

Bereavement Services Future Development Plan

Final Decision-Maker	Heritage, Culture & Leisure Committee
Lead Head of Service/Lead Director	William Cornall, Director of Regeneration and Place
Lead Officer and Report Author	Sharon Smith, Bereavement Services Manager Lesley O'Reilly, Senior Bereavement Services Assistant Jennifer Shepherd, Head of Environment and Public Realm
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All but specifically Boxley Ward & Shepway North

Executive Summary

In 2013, Bereavement Services created its first five year plan for development of the business. Many of the items listed that could be funded from revenue have been completed along with a large capital investment in the Crematorium car park. However a number of capital improvements proposed at that time have yet to be realised which will have an impact on the future development and revenue streams of the business.

This report outlines the opportunities for improvement at Maidstone Cemetery, some of which, if not completed will have a detrimental impact on the business, environment and staff. The report summarises the costs for each of the projects and potential revenue that can be gained.

The report sets out a two phase delivery plan for improvements at the Cemetery.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the Cemetery business case, including the two phased approach, is agreed.
2. That the capital budget previously set aside for a pet crematorium is used to fund Phase 1 of the cemetery business plan instead.
3. That delegated authority is granted to the Director of Regeneration and Place to determine the most appropriate and cost effective method to deliver the staff welfare facility within the existing capital budget.

4. That further funding is requested from the Policy and Resources Committee for the Phase 2 improvements outlined in the cemetery business plan.

Timetable	
Meeting	Date
Corporate Leadership Team	7 th August 2018
Heritage, Culture & Leisure	4 th September 2018

Bereavement Services Future Development Plan

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

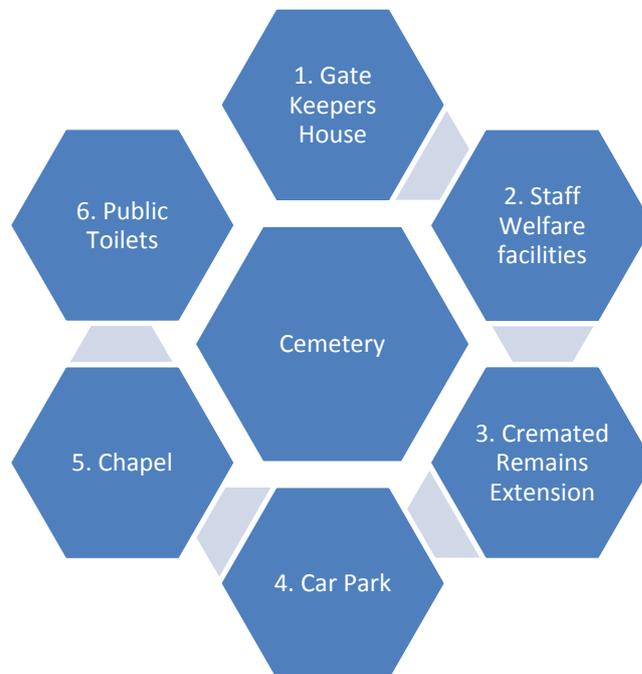
- 1.1 Maidstone Borough Council's Bereavement Services Team manages Vinters Park Crematorium and Maidstone Cemetery. This is a £1.2M business that delivers over £380k net income per year for the Council which supports the other services it delivers. It also offers an invaluable service to Maidstone residents and local bereaved families.
- 1.2 Maidstone Cemetery carries out approximately 130 burials per year and generates over £169k in Exclusive Rights, Interments and Memorial sales. The cemetery covers an area of 26 hectares and has approximately 25 years capacity of new graves for full burials; however, re-opening of graves for further burials will continue. There is only 6 years for the burial of cremated remains, which is why additional graves are required.
- 1.3 Vinters Park Crematorium undertakes over 1,600 cremations per year which is a £1.2m business that generates over £352k income for the Council which includes £80k in new memorial sales per year. The Crematorium operates at around 75% capacity, although the popular service times i.e. during the middle of the day are at 100% capacity. The service receives exceptionally high levels of customer satisfaction and is endorsed by all local funeral directors. The service's mission statement is "*We exist to relieve the distress of persons suffering from bereavement.*"
- 1.4 In April 2013, Bereavement Services produced its first five year business plan. This was an ambitious plan which set out developing the existing services and introducing new services such as a pet crematorium. The plan was reviewed regularly in light of the changing financial situation and the Council's commercial strategy. In 2017 this resulted in focus being realigned with the existing income streams and although planning permission was achieved for a pet crematorium, the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee supported the delivery of this being deferred until a more compelling business case could be identified. However permission was obtained for the expansion of the Crematorium car park which has now been successfully completed.
- 1.5 There have also been a number of smaller improvements at the Crematorium, including refurbishment of the public toilets, purchase of fire-

proof cabinets, energy recovery for heating, visual tributes and web-casting.

