

**STRATEGIC CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM
DEVELOPMENT WORKING GROUP**

Minutes of Meeting of 20th November, 2019

Members Present: Councillor Corr, Chairperson,
The High Sheriff of Belfast, Alderman Sandford,
Alderman Rodgers and
Councillors Flynn and Mulholland.

In Attendance: Ms. V. Brown, City Services Manager;
Mr. M. Patterson, Bereavement Services Manager;
Ms. S. Kalke, Project Sponsor and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 2nd October, 2019 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Message of Thanks

The Members of the Working Group wished to acknowledge their gratitude to the staff of the Parks section, on behalf of the Royal British Legion, for undertaking the clean up of both the Thiepval and Knock memorials prior to the Remembrance Day commemoration. The Working Group wished its gratitude to be conveyed also to Mr. G. McCoy (Skainos) for providing the Members with a tour of Knock Burial Ground and for the provision of information in respect of its cultural and historical significance.

Update on New Crematorium Development

The Project Sponsor provided the Working Group with an update on the new crematorium development which had moved to Stage 3-committed projects. She confirmed that the development proposal consisted of a new two chapel crematorium, each with a two hundred seat capacity and with an allocated capital budget of £18 million. She confirmed that a project management team had been appointed and that according to the draft programme a completion date of mid 2023 was envisaged. This had been noted at a meeting of the project board on 22nd August, 2019.

The Working Group was informed that Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) documents for a design team had been submitted and were being assessed currently. The Project Sponsor confirmed that eight design teams had submitted responses in regard to the Questionnaire and, after completion of the tender process, it was anticipated that a design team would be appointed to deliver the project in the spring of 2020. The Members were informed that a pre-application discussion (PAD) was required to be put in place and this was being arranged.

The Project Sponsor reported further that the officers in the Physical Programmes Department, in conjunction with planning consultants, had constructed a case outlining the unique circumstances surrounding the proposed development which would be submitted, in due course, to Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council Planning Service for consideration.

The Working Group queried the potential issue of ongoing operations during the construction phase of the new crematorium facility, The Project Sponsor stated that the Council was confident that there would be minimal disruption to the cremation service and that measures would be put in place to protect the dignity of the bereaved families and relatives during the construction phase.

The Project Sponsor stated also that she would endeavour to undertake measures which might assist in expediting the planning process to ensure that any unnecessary delay in the development of the new crematorium facility was minimised. Several Members suggested that officers examine the possibility of introducing penalty clauses in future capital works contracts, including the new crematorium facility, in order to counter the possibility of undue delay during its construction phase.

In response to a further question from a Member in regard to the current staffing levels at Roselawn Crematorium, the Bereavement Services Manager stated that he was aware of the staff pressures currently which had been exacerbated by the increased number of cremations during the winter months. He informed the Members that cremation staff worked under a shift rota pattern but agreed to look at the future staffing levels given the increase in the seasonal workload at Roselawn.

The Project Sponsor stated, in response to a Member's question in regard to staff facilities at Roselawn, that, after the new crematorium was completed, the existing crematorium would be utilised in a way which was sympathetic to its history and the overall operation of the site

Noted.

Update on Expression of Interest for New Cemetery Land

The Members were provided with an update on the expression of interest in respect of the process to procure new burial land. The Bereavement Services Manager reminded the Working Group that in 2018 the Council had commissioned a review of its burial land requirements which had indicated that the Council required an additional 5.5 hectares (13.59 acres) of potential cemetery land. The Bereavement Services Manager stated that, following expressions of interest from ten potential applicants, the sites identified had been assessed with a number being eliminated at the preliminary stage due to the fact that they failed to meet the required size criteria, including problems associated with general access. He reported that, of the remaining sites, depth to bedrock data would be required to be obtained and assessed prior to any further exploration to any particular site. The Working Group was informed that the Council's Scientific Unit were currently analysing geological data in respect of each of the sites, prior to the presentation to the Departmental Assets Board and presentation of an option appraisal for consideration by the Members.

The Working Group was advised that, after agreement had been reached on a preferred site, future screening and assessment would be required before planning permission was sought, including the possibility of further hydro-geological tests on any of the preferred sites. He stated further that it was anticipated that a more detailed report in the matter would be presented to the Working Group in February 2020.

Noted.

Best Practice on Memorials for Cremated Remains

The Bereavement Services Manager provided the Working Group with an overview of best practice in respect of storage/disposal of cremated remains. He reminded the Members that the Council had, since 2017, ceased the provision of

memorial tress at Roselawn Cemetery and that current provision available included the burying of cremated remains in existing and new family graves. He stated that current legislation in Northern Ireland dealt with the burial of cremated remains in the same manner as full earth burials. He stated that it was also possible to bury cremated remains in the City of Belfast Crematorium Garden of Remembrance. The Working Group was informed that the Council did provide facilities for the scattering of cremated remains at both Roselawn and Shankill cemeteries with land set aside at those cemeteries for that purpose. The Members were advised also of the provision of a columbarium at Roselawn Cemetery for that purpose, but stated that take-up of that option had not proved popular.

The Bereavement Services Manager informed the Working Group of the measures put in place by other authorities in Great Britain in respect of cremated remains, including proprietary niche systems and the provision of both indoor and outdoor columbaria. It was pointed out that most provisions in Great Britain for cremated remains were limited by a time bound lease. The Members acknowledged the need to promote the current facilities available by the Council in respect of the storage/disposal of cremated remains. They requested that officers explore the possibility of making more facilities available for cremated remains at current cemeteries. The Working Group recommended also that the provision of purpose-built facilities be included in the overall design of the crematorium development and any new cemetery land.

The City Services Manager agreed that a report would be brought back to the Working Group in February 2020 with outline options associated with the storage/disposal of cremated remains. The Members proposed holding a short workshop, immediately following the February meeting, to consider how the Working Group might wish to progress the matter.

A Member stated that they had been contacted by the Plot Z1 Public Focus Group and that they had requested that the Council investigate the options to allow families to display the names of their babies buried in the section.

Noted.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting would be held on Wednesday, 5th February, 2020 at 4.30 p.m.

Chairperson