

# Parks and Leisure Committee

Monday, 18th February, 2013

## SPECIAL MEETING OF PARKS AND LEISURE COMMITTEE

Members present: Councillor McCabe (Chairman);  
Alderman Rodgers; Councillors Garrett,  
Haire, Hartley, Hendron, McNamee, A. Newton,  
O'Neill, Spence and Thompson.

In attendance: Mr. A. Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure;  
Mrs. R. Crozier, Assistant Director of Parks  
and Leisure; and  
Mr. B. Flynn, Democratic Services Officer.

### Apologies

Apologies were reported from Alderman Humphrey and Councillors Kelly, McKee and Ó Donnghaile.

### Future Cremation Provision - Feasibility Study

The Committee considered the undernoted report:

#### **"1 Relevant Background Information**

**Over the last number of years officers have been working on a clear, phased approach to cemetery and crematorium development in the city based on an analysis of available data gathered, trend information and the development of a robust plan to meet current and future service requirements.**

**At its meeting in February, 2012, the Committee agreed that the Council should work together with Newtownabbey Borough Council to examine the feasibility of a sub-regional approach to the development of additional crematorium facilities. Newtownabbey Borough Council had already identified a site at the Doagh Road which was to be the subject of the feasibility study.**

**Cogent Consulting were appointed to undertake a study on the feasibility of a sub-regional approach to the development of a new crematorium at the site identified by Newtownabbey Borough Council at Doagh Road, Newtownabbey.**

At a workshop in August, 2012, to which all the Parks and Leisure Committee were invited, Cogent presented their interim findings to Members and tested some of their thinking in order to inform the options within the report.

## **2 Key Issues**

Cogent Consulting have now provided us with a copy of the final report and they will present the key findings and recommendations to Members at today's special meeting.

A copy of the final report will be provided at the Special Committee meeting. The report takes the following format:

- Introduction and background
- Analysis of the demand for crematoria provision
- Analysis of the supply of crematoria provision
- Potential impact of the expansion of crematoria provision
- The proposed site and provisional costing of a new crematorium
- Potential options for expanding crematorium provision
- Conclusions

In summary the key findings include:

- There will continue to be an upward trend in demand for crematorium provision in NI.
- The City of Belfast Crematorium (at Roselawn) is the only crematorium provision in NI and when compared to the rest of the UK and RoI, NI has a relatively low number/level of provision of crematoria when examined on a per capita basis.
- There are a number of deficiencies hampering the effective delivery of dignified cremation services at Roselawn.
- Outline planning permission has been granted for three additional crematoria in NI – Lisburn (February 2012) and Dungannon and Omagh (November 2012).
- A new crematorium in Co. Cavan is due to open early in 2013.
- The private sector has been undertaking exploratory research into the potential of creating a new crematorium in Newtownabbey.

### Potential impact of the expansion of crematorium provision

Section 4 of the report examines the potential impact of any expansion in the supply of crematoria provision on the current operation of the City of Belfast Crematorium at Roselawn. Four scenarios are considered through the analysis and the worst case scenario considers the impact if all the proposed crematoria are developed i.e. Cavan, Omagh, Dungannon, Lisburn and Newtownabbey. This scenario would suggest that 57% of current market share would be eroded, leaving a potential 1,212 cremations<sup>1</sup> being undertaken annually at the City of Belfast Crematorium. The impact on income (based on the 13/14 charges) would be a drop from £1,246,515 to £525,117.

### Proposed site and provisional costing

The identified site, which is owned by Newtownabbey Borough Council, amounts to c.5.2 hectares and is located to the south of Doagh Road in Newtownabbey opposite Ballyearl Leisure Facility. The main risk at the identified site is the 'type' of zoning attributed to the area in which the site is situated within the Area Plan. The Plan also defines acceptable uses of the site, none of which is for a crematorium. An initial site meeting with the local planning officer indicated that these issues were not insurmountable but it has been recommended that a formal meeting with the Planning Office be held in order to formally record their position.

