

Briefing Notes

Committee name: Overview and Scrutiny

Date: 27 November 2017

Responsible officer: Mike Redman, Director of Environment

This note contains information to keep Members informed of matters relating to the work of the Cabinet or a committee but where no decisions from Members are needed.

If Members have questions relating to matters shown, they are asked to contact the Officer indicated.

Crematorium Development Programme Update

Background

The decision to build a new crematorium and chapel was taken by Cabinet and Council in September 2015 following difficulties experienced with operating new cremators in the existing crematorium and a public consultation on options for the future of the service. Further decisions to build a second new chapel were taken in March 2017. Once more, the plans were overwhelmingly supported by the public and major stakeholders such as funeral directors, ministers of religion and celebrants.

Following the agreement of designs, the programme has entered its construction phase with work beginning on site on 2nd October 2017.

The council has contracts with Willmott Dixon (WD), the principal contractors, and Pick Everard who are providing project management, quantity surveying and NEC Supervisor (largely relating to ensuring construction quality) roles.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has requested an update on the programme.

Progress

Since the last update to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2017, the programme has completed its design phase. Designs were extended to incorporate the second new chapel and to reflect a Cabinet decision to build a new road outside the southern boundary of the current cemetery, which mourners will use to leave the new buildings.

Planning permissions have been granted by CBC, in relation to the new road and construction traffic route, and by Tewkesbury Borough within whose boundaries the new buildings are situated.

Willmott Dixon employed their engineering consultants, Hydrock, to evaluate the cremator market in the UK using an independent industry expert. Based on his findings, market leading suppliers were invited to submit tenders to WD. The tenders were assessed and the final selection was made following presentations to a team from WD, Hydrock and CBC, whose representatives were Garrie Dowling, Senior Property Surveyor and Rob Hainsworth, Bereavement Services Manager. Facultative Technologies (FT) emerged as the preferred choice, a result which pleased Rob Hainsworth, having received favourable reports about FT's reliability and customer service from the many of the crematorium managers he had spoken to during his research for the project.

The design phase culminated in Willmott Dixon tendering the designs across its supply chain, enabling most pricing and timetabling elements to be confirmed. As anticipated, this led to a period of contract review during which we were able to negotiate and agree adjustments to the contract.

Following this review, the programme remains on budget (the amount agreed by Council in 2015 and the additional cost of the second chapel agreed by Council in 2017) and we are projecting a completion date in Spring 2019.

Preparations for beginning work on site took place throughout September and included a newsletter delivered to residents in the vicinity of the cemetery and notices placed at the main access points to the land affected. Our Bereavement Services Manager visited the residents most affected by the initial stages of the work and we continue to positively promote awareness of the work to the local community and to respond to concerns raised. Engagement with the media took place as construction began and resulted in excellent publicity for our programme.

Risks

As with any large and complex construction project risks inevitably remain and although many are now transferred to the contractor, we carry some significant risks which we cannot control. For example:

- There have been recent archaeological finds on parts of Priors Farm and whilst these have not yet affected us directly and we have already undertaken many surveys in the area, there is an ongoing watching brief on the construction of the new road. A major find would have a huge impact on our costs and timescales.
- There are several ecological issues in the area, notably the existence of a badger sett close to the route of the road. We need to conform to strict methods of working which protect the animals and complete works in the immediate vicinity of the sett within an ecological time window.
- Whilst we have undertaken several ground surveys, work on the main building area to the east of the current cemetery will not begin in earnest until the New Year and could uncover problems under the surface.
- Up to the time of writing we have been very fortunate with the weather, but of course, the winter period is only just beginning.

There are some other risks over which we have an element of control:

- A flood alleviation scheme is being developed by Gloucestershire County Council in the area with works planned on Priors Farm in the New Year. We are working with the County's project team to ensure that designs and working arrangements are compatible with the crematorium scheme and that we minimise the projects' combined impacts on recreation in the area.
- Whilst we have factored in internal resourcing costs to an extent, the pressure of other council-led projects is having a significant effect on staffing capacity and is the focus of continual monitoring.
- Some elements of the programme have not been fully detailed as yet, for example fixtures and fittings, and these remain subject to a level of price uncertainty.
- As with all programmes and projects, there is the potential for change to be introduced. Indeed, the programme team has already agreed several changes which will enhance the quality of the service. Inevitably though, change brings additional cost and the potential for delays. The programme has adopted a rigorous change management approach, with all changes identified and analysed before a decision is made to proceed (or not) by the core council team including the programme's Senior Responsible Officer (Mike Redman).

The programme has contingencies in place to deal with cost increases and time delays. A systematic monthly review is undertaken of risks, their likelihood, potential impact and the steps we are taking to mitigate. Where appropriate, a contingency sum is attached to each risk and the total

contingency requirement across all risks is compared with the total contingency held in the budget. The programme's approach to risk has recently been audited by the South West Audit Partnership (SWAP) which has offered 'substantial assurance' – the highest level of assurance possible.

Nonetheless, some low likelihood, high impact risks have the potential to far exceed our contingencies if they materialise, an obvious example being a major archaeological find. Therefore, there remains a significant possibility that the programme may have to request additional funding from Cabinet or Council at some stage of the construction process.

Meanwhile, the existing cremators remain a source of serious concern due to their unreliable performance. Our maintenance engineers regularly service the equipment and carry out scheduled repairs as and when required, which is proving to be an expensive process. However, the staff are continually having to deal with the cremators' erratic performance and the need for unscheduled shutdowns for repairs. For example, we are currently experiencing a problem that has meant that one of the cremators has had to be taken out of action. This unscheduled work means the staff will have to work evenings and weekends in order to cope with all the appointments already booked. The staff of Bereavement Services are really looking forward to the new facility becoming available as soon as possible!

Plans

The current phase of construction involves the creation of a route for construction traffic across Prior's Farm and preparation for the permanent crematorium exit route.

It is expected that work on the buildings themselves will begin in the New Year, continuing throughout 2018 and into the following year, with a planned completion date in Spring 2019.

The programme continues to benefit from advice given by the Cabinet Member Working Group whose membership has experience of cemetery and crematorium matters dating back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's report on the installation of the current cremators.

The Programme Board is led by the Senior Responsible Officer, Mike Redman, Director of Environment and its membership includes Councillor Chris Coleman, Cabinet Member for Clean and Green Environment.

Members can view our website to keep up-to-date with progress as construction proceeds and view illustrations of the new buildings - <https://www.cheltenham.gov.uk/new-crem>.

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