

CHILTERNS CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

FIFTY EIGHTH ANNUAL REPORT 1st APRIL 2012 – 31st MARCH 2013

CONSTITUENT AUTHORITIES AND REPRESENTATIVES

Aylesbury Vale District Council

Councillor David Thompson
Councillor Brian Roberts

Chiltern District Council

Councillor Michael R. Smith (Chairman)
Councillor Nick Rose

Wycombe District Council

Councillor David Carroll
Councillor Ms Katrina Wood (from May 2012)
Councillor Mrs Jean Teesdale (to May 2012)

Superintendent and Registrar

Charles Howlett DMS, F.ICCM(Dip)
Chilterns Crematorium
Whielden Lane
Amersham
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Clerk

Alan Goodrum
Chief Executive
Chiltern District Council
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King George V Road
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Treasurer

Alison Howes
Chief Financial Officer
Chiltern District Council
Council Offices
King George V Road
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Buckinghamshire

**CHILTERN CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE
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1) CREMATIONS

The following tables show the number of cremations from 1st April to 31st March for the past five years and their originating Districts:

| District | 2008/09 | 2009/10 | 2010/11 | 2011/12 | 2012/13 |
|-----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Aylesbury Vale | 668 | 639 | 614 | 678 | 637 |
| Chiltern | 596 | 552 | 563 | 546 | 528 |
| Wycombe | 899 | 834 | 895 | 899 | 915 |
| Other | 1,004 | 911 | 973 | 995 | 1,026 |
| Total | 3,167 | 2,936 | 3,045 | 3,118 | 3,106 |

Comparative figures for the previous years are:

| 2000/01 | 2001/02 | 2002/03 | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| 2,967 | 3,021 | 3,104 | 3,065 | 3,010 | 2,989 | 2,950 | 2,930 |

The total number of cremations since opening until the end of March 2013 = 121,162.

The 3,106 cremations carried out in 2012/13 generated income of £1,504,700.00

In 2012 Chilterns Crematorium ranked at 5 in a league table in order of the number of cremations carried out at each of the 266 crematoria in the UK.

The proportion of cremations to burials first reached 70% in 1992 and has increased by approximately 2% each decade since then and is currently 74%. By 1995 the actual number of deaths in the UK had risen to 650,000, but since then there has been a general downward trend, with the least number of deaths so far in 2011 when only 556,434 were recorded, 9,000 less than in the previous year. 573,000 deaths were recorded in 2012 of which 74% were cremated. Mortality rates are expected to start rising again in the next few years.

2) DISPOSITION OF CREMATION ASHES

Nationally there has been a steady reduction in the number of cremation ashes being placed in the grounds of the crematorium where the cremation has taken place, with a higher incidence of ashes being removed from the crematorium for disposal elsewhere.

In 1970 approximately 86% of ashes remained at crematoria nationally (including about 15% being buried as opposed to scattered), but since then there has been a gradual decline and in 2004 the national figure was 40% (including 10% being buried).

At Chilterns (where ashes have only ever been scattered), in the 1970's around 80% of ashes were remaining in the garden of remembrance. By 2004 this was reduced to 35%. In 2007 approximately 34% of ashes were scattered in the garden of remembrance, 32% in 2008, 30% in 2009, 28% in 2010, 30% in 2011 and 27% in 2012.

The number of cremation ashes being taken away for disposal elsewhere is being offset to a small degree by those being received for scattering from other crematoria. 62 were received in 2011/12. 67 were received in 2012/13 generating an income of £1,933.00.

Although the reduction in ashes being scattered is reflected in memorial sales, nevertheless the Garden of Remembrance remains an important feature essential in providing an appropriate setting for the place of cremation and afterwards for mourners to visit when it helps to act as a focal point in the mourning process.

3) **COMMEMORATION**

An additional 65 commemorative plaques were added to the kerbing around the rose beds and the total number of plaques, after deducting those that were not renewed at the expiration of the lease period, is 2,599. Together with the income from renewals, the total income from rose bed commemorative plaques amounted to £45,716.

An additional 16 stone memorial plaques were sold, and the total number of plaques, after deducting those that were not renewed at the expiration of the lease period, is 726 since the scheme was introduced in 1994. Together with the income from renewals the income for the year amounted to £21,186.

