

# AGENDA ITEM 14

## COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

18<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER 2013

### REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

#### THORPE ROAD CEMETERY REVIEW 2013

##### 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide members with a general update and overview of the current cemetery service
- 1.2 To seek members determination in regards to the future of the closed cemetery lodge
- 1.3 To seek member's determination in regards to identifying an option to best address the issue of diminishing burial space within Thorpe Road Cemetery

##### 2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **Members endorse and support the development and current delivery of the Thorpe Road Cemetery Service as detailed within Appendix A**
- 2.2 **Members support option 3 (see 3.10 to 3.12) in regards to the future of the Cemetery Lodge building**
- 2.3 **Members endorse the approach suggested at 3.21-22 in regards to establishing a Natural Burial Provision.**

##### 3.0 KEY ISSUES

- 3.1 Thorpe Road Cemetery was opened in 1892 and has since that time been in constant use as a cemetery facility for the residents of Melton Mowbray as well as a Corporate Burial site available to residents of the whole Borough
- 3.2 The cemetery site has been well maintained and managed over the years and has been the subject of a number of comprehensive reviews.
- 3.3 Following the most recent internal review carried out and reported to members in 2007 an external specialist consultant 'Peter Mitchell Associates' was engaged in 2008 to look at the service in detail which included considering:
  - The site issue of diminishing remaining burial space
  - The administration of the service
  - Cemetery operations, policies and options
- 3.4 The attached Appendix A considers the recommendations and proposals made by the Peter Mitchell 2008 review and details the actions, changes and developments that have occurred since that time.
- 3.5 **Cemetery Lodge Future Options( and associated cemetery space issues )**

### **3.6 Life of existing cemetery site**

The cemetery site has an increasingly limited amount of space left for its present use going forward. The exact length of time the remaining space provides is dependent on the level of demand and the customer's choice of service.

Each type of service takes up varying amounts of space. Scatterings/Cremated remains interment/Coffin interment/Vault burials all vary in the land take required.

They average around 60 to 70 of these services provided annually with around 60% being burial of cremated remains and traditional coffin burials around 40 %. Scatterings in the Garden of Remembrance does not involve further land take and the remaining other burial option, that being the interment of cremated remains into a 300x400x500mm sunken Sanctum Vaults although does involve the use of space the amount taken is not significant

A very small amount of addition space for cremated remain interment is expected to be created by converting part of the large shrub bed at the Northern end of the cemetery.

As referred to in sections 1,2,4,10,18,19,21 and 22 within in the attached Appendix A additional spaces within the existing site will be sought through undertaking a number of exercises, using unused reserved plots when satisfied they are no longer required, using spaces previously excluded but now usable with hand grave digging in place of mechanical digging, close examination of the records will identify vacant plots wrongly marked as unavailable and the removal of further unwanted paths .Together this will add to the lifespan of the existing site, however these measures should be seen as holding measures and they do not in themselves change the pressing need to identify a suitable site (land) to extend the corporate cemetery service provision.

The current estimated life of the cemetery if existing average usage continues and all the actions within this report to create additional space within the existing site are carried out is likely to be in the region of 7 to10 years

It is proposed that a land or appropriate property agent be best engaged through the Councils' Property Services section working together with the Councils' Cemetery Service management team who best understand the specific requirement to identify a piece of suitable land

With the various authorisations, protocols and site development almost certain to be needed following the identification of a suitable site for the establishment of a 'cemetery extension' it is proposed that the seeking of such a site commence immediately if not at the earliest possible opportunity

It is intended to keep members apprised of the progress in regards to the search for a suitable site for a cemetery extension to the Thorpe road site through further reports to this committee during the coming months.

### **3.7 The Cemetery Lodge**

Following the removal of the Cemetery Superintendent post from the establishment in 2012 the Cemetery Lodge was vacated and has remained empty and secured since that time

- 3.8 Together with advice from the Council's Property Services section a number of options have been proposed for its future.
- 3.9 Members are respectfully requested to consider the options listed below to determine which they feel is optimal at this time, with that determination then giving the authority to move the lodge site development forward.