- 1.6 Unfortunately no improvements were completed at Maidstone Cemetery during this time, although the Committee agreed that the business case for a number of improvements at the Cemetery should be developed.
- 1.7 The purpose of this report is to update the Bereavement Services Development Plan and to outline the business case for a two phase approach to improvements at Maidstone Cemetery.

BUSINESS CASE

- 1.8 A full review of the Cemetery highlighted six opportunities for development which would deliver significant improvements to the local community, bereaved families, staff as well as the business. These options are shown in the diagram below.



- 1.9 The diagram above highlights the proposed order of work starting with the dismantling of the Gate Keepers House, given that some aspects require further funding and greater urgency for welfare improvements.
- 1.10 A map of the Cemetery highlighting all the key locations and buildings is included in Appendix A.

Dismantling of the Gate Keeper's House and new Staff Welfare Facility

- 1.11 There is no doubt that the initial visual appearance of the Cemetery is impacted by the presence of the 1970's prefab house at the far end of the car park (see Appendix A) and the dilapidated shed used as staff welfare facilities. The potential deterioration of the Cemetery Lodge at the

entrance, which is currently in private ownership is also likely to impact the initial perception of the Cemetery.

- 1.12 The Gate Keepers House and its garden takes a significant amount of room at the front of the Cemetery and due to the presence of asbestos throughout and previous flooding is inhabitable. The building is currently boarded up as it poses a health and safety risk and therefore needs to be professionally dismantled to ensure the hazardous material is removed and disposed of appropriately. The removal of this building also offers a number of opportunities for the land. In 2012 consideration was given to the sale of the land to developers, however the restricted access and low capital receipt resulted in this being unfeasible and the land handed back to Bereavement Services.
- 1.13 Therefore a more viable use for the land would be the extension of the Cremated Remain Section, which is covered in 1.20 and the potential siting of new staff welfare facility. The pre-existing utilities and building foundations on site would reduce the cost for the staff welfare facility. This would also enable the existing car park which can only accommodate 10 cars to be extended.
- 1.14 The current staff welfare facilities are recognised as inadequate and in poor condition. It is possible for the staff to be relocated to the Park Wood Depot, however this would reduce their productive time on site. Whilst this alone would not generate a return on the capital investment, it would support the ongoing development of the service through greater engagement with customers and investment in the staff. There is a further opportunity for income generation if the new facility incorporated accommodation which could be rented out.
- 1.15 It is anticipated that the cost to dismantle the gate keeper's house would be £15,500 including the safe removal and disposal of asbestos. Expansion of the car park is estimated to cost in the region of £40,000 which would deliver approximately 16 additional spaces.
- 1.16 The staff welfare facility could be delivered through a prefabricated temporary cabin at a cost of £35,500. However this would need to be replaced in 15 years and therefore the full life cost is likely to be greater than a purpose-built facility using standard construction. Initial quotes for this build have suggested a cost in the region of £125,000.
- 1.17 An alternative option for the staff welfare facility could be the Cemetery Lodge should the Council be able to re-acquire the property at a suitable price to reflect the level of work required to make it habitable. There are a number of structural concerns regarding the property and it is likely to require underpinning. At present the cost to purchase and repair this property is unknown, however if this was found to be a cost effective option it could be pursued.
- 1.18 Should it not be deemed affordable to purchase and repair the building for use as a staff welfare facility, it could still be explored further as a commercial opportunity at the Cemetery. Its key location at the entrance

to the Cemetery would make the building ideal to house a retail unit for the sale of refreshments, flowers or for a stone masons.

- 1.19 The return on the capital investment for this work is covered in 1.22 as income from the extension of the Cremated Remains Section.

Extension of Cremated Remain Section

- 1.20 Within Maidstone Cemetery there is a section where families can bury the cremated remains of their loved ones. It is anticipated that this will be full in 6 years, although it could be sooner given recent changes to the Roman Catholic view on cremation.
- 1.21 Use of the garden around the gate keeper's house would enable between 926 and 1,178 new plots to be created. The maps below show the potential areas for the new cremated remains section.



- 1.22 The cost to carry out this work will be in the region of £15,000, however could generate significantly more revenue through the sale of exclusive rights, permits and inscriptions. It is important to note however that this may take in the region of 60 years given the current rate of uptake. Therefore a conservative income projection would be £15,000 per year from the sale of exclusive rights of burial.

