

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**NEIGHBOURHOODS
CABINET MEMBER**

WOODLANDS CREMATORIUM – MEMORIAL POLICY

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Cabinet Member of a request to consider amendments to the management regulations of Plots A and B at Woodlands Crematorium.
- 1.2 To inform the Cabinet Member of the general powers of the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO), resulting in current policy setting standards within North Lincolnshire Cemeteries.
- 1.3 To consider options to amend the policies.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Woodlands Crematorium has operated for 50 years. Section A was first used for burials in 1977 and holds 1,514 plots. Section B was first used for burials in 1989 and holds 1,467 plots. Current policy applicable to the areas in question requires the use of standard bronze plaques as memorial headstones. As such, the areas benefit from some uniformity of appearance and equality of provision to plot holders.
- 2.2 Recently, the council has become aware of a local campaign seeking to change the regulation around areas A and B at Woodlands Cemetery. A petition has been established in support of this campaign. The campaign is to allow a different style of headstone from the bronze plaques designated for these areas. A counter campaign aiming to retain the existing arrangements has also been launched in response, also supported by a petition.
- 2.3 The Local Authorities Cemetery Order 1977 (LACO) sets the general parameters under which cemeteries can operate. The parameters state:

Layout, repair and access

4.—(1) A burial authority may enclose, lay out and embellish a cemetery in such manner as they think fit, and from time to time improve it, and shall keep the cemetery in good order and repair, together with all buildings, walls and fences thereon and other buildings provided for use therewith.

2.4 The council provides details of the regulations at the time of sale of a plot. The regulations are also available on request from the Woodlands Crematorium office.

2.5 The requirement relating to headstones are contained in regulation 51 and the exception to Sections A and B in 52, detailed below:

51. All memorials shall comply with the following, as appropriate:-

A headstone or similar shall have a base fixed on a foundation of solid stone or concrete. The foundation should be no greater than the width of the grave on the plan less 2" Such base may incorporate one or two flower containers and include up to two vases, tablets or figures so long as they shall comply with the following Regulations and shall not extend beyond the perimeter of the base.

Full sized graves: Memorials may be up to 36" above ground level (inclusive of base), 24" wide, and 2" – 3" thick, fixed at the designated head end of the grave – 1 per grave; or vase or vases (up to 2) no greater than 9" in any dimension fixed, securely, on an appropriate base.

Kerbing: This is permitted on Traditional graves only.

Cremation plots: Memorials may be up to 24" above ground level (inclusive of base), not more than 18" wide and 1" – 2" thick, fixed at the designated head end of the grave – 1 per grave; or vase no greater than 9 inches in any dimension, fixed at the head of the grave – 1 per grave.

52. The exception to the above Regulations is Woodlands Cemetery Sections A and B which are as follows:-

Full sized graves: Bronze plaque (available at the office) supplied in two colours, fixed at the head of the grave – 1 per grave, accompanied by up to 2 vases no greater than 9" in any dimension, fixed in the garden border at the head of the grave; or up to 2 vases no greater than 9 inches in any dimension fixed in the garden border at the head of the grave.

Cremation plots: Vase no greater than 9" in any dimension fixed in the garden border at the head of the grave – 1 per grave...

2.6 The council recognises that arranging for a burial comes at a very difficult time for bereaved families. As such, maintaining clarity over the regulations and adhering to them on an on-going basis is critically important. The council operates nine cemeteries in total. As Brumby, Crosby and Woodlands are all located in the Scunthorpe urban area, there is some degree of choice in terms of the service provision available.

2.7 The council can periodically consider changes to regulations. However, in making any changes there are some key points to consider:

- Relevant operational and on-going liability issues. In particular, the council currently provides the bronze memorials in Section A and Section B at a cost of £425. The council is also responsible for memorial safety for any memorials above 20" in height, once the 50 year exclusive 'Rights of Burial' have elapsed. At present, the memorials in areas A and B are under these height limits and as such incur no future liabilities. It is therefore proposed to strictly limit any change to current policy to only allowing headstones of a height not exceeding 20".

3. **OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

3.1 In light of the preceding information, the following options are suggested for consideration by the Cabinet Member.

3.1.1 **Option 1** - Change the current regulations that apply to sections A and B to allow granite or marble headstones up to 20" high so as not to incur future liabilities for memorial safety testing.

3.1.2 **Option 2** – Change the current regulations that apply to sections A and B to allow granite or marble headstones up to 30" high so as not to incur future liabilities for memorial safety testing.

3.1.3 **Option 3** – Continue to observe the existing regulations already in place.

4. **ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

4.1 **Option 1** – This option would go some significant way towards meeting the requirements of one group of petitioners. The option would remove the risk of additional cost liabilities for the council in relation to future maintenance and testing of headstones above 20" high.

4.2 **Option 2** – This option would go some significant way towards meeting the requirements of one group of petitioners. However, it might lead to objections from other 'Exclusive Rights of Burial' owners who purchased a plot in A and B section at Woodlands. This option also places additional cost liabilities back onto the council for future maintenance and testing of headstones.

4.3 **Option 3** – This option would retain the existing policy.

5. **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

5.1 There are no other significant resource implications to highlight.

6. **OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

6.1 Not yet available.

7. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

7.1 An on-line petition is currently running calling for changes to the existing policy. In response an opposing petition is running on social media calling for the current arrangements to continue.

7.2 Officers responsible for managing Woodlands Crematorium have highlighted some potential concerns regarding the possibility of introducing changes to the existing policy. They highlight that the option to purchase a plot to include a headstone was always available

in the Scunthorpe area during the periods when the areas in question were available for burials. They note that changing the policy after such a long time will alter the look and feel of Plots A and B, that are highly regarded by many who attend regularly to visit loved ones in terms of their appearance, layout and maintenance. They highlight the possibility that failing to provide existing 'grave owners' the opportunity to comment may create some dissatisfaction and complaint.

7.3 It is suggested that if either of option 1 or 2 is approved that we issue formal notice of the intention to change the current arrangements.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 That the Cabinet Member considers the information set out in this paper and decides on the way forward in responding to the request to consider amendments to the management regulations of Plots A and B at Woodlands Cemetery.

DIRECTOR OF PLACES

Bereavement Services
Woodlands Crematorium
Brumby Wood Lane
SCUNTHORPE
DN17 1SP
Author: Chris Matthews
Date: 25 September 2015

Background Papers used in the preparation of this report:

- Local Authorities Cemetery Order
- North Lincolnshire Cemetery & Crematorium Regulations
- ICCM Management of memorial safety