

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Executive Director Neighbourhoods &
Environment

to
Cabinet

on

25 February 2020

Report prepared by: Paul Jenkinson Head of Parks and Open
Spaces

Agenda
Item No.

Refurbishment of Crematorium and Replacement of Cremators.

Relevant Scrutiny Committee(s)
Executive Councillor: Councillor Carole Mulroney
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To highlight the limited remaining operational lifespan of the cremators and associated equipment at Sutton Road Crematorium.
- 1.2 To seek approval on the approach to be taken regarding securing cremation services over the next twenty-five years.
- 1.3 To highlight the potential use of electric cremators as an alternative to gas cremators and the potential benefits these can have in reducing carbon emissions.
- 1.4 To highlight the existing funding within the capital programme for refurbishing the facility, subject to business case, and the requirement for additional funding if electric cremators are the preferred option.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **Agree to continue to provide crematorium facilities within Southend-on-Sea.**
- 2.2 **Note the problems with the existing facilities as set out in Appendix 1.**
- 2.3 **Note that without the replacement of the cremators and works to the building the provision of a crematorium service in the short to medium term will not be possible.**

- 2.4 Note the potential environmental benefits that the installation of electric cremators could bring and the additional capital expenditure that this would require (exact level of investment to be determined).**
- 2.5 Agree that the option of electric cremators and other options that would have environmental benefits can be considered during the project development.**
- 2.6 Note the predicted cost to fund the replacement of the cremators, associated plant and building refurbishments as outlined in paragraph 6.3.**
- 2.7 Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Neighbourhoods and Environment to carry out the refurbishment and replacement of the cremators.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Crematorium at Southend-on-Sea was constructed in November 1953 and contained three cremators. In 1986/87 the cremators were replaced and the number increased to six. In 1999/2000 the cremators were replaced again but the number reduced to five, this replacement was as a result of changes in legislation, which meant the existing cremators could no longer be used.
- 3.2 In 2009 after an inspection of the chimney, it was reported that the structure was starting to decline. The condition of the stack was monitored, and the condition was confirmed as declining. In 2018 the structure of the stack had declined to such an extent that temporary props needed to be installed. At this time, plans were also considered for its rebuild. However, due to other issues with the cremators and plant, it was decided to postpone any works and to consider a more coordinated project.
- 3.3 In April 2010 the cremation facilities were reviewed again, and the number of cremators reduced to three. However, at this time one of the cremators was replaced with a larger cremation unit to facilitate the increasing number of requests to accommodate larger coffins. At this time an abatement system was installed to address mercury emissions.
- 3.4 In 2010, works were also undertaken to some of the front of house facilities, namely the chapels.
- 3.5 The change in cremator units and associated plant over the years, including the need to install a refrigeration unit has resulted in the layout of the building, especially back of house, becoming fragmented causing inefficient operation and problems such as lack of suitable storage for cremated remains.
- 3.6 Surveys have raised a number of problems with the existing facilities including structural problems with the buildings and two of the cremators that are at end of life and no longer have guaranteed support by the manufactures.
- 3.7 As a result of works in December 2019, to keep the larger cremator operational, new issues with the facilities have been highlighted in that heat is not venting

away from the top of the cremator units which has resulted in failure of some elements. This problem will continue without appropriate upgrade of the facilities.

