

Recommended option for the future provision of the Cheltenham Crematorium service

Appendix 2 – Summary of public consultation

1. Introduction

1.1 The feasibility study into future options for the provision of Cheltenham's crematorium service included a period of consultation with the public and relevant community and stakeholder groups from 20th July to 16th August 2015.

1.2 This report describes the consultation process and details its outcome.

2. Approach to consultation

2.1 The consultation was undertaken by Cheltenham Borough Council with support from its consultants Robert Potter and Partners.

2.2 It was based on five options for future provision which were put forward by the project team and agreed by the Cabinet:

2.2.1 **Option A – Do Nothing**; Continue to operate the facility as currently, without mercury abatement and accepting the likelihood of increasing maintenance and reliability issues.

2.2.2 **Option B – Minimal solution**. Replace existing cremator plant (2 no.), install mercury abatement plant, provide new floral tribute area, improved vehicular and pedestrian circulation and new car park to accommodate an extra 120 vehicles.

2.2.3 **Option C – Remote crematory**. Remote crematory to accommodate two cremators, with potential for third cremator, together with abatement plant, expansion of South Chapel into vacated crematory to accommodate 152 seated mourners, new floral tribute area, improved vehicular and pedestrian circulation, and new car park to accommodate 120 cars.

2.2.4 **Option D – Extension of existing facility**. Remodelling of existing crematory and extension to accommodate two cremators, with potential for third cremator, together with abatement plant, extension of North Chapel to accommodate 133 seated mourners plus overspill for large funerals, enhanced waiting areas, enhanced staff facilities, general improvements to functionality, new floral tribute area, improved vehicular and pedestrian circulation, and new car park to accommodate 120 cars.

2.2.5 **Option E - New-build**. New-build option on land to the east of the site, providing a new chapel which can accommodate at least 150 seated mourners plus standing areas and overspill areas for large funerals, clear pedestrian flows and separation between services, retention of the North Chapel for small ceremonies, improved vehicular and pedestrian circulation, and new car park to accommodate 120 cars (including 20 spaces adjacent to the building for disabled parking), with scope for future expansion in the medium to long term

2.3 Conceptual plans and a list of 'pros' and 'cons' for each option were:

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- 2.3.1** displayed at the Cemetery and Crematorium and at the Municipal Offices
- 2.3.2** made available on the council's website
- 2.4** A public drop-in session was held at the Cemetery and Crematorium on 13th August 2015. 39 people attended and discussed the options with members of the project team including a representative from the consultants.
- 2.5** The public consultation was promoted through:
- 2.5.1** Press releases (20th July and 5th August) and briefings to press and radio
- 2.5.2** Frequent social media prompts
- 2.5.3** Leaflets delivered to around 300 of the households closest to the Cemetery and Crematorium
- 2.6** Groups with official roles at the Cemetery and Crematorium were invited to a meeting on 14th August 2015. 16 attended including funeral directors, representatives from Christian churches, the Jewish community, the Muslim community, humanist celebrants and organists. The options were presented by a representative from the consultants and discussed with those present.
- 2.7** Funeral directors were also involved in earlier discussions throughout the feasibility study and have contributed greatly to understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the current facilities and how they might best be improved.
- 2.8** The Cabinet Member – Clean and Green Environment attended a meeting of Prestbury Parish Council and discussed the options.
- 2.9** All those consulted were invited to complete a questionnaire, available in paper form at the meetings and the places at which plans were displayed and also available electronically on the council's website. On the questionnaire, respondents were invited to award between zero and five stars to each option; and to comment on each option and on the current facilities. They were also asked whether they had visited the site, whether they were part of a business connected to the site and were asked to supply their postcode.

3. Consultation Results

- 3.1** A summary of headlines is shown below

- There were 225 responses to the questionnaire in total, 149 on-line, 11 from the Municipal Offices, 65 from the Cemetery and Crematorium
- 203 respondents said they had visited the site
- 34 said they were part of a connected business
- Three people made additional comments by e-mail
- A long letter was printed in the Echo by the Minister of Highbury Congregational Church

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- Of all responses with a preferred option, 86.4% preferred option E
- Next highest first preference was option D with 5.5%
- 49.6% of all stars were awarded to option E
- Next most popular was option D with 19.2%
- People who had visited the site were slightly more favourable towards option E than those who had not visited.
- Those who declared a 'business' interest were even more strongly in favour of option E, awarding 61.1% of all stars to it
- Comments made on the questionnaire and in the consultation meetings focussed overwhelmingly on the difficulties with chapel size and configuration, waiting room and parking. They were strongly supportive of option E as providing the most cost-effective and long-term solution.

3.2 Responses came from a wide geographic area. Of those who included their postcodes, 155 were from Cheltenham with a significant bias towards the localities closest to the site of the Cemetery and Crematorium. There were a small number of responses from each of Gloucester, Stroud and surrounds, Cirencester and surrounds, Hartpury and surrounds, Tewkesbury, the Cotswolds, Oxford, Witney, Pershore and surrounds and Dorset.