An additional 8 leather memorial plaques were sold in the chapel of remembrance, and the total number of plaques, after deducting those that were not renewed at the expiration of the lease period, is 265 since the scheme was introduced in January 2001, with income for the year of £5,671.

A total sum of £1,836 was donated for the purchase of trees, shrubs and flowering plants and bulbs.

A further 325 inscriptions were entered in the Book of Remembrance and the income, including the sale of miniature replica books and memorial cards, amounted to £31,285.

4) **FEES**

The scales of fees were reviewed by the Joint Committee in March 2012. Increases of around 3% in line with the projected rate of inflation were approved in relation to the majority of the fees, effective from 1st April 2013.

The cremation fee was increased by a similar percentage from £490 to £505. However, it is relevant to note that measures taken in recent years to operate the cremators more efficiently, notably the move away from the previous policy of carrying out all cremations on the same day as the funeral service, has achieved significant energy savings without which larger increases in the cremation fee would be necessary.

The national average cremation fee in 2012 was £538.28, and in a league table of the 260 crematoria in the UK, starting with the most expensive, Chilterns' cremation fee ranked at 225.

5) **STAFF**

There were three staff changes during the year:-

1. Clerical Assistant, Melanie Reed, had been acting up as Senior Administrator since December 2011 during the long-term sickness and subsequent death of the previous post-holder. Her position was made permanent from 1st May 2012
2. Julie Wright, who had been appointed as a temporary part-time clerical assistant in November 2011 to help cover the long term sickness absence, was offered the post on a permanent basis which she accepted, effective from 1st May 2012.
3. Another part-time clerical assistant, Sylvia Whelan, was appointed in August 2012 to fill a remaining vacancy.

A diagram showing the current staffing establishment at the Crematorium as of 31st March 2013 is included as *Appendix 1*.

6) **PROPOSED CREMATORIUM: AYLESBURY**

It is six years since the Joint Committee first got involved in the search for a site to build a crematorium to serve Aylesbury, the last three searching intensively since it was decided it wished to build the crematorium itself.

At the point where last year's report ended a site was being actively pursued in the Aston Clinton area where the owner had been approached and indicated he was interested in selling. Contact with the owner had first been made in the summer of 2011, but little progress had been made because of planning and political sensitivities arising from the Arla Dairies development and a number of other planning applications around Aylesbury, including one for housing in the Aston Clinton area. A pre-application meeting with AVDC planners was favourable, but there were a number of complications in the negotiations with the landowner, in particular that the planning sensitivities meant any project to build on this site would require a long-term option which the landowner did not favour. Consequently the negotiations ended without agreement.

Following this setback the officers reviewed all the sites considered so far with a view to revisiting any key sites to see if anything had changed. A northerly site is still considered the preferable location for a crematorium to best serve Aylesbury Vale, but in view of the longstanding difficulties in finding a site in the AVDC area the Superintendent also started looking around Princes Risborough. Two possible sites were identified and letters sent to the owners of the land, one of which responded positively and with whom a preliminary meeting was held. However, after some initial enquiries it was decided there were too many potential complications with the site and in view of the long-standing preference for a northerly location it was decided not to pursue the matter any further or continue searching in this area.

Despite these setbacks and lack of success, at a meeting on 7th March 2013 the members of the Joint Committee resolved to continue with the search and authorised additional expenditure if necessary to engage outside agencies that could assist in expediting the process.

7) **MAINTENANCE OF GROUNDS – WOODLAND MANAGEMENT PLAN**

Following approval by the Forestry Commission the previous year of a ten year Woodland Management Plan, during the autumn of 2012 the first phase of works was carried out. This involved the removal of two large blocks of conifers which were originally planted as a condition of planning permission to build the Crematorium in 1964 to help screen it from the road. Since then the conifers have grown too large, overshadowing some of the commemorative rose beds and generally looking out of place in what is largely native woodland fairly typical in the Chilterns.

Following a quotation process the work was carried out very satisfactorily by forestry contractor, Roderick Wilson of Great Gaddesden, Hemel Hempstead, with minimum disturbance to the ground in the Garden of Remembrance, which included areas where cremation ashes have been scattered. Fortunately no complaints were received, attributable largely to the care taken by the contractor. The cleared areas were replanted with more appropriate and mostly deciduous native species.

Following a tree inspection a number of other trees were identified as needing work for health and safety reasons from removal of dead branches and in other cases complete felling. This work was carried out at the same time.

