memorials, a material which tends to attract stains and mould growth over time, particularly where they are overhung by trees and shrubs. They are also is prone to crumbling due to long term weathering.
- 3.4 There is an ongoing issue with some visitors placing unauthorised memorials, flower vases, photographs and other artefacts throughout the gardens at evenings and weekends, particularly where their relatives' ashes may have been scattered. Unfortunately unauthorised memorials are at a risk of being damaged and cause difficulties with grounds maintenance. They may also deteriorate quickly and can often offend those families whose loved ones remains are also scattered in the same area. Those who have purchased memorials from the Council in the past also ask on a fairly regular basis (approximately 1 in 5 visitors), why we allow this to happen when literature given out by the crematorium states no unauthorised memorials makes it clear that such ad hoc memorialisation is not permitted and will be removed.
- 3.5 There are currently a small amount of memorials and artefacts throughout the gardens which have been placed despite asking visitors not to do this.

Review of Memorial Options

- 3.6 Management must advise that improvements are required to the maintenance and of the memorial gardens, which would include the removal of unauthorised memorials. It is advised that a wider range of memorials should be available on a leased basis, rather than purchased in perpetuity.
- 3.7 If memorials are sold in perpetuity then those particular locations can no longer be used again even though the families may eventually cease to visit them. Over time this would reduce and diminish the areas available for memorialisation. Ultimately this could put pressure on land availability. Leasing memorials would also avoid difficult issues relating to individuals wishing to place privately purchased, and potentially inappropriate memorials in perpetuity within the gardens, rather than take up memorials supplied by the Council.
- 3.8 It is widely known that leasing memorials is done elsewhere at other Crematoria, which enables a family to decide whether to continue with their lease after 10 or 20 years, or release that memorial inscription space for another family to use. It has been identified that current memorial sales at Mansfield Crematorium were below half the average of other crematoria, offering leased memorials.

Proposals

- 3.9 It is proposed to offer 5 and 10 year memorial leases in the future. Families would lease space for an inscribed plaque available to purchase separately which would then be placed on a Council owned memorial. After 5 or 10 years a family could further extend the lease in increments. The current records database will enable staff

to be aware of when particular leases are due for renewal. At that point contact will be made with the family to offer an extension of the lease. If it is not extended, or if the descendants cannot be traced, the memorial space will be offered for lease to another family.

- 3.10 The plaque would be removed and returned to the family if they wished, or stored for a period in the absence of any descendants.
- 3.11 It is proposed to introduce a high quality range of removable granite memorial options and install them within a pleasant and well maintained setting. They can be installed around the edges of the paths or other free standing options. These will be more permanent and easier to maintain than existing memorials.
- 3.12 They will also ensure a consistency of appearance and quality is maintained.
- 3.13 Where space is more limited, it is proposed to using columns as shown in Appendix 2, each supporting a number of leased polished granite plaques located on each face, pointing in different directions, to suit the position where cremated remains are scattered.
- 3.14 It is proposed to trial the use of the remaining vacant plaque areas in the grounds to install small double casket columbaria (see Appendix 2), which enables families to locate their loved ones remains in a safe, secure and attractive inscribed memorial case above ground. There is no option to inter caskets of cremated remains within the gardens themselves as this would require the creation of a burial area which is not the purpose of the gardens. Scatterings on the turf are allowed as they do not have the same land use implications as formal burial grounds. The use of the columns would enable families to memorialise their loved ones whilst keeping their remains intact at the Crematorium, rather than purchasing a cemetery burial plot for casket interments. This leased option also enables families who move away to be able to retrieve their loved ones remains, if they wish to take them elsewhere.
- 3.15 The wooded Gardens are one of the most popular options for families seeking memorials within a woodland garden setting. However, because of this popularity, available space for scattering ashes is becoming limited. An option growing in popularity in other crematoria is the tower columbaria where families can securely store two caskets of cremated remains behind an inscribed memorial plaque within an attractive granite column approximately 1.5m high This option would allow up to 24 families to retain their loved one's remains in an attractive feature on a lease basis within these most popular gardens.
- 3.16 High quality signage is an essential feature for the gardens and new replacement signage is being sourced. This will not only assist the public in finding the specific garden they seek, but also will enable visitors to be informed about management of gardens e.g. not allowing unauthorised memorials or scattering cremated remains without an appointment and avoidance of dog exercise etc. Any unauthorised memorials will be carefully uplifted once discovered and will be taken into safe storage for a three month period. A notice will be placed in the vicinity to advise that the items

can be collected from the crematorium staff during that period, after which they will be disposed of.

- 3.17 A memorial brochure and price list is currently sent out to all families who use the services of the Crematorium. It is proposed that an updated brochure will describe a variety of memorial lease options available for placement within the memorial gardens at the Crematorium and renewal options of existing leases will be explained further.
- 3.18 In terms of the plaque supply itself, it will be important that the plaque size, material, colour, quality and fixings are consistent with the others in the garden. If a customer was able to source and purchase an exact fit for one of these plaques and its security fittings, it could cost them at least £75. This was based on a price obtained from a local independent memorial mason and is more than the Council are proposing to charge. In addition, the Council's current plaque supplier will not sell to private individuals. By allowing alternative providers of plaques there is a risk of an alternative not matching the existing display in size, colour and screwed fitting's.
- 3.19 Appendix 2a shows potential income generation and cost of memorial options in this report which is exempt due to commercial sensitivity. This appendix also sets out proposed budget requirements for the provision of these memorials for the Committee to discuss and agree.
- 3.20 Appendix 3 is a comparison of other Local Authority and Private Sector crematorium offering memorials and the cost to the client at each site as an indicative guide to setting fees and charges for new and existing memorial provision at Mansfield.