



## Belfast City Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Parks and Leisure Committee
<b>Subject:</b>	Update Report: acquisition of land for burials for Belfast City Council
<b>Date:</b>	16 September 2010
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	Andrew Hassard, Director of Parks and Leisure
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Claire Sullivan, Policy and Business Development Officer

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to:

- (i) provide Members with an update on the burials land acquisition project;
- (ii) seek the Committee's approval of the recommendations made by the Cemeteries Working Group
- (iii) seek the Committee's approval for officers to commence the process to appoint a suitably qualified consultant to carry out the site investigations at the Dundrod sites;
- (iv) seek the Committee's agreement that the Nutts Corner site is not suitable as a potential site for a new cemetery; and
- (v) seek the Committee's approval that an update newsletter is sent to all potentially affected landowners and other key stakeholders.

### **Relevant Background Information**

Members will be aware of the ongoing project to select a site for a new cemetery for Belfast and that update reports are brought to Committee on a regular basis, the last of which was in June 2010.

It was reported at this Committee meeting that a number of pieces of work had been completed and the key findings of the final draft report for the Tier 3 tests at Lisleen, the draft interim report for Nutts Corner and the final report on the Review of Burial Capacity were presented.

We have now also received the final draft report for the economic appraisal of a new crematorium facility and its key findings were presented to the Cemeteries Working Group at their meeting in August 2010 and in a paper that was circulated to all Members prior to the party group briefings (copy attached at Appendix 1).

Members agreed at Parks and Leisure Committee meeting in June 2010 that the findings of the various pieces of work be referred for discussion at a meeting of the burials working group and that party group briefings be carried out on this issue during August.

### **Key Issues**

The Cemeteries Working Group met on 9 August 2010 and was presented with the key findings from the tier 3 tests at Lisleen and Nutts Corner, the Review of the Burial Capacity and the economic appraisal for a new crematorium facility.

A summary of the findings of these pieces of work show that:

- If the council proceeds with the original approach of cemetery only provision, a site of 72 acres will be sufficient to meet the council's burial needs.
- The site at Lisleen is suitable for burial provision.
- Applying a weighting for sites which would serve the North and West of the city resulted in the two sites at Dundrod coming to the top of the rank order. However no site investigations have been carried out on either site. One of these sites came forward through the expressions of interest approach.
- There are a number of options available for the development of additional crematorium facilities. Based on current trends, additional facilities would impact on the requirement for additional burial land.

Based on the new information now available there are a number of options open to the council and the Cemeteries Working Group was asked to consider these.

The options are:

1. Stay with the original approach and agreed to acquire and develop all or part of the site at Lisleen.
2. Given that the priority for new cemetery provision is in the North and West of the city, agree to commence site investigations into the two Dundrod sites to assess their suitability with a view to acquisition and development.
3. Abandon the current process to acquire a new cemetery and rely on the existing provision at Roselawn supplemented with additional crematorium provision in the city.
4. Option three as above but agree to commence site investigations into the Dundrod sites to assess their suitability with a view to acquisition and land banking to meet future cemetery needs.

### Recommendations of the Cemeteries Working Group

Following a discussion around the options for going forward the Cemeteries Working Group proposed:

1. That the issue of providing additional crematorium facilities needs to be addressed and work needs to be undertaken to identify what is required, where facilities would be located and the options for financing it.
2. That abandoning the current process to acquire a new cemetery and rely solely on the existing provision at Roselawn was not a feasible option.
3. That further consideration is given to tests at the Dundrod sites, to assess their suitability as cemetery sites, and that legal advice is sought on the implications of keeping Lisleen as an option while these are ongoing.
4. That further work should be taken to investigate the provision of natural

burials.

5. That burial and cremation charges should be reviewed.

Members are asked to note that the provision of additional crematorium facilities does not include refurbishment to the current crematorium at Roselawn. If a new crematorium were to be developed consideration would have to be given to the refurbishment of Roselawn to bring it up to the current requirements of a modern crematorium.

If the Committee agrees to accept the recommendations of the Cemeteries Working Group it is proposed that arrangements are made to undertake initial site investigations at both Dundrod sites. It is suggested that, given that one of these sites come forward through the expressions of interest process, it should be given priority for site investigation. If these investigations show that either site has the potential to be used as a new cemetery the Council will then be required to undertake more detailed tier 3 tests. A further report will be presented following these investigations.

#### Nutts Corner site

Members are advised that the tier 3 tests have shown that two thirds of the Nutts Corner site is unsuitable in its current form for the proposed development. For this reason it is recommended that the site at Nutts Corner no longer be viewed as a potential site for a new cemetery.

#### Lisleen site

No specific decision is required regarding the site at Lisleen at this time and Legal Services has indicated that this has no implications for any duties that might be placed on the council by the legislation regarding blight.

However if there is going to be a potential change to the council's policy on burial provision further legal advice will be required on the implications for a compulsory purchase order proposal.

#### Communication with landowners

Members will be aware that an update newsletter has been sent on several occasions to potentially affected landowners at both Lisleen and Nutts Corner and to other key stakeholders. It is proposed that a newsletter be produced providing an update on the Committee's decisions and this also be sent to potentially affected landowners at the Dundrod site.

### **Resource Implications**

#### Financial

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

#### Human Resources

There are no human resource implications at this stage.

#### 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.

**Recommendations**

The Committee is asked to:

1. note the contents of this report;
2. agree to the recommendations made by the Cemeteries Working Group;
3. agree that officers make appropriate arrangements for site investigations at the Dundrod sites, with priority to be given to the site offered through the expressions of interest process;
4. agree that the Nutts Corner site is not suitable as a potential site for a new cemetery;
5. agree to seek legal advice on the implications for potential future compulsory purchase; and
6. agree that an update newsletter is sent to all potentially affected landowners and other key stakeholders.

**Decision Tracking**

The next update report on the new cemetery process will be brought to Committee in November 2010 by the Policy and Business Development Officer.

A report on Natural Burials will be brought to Committee in November 2010 by the Policy and Business Development Officer.

**Key to Abbreviations**

None.

**Documents Attached**

Appendix 1: Paper circulated to all Members prior to the August party group briefings