

PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL

Environment Committee – 28 August 2013

Renovation of the Crematorium Memorial Gardens and Development of Memorial Lease Options**Report by Depute Director (Environment)**

This report describes current progress and future proposals for renovating the Memorial Gardens at the Crematorium and the proposed improvements to the range and affordability of memorialisation through new lease options. It also addresses issues arising from unauthorised memorials being placed in the Crematorium Gardens.

1. BACKGROUND / MAIN ISSUESCrematorium Garden Memorials

- 1.1 The Crematorium Memorial Gardens comprise six seasonal areas within an attractive woodland setting (see plan in Appendix 1). The gardens attract over a thousand visitors throughout the year, who come to pay their respects to their deceased loved ones in a tranquil attractive wooded and landscaped location, place flowers and at an appointed time, to scatter cremated remains. Over time the desire to memorialise their loved one with an inscription on an attractive long lasting memorial in a specific location has become much more popular and staff have endeavoured to meet that need.
- 1.2 An existing wall plaque area in front of the main building has been provided for memorials and 25% of the space available has been used for plaques, on a leased basis. Over the years however this area has gradually ceased to attract interest, mainly due to the increasing choice of other memorial options available within the gardens themselves. The remainder of the unused area of this wall is proposed to be utilised alternatively, as explained below in 2.4. In terms of memorials for the gardens, the Council offers individual styles of memorials specific to each of the seasonal gardens. These vary in price from £195 in the Children's Garden through to £750 for a large Mother of Pearl granite memorial within the Summer Gardens. Approximately 70 inscribed memorials are sold per annum.
- 1.3 New and refurbished paths have recently been provided in the gardens to improve the visitor experience and provide a location for placing the granite kerb memorial plaques. This provides a consistent appearance and quality for the gardens. The use of granite plaques also addresses problems with older sandstone memorials, a material which tends to attract stains and mould growth over time, particularly where they are overhung by trees and shrubs. They are also is prone to crumbling due to long term weathering.

- 1.4 There is an ongoing issue with some visitors placing unauthorised memorials, flower vases, photographs and other artefacts throughout the gardens at weekends, particularly where their relatives' ashes may have been scattered. Unfortunately unauthorised memorials are at a risk of being damaged and cause difficulties with grounds maintenance. They may also deteriorate quickly and can often offend those families whose loved ones remains are also scattered in the same area. Those who have purchased memorials from the Council in the past also ask on a fairly regular basis (approximately 1 in 5 visitors), why we allow this to happen when signage makes it clear that such ad hoc memorialisation is not permitted and will be removed (Appendix 2).
- 1.5 There are currently 49 unauthorised small memorials and artefacts throughout the gardens which have been placed despite signage asking visitors not to do this.

Review of Memorial Options

- 1.6 An external consultant, in his 2009 external Review of Bereavement Services, advised that improvements were required to the maintenance and management of the memorial gardens, which would include the removal of unauthorised memorials. He advised that a wider range of memorials should be available on a leased basis, rather than purchased in perpetuity, as at present. If memorials are sold in perpetuity then those particular locations can no longer be used again even though the families may eventually cease to visit them. Over time this would reduce and diminish the areas available for memorialisation. Ultimately this could put pressure on land availability. Leasing memorials would also avoid difficult issues relating to individuals wishing to place privately purchased, and potentially inappropriate memorials in perpetuity within the gardens, rather than take up memorials supplied by the Council.
- 1.7 The consultant also indicated that leasing memorials, as is done elsewhere, enables a family to decide whether to continue with their lease after 10 or 20 years, or release that memorial inscription space for another family to use. He also identified that current memorial sales at Perth Crematorium were below half the average of other municipal Scottish crematoria, offering leased memorials.

2. PROPOSALS

- 2.1 It is proposed to offer 10 and 20 year memorial leases in the future, rather than sales in perpetuity. Families would lease space for an inscribed plaque available to purchase separately which would then be placed on a Council owned memorial. After 20 years a family could further extend the lease in at least 10 year increments. The current records database will enable staff to be aware of when particular leases are due for renewal. At that point contact will be made with the family to offer an extension of the lease. If it is not extended, or if the descendants cannot be traced, the memorial space will be offered for lease to another family. The plaque would be removed and returned to the family if they wished, or stored for a period in the absence of any descendants.

