

CHILTERN CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the Meeting of the **CHILTERN CREMATORIUM JOINT COMMITTEE**
held on **5 DECEMBER 2006**
at **CHILTERN DISTRICT COUNCIL**

PRESENT: Councillor P Cartwright - Chairman
Councillor D Thompson - Aylesbury Vale District Council
" K A Campbell - Chiltern District Council
" J F Warder - Chiltern District Council

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: were received from Councillor J Cartwright.

1. **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the Joint Committee held on 23 June 2006 were agreed and signed by the Chairman.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor D Thompson declared a personal interest in agenda item 51. Nature of interest, Councillor Thompson was the ward member for Aston Clinton.

3. **ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

The Joint Committee were requested to consider continuing the custom of sending the Chairman and Superintendent to the Annual Conference of the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM).

RESOLVED -

That the Chairman of the Joint Committee and the Superintendent be nominated to attend the 2007 Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management Annual Conference.

4. **LIAISON MEETING WITH PERSONS TAKING SERVICES AND FUNERAL DIRECTORS**

Liaison meetings were held every year, the last one was in May 2006. At that meeting it was proposed that the meeting in 2007 be held at 6.30pm on a date in May 2007. District elections would be held in May 2007 and therefore the date for the next liaison meeting was put back to June 2007. The Superintendent agreed to contact funeral directors and persons taking services to find a mutually acceptable date in June.

RESOLVED -

That the next liaison meeting be held at 6.30pm at the Crematorium on a date in June 2007 to be determined by the Clerk.

5. **ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT - VACANCY**

The recruitment process earlier in 2006 had not been successful in identifying a candidate for the post of Assistant Superintendent. The problem would seem to be the difficulty in attracting suitable candidates with previous crematorium administration/supervisory experience.

In order to cover the work, a temporary appointment of a part time clerical assistant was made and the full time clerical assistant was acting-up to cover some of the duties. This present temporary arrangement was working satisfactorily, but would be reviewed again in April/May 2007.

RESOLVED -

That the report be noted.

6. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CREMATION AND CREMATION WITHIN 72 HOURS OF RECEIPT OF THE COFFIN

It had been agreed by the Joint Committee at their meeting on 17 December 2003 (Minute Number 7 refers) to adopt the Guiding Principles for Cremation and to approve the policy of retaining coffins overnight for cremation the following day. The Guiding Principles for Cremation allowed coffins to be retained for up to three days before cremation, provided the cremation authority was open about the policy. There was a period of publicity and consultation, but there were no adverse reactions. The policy was then put into practice in September 2005.

Only a small number of coffins were retained and it meant that only three cremators needed to be operated at a time. The substantial increases in energy costs, the amount of energy being saved and the raised awareness of environmental issues, led to consideration of how the policy was being implemented.

It was possible to reduce the number of cremators being used to two for most of the time, if more coffins were retained, sometimes up to twelve. This was put into practice and 30% less gas was now being used compared with when all cremations were carried out on the same day as the funeral. Less electricity was also being used because only one fan was required for two cremators.

The Superintendent assured Members that although operating methods had changed to conserve energy and reduce costs, there had been no compromise with regard to the propriety of treatment of the deceased whilst awaiting cremation, nor to the cremation process itself.

The Superintendent had prepared some figures to show how the energy consumption was reduced if the cremators were used continuously. As part of the Emergency Planning preparation for a flu pandemic the cremators had been run for a period of 36 hours and dealt with 20 cremations. This had shown that the last 12 hours of use had produced the most savings in energy costs.

Other options were discussed, such as using only one cremator continuously, but this had staffing implications. A suggestion was also made that a 'dummy load' could be used to stop the cremators losing heat when not in use.

RESOLVED -

That the report be noted.

7. CREMATIONS EMISSIONS ABATEMENT

The Committee had resolved, in principle, to achieve filtration of all cremations as soon as possible and as a minimum to install plant capable of filtering cremations from two cremators, thus achieving abatement in excess of 50% ; this was at the meeting on 8 December 2005 (Minute number 6 refers). A further report was requested when more details were known.

More was now known, but not enough to produce the level of detail that was necessary. Abatement equipment was very technical and manufacturers had all developed different methods of achieving filtration. Any abatement system purchased would need to be compatible with existing cremators, which were extremely robust and would not need replacing.

The report set out the specific issues which needed to be addressed and in connection with these issues, what actions had been so far carried out. Abatement was required by 31 December 2012 at the latest. The Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) had indicated that they expected to see substantial progress on installations well in advance of 2012. Without proof of progress, DEFRA would consider imposing requirements and a timetable on busier crematoria and Chiltern falls into this category. Progress with this project was, therefore, a priority.

Because of the technical complexities of abatement equipment, it was agreed that specialist engineering expertise was sought to give advice on the issues involved.

