

**Cemeteries & Crematoria Horticultural Maintenance Working Group  
for Scrutiny Board (City Development)**

**Visit to Lawns wood Cemetery and Crematoria on  
Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> November 2010 commencing at 1pm**

**Present:**

Councillor J Procter (Chair)  
Councillor M Robinson  
Councillor J Akhtar

**Others in Attendance**

Sean Flesher – Head of Parks and Countryside  
Phil Stephenson – Chief Superintendent, Lawnswood  
Guy Smithson – Senior Area Manager, West  
Richard Mills – Principal Scrutiny Adviser  
Kelly Crosby – Scrutiny Support

**1.0 Cemetery and Crematoria Briefing Note**

- 1.1 A copy of a cemetery and crematoria briefing note was provide to Members on the visit which summarised a more detailed report which had been considered by the Scrutiny Board (City Development) on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2010.
- 1.2 The main points in the briefing note were as follows:
- (a) That Leeds City Council is responsible for the management and maintenance of 3 crematoria, 23 cemeteries, 23 closed churchyards, 49 war memorials and the contracted mortuary service.
  - (b) That Lawns Wood Cemetery and Crematoria is one of the main cemeteries and crematoria in the City, being over 65 acres in size.
  - (c) That the cemetery opened in 1876 with the addition of the crematoria in 1905. The site was managed by the Headingley Burial Board, from opening until 1974. Lawns Wood was transferred to Leeds City Council in 1974.
  - (d) That during the 1960's Lawns Wood employed around 32 staff covering gardening duties, cremation duties, grave digging, masons and greenhouse work. Today Lawns Wood has 17 staff covering the gardening duties, cremation duties and grave digging duties for Lawns Wood and all north side cemeteries in the City.
  - (e) That over the years the cemetery has expanded to its current size of 65 acres, the cemetery became full in 2004 and has not provided new graves since that date. This has put extra pressure on other local cemeteries and increased the pressure for new cemeteries to be opened.

- (f) That Lawn garden rules are enforced in new cemeteries and clearly divided extensions i.e. Guiseley, Garforth and Pudsey, but families still challenge these rules.
- (g) That memorial headstones and kerbs are permitted in all other cemeteries, but this makes the maintenance of the cemeteries difficult with small machines needed and strimmers which is labour intensive.
- (h) That the maintenance of the Gardens of Rest and strewing lawns is also labour intensive as families expect to leave floral tributes on the lawn, but this requires staff to remove them before cutting the area, then replace all the tributes after cutting.
- (i) That the City Council does not own any of the memorials that belong to the families, but safety is the Council's responsibility, therefore memorials have to be tested and either pinned or laid down. Also tidying neglected memorials is a concern once families no longer exist to maintain the memorial.

## **2.0 Main issues discussed**

2.1 During the visit Members commented on and discussed a number of issues with staff including:

- (a) The fact that the cemetery is full and no longer provides new burials, however it does continue to provide burials in family plots.
- (b) The position with regard to land owned by the University next to the cemetery and crematoria.
- (c) The size of the cemetery of 65 acres and the reduction in staffing levels over the years from 32 staff in the 1960s to 17 staff today. They not only undertake all the gardening, cremation and grave digging duties for Lawns Wood they are responsible for all north side cemeteries in the City as well.
- (d) Seeing at first hand the large number of flowers, ornaments, fenced off sections and trinkets that families place as tributes on graves and on grass next to memorial plaques. This included nailing items to mature trees. Officers reported that in the growing season one member of staff spends his whole time removing floral tributes so the grass can be cut and then putting them all back again afterwards. Members were informed that they often received complaints from the public that flowers and other tributes were missing or had been removed and not put back in the same place after the grass had been cut.
- (e) The suggestion from Members that it might be appropriate to introduce designated areas at suitable locations in the cemetery for people to place flowers and other tributes in an effort to reduce the numbers placed on grassed areas. This could include an area in front of the Gardens of Rest.

- (f) The difficulties in maintaining areas where families ignore the rules regarding graves which state that “railings, footstones, kerb and border stones, chains or other structures enclosing graves or parts of graves, flags or chippings are not allowed.” These prevent the larger grass cutting machines from being used. As a consequence staff have to resort to smaller machines and strimmers which are less efficient. In addition having to manoeuvre machinery around obstacles can result in damage to grave features.
- (g) The subsequent discussion under (f) centred around the fact that whilst applicants wishing to obtain grave burial rights sign an agreement that places restrictions on what they can and cannot do these are not being applied by the Council. This was because of the sensitivity of the subject and local pressures around enforcement.
- (h) Members were provided with a map of the cemetery and crematoria and a copy of the grave burial rights and extracts from the rules and regulations relating to grave memorials on non-lawned areas and lawned gardens which were circulated to the Members of the Working Group prior to the visit and are attached to this note.
- (i) Reference was made to the Friends of Guiseley Cemetery which is a group of 20-30 people who support and help maintain the site on a volunteer basis. It was proposed that an invitation be made for a representative of the Friends of Guiseley Cemetery to attend the next meeting of this Working Group to hear their experiences and thoughts with a view to establishing a Friends Group for Lawns Wood cemetery and crematoria.
- (j) It was suggested that the Working Group could invite a number of families and relatives who visit Lawns Wood cemetery to hear their views and thoughts about the upkeep of the cemetery.