- 2.2 It is proposed to introduce a high quality range of removable granite memorial options and install them within a pleasant and well maintained setting. They can be installed around the edges of the newly refurbished and developed paths (see Appendix 3) or other free standing options. These will be more permanent and easier to maintain than existing memorials. They will also ensure a consistency of appearance and quality is maintained.
- 2.3 Where space is more limited, it is proposed to continue using hexagonal columns as shown in Appendix 3, each supporting a number of leased polished granite plaques located on each face, pointing in different directions, to suit the position where cremated remains are scattered.
- 2.4 It is proposed to trial the use of the remaining vacant wall niches in front of the main building (see section 1.2) to install small double casket columbaria (see Appendix 3), which enables families to locate their loved ones remains in a safe, secure and attractive inscribed memorial case above ground. There is no option to inter caskets of cremated remains within the gardens themselves as this would require the creation of a burial area which is not the purpose of the gardens. Scatterings on the turf are allowed as they do not have the same land use implications as formal burial grounds. The use of the wall niches would enable families to memorialise their loved ones whilst keeping their remains intact at the Crematorium, rather than purchasing a cemetery burial plot for casket interments. This leased option also enables families who move away to be able to retrieve their loved ones remains, if they wish to take them elsewhere.
- 2.5 The Summer Garden is one of the most popular options for families seeking high quality granite memorials within a manicured formal garden setting. However, because of this popularity, available space for scattering ashes is becoming limited. An option growing in popularity in other crematoria is the tower columbaria where families can securely store two caskets of cremated remains behind an inscribed memorial plaque within an attractive granite column approximately 1.5m high similar in design to that referred to in 2.3 above. This option would allow 24 families to retain their loved one's remains in an attractive feature on a lease basis within these most popular gardens.
- 2.6 High quality signage is an essential feature for the gardens and new replacement signage is proposed. This will not only assist the public in finding the specific garden they seek, but also will enable visitors to be informed about management of gardens e.g. not allowing unauthorised memorials or scattering cremated remains without an appointment and avoidance of dog exercise etc. Any unauthorised memorials will be carefully uplifted once discovered and will be taken into safe storage for a three month period. A notice will be placed in the vicinity to advise that the items can be collected from the crematorium staff during that period, after which they will be disposed of.

- 2.7 A quality memorial brochure and price list is currently sent out to all families who use the services of the Crematorium. It is proposed that a new brochure will describe a variety of memorial lease options available for placement within the six seasonal memorial gardens at the Crematorium. Prices will start from £145 for a 10 year lease (£70 plaque cost £75 lease cost) and £220 for 20 years (£150 lease cost). At the upper end of the range the large Mother of Pearl memorials will cost £565 for a 10 year lease (£350 plaque cost and £215 lease). Renewal of existing leases will be 75% of the relevant initial period cost.
- 2.8 In terms of the plaque supply itself, it will be important that the plaque size, material, colour, quality and fixings are consistent with the others in the garden. If a customer was able to source and purchase an exact fit for one of these plaques and its security fittings, it could cost them at least £75. This was based on a price obtained from a local independent memorial mason and is more than the Council are proposing to charge. In addition, the Council's current plaque supplier will not sell to private individuals. By allowing alternative providers of plaques there is a risk of an alternative not matching the existing display in size, colour and screwed fittings.

3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 It is important to ensure the future management of the Crematorium grounds is carried out consistently and to a quality which is affordable and in the best interests of the wider public and in line with current best practice.
- 3.2 The Committee is asked to agree to:
- leasing space at the Crematorium for 10 or 20 years for a range of quality memorials and plaques which are available for purchase from the Council.
 - to continue with the current grounds improvements at the Crematorium to provide a sustainable quality location for leased memorials.
 - to the removal of unauthorised memorials following all reasonable attempts to get the families to remove them.

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1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

The undernoted table should be completed for all reports. Where the answer is 'yes', the relevant section(s) should also be completed

Strategic Implications	Yes / None
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	Yes
Corporate Plan	Yes
Resource Implications	
Financial	Yes
Workforce	Yes
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	Yes
Assessments	
Equality Impact Assessment	Not required
Strategic Environmental Assessment	Not required
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	None
Legal and Governance	No
Risk	Yes
Consultation	
Internal	Yes
External	Yes
Communication	
Communications Plan	Yes

1. Strategic Implications

Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement

- 1.1 In terms of delivering “Safe, Healthy and Inclusive Communities”
“Our communities will have better access to the services they need”

The wider range of leased memorials proposed will offer more choice and affordability for the bereaved families. More time can also be spent by staff in servicing those specific needs.

Corporate Plan

- 1.2 This report supports the Council's Corporate Plan 2013-18 objective of:

- Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations

2. Resource Implications

Financial

- 2.1 Initial funding of £100k was approved in the Council's 2016/17 Capital Budget on a prudential borrowing basis for improving the memorial gardens and investing in the required granite memorials and plaques.
- 2.2 The capital investment will be repaid over a 10 year period. Income generated from memorial lease sales will be used to meet the current net budgeted income target of £20k. This will cover the recurring loan charges associated with the investment and the income target set for the Crematorium as a whole. Customers will pay the full 10 or 20 year lease cost up front and will be held in the Council's Reserves. An accounting entry will be made at the financial year end to draw down only the level of income required in that financial year to meet the loan charge repayments and the budgeted income target.
- 2.3 The reason for requiring payment of the lease cost up front is that if the lease was split over a 10 – 20 year period it would not be economically viable to recover such small sums of money e.g. £7.50 per annum.