RESOLVED -

That delegated authority be given to officers to develop the proposal to install plant to abate cremation emissions, including costing, through the appointment of a consultant with a first stage expenditure of up to £10,000.

8. COLLIER AND CATLEY: CLAIM FOR EXTENSION OF TIME

At the meeting of this Joint Committee on 23 June 2006, a revised financial account figure was agreed, subject to the completion of a settlement agreement with the contractor (Minute 7 refers). A settlement agreement was finally signed by both parties in September which would achieve the objective of securing the proper completion of the building at a level the Joint Committee could afford.

Discussions began on site in October with the architect and contractor to draw up a programme of works. The Superintendent was now waiting for the contractor to come back with a programme of dates and timings. It was anticipated that the project would be completed by next summer.

RESOLVED -

That the report be noted.

9. COMPLAINTS AND COMPLIMENTS 2005

In 2005 there were 2,981 cremations and questionnaires were sent to all those who requested a cremation. The results of the responses were set out in an appendix to the report.

There was a fourth complaint that had been omitted from the report and the Superintendent gave a verbal update to Members. Without exception all matters on which three or more comments were received related to the fact that there was only one chapel in use with half hour service slots, the new car park was still under construction and only one floral tribute area was in use.

Where complaints were received, procedures had been examined and where possible appropriate changes implemented.

RESOLVED -

That the report be noted.

10. MILTON CHAPEL

The Clerk to the Joint Crematorium gave a verbal update on the proposed official opening of Milton Chapel.

The earliest date for the opening ceremony would be in June 2007. Last year it had been suggested that the Lord Lieutenant for Buckinghamshire was invited and this was agreed.

Another suggestion was that the Princess Royal, as patron of the Rural Housing Trust, might be attending the opening of the recent Trust build in Winchmore Hill. Members agreed that the Clerk should make enquiries.

11. **TREASURER'S REPORT**

The Council's auditors, RSM Robson Rhodes, required an annual return to be signed by the Chairman of the Joint Committee. Members agreed that the Chairman should sign the Smaller Bodies in England Annual Return for the year ending 31 March 2006.

RESOLVED -

That the Smaller Bodies in England Annual Return for the year ending 31 March 2006 be signed by the Chairman.

12. **CAPITAL EXPENDITURE**

The report contained details of the expenditure for the current year and the following three years. The figures included the settlement agreement, which was within the existing budget provision, an estimate for the installation of cremator filtration and cabling works.

The cost of the new filtration system could not be estimated until the new system was chosen and there were a number of systems from which to choose. Members had agreed that a specialist should be consulted (Minute Number 7 above refers).

In answer to a question from Councillor Campbell about the waste from filtration and the cost of disposing of it, Councillor Warder explained the different ways of filtration:

A.

Sodium carbonate and activated carbon materials would be mixed by a cyclone into the gas stream and used to clean the fumes; this would clean out the mercury, particulates, dioxins and other toxins which would then be filtered out of the gas stream and automatically deposited in a barrel. The whole process was automatic and the waste would not be touched. A company would then collect the barrel for disposal. Councillor Warder said claims were being made that mercury could be reclaimed from the waste which would help offset the costs of disposal, but he was doubtful if this would amount to very much.

B.

Gas would be passed through cartridges of granules of activated charcoal which would absorb the waste; these cartridges would be changed periodically without the need for the waste to be touched, and again it was claimed that mercury could be reclaimed before disposal. Councillor Warder was concerned this might not be such an effective system as it relied on even gas flow through all the cartridges to be fully effective. Also the effectiveness of the cartridges would decrease before replacements were installed.

C.

A third system used lime and carbon, but the problems of disposing of lime made this more difficult.

The heat that was produced by the cremation process was not enough for steam boilers to drive an electric generator, but could be used to heat the chapels in winter.

RESOLVED -

That the capital expenditure programme for 2006/2007 to 2009/2010 be agreed.

13. **FEES AND CHARGES**

The tables set out in the report showed the current charges, the proposed charges and the comparison with the fees charged with other neighbouring authorities.

Members agreed that the level of charge must kept in line with competing crematoria, but recognised that a surplus was needed in the budget to pay for the filtration system. The initial funding put in by the three authorities had been returned, but it was suggested that consideration be given to making a return on the investment. Members agreed this would be reviewed in the future and certainly after the installation of the new filtration system when the capital costs would be known.

The recommended fees, shown in appendix B, were discussed and it was agreed that the fees that did not incur VAT would be rounded up to the nearest whole pound. The recommended fee for cremation of persons over the age of 18 years would remain as £370.00. All other fees were agreed as recommended from 1 April 2007.

RESOLVED -

That the fees and charges for 2007/2008 be approved as amended.

14. **REVENUE**

Detailed revenue estimates were shown in appendix C attached to the officer's report. Comparisons between the revised and original estimates were included in a table within the report. Revenue expenditure was just below the original estimate and the report detailed the variations within the total.

