

**DERBY CITY COUNCIL  
COMMUNITY COMMISSION**

# **Strategic Decisions On The Future Of Markeaton Crematorium**

**APRIL 2010  
CONDUCTED ON BEHALF OF THE COMMUNITY COMMISSION BY THE  
CREMATORIUM SUB GROUP**

## **COMMUNITY COMMISSION CREMATORIUM SUB GROUP**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Community Commission's budget scrutiny at the beginning of 2010 included the capital programme for the Environmental Services Department. The spending plans included: 'the replacement of cremators at Markeaton Crematorium, which are required to be changed to meet new legislation on emissions by 2012. Total costs are expected at around £1.9m'.

This proposal was relayed to Community Commission members as being a concern to Councillor Baxter. It was decided at the January meeting that it should be the subject of further consideration at a second meeting in early February, at which Councillor Baxter would be welcome. He addressed that meeting and stated that it was essential to retain the four cremators rather than reduce to three, as proposed. He accepted that the installation of new Mercury abatement equipment may require an extension to the existing premises. He made other points about the provision of office space for employees and the service to the public. The outcome of the meeting was that the following recommendation was made to Council Cabinet:

To recommend this capital scheme of £1.9m only be finalised by Cabinet following the report of the sub-group established by the Community Commission.

The Sub Group was comprised of Councillors Grimadell, Leeming and Lowe plus Councillor Baxter. Appendix A to this report includes the evidence considered by the Sub Group, together with the notes of the meetings held. It forms one composite evidence bundle and should be considered as integral to the report. It is freely available from the Overview and Scrutiny team.

This review had, of course, not been part of the Commission's work plan when agreed last July. What I hope this process again demonstrates is that the overview and scrutiny function is able to act swiftly when the need arises.

The outcome of this scrutiny exercise was the forming of the conclusions and recommendations that follow.

I wish to thank the Sub Group members for the time and energy they have invested in the weeks since the issue was identified. A special thanks is due to Councillor Baxter for the invaluable experience he contributed. After a third of a century's public service to Derby he is to retire from the Council. We have informed him that beyond 6 May the Community Commission may well wish to retain his services in an advisory role.

Councillor Alan Grimadell  
Chair of the Community Commission

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Conclusion 1** While the Sub Group has been willing to act urgently to conduct its review it does not believe the scheme itself is as urgent as originally indicated given the achievement date of 31 December 2012.

**Reasons for conclusion 1.** Members had been informed that there was an eighteen month timeline for the project to be undertaken. With the completion deadline being 31 December 2012 that would suggest the latest start date would be 1 July 2011. It later became clear that the 18 months referred to the time from placing the order for abatement equipment, so that all the various stages connected with procurement need to be completed prior to that point. Factoring in a safety cushion of, say, three months to anticipate the growing order books of abatement suppliers would mean an order placed by 1 April 2011. A second cushion of three months to allow for unexpected delays would still only require an award in January 2011. This does not point to a decision needing to be taken as urgently as originally indicated to the Community Commission. However provided the right way forward is agreed the Sub Group will be pleased to see formal decisions taken soon after the Annual Meeting.

**Conclusion 2** The Sub Group has not been convinced that any of the facilities schemes E, F or G are really necessary and that, instead, more modest changes could achieve an acceptable level of DDA-compliant improvement for staff, mourners and funeral directors. Our recommendation 7 is that extra office accommodation can be provided using the vacant staff house. If that proves unworkable a small office extension could be added at the same time as the crematory extension is built.

**Reasons for conclusion 2** Parts of the crematorium, for example the gentlemen's toilet need improvement and the nearby south facing entrance has a tarnished look. It was reported that the back rests in the waiting area are a source of complaint. The facilities are not currently DDA compliant. There is a reported need for more office accommodation. All these issues need addressing and in the case of DDA compliance, promptly so.

However, all three proposed schemes cost at least £.9m. The question has to be posed as to whether this is a desirable use of public money in a time of belt tightening and – perhaps more importantly – what else that sum could be used for.