Workforce

- 2.4 There are no workforce issues arising from this report.

Asset Management (Land, Property and IST)

- 2.5 The Council is preserving its grounds maintenance assets by leasing memorials.

Risks

- 2.6 There is a risk, which is that we may not achieve income targets from this new service, however the risk is mitigated by the consultant's report, the experience of other crematoria, and proper marketing of the Service

3. Consultation

Internal

- 3.1 The Head of Finance, the Head of Legal Services and the Head of Planning and Regeneration have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

External

- 3.2 An external consultant carried out a Review of Bereavement Services in 2009 which was used in the preparation of this report.

4. Communication

- 4.1 There will be communication with the public via a new brochure covering the new memorial options and dialogue with the Bereavement Services Consultative Group consisting of representative local Funeral Directors. Updated information will also be provided on the Bereavement Services web page.

2. APPENDICES

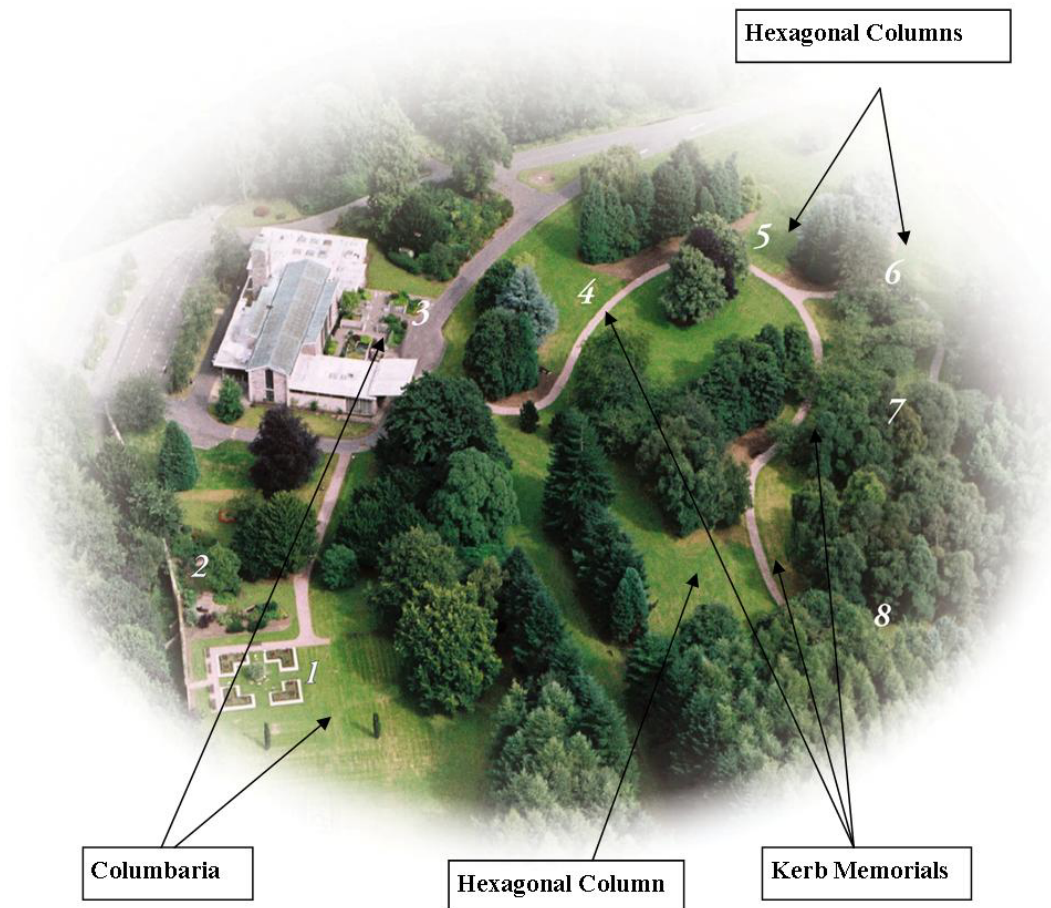
Appendix 1: Plan of Crematorium Memorial Gardens

Appendix 2: Unauthorised Memorial Sign

Appendix 3: Memorial Options

Plan of Crematorium Memorial Gardens

Perth Crematorium Gardens



Key to Remembrance Gardens

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Summer Garden | 5. Spring Garden |
| 2. Children's Garden | 6. Winter Garden |
| 3. Memorial Plaque Garden | 7. Daffodil Garden |
| 4. Autumn Garden | 8. Bluebell Garden |

**New Signage to be installed in
all Gardens**

Unauthorised Memorials Sign



Memorial Options

Photo 1 – Path Edge Memorials



Photo 2 – Hexagonal Column Memorial



Photo 3 – Double Casket Columbaria