Capital expenditure was lower than estimated due to the re-scheduling of relining the cremators and renewal of hearths to 2008/2009. Income from cremation fees was expected to be slightly higher than anticipated. The original estimate had allowed for a small reduction in numbers to take into account the potential impact of disruption from the project works; figures to date show that this had been negligible.

The income estimates reflected the proposed fees and charges in the previous agenda item.

RESOLVED -

That the 2006/2007 revised and 2007/2008 revenue estimates be approved.

15. **EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC****RESOLVED -**

That under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

Note: The relevant paragraph number from Part 1 of Schedule 12A is indicated at the end of the Minute heading.

16. **FUTURE STRATEGIC BUSINESS PLAN (Paragraphs 7 & 9)**

The report gave initial consideration to the next stage of the development of the Crematorium and Members were asked for the options they would wish officers to consider in greater detail.

The Second Funeral Chapel project had stretched the Joint Committee's resources in keeping the project on track; it would still require management input in the first quarter of 2007. The Cremations Emissions Abatement would need to be taken forward and further diversification of the service or supporting the growth in Aylesbury.

Croydon Crematorium was faced with a declining demand for their services and was therefore proposing a semi commercial venture into a Pets Crematorium. Information on this was attached to the Officer's report as appendix 51.1.

The Westerleigh Group were trying to develop a site in the Bedgrove/Aston Clinton area for additional cemetery and crematorium use. The Joint Committee would need to consider whether it wished to support the Site Search in an advisory capacity or be involved in the longer term creation of a new facility. Should a crematorium be sited on the southern identified site, this could have substantial impact on the Chiltern Crematorium. A map was attached to the Officer's report showing the various areas that had been identified as possible sites for a crematorium.

There was currently capacity at the Chiltern Crematorium to deal with more cremations arising from the anticipated growth in the Aylesbury area. The Superintendent had researched the projected number of deaths at the time the planning application for the second funeral chapel was being prepared and this had shown a gradual increase up to 2011, but no account had been taken of the extra growth in Aylesbury. In answer to a question, the Superintendent advised that some cremations come from outside the three authorities, mainly from South Bucks and Hertfordshire and also to some extent from areas also served by crematoria at Slough and Oxford.

An alternative option was discussed based on what was happening at Croydon Crematorium where, faced with a declining demand for their services, they were proposing a semi commercial venture into a Pets Crematorium. Information on this was attached to the Officer's report as Appendix 51.1

After much discussion when a number of different options were considered, it was agreed that the Joint Committee should investigate supporting the Aylesbury development either in an advisory capacity for a Site Search or to be involved in the longer term creation of a new facility.

With regard to a pet crematorium, it was decided to wait until more was known on how the Croydon project was developing and also what happened at Aylesbury.

Further discussion would be needed at a future meeting, a business plan compiled and a consultation to establish, as much as possible, the opinion of the public.

RESOLVED -

- 1. That officers be requested to consider the development of the cremation service supporting the growth in Aylesbury.**
- 2. That a further report be brought to a future meeting of the Joint Committee.**

17. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

This was agreed as Tuesday 10 July 2007 at 2.00pm at Aylesbury Vale District Council Offices.

Should there be any issues arising before this date it was agreed that a meeting would be called in March 2007.

18. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

At a previous meeting the Superintendent had reported that the Hornbeams on the main drive had deteriorated due to progressive bark necrosis and would need replacing (Minute Number 6, 17 December 2004). As a result the Joint Committee had agreed that the trees on the drive should be felled.

The Superintendent had researched with the Arboricultural Advisory and Information Service (formerly the Forestry Commission) what species of trees would be suitable replacements and circulated pictures of several species of trees that would be appropriate. The trees would be planted in the verge and therefore not all species would be suitable. As the Crematorium was sited in the Green Belt, it was agreed that ornamental trees would not be used.

Hornbeams were prone to bark diseases and to replace with hornbeams again would probably lead to the same problems in the future. The shape of the hornbeam was also not appropriate as the branches grow too wide and protrude over the drive.

Beech was also a species that would be suitable, but again were prone to bark disease.

The third species was a variety of oak that would not grow too wide and this was agreed as the most suitable species. The Clerk suggested that a press release was issued regarding the planting scheme.

Although the trees were not subject to a tree preservation order, a felling licence may be needed and also permission from Chiltern District Council as the trees were subject to a 5 year restriction on any unauthorised pruning or felling imposed as a condition of the planning application to build the second funeral chapel. However, the fact that the deterioration of the trees posed an increasing safety risk meant that it was unlikely permission would be refused. The Superintendent would now apply for the necessary permission.

RESOLVED -

- 1. That the trees along the main entrance drive be replaced with the species of Oak identified by the Superintendent.**
- 2. That the Superintendent applies for the necessary permissions to implement the changes.**

The Meeting ended at 4.40pm.