

**STRATEGIC CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM
DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of Meeting of 3rd October, 2018

Members Present: Aldermen Rodgers (Chairperson); and
Sandford and
Councillors Corr and O'Neill.

In Attendance: Mrs. S. Toland, Director of City Services,
Mrs. C. Sullivan, Policy and Business Development
Officer,
Mr. M. Patterson, Bereavement Services Manager,
Mr. A. Charles, Project Sponsor,
Mr. I. Bowden Senior Engineering Officer, and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 5th September were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Update on Plot Z1 Memorial

The Policy and Business Development Officer provided the Working Group with an update on the consultation process to design, produce and install a permanent memorial at Plot Z1 in the City Cemetery. She stated that the overwhelming majority of responses, following that process, had been positive and that it was intended that some of the recommendations in regard to the design of the structure would be incorporated into the commemorative memorial, where feasible.

The Working Group was advised that, the next stage in the process would be to hold a meeting with the Focus Group to agree the final design and inscription and that it was anticipated that the final design of the of the memorial would be brought back to the November meeting of the Working Group for its consideration.

The Working Group, aware of concerns in regard to the ground conditions in respect of the area where it was anticipated that the memorial would be erected, agreed that it would be prudent to undertake a site visit to the City Cemetery in order to obtain a detailed view of the site, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee.

**Proposal to make Clifton Street Graveyard
Safe for Public Access**

The Bereavement Services Manager advised the Working Group that a Member had requested that Clifton Street Graveyard be opened to free public access during daytime. The Members were reminded of the cultural and historical significance of the graveyard, which includes the Dunville, Sinclairs and McCracken graves. The Working Group was advised that currently the graveyard remained locked, due to safety concerns about some of the large monuments, and that these could not be made safe without incurring unplanned expenditure. The Working Group was informed of work which had been undertaken to date, including paths which had been levelled and tarmacked, trees cut back to allow safe access. In particular, during September staff had inspected and documented all 457 monuments. It is encouraging that 434 were designated as safe, 13 had been made temporarily safe and around 10 required specialist intervention. Most of the safety concerns related to monuments which are built into the perimeter walls where trees had been allowed to grow up within the wall. He stated that these 10 monuments required external expertise to secure and render them safe. Quotations from tree surgeons and structural engineers amount to approximately £6,600, however a quotation for the structural repairs had not been obtained yet. The Bereavement Services Manager requested that the Working Group grant permission for the release of this additional expenditure by the Council to undertake the necessary remedial work, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee.

One Member expressed concern in regard to the level of anti-social behaviour in the area and the possible risk to irreplaceable monuments if the graveyard were left open. Another Member highlighted that the damage from trees would get worse if not remedied. Members requested also that, further information be provided in respect of the potential costs associated with the provision of public access to the graveyard and of the potential external funding streams available to offset the potential costs to the Council, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee.

The Director stated that it would be necessary to engage with the local community and surrounding stakeholders in regard to opening of the Graveyard. She noted the Members concern regarding potential anti-social behaviour in the area, and that all these need factored in prior to any decision being taken to provide a more permanent public access facility to the graveyard. She highlighted the need to undertake certain remedial work within the graveyard to ensure the preservation of the historical monuments contained therein.

Update Report on implementation of Plotbox

The Bereavement Services Manager provided the Working Group with information in regard to the procurement and implementation of a cemeteries business solution which had been approved by the Finance Oversight Board in June 2017. He reported that the contract to provide the new business solution had been awarded to Plotbox. He provided the Working Group with an outline of the functionality of the new integrated system including its ability to integrate with the Council's corporate financial system including ensuring the elimination of double booking errors. There has been a lengthy preparation process and on completion of staff training in October, it was anticipated that the new system would be operational by November, 2018.

Noted.

