

Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum

A meeting of Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum was held on Wednesday, 28th February, 2007.

Present: Cllr M Frankland (Chairman), Cllr Mrs J Beaumont, Cllr M Cherrett, Cllr K Faulks, Cllr K Leonard, Cllr W Noble, Cllr F G Salt, Mrs E Chapman (St. John's Living Well) and Mrs D Fairhurst (Stockton Resident's & Community Group)

Officers: Mrs J Robins (DNS); Mrs T Harrison and Mrs J Trainer (LD)

Also in attendance: No other person's were present

Apologies: Mrs Mr Cooper (University of the Third Age), Mr S Neal (Teesside Pensioners), Mr R Put (Stockton International Family Centre), Mrs D Rose (Age Concern), Mr L Stanley (Royal Navy Associates), Mr and Mrs Parker (Retired Members Association TGWU) and Alderman Wood (Age Concern)

1 Minutes of the Meeting held on 19th January 2007

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 19th January 2007.

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19th January 2007 were agreed as a true record and would go to the next Council meeting.

2 Review of Cemeteries and Memorials.

The Scrutiny Officer overseeing the scrutiny review of Environment and Regeneration attended the Forum and asked the Members a set of questions which were to be compiled with the same asked of other groups to assist in the review of Cemeteries and Memorials.

Members gave the following responses to the prepared questions:

Members had little experience of Cemeteries but felt that the Planting and landscaping appeared to look good.

Members felt that with certain exceptions cars should not be allowed into the cemetery, however it was identified that there was a lack of parking provision for people visiting cemeteries.

A Member advised that they would not have been able to find the gravestone they sought if they had not been able to drive into the Cemetery due to the size of the Cemetery.

Members felt that dog walkers should not be prevented or discouraged from walking their dogs in Cemeteries provided that there was no uncollected fouling and that dogs were kept on leads.

Members expressed the need for water, bins and seating facilities within Cemeteries and observed that the Crematorium had a hut, which sold tea and coffee. The Crematorium also had a very large car park.

Members advised that it would be nice to have a café of some kind in the cemeteries and suggested that the disused chapels could be used as a café. The chapels could also be used as a bereavement or remembrance place. They

could also be a place where individuals could get help, directions or advice.

Members felt the use of disused chapels would be great for civil services, as it would make great use of some beautiful buildings.

Some Cemeteries experienced anti social behaviour, which Members felt was attributed to the proximity to some areas of local residents. To combat anti social behaviour, Members suggested a guard or warden be on call. It was observed that keepers used to be given a house within the Cemetery from which they could maintain the area and be a resident warden. A Member felt the way to combat anti social behaviour was to prevent the publicising of such behaviour in newspapers.

Members discussed the various 'green' burial options available to people such as woodland burials and cardboard coffins for cremations.

Members gave examples of civil burial services they had attended and advised how nice they were with many personal touches linked to the individual.

Members were happy with the opening times for Cemeteries and registrars, however a Member advised that when registering the death of his father he had to book and could not get an appointment for 4 days. The Registration and Bereavement Services Manager advised that they had changed to bookings as people were having to sit and wait for long periods of time until a registrar became available which the officers did not feel was right for grieving family. Members were advised that the four-day wait experienced by one of the Members was an unusual exception, appointments were usually provided within two days.

Members discussed the issue of limited burial space and whether the Council should provide local burial areas. It was observed that space was an issue and locals would complain if a burial site were placed near them. It would be preferable to have local site, however the sites would not have to be too close but they would have to be on a good transport route.

It was observed that there could be less call for cemeteries in the future as more people were opting for cremation; such trends were very difficult to predict.

Members felt the use of unused reserved burial spaces could be considered to cope with shortages in burial sites but a clear record of who was buried in the plots would need to be kept. It was felt that if the plots were unused for 100 years then it would be acceptable to be occupied by others.

Members advised that there was a need for a crematorium in the Stockton area and raised the question of whether there was enough room on an existing cemetery to house a crematorium, which was unable to be clarified.

Members were advised that a planning application had been submitted in the 90's for a crematorium in Stockton but the scheme had not proceeded.

A Member felt that the crematorium should be built in the area proposed in the planning application but should also have a woodland area behind it so that people's ashes could be buried in the woodland area.

When asked if they felt the current regulations of memorial types were acceptable, Some were of the opinion that the regulations were reasonable but some of the decorations were not appropriate. On the whole Members advised that the items placed on graves were the families form of remembrance and helped them in their grief and the authorities needed to consider this and be careful. It was the choice of the families and such things should not be dictated to by others.

Travellers decorated the graves of their loved ones with photographs and other items and their graves were always nice and colourful and were always well looked after unlike some other graves which had no items of remembrance and were not looked after. Members suggested that the focus should be more on those graves that were not looked after/maintained.

Some people planted trees as a remembrance beside the grave; however this could cause problems in later years.

Members were asked their opinion on cardboard coffins to which they advised that they thought it was a good idea.

Members discussed the cost of funerals; they felt that they were very expensive and were an additional cause of grief and suffering for the families.

Some aspects related to burial/cremation were not required, such as embalming but many people were not advised. It was felt that more information should be given to people on these issues.

Members were not happy at the amount that newspapers charged to advertise the death of a loved one, however it was acknowledged that newspaper charges were not part of the remit of the Environment and Regeneration scrutiny review and could therefore not be addressed.

Members acknowledged the need for individuals to plan their own funerals, as it would take a lot pressure off family members in a time of grief.

Members were advised of the transfer of rights act.

CONCLUDED that: -

1. The Members be thanked for assisting in the scrutiny review of Cemeteries and Memorials by the Environment and Regeneration Select Committee.
2. The Scrutiny Officer and Registration and Bereavement Services Manager be thanked for attending and providing insight.

3 Work Programme

Members were advised that after the Election in May, the Elderly Citizen's Liaison Forum would be merging with two other older people's groups. The work programme would therefore be planned out to take the Forum up to April.

Mrs Cooper had sent written request to have provision of sheltered housing (public and Private) included to the work programme. Members were in agreement.

Further to the previous minutes the secretary advised that she had invited the Town Centre Manager to attend the Forum to provide information regarding the Markets Improvement Plan but availability was an issue.

Members confirmed that they wanted the Town Centre Manager to attend the next meeting, as they were very concerned at the lack of provision for the elderly. Some Members had seen a leaflet-relating tot the consultation on the regeneration of the Town Centre and although there was information on facilities proposed for all other ages, there was nothing for the elderly. Members were not happy about this and wanted to discuss their concerns with the Town Centre Manager.

The only available dates in March were Tuesday 27th or Wednesday 28th March. The secretary would check the Town Centre Managers availability on those dates.

CONCLUDED that: -

1. The secretary will check the availability of the Town Centre Manager on either Tuesday 27th or Wednesday 28th March and will invite her to attend the Forum in the most suitable date. Members will then be informed of that date.
2. Sue Burgess will be invited to attend the meeting to provide information regarding the Markets Improvement Plan and provisions/facilities for older people.
3. The work programme will consist of:
March – Markets Improvement Plan. Date to be confirmed.
April – Provision of Sheltered Housing (Public and Private). Date to be confirmed at next meeting.
4. There will likely be no meeting in May due to the election and then the older peoples groups will be combined with a new work programme and schedule of meetings to be advised by the facilitator.