The Sub Group believe that relatively modest modifications could be made a fraction of the proposed total

- updated plumbing and layout in the gentlemen's toilet,
- widening of the south facing entrance,
- a joiner giving attention to the waiting room seats plus some revarnishing and redecoration

would all improve the facilities for mourners including those with mobility problems at a relatively small cost. Achieving DDA compliance may cost significantly more but should not require pursuance of a scheme of £900,000.

The need for a significant expansion to the waiting area is not accepted by the Sub Group. Many mourners probably would not know there is a waiting room but would probably not use it if they did: mourners were observed choosing to form a quiet queue along the side of the building. The nature of a crematorium is that over the days and weeks a very large number of mourners pass through but are only there a short time. There is simply not a need to provide facilities appropriate for the comfort of persons present for a number of hours.

The Council has had to close popular public facilities because there have not been the funds available to refurbish and life extend the premises. Several hundred thousand pounds not spent on the crematorium would then be available to repair / update other Council buildings or, for example, help deliver the new leisure strategy.

If that proves unworkable a small office extension could be added at the same time as the crematory extension is built (as at recommendation 2)

**Recommendation 1** The paramount project driver should be the fitting of abatement equipment and any changes to office, visitor and funeral directors' facilities should be secondary considerations.

**Reasons for recommendation 1.** The scheme appeared in the January 2010 capital budget proposals. Paragraph 2.6 said 'The programme includes for the replacement of cremators at Markeaton Crematorium, which are required to be changed to meet new legislation on emissions by 2012. Total costs are expected at around £1.9m. This is funded by a combination of council funding plus a current abatement charge of £40 included within existing adult charges'.

This review was prompted by Cllr Baxter's twin concerns that the proposals:

- were substantially more elaborate – and therefore more expensive - than just the achievement of mercury abatement
- involved unnecessary – and undesirable – expenditure by replacing rather than retaining the existing cremators.

After the formation of the Sub Group, its other members also developed a shared concern that a substantial project of enhancing and expanding the crematorium facilities was being piggy backed on the core task of abating mercury emissions. Further, that the focus seemed to be about exploring options about the improvement of facilities. It seemed to have become a working assumption that three new cremators should be purchased to replace the current four.

This view was reinforced when the breakdown of the £1.9m was given. Approximately £1m was for achieving abatement and £.9m for extending/upgrading the facilities. However, within the £1m for abatement about £450k would come from the special abatement fund, leaving about £550k to come from other capital financing. Leaving aside the £450k special fund, a total of £1.45m of capital financing is required but less than 38% is for

the core task of achieving mercury abatement and 62% is for improved facilities.

Space is tight at the crematorium and fitting the additional equipment and internal changes will be needed depending on whether cold storage is to be provided and/or whether the current double ended cremators are retained or replaced by single end cremators. These changes may impact on the visitor and office areas. Therefore, the driver for the project should be the decisions on achieving abatement. Office, visitor and funeral directors' facilities need to be viewed as secondary and consequential considerations. As conclusion 2 and recommendation 7 shows the Sub Group do not consider the spending of £.9m on upgrading to be desirable.

**Recommendation 2** In installing Mercury abators the Evans 300/2 cremators should be retained rather than replaced. Having regard to the options and costs the preferred option to achieve this is to:

- retain four cremators by building *outwards* to create space within an extended building,
- install one triple abater but connected to all four cremators
- use only three cremators (maximum) at a time.

**Reasons for recommendation 2** i) As mentioned at recommendation 1, the outline scheme for Markeaton Crematorium was first raised in the 2010 capital programme. It is the first document in the evidence base of this review, which itself is the result of the interest shown by Councillor Baxter. It is quite rare for an elected member in any authority to have such a longitudinal and detailed knowledge of a very technical area. Regarding the cremators, the central concern of Councillor Baxter was that really good, serviceable equipment was proposed to be replaced prematurely, at a substantial cost to the public and with no certainty that the replacement cremators would be of the same standard.

