

Mountsett Crematoria Joint Committee

29 July 2011

Business Case for the Development of a Memorial Garden



Report of Graham Harrison, Bereavement Services Manager & Ian Staplin, Superintendent and Registrar to the Mountsett Crematoria Joint Committee

Purpose of the Report

1. To set out for consideration proposals for the creation of a memorial garden, within the grounds of Mountsett Crematorium, following the Joint Committees recommendation (4th Feb 2011) to develop a business case for this.

The Demand for Memorial Gardens

2. The Demand for memorial gardens has long been recognised and many crematoria have been fulfilling this need for many years. Families who are bereaved very often find comfort in being able to visit a "special" place, which is marked. This place can be marked by a rose, bush, shrub or by some plaque or even by laying of flowers in the area where the cremated remains were scattered.
3. The decision not to provide memorials at Mountsett, other than the book of remembrance historically was due to the open "parkland" aspect of the grounds and that it did not easily lend to a formal pattern. Mountsett Crematorium Joint Committee have previously never formally considered the development of a memorial garden scheme before.
4. Since 1966 when the crematorium first opened until 1984 approximately 10 % of the cremated remains were taken away. The trend over the past 25 years or so has increasingly been for more remains to be removed from the crematorium to other places. Approximately over 45 % of remains are currently taken away, compared to 66% nationally. The fact that the Crematorium at Mountsett is unable to provide memorials is a contributory factor in the big increase in cremated remains being removed. This has an impact with regards to cremated remains being interred in cemeteries which is on the increase, using up burial space which is one of the key issues highlighted in the recent Bereavement Services Consultation.
5. The provision of a well-planned and maintained formal garden providing a choice of memorials is likely to be popular. Durham Crematorium introduced a memorial garden in 2000 and during the first twelve months sold over 204 plaques. Demand was so strong that they had to construct a second memorial garden in 2008.

6. At the Durham Crematorium the average number of plaques that have been sold is 190 / year over the last ten years, since the first memorial garden was commissioned. There were more plaques sold the first year as many people took the opportunity to have a plaque that was not available before so around 170 per year would be a more accurate figure. This works out that around 8% of cremations carried out produce a plaque sale out of 2,282 cremations carried out each year. The average cost of each plaque has been around £65.00

Design of Memorial Garden

7. The location of a potential memorial garden is shown in Appendix 2. The garden would be close to the building which houses the book of remembrance, but would not interfere with the magnificent views.
8. In formulating proposals for the garden, it has been important to set out a number of guiding principles. The following design requirements for the garden have been addressed:
 - It should be compact, well defined area which would provide shelter and comfort to visitors in a high quality environment.
 - It should relate well to the grounds as a whole and the building in particular.
 - Opportunities should be provided to incorporate a wide range of memorials which may be added over time without disturbance to the gardens.
 - Easy access for all from the chapel and car park should be provided.
 - It should be a very attractive area using high quality planting with all year around interest.
 - It should allow for the possible future extension if required.
 - During construction of the garden, noise and disturbance should be kept to a minimum.
 - It should be maintained to a high standard throughout the year.
9. The shape of the potential garden would echo the shape of the book of remembrance building and the design should reflect this, with an octagonal outdoor “room” enclosed by walls and planting.
10. The space around the outside of the garden is very important for two reasons. As well as providing access and an opportunity for designing a suitably gentle approach to the garden, the external edges to the garden will be utilised for memorials landscaped to the same high standards.
11. Any development proposed would be at the same level as the existing book of remembrance building. The entrance of the garden would reflect the aspects of the garden and provide a framed view into the garden along with a comfortable space for quiet reflection.