Reopening of the Cemetery Chapel

- 1.23 The Grade II listed Chapel at Maidstone Cemetery held its last service on the 27th January 2006. It has been closed off due to the urgent need for repairs to the spire and roof. It is not known why the decision was taken at that time not to carry out the repair work, but it is likely that it was financial due to the level of investment required.
- 1.24 Since its closure there has been regular interest from the public about the Chapel, with over 75% saying they would have used the service if it had been available and it regularly features in customer feedback:

"Chapel should never have been closed, its not right to make people travel half way round Maidstone to lay loved ones to rest."

"Buried Wife's ashes in family grave...would have been nice to spend time in Chapel as it was mid-November...had to go straight to graveside and it was over in minutes."

"It would be lovely to have such a beautiful building in use again, to help families at such a difficult time in their lives." – Funeral Director

1.25 Since 2004, five surveys have been carried out on the Cemetery Chapel. The first two of these carried out in 2004 and 2005 by St Blasé resulted in the closure of the Chapel due to a significant risk identified to the public and staff at the Cemetery. The main areas of concern were the stability of the spire due to rusting ironworks and potential for stonework to become detached and fall onto the footpath, posing a significant risk to visitors and staff.

1.26 A further condition survey was undertaken on the Cemetery Chapel in October 2011 by Humphries & Jones. This report suggested that the work was prioritised as:

- Structural works to Spire
- Overhaul/repairs to roofs
- Overhaul rainwater goods
- Eradicate wet rot
- Re-pointing elevations and repair of sculptural detail

1.27 Two further surveys were completed in 2012 and 2018 by Torcel Ltd. The first suggested that by addressing the issue of water ingress and the condition of the spire, the Chapel could be reopened. Following the 2011 report work was undertaken to make the building water tight however funding could not be secured to repair the spire. The report earlier this year confirmed that water ingress had ceased and had arrested the progression of wet rot affecting the roof timbers. However the spire condition had remained unchanged. One positive report was that the condition of the Chapel had remained relatively stable since its closure in 2006 and had not demonstrated any significant deterioration which could suggest imminent danger to the building.

1.28 Based on the reports and discussion with the Conservation Officer due to the building Grade II listing, it is understood that the building could be recommissioned following work on the spire, protection of the roof tiles and interior repair. Improvements to the public toilets have also been included in this as the current facility would not be sufficient once services recommenced. The approximate cost for this work has been identified from the surveyors and through obtaining quotations:

Work required	Approx. cost
Replacement of cast iron girdle around steeple	£100,000
Tile guards around eaves	£20,000
Asbestos removal floor tiles	£2,000
Decoration internal & external	£27,000
Electrical works (including a full rewire of the building)	£33,000
Music system	£15,000

Furniture deep clean & replacement where necessary	£5,000
Refurbish public toilets	£20,000
TOTAL:	£222,000

1.29 In order for the Chapel to remain open a further investment of around £160,000 would be required to repair the roof and repoint the external stone work. However it is anticipated that this work would not be required for 8-10 years.

1.30 Based on the anticipated chapel fee for the Crematorium in 2019/20, £265 per service, the anticipated income per year would be £30,000 for the Chapel alone. This is based on 87% of burials using the Chapel for their service.

Chapel cost (at 2019/20 prices)	Single interment	X 130 services Chapel & Interment
£265	£565	
£30,000	£73,400	£103,400

However research has indicated that church fees are in the region of £500-£800 per service, therefore the actual fee needs to be considered to ensure that the full cost of the service and repairs to the Chapel is recovered, yet remains affordable for families.

Further Bereavement Service Improvements

1.31 Unlike the Cemetery, there has been investment at the Vinters Park Crematorium over the past few years, however there remains a number of improvements which if delivered could generate additional income or improve the existing offer to customers. These include the conversion of the Gardener's Store to create a retail unit for refreshments, flowers and potentially a showcase for a stone mason, as well as extension of the office, additional covering for the Cloisters and Chapel air conditioning. It is recommended that the potential developments are fully explored following completion of the Cemetery projects.

FINANCIAL SUMMARY

1.32 In conclusion, the table below shows the total costs for Phase 1 of the work at the Cemetery and projected annual income. The majority of the work outlines in Phase 1 is not designed to bring a capital return, however is necessary work to bring the service up to standard.

MAIDSTONE CEMETERY – Phase 1	£
Demolishing gate keeper's house	15,500
New staff welfare facility	125,000
Extension of Cremated Remains Section	15,000
CCTV / Security	10,000
Car park expansion	40,000

TOTAL Cost	205,500
Annual Income from Cremated Remains plots	15,000
TOTAL Annual Income	15,000

1.33 There is currently £213,000 within the Capital budget for development of Bereavement Services. This was originally set aside for the delivery of a pet crematorium at Vinters Park. Given the business case identified for the work at the Cemetery, it is proposed that this funding is allocated for this work and no longer held for the Pet Crematorium project. Should a more compelling business case for a pet crematorium be identified, new funding would have to be sought through the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee and Policy and Resources Committee.