ii) Mr Mitchell's February report 'Replace or Retain Cremators' analyses the associated issues. This is included as pages 71 to 79 of the evidence bundle. Page 74 explains that the current Evans 300/2 series were installed in 1996 and 1997. Two later sentences rather confirm Councillor Baxter's strength of feeling. 'A 20 year period is generally regarded as the norm, however, many cremators installed by other companies have been replaced within a much shorter time frame due to dissatisfaction with their performance' Then: 'In contrast, the 4 cremators at Markeaton Crematorium are in very good condition and continue to operate within their original design references'.

iii) Two arguments identified by Mr Mitchell which favour replacement of the cremators now are:

- that it is not possible to accurately predict exactly how long the existing cremators will continue to perform satisfactorily and at what cost and
- the effect of 'globalisation' and innovation is that the continued availability of spare parts for old equipment may be compromised.

iv) Although both are indisputable they are also arguments for retaining what we have. If new model cremators are purchased now the procurement process itself cannot guarantee their durability, so could need to be replaced (to reuse the words) 'within a much shorter time frame due to dissatisfaction with their performance'. Further, the trend with globalisation won't diminish so even if new model cremators prove excellent there may be concerns about replacement parts before their 20 year life expectancy being completed. Taken together this suggests the safer course of action is to retain not replace the Evans 3000/2 cremators.

v) Mr Mitchell's report included a financial comparison regarding 'replace or retain' (page 73 of Appendix A). The cost of a building extension was not known, therefore neither could the total.

### Finance entry as printed

Existing cremators	Replacement cremators
Remove 1 cremator - £25,000	Remove 4 cremators - £60,000
Modify 3 cremators - £125,000	3 new cremators - £450,000
Flue gas treatment - £525,000	Flue gas treatment - £525,000
Hot face relines x3 - £90,000	No building extension - £0
Plus building extension -	
Total approx -	Total approx - £1,035,000

Page 134 of Appendix A attempts to incrementally show the effect of retaining four, not three, cremators and then building an extension. On 16 April a new plan was kindly provided by FT which, in turn, enabled a further estimate (below) to be produced by Property Services for an extension to accommodate the four current cremators and:

- twin double abaters or
- a single triple abater connected to all four cremators

as FT stated that both require the same space.

### Comparison finance based on retention, extension, single triple abater

Existing cremators	Replacement cremators
No cremator removal - £0	Remove 4 cremators - £60,000
Modify 4 cremators - £167,000	3 new cremators - £450,000
Flue gas treatment - £525,000	Flue gas treatment - £525,000^
Hot face relines x4 - £120,000	No building extension - £0
Plus building extension - £410,000	
Total approx - £1,222,000	Total approx - £1,035,000^

Note: ^Mr Mitchell has commented (page 136) that £520,000 would not be sufficient to abate 4 cremators. However as a triple abater would be cheaper than two twins the figure is retained

vi) This therefore suggests that retention rather than replacement would cost £187,000 more. Behind this headline figure there are several factors to consider about overall best value:

- relinings are a maintenance (=revenue) cost so should be discounted in a capital expenditure comparison: this recalculation brings down the difference to £67,000
- the *higher* extension cost estimate has been used
- confidence about the current cremators having longer service (next paragraph) against the risk that replacement ones will not prove so durable (as above) and potentially result in another capital replacement in less than 20 years

Therefore the net difference is less than first appears and dependant on future events retention may prove to be the better option in money terms. In so far as an extension means there is an immediate net cost to retention, not proceeding with scheme G but instead having much more modest improvements to facilities will more than yield the balance required.

vii) Retention of the 4 cremators but using only three (maximum) at a time should also add a third to the gap between relinings. Instead of about every five years (= 60 months) that should be stretched to 80 months. More efficient use of the machines, achieved through a mix of Saturday opening, fewer starts from cold, reduced secondary zone temperatures following abatement, will also reduce the operational wear and tear and further extend the gap between relinings.

viii) Actual figures for purchase and installation of abaters will presumably only become clear through a tendering process. However, there must be a substantial cost difference – and saving – by buying a single triple abater instead of two twin abaters. Mr Mitchell has commented this would be a compromise and not ideal. He envisages use might still be made of four cremators at one time. The Sub Group believe that operating with a maximum of three *plus* planning services across the day and week are the means of minimising gas wastage.