- 3.8 An initial informal review of the services which the crematorium facilities are able to provide have highlighted a shortfall in our ability to accommodate, in an appropriate way, the needs and requirements of the beliefs of the range of people who use the service. To ensure we are able to meet the needs of these groups changes to the crematorium buildings are required.
- 3.9 To ensure Southend Council can continue to provide high-quality crematorium services to people at what can be a very difficult time, it is recommended that a full refurbishment of the current facilities is undertaken, including the following:
- Market test to confirm the practicality of changing from gas to electric cremators.
 - Replacement of the three existing cremators.
 - Replacement of plant associated with the cremators.
 - Reconfigure back of house to accommodate new equipment and facilitate better working.
 - Rebuild of the chimney.
 - Structural and roof works.
 - Reconfigure and upgrade some front of house areas including the installation of a viewing area to accommodate different faiths and beliefs.
 - Make good and resurface parking area.
- 3.9 Also included would be a 10-year cremator maintenance package as part of the tender process. This does not include the costs associated with cremator relining which will be required at least four times during the life of the cremators.
- 3.10 Consider options for onsite power generation and other green initiatives.
- 3.11 It is currently estimated that the cost for these capital works will be in the region of £2.4 million if gas cremators are installed and £2.7 million if electric cremators are installed. These are the likely levels of capital investment but the exact level of investment would be determined ultimately through the market testing of the procurement.
- 3.12 Electric Cremators, are being promoted by the manufacturers as a more environmentally friendly option when compared to gas or oil cremators. Although connected to the electricity network, they can also be partly powered by electricity generated on site by, for example, solar panels. The manufacturers also report the CO₂ and NO_x emissions as significantly lower when compared to the emissions of gas or oil fuelled cremators.
- 3.13 Due to the lack of mains drainage at both the Crematorium and Cemetery it is not practical to explore another new opportunity coming to market such as water cremation.
- 3.14 To ensure the best cremator option for Southend-on-Sea it is proposed that a cremator supplier is appointed early in the process to work with the Council on the design and layout of the facility and to help ensure that a service can continue to be provided throughout the works.

- 3.15 The condition of the two older cremators is such that failure in less than one year is a real possibility. The loss of two cremators will significantly impact on the ability to meet the requirements for cremation services in the Borough.
- 3.16 It is also likely that without replacement of the existing plant, associated with cremation operations, the facilities will no longer meet environmental requirements within the next two to three years due to likely failure of the heat exchanger.

4. Other Options

4.1 **Alternative Option 1.** Estimated £400,000. Decommission the crematorium and stop providing cremation services to residents and others.

4.1.1 This option would require a separate project to consider decommissioning and what to do with the existing buildings.

4.2 **Alternative Option 1** has not been recommended for the following reasons:

4.2.1 Not providing cremation services within the Borough is likely to cause distress to residents during a difficult time. This option also impacts on the Council's ability to respond to some civil emergencies.

4.2.2 Not providing cremation services in Southend will require people to be directed to facilities outside the Borough, such as Basildon.

4.3 **Alternative Option 2.** Estimated £8.5m. Build a new crematorium and public facing facilities on the crematorium car park. Once new facilities are completed, demolish the old crematorium and chapels and lay out space for car parking.

4.3.1 This option would provide a modern facility fit for purpose. A new facility would allow for easy accommodation of new technologies, and improved public facing facilities to meet the needs of Southend's diverse population. This option would allow the existing facility to continue operating until the new facility is commissioned, minimising the disruption to cremations and those attending services.

4.4 Alternative Option 2 has not been recommended for the following reasons:

4.4.1 Higher level of capital investment required.

4.4.2 Existing chapels are in a good condition internally

5. Reasons for Recommendations

5.1 A comprehensive refurbishment of the crematorium facilities will ensure that Southend can continue to provide a high quality of service to people at a time that many find emotional and distressing.

- 5.2 The replacement of the cremation facilities and comprehensive refurbishment of the back of house facilities and improvements to the front of the house will:
- a) Provide a facility that will have a usable life of up to 25 years.
 - b) Be supported by the manufacturer.
 - c) Increase the capacity to deal with larger coffins.
 - d) Increased resilience.
 - e) Provide options to better accommodate the requirements of different faiths and beliefs.
 - f) Improved energy efficiency and reduced impact on the environment.
- 5.3 The relative reduction in faults and maintenance.
- a) Improved access for the maintenance of the plant and building.
 - b) Inclusion of a maintenance package for a minimum of 10 years within the tender process.
 - c) Ability to support emergency plans related to pandemics and other emergencies.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

6.1.1 Pride and Joy. "Our Streets and Public Spaces are clean and inviting."

6.1.2 The Crematorium is public space, visited by thousands of people each year. Works to keep the buildings in good condition help meet this objective.