1.34 It is appreciated that the available capital funding will not cover all improvements and that there are a number of options for delivery which is likely to have an impact on the cost. Therefore it is proposed that a phased approach is used for the delivery of improvements to enable the method of delivery and costs to be considered at each stage.

DELIVERY SCHEDULE

1.35 The projects highlighted with this report fit within a two phase delivery model:

Phase	Activity	Cost	Timeframe (Oct 18 – Sept 19)											
			O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S
1	Demolish Gate Keepers House	£15,500		■										
	New Staff Welfare Facility	£125,000		■	■	■	■	■	■	■				
	CCTV	£10,000					■							
	Extend Cremated Remains	£15,000								■	■			
	Car Park	£40,000								■	■	■	■	■
2	Chapel reopening	£222,000								■	■	■	■	■
TOTAL		£427,500												

1.36 Appendix B shows the full timetable of work.

1.37 It is recognised that there is sufficient funding with the Capital Programme to fund Phase 1 of the proposed improvements.

1.38 However Phase 2 cannot be delivered within the existing capital budget therefore it is recommended that a further report is taken to Policy and Resources Committee requesting further capital funding to complete the work.

2. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The Committee could decide that the business case presented in this report for the Cemetery demonstrates a viable opportunity for the Council and that a two phase approach is used for its delivery. The Committee can agree to delegated authority to the Director of Regeneration and Place to determine the best delivery option for welfare facilities within the existing capital budget.
 - 2.2 Alternatively the Committee could decide that only selected aspects of the development plan are agreed and prioritised for delivery from the existing capital funding.
 - 2.3 However the Committee could also decide that no further investment is carried out at the Cemetery and that the Chapel remains closed.
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3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is recommended that the Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee agrees with the option set out in 2.1 and approves the business case to fund improvements at Maidstone Cemetery from the existing Capital Programme budget for Bereavement Services.
 - 3.2 As set out in 1.24 and 1.25, it is recommended that the Committee approves the provision of new staff welfare facilities through the most cost effective means, and delegating to the Director of Regeneration and Place the authority to determine how this is delivered within the budget available.
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4. RISK

- 4.1 The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. The Risk Register is attached as Appendix C.
 - 4.2 Such a significant investment at the Cemetery is not without risk as the business case is based on a number of assumptions relating to uptake of the service and the level of work required in the short and medium term. However these assumptions are based on reliable data from the service and five condition surveys.
 - 4.3 There is also a risk to the Council if the work is not undertaken as the buildings will continue to deteriorate putting greater risk and financial burden on the Council. The Chapel is Grade II listed and as a local authority, the Council has a duty under the planning regulations to be an "exemplary owner" and therefore the building should be preserved and not allowed to decay further.
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5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 5.1 Once approved, a project team will be set up to move this forward, with representatives from Property Services, the Conservation Officer, the Procurement Team where necessary, Communications and eventually the contractors.
- 5.2 Engagement with Ward Members, Heritage Culture and Leisure Committee and local residents surrounding the Cemetery will be very important, and we will require the Communications team to help with that. The team will also need to ensure that the Funeral Directors and Arrangers are kept abreast of proposals and works we shall be undertaking.

6. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	The recommendations support the Council's priority for a <i>Respecting the character and heritage of our Borough</i> through preserving and enhancing Maidstone Cemetery for future generations.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Risk Management	See Appendix C	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Financial	The proposals set out in the recommendation can be partly funded from Capital money already set aside from the pet crematorium project. Other funds could be invest to save from the projected revenue or to seek the possibility of additional capital funding.	S 151 Officer and Finance Manager
Staffing	The recommendations will be delivered with existing staff resources.	Head of Environment and Public Realm
Legal	We will work with Procurement and Property to ensure the contractors we use fit within the Borough Councils guidelines	Legal Team
Privacy and Data Protection		

Equalities	An EIA will be completed for the proposal agreed. More than one EIA may be required, dependent on the decision made and development plan that follows.	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
Crime and Disorder	By making the proposed changes at the Cemetery it is expected that the amount of burglaries and loss of MBC equipment will decrease	
Procurement	Should the value of the works require it, we shall use procurement to find suitable contractors.	

7. REPORT APPENDICES

- Appendix A – Map of Maidstone Cemetery
- Appendix B – Timetable
- Appendix C - Risk Register

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A