Based on an outline schedule of accommodation and high level design, the potential cost of creating a new crematorium could be c.£7.5m, disaggregated as follows:

Indicative Costs of a new crematorium	
Cost/Area of works	Cost
New Build (2,687.3m <sup>2</sup> )	£3,212,000
Cremators/abatement equipment	£2,013,000
External Works	£858,000
Right Turn to Main Road	£82,500
New Garden of Reflection / landscaping	£382,500
Re-routing of existing power line	£33,000
<b>Sub-total - Preliminary Costs</b>	<b>£6,581,000</b>
Professional Fees (@12% <sup>2</sup> )	£789,720
Statutory Charges	£100,000
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>£7,470,720</b>

<sup>1</sup> This is based on the current rate of cremations and does not take into account any increase in cremation rates.

<sup>2</sup> 9.5% in consultancy costs for town planning, architecture, mechanical and electrical, structural and civil engineering, landscape architecture, Project Management and BREEAM. 2.5% in consultancy costs for specialist environmental assessments, archaeology, legal fees and public relations (PR).

The new build includes provision for two chapels, whilst both may not be required in the first instance/phase of development a second chapel has been included to 'future-proof' the site.

### Potential options

Section 6 of the reports considers the pros and cons associated with the six possible delivery options:

- Option 1: Do nothing / Status Quo;
- Option 2: Extension of crematorium facilities in Belfast;
- Option 3: Creation of a new crematorium in Newtownabbey by NBC and BCC;
- Option 4: Creation of a new crematorium in Newtownabbey by NBC only;
- Option 5: Creation of a new crematorium in Newtownabbey by the private sector; and
- Option 6: Creation of a new crematorium in Newtownabbey by the public and private sectors.

### Conclusions and recommendations

Among the recommendations proposed by Cogent Consulting are:

Withstanding the concerns identified in relation to the involvement of the private sector in crematorium provision, weighing up the pros and cons; it is the view of the Research Team that the Councils (either on an individual basis or collaboratively) should give due consideration to Private Sector involvement as there is the potential for the following benefits to occur:

- Enhancement of crematoria provision, consumer choice and equality of access;
- Many or all costs would not be borne by BCC and NBC;
- Profit incentive drives greater efficiencies in provision;
- The application of expertise within cremation provision.
- Given this, the Research Team considers that Option 6 has the greatest potential to fulfil the requirements of both Councils.
- Regardless of the preferred option, it is considered essential that refurbishment works take place at the City of Belfast crematorium as it was the view of a number of consultees that service provision deficiencies (largely relating to the current schedule of

accommodation) are hampering the effective delivery of dignified cremation services.

**3 Resource Implications**

**Financial**

There is provision of £13.9m in the Council's capital programme for new cemetery provision for Belfast City Council.

**Asset and Other Implications**

None at this stage although the final phases of the project will inevitably increase the Council's land ownership and associated liabilities.

**4 Equality and Good Relations Implications**

There are currently no equality or good relation implications however this will continue to be reviewed as the project is developed.

**5 Recommendations**

Members are asked to:

- (i) Consider the proposed options and provide feedback and commentary as appropriate;
- (ii) Note that whichever option is preferred that further improvement and modernisation work will be required to be undertaken at the City of Belfast Crematorium at Roselawn and that a further report will be brought back to the Parks & Leisure Committee in due course."

The Committee was advised that Mr. B. McKiernan and Ms. B. McGrory, representing Cogent Consulting, were in attendance to provide a presentation in respect of the feasibility study, a copy of which had been tabled at the meeting for the Members' information, and they were admitted to the meeting and welcomed by the Chairman.

Mr. McKiernan indicated that, whilst only 20% of the deceased within Northern Ireland were cremated, that figure had increased by 45% since 1995, or 2.4% per annum. However, he pointed out that, when compared to crematoria provision in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, it was evident that Northern Ireland, with only one operational crematorium at Roselawn, was struggling to cope with current demands and would, given the limited availability of burial space, be unable to meet any anticipated growth in demand for cremation. He explained that perceptions to cremation had changed and that families were becoming more accepting of it as an option.

He reminded the Committee that cremation was considered to be a more cost-effective alternative to the traditional earth burial and indicated that the establishment of a second facility in Northern Ireland would, in all probability, lead to a further increase in demand.