Option 1 Bringing the lodge up to current habitable standards with a view to adding it to the Councils' housing stock.

Option 2 Selling or letting the lodge for commercial purposes

Option 3 Demolishing the lodge site which occupies some 600m<sup>2</sup> of land which if made available could be used to extend the cemeteries burial space

### 3.10 **Option 1**

**Residential use** Returning the lodge back into residential use as part of the Councils' housing stock is possible, however there are a number of concerns including tenant issues and cost

There are concerns that any problems that might arise whilst tenants are being accommodated there that may cause disruption at the site during services. Such a concern could be mitigated by creating an alternative new access from Thorpe Road so that people using the access way to the cemetery do not share the same small front area, along with screening of the front door to give more privacy to both parties, both these proposals will be limited by the space available.

To help mitigate this issue the property could be let with attached controls of use so the property is released to Housing Stock with conditions i.e. Residents to be over 55 years old or in employment.

The property could become employee accommodation however this is not favoured as this employee benefit has issues which are complicated if accommodation is involved.

#### Costs and benefits

**To bring the property back up to appropriate standard £20,000-25,000 with an income expectation of £600 pm**

**Creating a separate access £4,000**

**Screening front door £2,000**

**N.B. An approved business case will be needed to take this option forward**

### 3.11 Option 2

**Commercial Use.** The property could be let to funeral directors, stone masons, florists etc, however it is likely that there is insufficient custom for a viable commercial development opportunity compounded by the fact that there is a significant number of alternate similar service suppliers already established in the local area

In addition the building does not have good visibility from the road, it is not in a commercial area and signage would be required by the business.

A new entrance may also be considered necessary for similar concerns expressed relating to the proposed residential use.

#### Costs and Benefits

**To convert the property so as to be suitable for commercial usage £10,000 although the potential to let the property for commercial usage is uncertain**

**Creating separate access £4,000**

**N.B. An approved business case will be needed to take this option forward**

### 3.12 Option 3

**Demolition of the lodge** to create an extension of the cemetery of roughly 600m<sup>2</sup> of land. This additional space could add around 4 years of life to the Cemetery

#### Costs and Benefits

Costs would include

**Demolition £6,000 – £8,000, asbestos survey £500** site clearance and turf laying in addition there may be a need to relocate the sites toilet facilities.

If the cemetery lodge was demolished the resulting empty plot would provide additional grave spaces for the cemetery (depending on burial type extending the life of the site by up to 4 years )

The following estimated incomes might be realised if the new space was used to permit burials of the following types

**For an average mix of burials and cremated remains £65,500**

**For coffin burials only £96,900**

**For cremated remains burials only £58,500**

- 3.13 It should be noted that the incomes above are not incomes over and above the existing annual cemetery income budget but in essence extend the period of expected cemetery income budget
- 3.14 Coffin interments incur outgoing grave digging charges whilst the Cremated remain plots are dig in house with no additional cost to the council
- 3.15 Additional income to the council from all monument i.e. headstone and or kerb set installations applies to all options.
- 3.16 A point to note is that the size of a grave plot needed to accommodate a coffin burial takes up around 3 times the amount of land required for a cremated remain burial The option for either has always been the customer's choice and there is no suggestion that this should change for the existing Thorpe Road site, most especially with its limited remaining life. However to maximise the life of a new cemetery extension this policy may need reviewing.

### 3.17 **Natural Burial Site Development**

Natural Burials and the sites of Natural burials do vary. They basically offer non-traditional sites for burials and welcome low cost alternate often part customer lead or jointly arranged services and burials. Such facilities are always located in tranquil rural locations with natural surroundings and bio diversity focused management