The opportunity was also taken to create a pathway through the remaining block of woodland which was purchased at the end of the 1980's as part of the long term plan to build a second funeral chapel. The long term intention was always to open this woodland up to the public. The first stage in this process was negotiating the rescinding of a long lease to the Forestry Commission dating back to the 1950's when the woodland had been replanted largely with conifers. In conjunction with the clearance of the trees to build the new car park for the second funeral chapel in 2003, all these conifers were removed and the remaining trees thinned to leave only the best. It was then necessary to discourage public access for up to five years as these remaining trees would be susceptible to wind-blow, and indeed a number did come down. The creation of the path in 2012 sees this long term project brought to fruition and means there is now public access throughout the 22 acres site at the Crematorium.

8) **CREMATORIUM BUILDINGS – THEFT OF COPPER AND LEAD**

As reported last year, during April 2011 the Crematorium was visited three times by thieves who removed lead flashing, copper roofing sheets and copper guttering. Unfortunately this was not an isolated incident as metal theft from buildings has become all too common a problem nationally and many other crematoria around the country have been affected. In last year's report the short term measures which had been put in place to try to prevent further incidents, at a cost of £24,000, were outlined.

It was also reported that a more cost effective long term measure of installing monitored CCTV was being investigated. In the event it was decided to install CCTV. The cost of installation and the first year of routine maintenance and monitoring was £29,000.00. A further £10,000 was also spent on mobile security patrols pending the installation and commissioning of the CCTV system. Once the CCTV was operational the stolen lead and copper was replaced. Even though the amount removed was relatively small its replacement cost was £15,000. Most of the repair costs were recoverable through the building insurance.

It is pleasing to report that no further thefts have occurred, but a total of £63,000 has been expended in achieving this outcome. To keep this cost in perspective, as reported last year at some other crematoria the amount of damage sustained was considerably greater, for example in the case of a near neighbour where the thefts continued until one night the entire side of the chapel roof was removed, and at another where the chapel had to be temporarily closed – with all the attendant disruption to funeral services and additional distress to the bereaved - because of internal water damage. In both cases the cost of repairs certainly ran into many tens of thousands. Also, insurance companies will not repeatedly pay for repairs where measures are not taken to try to prevent further thefts.

Having installed CCTV, this should last for many years and, along with the renewal of the SmartWater licence (a deterrent product, with a good track record, painted at random on the lead and copper) and a retention fee to a mobile security company (to attend site in event of an incident), will incur an annual cost in the region of £3,500.

9) **CREMATORIUM BUILDINGS – REDECORATION AND NEW FLOORING**

During the summer of 2012 the external paintwork of the original part of the building (the Hampden chapel end) was redecorated at a cost of £8,000. Internally the offices were also redecorated at a cost of £3,000. This was the first redecoration of the offices since the major refurbishment which was carried out in 2000. And following the completion of the installation of the cremator filtration equipment the floor covering in the crematory was replaced at a cost of £7,500.

10) DISABILITY ACCESS SURVEY

A member and past Chairman of the Chiltern District Council Disability Focus Group, Nigel McAlister, kindly offered to assist in carrying out a survey at the Crematorium. The Superintendent accepted this offer and accompanied Mr McAlister on the survey which took place on 30th April 2012.

Generally the Crematorium received an overall good report with no ‘urgent’ changes required, but a number of suggestions were made for improvements. Some of the ‘minor’ improvements can be achieved relatively easily with little cost and are gradually being implemented. Of the more substantial suggestions the refurbishment of the Hampden disabled lavatory was considered the most urgent and money was found out of existing budgets to enable this work to be done. Other items require more detailed investigation to establish feasibility and costs and, where considered practicable, will be incorporated into related works when they are being carried out in the future e.g. changes to the layout of the disabled parking spaces which will be dealt with the next time the car park is resurfaced.

11) REPLACEMENT OF MILTON CHAPEL FLOOR

This was the last outstanding latent defect with the builders of the new Milton chapel. The task was relatively substantial involving the entire removal of the ceramic floor tiles and under screed. The chapel had to be closed for several weeks so the work was timed to be carried out in the summer months to minimize disruption to funeral services. Its remedy successfully concluded, within budget, the second funeral chapel project which commenced with the appointment of the architects, Haverstock Associates, in May 2000, and saw the Milton chapel first open for funerals in April 2005.