Types of Memorial and Potential Income

12. The potential garden has been designed to provide space for a range of memorials, which will be attractive to the public. The types of memorials that are proposed can be seen in Appendix 3 and would be as follows:

- Plaques fixed either side of the walls
- Vase blocks edging paths within the garden
- Vase blocks around the garden
- Columbarium units

13. It is important to learn from the experience of other crematoria. For example, although the memorial garden at Darlington has been very successful and well laid out, it sold off the memorials in perpetuity, which means that the space available is shortly to run out and no further income could be gained via renewals. Therefore as with Durham Crematorium, any proposed memorial garden would involve a lease / fixed term with plaques being maintained for a ten year period after which lessees would be given the option to renew for a further period of ten years at the appropriate fee.
14. The costs to the family would cover two elements, firstly the cost of the plaque which would be facilitated through the Crematorium and include the cost of supply and fix and secondly the lease costs for ten years. After the ten years an option to purchase and extension/renewal to the lease is available to the families at a cost. This renewal charge needs setting and reviewed annually but Durham crematorium has not done so as yet.
15. The potential sales, based on the experience of Durham Crematorium, are the plaques themselves and it is suggested that Mountsett should charge £247.60 (inc VAT) for a small 12" x 3" and £397.60 (inclusive of VAT) for a 12" x 6" plaque, which would cover the cost of initial fixing and maintenance (cleaning etc) for ten years, which is broadly in line with other Crematoria who charge between £400 and £600 for a 10"x 18" plaque. For the vases and columbarium it is suggested that the charge is set at the same level as Durham and in line with other crematorium at £593.20 & £1240 respectively (Inc VAT).
16. To provide a view of the potential income last year Durham Crematorium sold 183 memorials equating to £66,018.02. It is anticipated that the likely income to Mountsett would be half this, due to the lower number of cremations handled by Mountsett.

Option Appraisal

Option 1

17. The construction of 3 walls (each 3 metres) which would be angled to be in keeping with the octagonal book of remembrance building, which would provide the opportunity for memorial plaques to be installed on both side of the wall providing space for 270 plaques. This 9 metre wall also provides 38 metres of edge and the potential for up to 152 vases or up to 63 columbarium depending on the number of each sold. A plan of the location and orientation of the wall can be seen in Appendix 5.
18. Indicative costs have been outlined in Appendix 4 and detail the works required but are estimated at £48,000 for the initial construction.

19. The potential sales for a wall of this size range due to the number of vases or columbarium's sold and is estimated at between £69,000 and £89,000 if full sold. This then provides an overall surplus of between £21,000 and £41,000.

Option 2

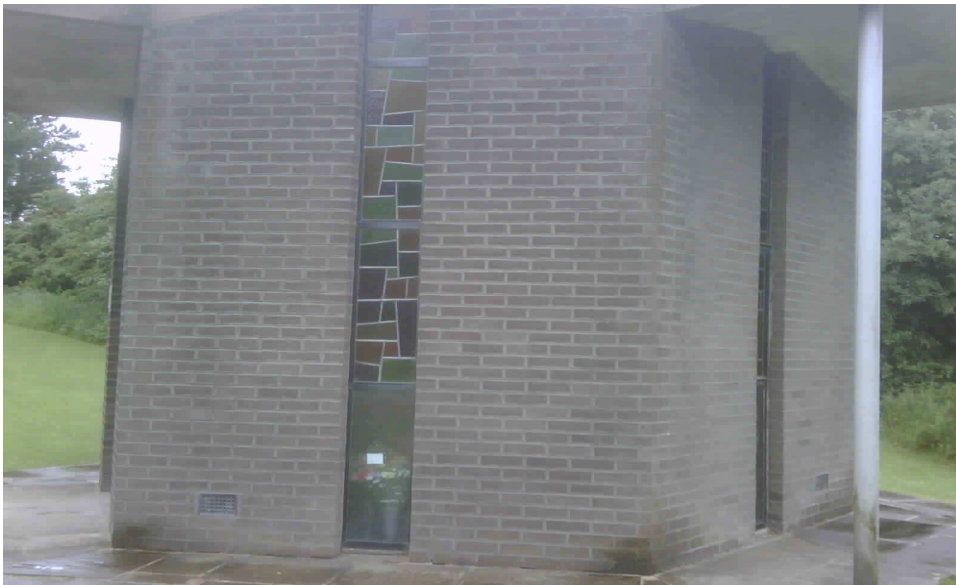
20. To utilise the existing exterior walls of the book of remembrance building (see photo below) and would be a quick and no cost way of allowing memorial plaques without having the need for any capital expenditure and could give Members an indication of the demand from the public at Mountsett.

