

Place Select Committee

A meeting of Place Select Committee was held on Monday, 9th April, 2018.

Present: Cllr Derrick Brown (Chair), Cllr Sonia Bailey (Vice-Chair), Cllr Maurice Perry, Cllr Mrs Sylvia Walmsley, Cllr Louise Baldock, Cllr Gillian Corr (sub for Cllr Ken Dixon), Cllr Norma Stephenson OBE (sub for Cllr Evaline Cunningham), Cllr Paul Weston

Officers: Reuben Kench (CL&E); Craig Willows, Jayne Robins, Andrew Ruddock (CS); Gary Woods, Annette Sotheby (DCE)

Also in attendance:

Apologies: Cllr Ken Dixon, Cllr Bill Woodhead MBE, Cllr Evaline Cunningham

PLA 1/18 Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure was noted.

PLA 2/18 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest from Members.

PLA 3/18 Scrutiny Review of Management of Memorials

Members received information from the Cemeteries Superintendent who gave an overview of memorial management and grave personalisation in cemeteries which included:-

- 25% of grave space is allowed for personalisation. Although it is recognised that this is a source of comfort to bereaved families, it needs to be kept to a level that does not cause operational issues for cemetery staff or access problems.
- Personalisation tends to be most visible in the first year of bereavement, with several family members wanting to place items on the grave.
- Stringent procedures are followed from receipt of a memorial application.
- Raising public awareness of the new personalisation policy was a recommendation from the previous Scrutiny Review in 2007.
- Grave personalisation policy is discussed with the family to ensure understanding and compliance. In addition, leaflets and signage are displayed in prominent places in cemeteries, and details on the Bereavement Services website.
- An audit was carried out last year in relation to the level of grave personalisation across all five of the Borough's cemeteries – of the 59,651 graves audited, 98% were compliant with the policy, 1.8% partially compliant and 0.2% non-compliant. The 2% that are not fully compliant equates to 1,183 graves.
- Families sometimes engage the services of masons themselves – this can lead to work that would be rejected if formally applied for to the Local Authority, becoming permanent despite Council efforts. Families are then reluctant to remove this due to cost implications. Disciplinary action could deter masons and send a clear proactive message that regulations will be enforced, although it is often difficult to prove as the work is carried out when cemeteries staff are not present.

- Families are asked with tact and diplomacy to reduce personalisation where they have strayed beyond the policy.
- Possible full enforcement, shortening all kerbs and edgings, could bring about a complete clean-up of cemeteries and eliminate operational difficulties. However, this would be a considerable undertaking and could result in negative publicity.
- Consider new concepts of controlling space personalisation in the future. A new model has been developed with the Horticulture and Cemeteries Team to trial at the forthcoming extension to Durham Road Cemetery. Members were given information on proposed new grave options and shown an example of the proposed new kerbing made of a durable material with a 20-year guarantee.
- The team would explain what is available to grave owners which will be promoted with clear text and pictorial references. Members were shown a leaflet example of this.

Members questions and comments could be summarised as follows:-

- What disciplinary action would be taken with masons carrying out unofficial work? It was noted that if found to be acting in breach of regulations they could be banned from working in cemeteries for 6 months which could be extended if further breaches occurred, and reported to their professional body.
- Members asked for an explanation of the procedure around multiple burials and coffin types and noted that most requests are for two burials, with a maximum of three adult interments and usually chipboard/bio-degradable type coffins used.
- The new collars would give more clarity on personalisation space and enable easy access and maintenance.
- Do grave owners realise when they sign up for a plot it is then part of their estate? It was confirmed that families receive a full explanation about this, and that should a grave owner die, the rights to the grave need to be transferred to the legal next of kin, or the Rights relinquished and transferred back to the Local Authority.
- The Chair asked if there had been any injury sustained from accidents related to grave personalisation, and noted there had been none.
- There are many balloons in cemeteries which are a banned item – more education is needed on the environmental impact and harm to animals.
- Potential to change in the new cemetery could be too restrictive as often people want variety. Could there be separate identified areas such as a lawned option and one for those who want more personalisation? It was noted that the new concept allowed for these alternative options.
- Clarity with regard to enforcement is needed especially if regulations are ignored in new areas.
- Would Durham Road Cemetery be the only Stockton Town cemetery available in future? It was reported that a project group has begun work on identifying land for burial space for central Stockton and to the South of the Borough.

AGREED - that the information be noted.

PLA 4/18 Action Plan for Agreed Recommendations - Review of Billingham Event Infrastructure

Members were presented with the Action Plan setting out how the agreed

recommendations from the Review of Billingham Event Infrastructure will be implemented and target dates for completion.

Members referred to the 'proposed actions/progress' wording under recommendation 7 which read "BIFF are required to consider the frequency of the event". A suggestion was made to amend this to "BIFF are requested to consider the frequency of the event", however after discussion with regard to the Council's current and potential future contributions to the funding of the event, "required" was considered appropriate.

AGREED that the Action Plan be approved.

**PLA
5/18** **Work Programme 2018-2019**

Next meeting to be held on 14th May 2018.

AGREED that the work programme be noted.

**PLA
6/18** **Chair's Update**

The Chair had nothing further to report.