Mr. McKiernan reviewed the current situation at the City of Belfast Crematorium and pointed out that, whilst there had been an increase in the number of cremations which could be facilitated, the Crematorium, which had opened in 1961, required considerable renovation work. He explained that, given that Roselawn contained only one chapel of limited capacity, and coupled with the limited time allocated to individual services, it was, at times, difficult for committals to be carried out in a sufficiently dignified manner. In regards to the Council's options for the upgrade of the current facility at Roselawn, or the feasibility of the building of a second facility in Belfast, the Committee was advised that the following options existed:

- Refurbishment and extension of existing crematorium – **estimated cost: £4,101,354;**
- Demolish existing crematorium to create new facility - **estimated cost: £7,575,223;**
- Demolish existing crematorium to create new facility with mezzanine floor - **estimated cost: £8,127,127;**
- Establish an additional crematorium in Belfast - **estimated cost: £10,523,673;** and
- Establish an additional crematorium with mezzanine floor in Belfast - **estimated cost: £11,002,832**

The Committee was advised that outline planning permission had been granted for crematoriums in Omagh, Dungannon and Lisburn and that work was ongoing on the building of a crematorium in Cavan in the Republic of Ireland. However, Mr. McKiernan pointed out that the opening of a singular crematorium in the mid/south Ulster area would, in all likelihood, have a minimum impact on the demand for cremation at Roselawn. In the event of a crematorium being established in Lisburn, together with a crematorium in mid/south Ulster, he explained that it was anticipated that demand for cremation at Roselawn would decrease by 18.6%. However, the number of cremations which would continue to be carried out at Roselawn would remain 46% higher than the average figure for crematoria in Great Britain. It was feasible that the establishment of a crematorium in Lisburn would decrease significantly the use of the City of Belfast Crematorium by residents of south and west Belfast, given that they might choose to use the facility at Lisburn. In such circumstances, it was projected that the decrease in demand for cremations at Roselawn would be approximately 27.8%. However, despite this reduced figure, Roselawn would still undertake 46% more cremations than those carried out at similar facilities in Great Britain.

Mr. McKiernan then outlined the projected additional impact which the establishment of a crematorium in Newtownabbey would have on the demand for cremation at Roselawn. He reported that projections had indicated that a new facility in Newtownabbey could reduce further the demand from Belfast residents for cremation at Roselawn by 50%. That figure, coupled with the demand for cremation at Newtownabbey from within the greater County Antrim and Londonderry areas, could potentially see the overall number of cremations at Roselawn drop by 56.6%, with an associated drop in income for the Council of £526,000 per annum.

Mr. McKiernan then provided an overview of the further options which existed for the Council regarding cremation provision. He explained that, given the projected growth in demand for cremation, a 'do nothing' option was somewhat unrealistic. In essence, the Council could opt to extend its own provision in Belfast or it could explore the feasibility of establishing a new facility in Newtownabbey in partnership with Newtownabbey Borough Council. He referred to the capital savings which the Council could achieve should it explore the feasibility of working in conjunction with Newtownabbey. He outlined also the potential arrangements and savings which could be accrued should the Councils agree to enter into a contract with a private sector company to construct a crematorium and oversee cremations on their behalf.

The Committee considered the contents of the presentation and a range of opinions were expressed by Members in respect of the Council's options in regard to future cremation provision. Mr. McKiernan answered a number of questions and pointed out that the trend in Great Britain had been for the private sector to operate crematoria. He reported that representatives of the private sector had estimated that the initial cost which could be charged for a cremation at a new facility at Newtownabbey would be £450.00, which was £80.00 less than the cost charged currently by the Council for the cremation of non-Belfast residents at Roselawn. The Chairman thanked Mr. McKiernan and Ms. McGrory and they retired from the meeting.

The Director provided an overview of the options which had been identified from a Council perspective. He pointed out that the Council, given the significant capital investment which would be required to address future cremation provision, would be obliged to make a far-reaching and strategic decision in the near future. He indicated that he would be content to brief any Party on the issues which had been raised within the report and undertook to consult with Newtownabbey Borough Council in order to clarify its views on the feasibility of working in conjunction with the Council to establish a new crematorium. In addition, he indicated that a report in respect of the establishment of a Council-owned burial ground at Dundrod, which would address the feasibility of a crematorium being established thereat, would be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee.

After further discussion, the Committee noted the information which had been provided.

Chairman