6.2 Safe and Well. "Green City - We act as a green city with outstanding examples of energy-efficient and carbon-neutral buildings, streets, transport and recycling".

6.2.1 New cremators and the associated plant will help ensure emission targets are met minimising the impact on local air quality.

6.3 Financial Implications

6.3.1 A commitment to fund and replace all cremators, associated plant and building works will be in the region of £2.4 to £2.7 million, depending on whether electric cremators are the preferred option. These are the likely levels of capital investment, but the exact level of investment would be determined ultimately through the market testing of the procurement.

6.3.2 Currently, funded capital works put on hold until the revised program for the crematorium agreed. This currently stands at £620,000, as per the table below.

Projects at the crematorium	2019/20 £(000)
Crematorium - Urgent Structural Repairs to Chimney	500

Replacement Boiler at Southend Crematorium	120
Total	620

6.3.3. Operating costs and general maintenance are already considered in the current revenue budgets. However, this will need to be reviewed once the new cremators are installed.

6.3.4 Currently the cost of a unit of electricity is higher than a unit of gas, therefore changing to electric may result in an increase in utility costs. However, if the Crematorium can become gas free, the supply could be disconnected resulting in a reduction in standing charges. Running costs will not be able to be confirmed until the cremators and associated plant are confirmed.

6.3.5 The cremators will require relining approximately every 5,000 to 10,000 cremations, approximately every five to ten years, based on current usage and the style of the new cremator lining and the fuel (gas or electric). The cost for relining is expected to be in the region of £45,000 to £60,000 per cremator (cost as of 2019). The costs associated with future relining will need to be requested through the Council's capital program when required.

6.4 Legal Implications

6.4.1 The Council has no obligation to provide cremation services. However, any facilities that it operates should be safe and fit for purpose.

6.5 People Implications

6.5.1 No people implications have been identified at this time.

6.6 Property Implications

6.6.1 Without investment, the existing crematorium buildings will have to close within the next three to five years, possibly sooner.

6.6.2 The stack is continuing to decline and could become a potential risk to the public and staff if not rebuilt.

6.7 Consultation

6.7.1 No public consultation has been undertaken at this time. However, operational staff have been engaged and if works are agreed, consultation will be undertaken with funeral directors.

6.8 Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 6.8.1 Existing facilities are not able to accommodate appropriately the requirements of some faiths and beliefs. Changes to the facilities will provide opportunities to review and better meet these needs.
- 6.8.2 The main focus of the works is on the cremator room which is not accessed by the public.
- 6.8.3 An equalities impact assessment will be undertaken on any development as required.

6.9 Risk Assessment

Risk	Mitigation
Failure of existing cremators.	Replacement of existing cremators would mitigate this. If the cremators are not replaced Southend will direct people to facilities outside the borough such as Basildon
Emissions not meeting standards.	Replacement of existing cremators and the associated plant would mitigate this.
The collapse of stack causing injury or death.	Rebuild the stack.
Bad publicity by not providing crematorium facilities.	Replace cremators and upgrade facilities.
Lack of crematorium facilities within Southend hindering response to the outcome of a pandemic or other emergency.	Replace cremators and upgrade facilities.
Changes to emissions and other environmental targets after the installation of new equipment.	Work to install the most efficient and environmentally-friendly equipment to minimise the risk of it becoming non-compliant.
Leaving the EU impacting on supply chains, costs due to exchange rates, new import taxes and other yet unknown risks.	No mitigation at this time. Tendering would take place after the current date the UK is meant to leave the EU.

6.10 Value for Money

6.10.1 Any associated works will be procured in line with Council policies and procedures

6.11 Community Safety Implications

6.11.1 No community safety implications have been identified at this time.

6.12 Environmental Impact

6.12.1 New facilities will help meet emissions targets and reduce the impact on local air quality.

6.12.2 New equipment will be more efficient in reducing fuel usage.

6.12.3 A change to electric cremators could reduce the impact on the environment further and benefit from onsite power generation.

7. Background Papers

No background papers.

8. Appendices

16.1 Appendix 1: Building survey.

16.2 Appendix 2: Comparison of energy consumption of gas and electric cremators.