21. There are 8 walls surrounding the building which are each 1.2m long that would be suitable for placing these memorials. Each wall could accommodate 18 small memorial plaques meaning that if all 8 sides were taken up then this would equate to 144 plaques. To ensure the building is suitable for this arrangement a survey has been carried out and confirmed it is suitable.

22. The potential net income for this wall is estimated at £21,000 for these 144 plaques over the ten year period. Due to the width of the path currently there is limited scope to offer vases or columbarium.

23. If Members were wishing to offer vases or columbarium then the pathway will require extending in order to accommodate these and provide pedestrian access around the building, this has been estimated at £6,000 for the initial construction of the pathway.

24. It would be proposed that the income generated could be placed in a memorial garden earmarked reserve in order to purchase vase blocks/columbarium units in the future.



Option Recommendation

25. Options 1 has an initial financial requirement of £48,000 to build the walls required and there are three main options to achieve this.

- a. Use of available reserves, which stood at £293,454 at 31st March 2011. This approach reduces the reserves that are at a low level and are being increased to develop a fund for the replacement of the existing cremators.
- b. Use prudential borrowing through a capital scheme, which would incur annual financing charges of approximately £6-8k.
- c. Change costs to the revenue account and hope that this is offset by additional income. This option is not advised / extremely risky in the current budgetary climate.

26. Option 2 provides for no initial outlay to provide memorial plaques as it utilises the existing facilities, it also generates the same net income at the lower estimates over the life of the memorial walls and subsequently is the least risky.

Publicity

27. As part of this important initiative to improve and extend services at the Crematorium within attractive gardens, the production of a brochure is seen as essential for both public relations and to promote the type of memorial available.

Recommendations and Reasons

28. It is recommended that Member of the Mountsett Joint Committee:-

- Consider and agree to Option 2, seeing the existing book of remembrance building used for memorial plaques and providing a cost effective pilot to determine demand whilst improving the available services to Mountsett users.
- Consider and agree to extend pathway around book of remembrance if demand for vase blocks and columbarium units are requested by families using available reserves to finance this work.
- Consider and agree the adoption of fees and charges for plaques as per Appendix 6
- Consider and agree for the income received from this initiative to be placed in a memorial garden reserve for potential future expansion at a later date.

Background Papers:

Contact: **Graham Harrison, Bereavement Services Manager**
 Ian Staplin, Superintendent and Registrar

Appendix 1: Implications

Finance

As identified in the report.

Staffing

There are no staffing implications associated with this report.

Risk

None

Equality and Diversity Public Sector Equality Duty

None

Accommodation

There are no Accommodation implications associated with this report.

Crime and Disorder

There are no Crime and Disorder implications associated with this report.

Human Rights

None

Consultation

None, however, officers of Gateshead Council were provided with a copy of the report and given opportunity to comment/raise any detailed questions on the content of the report in advance of circulation to members of the Mountsett Crematorium.

