

MINUTE EXTRACT

Cabinet Meeting – 20 April 2017

1. Title of Item/Report

The Development and Operation of a Crematorium and Gardens of Remembrance in Stockton-on-Tees

2. Record of the Decision

Consideration was given to a report that sought approval to build and manage a crematorium on the site of the former Blakeston School Playing Fields site, Junction Road, Roseworth, Stockton.

Stockton had a growing population. The population was estimated at 194,800 [ONS 2015 mid-year population estimate published 23 June 2016]. By 2034, based on most recent trends, it was projected to increase to 211,000 and by 2039 to 214,200 [ONS 2014-Based Subnational Population Projections for Local Authorities released 25 May 2016].

The Borough's population had increased by 1.56% from 2011 to 2015 and this was projected to increase by 9.96% by 2039 equating to an additional 19,400 residents compared with 2015.

In England, the vast majority of people opt for cremation over burial: 2014 figures from the Cremation Society of Great Britain showed the cremation rate was 74.77%. In a significant and growing number of cases, cremations were themselves followed by the formal burial of cremated remains at cemeteries, crematoria and churchyards.

Of those deaths registered in Stockton [based on statistics 2010 to 2016], the rate for those choosing cremation was 78%, with burials being 22%. This meant, on average 1605 of death informants choosing cremation had no choice other than to cremate their family member outside of the Borough as there was no crematorium facilities.

In February 2014 and February 2016, formal public consultation took place on the proposed provision of a crematorium in Stockton Borough. On both occasions overwhelming support for a crematorium was gained, with the latter identifying over 93% of respondents in favour.

During the period of February 2014 to February 2015, additional informal consultation was undertaken. Information boards used during the Community Engagement Event were placed in the reception area of The Register Office in order to engage with actual service users of Registration and Bereavement Services and to gauge to what extent they agreed or disagreed with a proposal for a new cemetery and crematorium at Stockton – 956 customers completed feedback sheets and the results were 87% strongly agreed with the proposal, 10% slightly agreed, 2% slightly disagreed and 1% strongly disagreed.

Similarly in a consultation exercise between April 2014 – October 2014, 496 death informants were asked the question "If the option had been available, would you have chosen Stockton Crematorium?" 87% stated 'yes'.

The location for development of a crematorium was the former Blakeston / Northshore School playing fields. The site was located to the north of Junction Road (B1274) and Roseworth housing estate, and fell within the Roseworth Ward.

Directly to the north of the site was a railway line. To the east was Blakeston Court housing estate and to the west was a large supermarket with car park. Adjacent to the western boundary of the site was Roseworth Community and Social Club and Crossley's Bungalow.

Under planning reference 16/0846/LAO, outline planning permission for a crematorium with associated memorial gardens, access roads, car parking and landscaping with all matters reserved was granted, with conditions, on the 1st September 2016.

A new site access from Junction Road would be required to service the facility. The requirements of the facility must conform to the Crematorium Act of 1902 and the Secretary of State (DEFRA) Statutory Guidance for Crematoria.

It was envisaged that the new crematorium would be a modern single-storey building with one service chapel and two cremators, with abatement equipment. The crematorium would be surrounded by attractive landscaped gardens of remembrance, where enhanced planting would contribute positively to the visual appearance of the site and also provide an enhancement to the ecological value. The location of the crematorium building would be sympathetic to the surroundings in terms of both design and setting and would be complemented by ample car parking provision in accordance with the Council's Supplementary Planning Document: Parking Provision for New Developments.

The expectation would be the first service to commence no earlier than 09:15 with the last service ending at 16:00 from Monday to Friday as well as morning services available on a Saturday. The preference being that each service should be at least 45-minutes in duration, with the crematorium being served by two cremators able to accommodate the largest of coffins.

Incorporating the overall cremation service period above, it was assumed that the actual crematorium building would not be used outside of the normal opening hours e.g. 08:30 to 17:00. The gardens of remembrance were to be designed to provide both an area for the scattering of ashes and sections for the interment of cremated remains. It was anticipated that the grounds of the crematorium would have suitable summer and winter opening hours to enable bereaved families to tend their loved ones cremated remains graves and visit the remembrance gardens.

Subject to obtaining reserved matters approval it was anticipated that highway works associated with the new crematorium would begin later in 2017 with construction of the crematorium starting in spring 2018 and completed spring 2019.

The assessment of future projected cremations in the Borough and the views of residents had focused the proposed design format as previously identified. These, together with the expected operation costs, had informed the determination process in assessing the viability of the preferred development.

RESOLVED that the construction of a crematorium, including gardens of remembrance and associated landscaping and parking on the former Blakeston School playing field site, which will be owned, and managed by the Council be agreed.

RECOMMENDED to Council that £6.35m be funded through prudential borrowing.