Report on Stream Diversion in Roselawn Cemetery

The Working Group were made aware of a risk of flooding to Roselawn Cemetery and nearby houses. Members were asked to support an initial recommendation taken by the City and Neighbourhood Services Asset Management Board to divert a stream as a means to mitigate the risk of flooding. The cause of the problem is an old culvert in a stream within the cemetery which had collapsed causing blockages and thereby increasing the risk of flooding to the cemetery and private properties. Although the Council has full responsibility for the stream, the matter is complicated as it is on the boundary with private properties. The Working Group was provided with additional information in regard to the removal of landscape trees to allow for the stream alignment process to be undertaken. The Director informed the Working Group that it was intended to write to those residents affected, outlining the requirement to undertake the work to mitigate the possibility of flooding.

The Members recognised that despite the complicated boundary issues, the Council owned the stream, it was prudent to safeguard the Council's liability, by agreeing to undertake the stream diversion programme. The Working Group agreed also, that a letter be forwarded to the residents of those affected properties, informing them of the necessity to undertake the necessary work to mitigate against flood damage to their properties, subject to the approval of the People and Communities Committee.

Update Report re: Children's Bereavement Charges Waiver

The Bereavement Services Manager reminded The Working Group of the decision by the Council on 1st October 2018 to implement a policy to waive charges in connection with the cremation of persons under the age of eighteen and who were resident in Northern Ireland, and the opening fees for burials for similar aged Belfast residents, and that this waiver which would be extended to asylum seekers. He informed the Members that the revised scale of charges following that decision was implemented on the morning of 2nd October. Additionally that this waiver would be incorporated into the 2019/2020 budget estimates.

Noted.

City Cemetery Heritage Project

The Project Sponsor provided an update on the development of the Council's City Cemetery Heritage Project.(H.L.F.) He informed the Members that, in July, 2015, the Council had received £165,800 from the Heritage Lottery Fund to develop plans which would protect and enhance the existing heritage of Belfast City Cemetery. It was reported further that after a further funding request in December, 2017, a letter of offer had been received from H.L.F for the amount of £1.687 million, subject to match funding, by the Council of £620,000.

The Working Group was advised that following the project plan being finalised in 2017, a team of architects was appointed to deliver the project and the Members were provided with an overview of the plans to transform the City Cemetery as part of the heritage development project. The Members were informed also that, the development

plans included, amongst other things, a new visitor centre and restoration of several of the key listed heritage assets within the cemetery. The Project Sponsor reported that after the 'Permission to Start' is granted from the H.L.F, it was anticipated that the work to develop the site would commence in late Autumn 2018. The Members of the working group requested a site visit to obtain a detailed view of the site – subject to approval from People and Communities Committee.

Noted

Verbal Report on Memorial Trees damaged in Storm Ali

The Bereavement Services Manager reported that as a result of Storm Ali, 28 memorial trees had been uprooted or completely destroyed and that a further 12 trees had incurred broken branches as a result of the strong winds associated with the storm. The Working Group was provided with an assurance that all damaged memorial trees would be replaced as soon as possible and that in the majority of cases the nameplates attached to the trees had been retrieved.

In response to a question from a Member in regard to the Council's capability and resources to undertake tree clearance after the storm, The Director highlighted that focus on public safety had been maintained throughout and explained that downed trees blocking major roads and then footpaths had been prioritised over trees in other places. Members recounted that trees which had fallen onto main roads were removed in hours. Members congratulated staff who had co-ordinated the response and staff and contractors who had responded so effectively.

Noted.

Headstone Foundations

The Chairperson on behalf of the Working Group asked questions in regard to the responsibility of maintaining gravestone foundations in Council cemeteries. The Bereavement Services Manager agreed to report back on the matter.

Noted.

Proposed Burial Site at Dundrod

The Chairperson referred to a press article which had indicated that Belfast City Council was no longer seeking the acquisition of additional burial space, as per an article in relation to the Dundrod area. The Director informed the Chairperson that there may have been conclusions drawn from our 2016 response to a planning consultation that the Council had made as a statutory consultee, and that the response merely referred to the period at which burial capacity at Roselawn Cemetery would be provided for. She agreed to forward a copy of the response to the Working Group for the purposes of information and that this matter would be considered.

Noted.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting would be held on Wednesday, 21st November, at 4.30 p.m.

Chairperson