- 3.18 Some sites permit full coffin burials, some cremated remain burials only, whilst others are only for general scattering of cremated remains.
- 3.19 These sites have grown in popularity over time, however there does appear to be a sufficient number of available Natural burial sites in the region with large Natural burial organisations having sites outside Loughborough and Oakham and one in South Croxton together with a few much smaller private Natural burial sites developed as part of farmers diversification plans however many of these are anecdotally currently underused
- 3.20 Much of the land currently within the Councils' control is not suitable and accordingly the proposal to investigate the feasibility of establishing a Natural burial site for Melton may not result in any significant benefit in regards to addressing the needs of the Boroughs' residents or assist to any significant extent with the current concerns regarding the need to find more space for a more conventional cemetery site for more traditional burials
- 3.21 It is suggested that one possible financially viable way forward for facilitating Natural burials close to Melton for residents of the Borough might be to establish an agreement with a local framer or landowner with a suitable site in close proximity to Melton Mowbray where a Natural burial site could be jointly developed with the farmer or landowner retaining ownership and management of the site whilst the agreement gives the residents of the Borough through the Councils' cemetery service the option to use a Natural burial site.
- 3.22 Accordingly it is proposed to use some of the monies already set aside by members for a Natural burial feasibility study to seek out through the Farmers Union, FWAG and other usual advertising methods relevant partners (local farmers and landowners) who are interested in jointly taking this matter forward.
- 3.23 Progression in regards to developing a Natural burial site will be duly reported back to Members for their consideration information and determination where required

## 4.0 **POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 This report does not seek any reversals of Council or corporate policy however there are a number of issues within it that might have eventual implications for the Council these include
- The reference at 3.18 to the potential to create a new Natural burial area
  - The possible re-use of what were previously considered 'used' spaces either due to the age of the plot, the depth of any previous usage, a change to the deeds of grant

## **5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This report includes a section that describes a range of options for the Disused Cemetery lodge. These options include bringing the lodge back into residential use with associated costs and benefits, marketing the site for commercial usage with associated costs and benefits and demolishing the lodge to create additional cemetery space with associated costs and benefits. As such this report is most likely to have some financial and or other resource implications

## **6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS**

- 6.1 This report has no direct implications in regard to legal matters or powers All the changes proposed are made within an understanding of cemetery legislation, traditions and practise and will have due regard to sensibilities and acceptability

## **7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY**

- 7.1 There are no direct community safety implications as a result of this report

## **8.0 EQUALITIES**

- 8.1 All actions changes and proposals within this report have due regard to equality issues. There are no negative equalities implications coming from this report and the insistence that a good network of paths are retained within the cemetery is made with a desire to maintain good accessibility for those with limited abilities . The suggestion that a small Natural burial site be established would be to add a further option for customers and be seem as improving or increasing the range of customers who consider the service of use to them

## 9.0 Risks

### 9.1 Probability

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Very High A				
High B				
Significant C		3		
Low D	2		4	
Very Low E				
Almost Impossible F			1	
	IV Neg- ligible	III Marg- inal	II Critical	I Catast- rophic

→  
Impact

Risk No.	Description
1	The various methods proposed to add available space for the existing site are not acceptable
2	A Natural burial site is not identified
3	A decision in regards to the future of the lodge is deferred
4	A firm decision to progress the search for a site suitable for a cemetery extension is deferred

## 10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 There are no specific climate change implications as a direct result of this report

## 11.0 CONSULTATION

11.1 There has been no direct consultation in regards to this report, however the Thorpe Road Cemetery is one of Melton Mowbray's highest profile sites and as such it is constantly in the public gaze and all changes that occur are quickly noticed and generate comment. The proposal within this report to demolish the Cemetery lodge may be of particular interest to the Towns Historical/ Heritage society and although not a listed property it is attractive building which may warrant further consideration by such societies as well as the Councils' planners

## 12.0 WARDS AFFECTED

12.1 The Cemetery is primarily for the use of Melton Mowbray residents, however it is a corporate cemetery and available for all, as such this report which considers the on-going sustainability of the service and the intention for it to be able to remain as a facility that meets the needs of the Borough for the foreseeable future, it impacts upon all Wards and potentially beyond.

Contact Officer      Raman Selvon

Date:                      9 September 2013

Appendices :            none

Background Papers: None

Reference : X : Committees\CSA/2013.14/180913/HR-Cemetery