3.3 Here is a summary of the stars awarded to each option.

	Option				
	A	B	C	D	E
Number of stars awarded	70	220	309	367	949
% of all stars awarded	3.7	11.5	16.1	19.2	49.6
Number of outright first preferences	2	8	6	11	172
% of outright first preferences	1.0	4.0	3.0	5.5	86.4

3.4 The views expressed at both the public drop-in session and the meeting for those with official roles were overwhelmingly in support of option E. Many, if not all, of the attendees will have completed questionnaires and therefore their opinions will be incorporated in the figures above.

3.5 Reasons given for supporting option E were typically:

3.5.1 It will provide a long-term solution which addresses all the difficulties with the current facilities – some (but not all) local residents referenced the noise and dust emitted at present.

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3.5.2 Its estimated costs of option E are not very much more than other options and demonstrate that E is much more cost-effective, a frequent view being that an increase in fees would be an acceptable consequence

3.5.3 The disruption to ongoing services will be much less than for other options

3.5.4 The opportunities it generates to re-purpose the existing building

3.6 Here are some representative quotes in support of option E:

- “An exciting proposal which with careful planning would meet the needs of Cheltenham in a way the current facility simply does not. The only option.”
- “Spending only £1m more provides a lot more value”
- “If Cheltenham Borough Council don't do this now, someone else will, and you will lose all your revenue”
- “The lack of disruption to existing services is a big bonus”
- “Current parking is totally inadequate”
- “The sight lines in the present South Chapel are awful”
- “Over the next 40-50 years I believe people will increasingly feel out of place in the Victorian architecture and atmosphere of the current chapels”
- “The old facility could be revised internally to cater for a number of uses (refreshments for wakes etc, or office accommodation) but the decision must be in keeping with its surroundings”.

3.7 Some respondents, whilst supporting option E, raised topics which will need to be addressed if this option is pursued:

3.7.1 The design of a new crematorium requires to be carefully considered. High quality is essential. The design should reflect the setting, the existing chapel building and local architectural features and materials. The chimney should be designed to be discreet.

3.7.2 Access of construction traffic to the site should be carefully considered and avoid routes through the cemetery.

3.7.3 The direction of car travel around the cemetery should be reversed.

3.8 Those not supportive of option E voiced some concerns:

- “There is no supplied evidence as to why facilities other than the cremators need to be extended.”
- “I would rather see the council manage their revenue better, spending when the funds are available”
- “Separate new building must surely raise operational issues in terms of staffing deployment and risk of increased revenue costs”
- “Where will the focal point be of the whole facility”
- “This option extends into green space which is not something I would support”
- “New build chapels, in my experience, never capture the gravitas and sense of calm

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that is perceived in a chapel”

3.9 Some (13.5% of the total response) were supportive of other options – here are some typical reasons:

- (preferring option A) “We used Cheltenham for my father's cremation. I received a number of positive comments about how nice the crematorium was, I would therefore be very reluctant to see any changes to the existing chapel”
- “I think option B is the most realistic because the council must practice economy as well as everyone else. The three million pound difference in the plans would go a long way towards safe, smooth roads”
- (preferring option C) “We suffer greatly from current pollution associated with the latest cremators and siting them further from the Chapel in a new screened area would certainly help”
- (preferring option D) “Everything still in one area. There will be disruption but much long term gain”
- (preferring option D) “More likely to preserve character and heritage of existing buildings in a way that a separate new build cannot”

3.10 Very many respondents were critical of the current facilities:

3.10.1 Two members of clergy stated that in their experience of many crematoria in different parts of the country, the facilities at Cheltenham are the poorest.

3.10.2 Typical views expressed included:

- “Insufficient seating. Around 40 people stood at my father's funeral. At my daughter's funeral, we chose to hold the service at a different church as neither chapel could accommodate the numbers expected.”
- “The entire set up is in need of refurbishment as facilities are outdated and somewhat 'seedy'. The interior environment is not particularly pleasant.”
- “Often the car park is not only chaotic but also dangerous”
- “Toilets in very poor state of repair”
- “The staff who work at our Crematorium are among the finest in the country and deserve the heartfelt appreciation of all in our community. When it comes to the building they work in, however, they are forced to make the best of a bad job.”

4. Summary

4.1 An extensive and wide-ranging consultation on available options has taken place at an early stage of the project.

4.2 On the evidence of the consultation, there is a clear preference, expressed by both those who take official roles at the crematorium and also by the broader general public, that they support the building of a new crematorium and the growth of the current site.

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- 4.3** Whilst those surveyed are a small proportion of the residents of Cheltenham, let alone the wider geographical area which uses the crematorium, the consistency of opinions expressed is marked.
- 4.4** Nonetheless, there is a minority who expressed different views. These views should be taken into account and, even if the new build option is taken forward, can influence later stages and how future public communication is approached.
- 4.5** Should the project proceed, there will be further consultation when a more detailed design is available.
- 4.6** Based on the outcome of the public consultation, further consultation has begun with Tewkesbury Borough Council and Southam Parish Council, within whose domain the new-build land lies.