

REPORT TO: Environment & Urban Renewal Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 13 June 2012

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Communities

PORTFOLIO: Environmental Sustainability

SUBJECT: Cemeteries Working Group - Conclusions

WARD(S) Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To provide Members with the findings and recommendations of the Cemeteries Working Group for comment and endorsement.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

- 1. Members receive and comment upon the report;**
- 2. the Policy & Performance Board endorse the recommendations of the Cemeteries Working Group; and**
- 3. a report be presented to the Executive Board recommending the adoption of the recommendations of the Cemeteries Working Group.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 On the 15 June 2011 it was agreed that a Cemeteries Working Group be set up to consider options for creating a new Cemetery for Widnes as the current Cemetery one at Birchfield Road has approximately six years of capacity left within it. The Group was to look at the most suitable location, most suitable design and make recommendations to the Board. The Working Group was Chaired by Cllr D Thompson and included Cllr J Bradshaw, Cllr E Cargill, Cllr A McInerney and Cllr G Zygadlo.

3.2 The group was also asked to consider current Cemetery Rules, making recommendations for how they might be amended and applied in the new Cemetery. The group was also to consider issues surrounding memorials in the existing cemeteries. Many memorials are now over 100 years old and many of them are in poor shape. They present obstacles to cost effective maintenance and many have had to be laid down for safety reasons. The group will make recommendations to the Board on how memorials should be

managed in future.

- 3.3 The Working Group met on three occasions, 31st January 2012, 21st of February 2012 and on the 24th of May 2012. During the first two meetings consideration was given to the need for a new Widnes Cemetery, a suitable location for it and how it might be laid out (see appendix 1). The third meeting considered the issues relating to memorial rules and how they might be changed to benefit management within the new cemetery and within the existing facilities.
- 3.4 Members heard how burial capacity at Widnes Cemetery is now down to about six years. Members were informed that a previous Executive Board report (5th March 2009) had recommended that residents of Widnes and Runcorn should be afforded burial space within the Borough and as a result an extension to Runcorn Cemetery has been built but nothing has been done with regards to Widnes Cemetery. That previous suggestions to extend Widnes Cemetery to the south, onto private land on which a thriving business is currently located, would not be financially viable given that it would only create about seven years of extra capacity.
- 3.5 Members heard how an opportunity had arisen through the closure of Fairfield High School in 2010 to use part of that site, the playing fields area, for a new Cemetery. The site is owned by the Council so money would not have to be spent on buying land. Currently Wade Deacon High School occupies the school buildings renting them from the Council whilst building works continue at their main school site. The site is located close to the existing cemetery and close to Widnes Town centre. It is also well served by public transport. Members were shown a draft design that would provide sixty-five years of burial capacity. The cost of creating a Cemetery at the former Fairfield High School site would be in the region of £1.5 Million (although there would be additional costs relating to highway works).
- 3.6 The Working Group concluded that the option of creating a new Cemetery at Peel House Lane, on part of the former Fairfield High School site was a sensible option and that it should be recommended to the Executive Board that part of the site be allocated for the use of a cemetery, that a cemetery be built there and that funding be identified to build it before capacity runs out at Widnes cemetery forcing residents to have to be buried outside of the Borough.
- 3.7 Members also recommended that the following issues should be considered:
 - The New Cemetery should be something to be proud of. It

should have an imposing entrance feature.

- It should have enough car parking space.
- All graves should be within lawned sections with memorial stones mounted on concrete as in the newer sections of the existing cemetery.
- The cemetery should be multi denominational.
- There should be space for green burials.
- There should not be a designated baby section.
- The first phase should be done in such a way that the cemetery does not give the appearance of being only half finished.
- Traffic Calming would have to be considered on the approach roads (road humps in the area for example would be an impediment to funeral cars).
- Consideration be given to 'Landscape Screening' for local residents.
- That consideration be given to a name and that the name Peel House Cemetery was favoured by members.

3.8 Members looked into the issues relating to Memorials in the existing cemeteries and heard how there are a number of problems with regards to health and safety of the general public and the workforce. Previous practice of laying down memorials has led to areas of the cemeteries looking untidy and has created trip hazards.

3.9 The Council is able to remove dangerous memorials using existing legislation and the working group recommends that the Executive Board make it policy that it will do so subject to notice being given. In addition the Work Group recommends that a new set of 'Cemetery Rules' be written for the new Widnes Cemetery and the Runcorn extension and that they contain images to better explain what is expected from deed holders and visitors to the cemeteries.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 None identified.

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Although there is a need to create a new cemetery in Widnes currently there is no identified source of funding for it. The costs associated with creating a new cemetery will be in the region of £1.5

Million. The Working Group recommends that the Executive Board asks the relevant officers to look at options for financing a new cemetery.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

There are no implications for Children and Young People.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

There are no implications for Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

The proposed location for the new Widnes Cemetery is well situated adjacent to walking and public transport routes which would mean that many visitors could walk to it for at least part of their journey thereby promoting a healthy lifestyle. Woodland burial space would be afforded within the new cemetery creating a pleasant green oasis that would be desirable to visit whilst at the same time filtering particulates and creating shade.

6.4 A Safer Halton

The new Cemetery would be laid out with lawned sections thereby lessening the risk from dangerous memorials. The Cemetery would be provided with CCTV.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

A well designed Cemetery will enhance the area creating a public space in keeping with the required dignity of its purpose whilst being something of which residents can be proud.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The key risk is that if the Council does not allocate the land of the former Fairfield High School for a new Widnes Cemetery, and no other site is identified, burial space will run out within six years and the residents of Widnes will have to be buried at Runcorn Cemetery or outside of the Borough. The new Runcorn Cemetery extension which has capacity for fifteen years (with current rates of burial) would fill in less than half the time leaving all Borough residents without a place of burial within the Borough.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None identified.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

There are none under the meaning of the Act.

Appendix 1 – Suggested Design (Please note this is a suggested design only at this stage that incorporates the required elements of a cemetery and Members suggestions. The actual layout may need to be altered)