Procurement

None

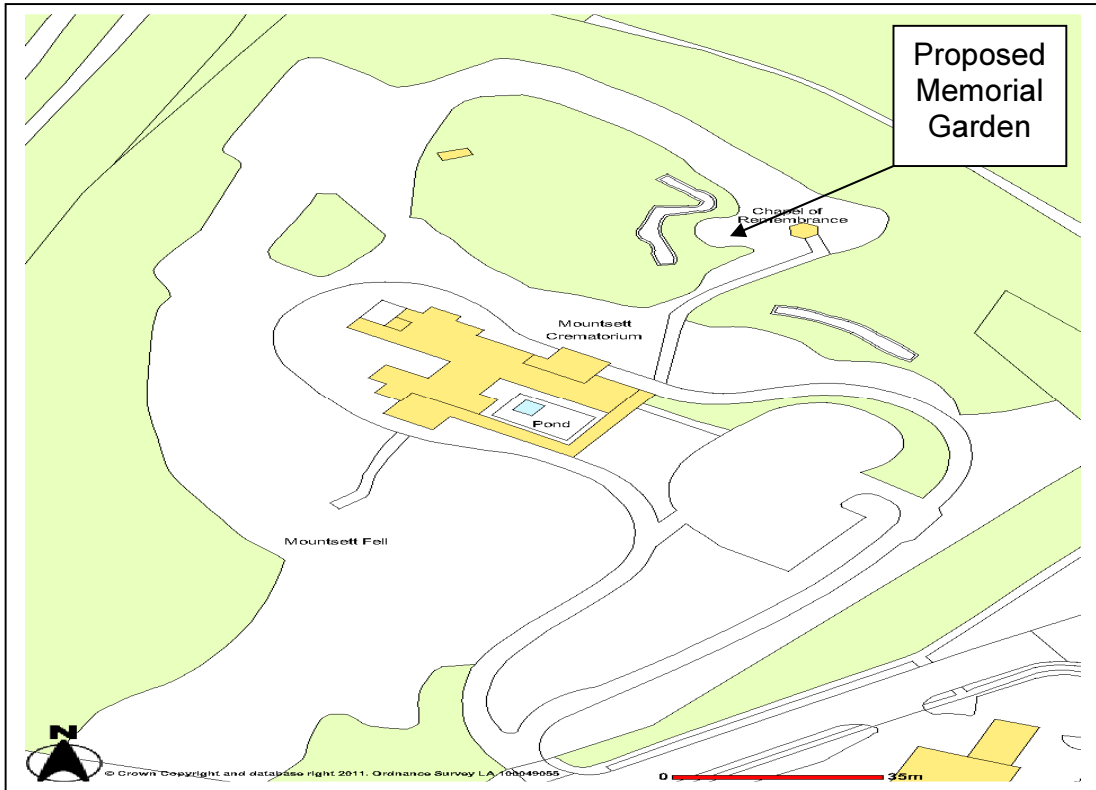
Disability Issues

None

Legal Implications

As outlined in the report

Appendix 2



Appendix 3

Durham Crematorium Memorial Gardens





Appendix 4

Cost Estimates Option 1

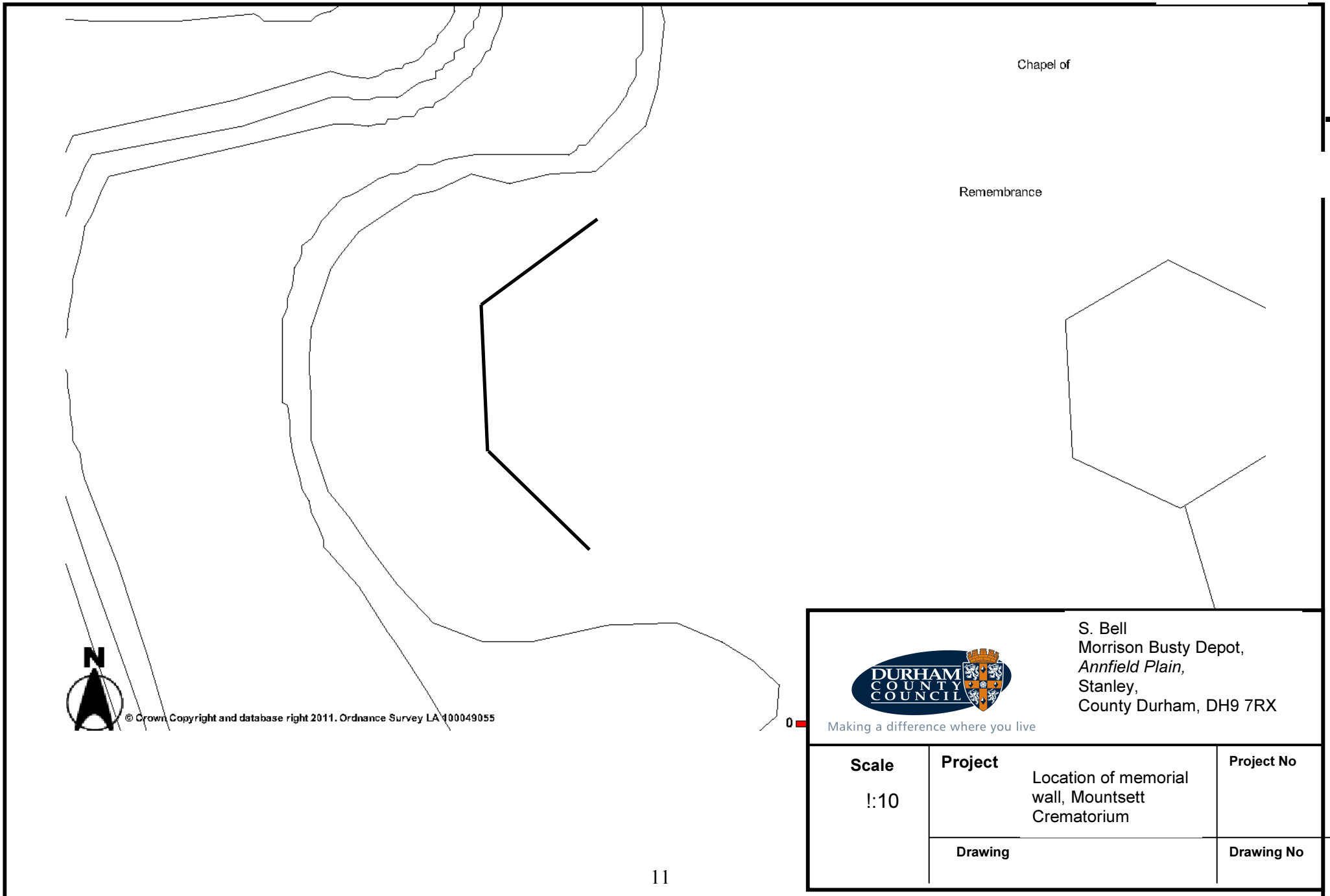
The anticipated costs for the garden are as follows:

1.0 Earthworks	Excavating for the garden wall and paths, installation of drainage stockpiling topsoil for reuse. Grading and spreading existing topsoil	£8,000
2.0 Planting	Ornamental shrubs around gardens Lawn	£500
3.0 Paths, Paving etc.	Paving within and around edges of garden Path from floral display area.	£12,000
4.0 Walls	1.8m high brick wall including piers, Artstone coping stones	£10,500
5.0 Contingencies		£5,000
6.0 Fees	Estimation of consultancy fees for taking the project forward from sketch stage through to detailed design and administering the contract on site to completion.	£12,000

This would include:

Detailed design
Selection of memorials
Preparation of Tender Documents-drawings and specifications
Bills of Quantities
Seeking tenders
Contract Administration
Site inspections during 6 month contract period and a one-year maintenance period.

Grand Total £ 48,000



SCHEDULE OF PROPOSED CREMATORIUM CHARGES 2011-12

	Durham				
	2010/2011 Charges incl VAT (where appropriate)	Proposed Charges 2011/2012 incl VAT (where appropriate)	VAT Status	Increase / (Decrease)	
	£	£		£	%
Seat for Lease of 10 years	£1,021.75	£1,042	E/S	£20.25	2.50%
Columbaria Unit for Lease of 20 years	£1,215.63	£1,240	E/S	£24.37	2.50%
Small Plaques for Lease of 10 years Plus Cost of Plaque at supplier price	£175.76	£178	E/S	£2.24	2.50%
Large Plaques for Lease of 10 years Plus Cost of Plaque at supplier price	£299.13	£304	E/S	£4.87	2.50%
Vase Block for Lease of 10 years Plus Cost of Plaque at supplier price	£522.38	£532	E/S	£9.62	2.50%