**Recommendation 3** Staff training is required to achieve the more efficient use of gas and for staff and managers to plan services and cremations across the day and week. The goal should be to have only one pre-heating from cold each week.

**Reasons for recommendation 3** The project led to the engagement of Mr Peter Mitchell as an external consultant. His involvement helpfully included a detailed analysis of energy consumption at the crematorium. This revealed that 25% of the gas is 'waiting gas' ie wasted gas due to technicians using too many cremators - on average each is idling 36% of the time. Mr Mitchell describes the money wasted on fuel and unnecessary emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> as unacceptable. Addressing this by planning daily use to daily demand should not wait until the project comes to fruition. Indeed, most of the potential energy gains from the project will not be realised if the current practices were continued.

Ms Thornicroft has made a welcome start in achieving a more efficient use of gas by informing the Sub Group that she had instructed that a 4<sup>th</sup> cremator should not be started unless at least 15 cremations would take place that day. We should aim to plan services over the week so that, as with the Westerleigh Group, there is only one start from cold each week. In combination, that company's practices achieve 96% gas efficiency.

**Recommendation 4** Saturday services until 12 noon pm should be introduced as soon as practical to provide more choice for families arranging funerals and to allow practice operating with a maximum of three cremators in use. A subsequent evaluation of Saturday usage should consider a possible extension of services until 3 pm.

**Reasons for recommendation 4** Derby has traditionally held services on a Monday to Friday basis. Ms Thornicroft surveyed municipal operators, including questions about Saturday and Sunday opening. Of the 122 respondents, 70 do open on Saturdays and 52 do not. Of the nearest respondents, Bretby, Chesterfield, Bramcote, Mansfield and Stoke all open on Saturday and only Sheffield does not. This confirms the Sub Group's instinct that Derby should introduce routine, Saturday services.

There is a general expectation by the Government and population that public services should be accessible beyond the traditional 9 till 5 from Monday to Friday. Funerals cannot be attended electronically. In the modern world where careers and lifestyles tend to cause families to disperse, it would make attendance at funerals more practical for more distant relations if held on a weekend. It may be that there would be some displacement of services from normal weekdays but it is also possible that Derby families would chose Markeaton rather than a neighbouring crematorium if the travel needs of further flung relations are met.

Following the pattern elsewhere Saturday opening should initially be until 12 noon. After, say, 6 or 12 months an evaluation of Saturday usage should consider a possible extension of services until 3 pm if warranted by demand.

Saturday services would also stop the cremators used from cooling so much and therefore reduce the amount of gas need on Monday to bring up to operating temperature. This also beneficially extend the time between relinings. It would also facilitate a trial of operating with three-cremators-only to be undertaken – which related to recommendation 2.

Based on the practice elsewhere, there may be a need to introduce a separate, higher charge for Saturday cremations to cover any additional costs identified. Subject to that there would be no adverse impact on the Council's finances because the crematorium is a trading activity with charges that fully recover operating costs.

**Recommendation 5** Sunday services should also be introduced on the basis of specific requests.



**Reasons for recommendation 5** Approximately one quarter of respondents showed that Sunday services are available. Locally this includes nearby Bretby and Bramcote. It is understood that this is a facility available by special request – rather than representing a standard seven day per week – and with charges that reflect that. This also should become an option for Derby families. Mortlake Crematorium has offered Sunday services by arrangement for about 15 years and its manager explained it brings at least three benefits, it:

- offers flexibility to relatives
- facilitates big funerals, because of the time and space available
- is profitable.

**Recommendation 6** Services should become available over the lunchtime pause.

**Reasons for recommendation 6** Only one quarter of responding crematoria hold services without some break at lunchtime. However, at least for Derby the centre of the day is the most popular time for families seeking to book a service for their loved one. Ms Thornicroft has confirmed that there is no operational impediment to having continuous services. The only change required would be the introduction of staggered lunch breaks for the four technicians and chapel trained office staff. It should be noted that the office itself does not close.

**Recommendation 7** The option of using the vacant staff house for office accommodation should not be discounted unless fully explored; the Commission will want to see a full explanation of this in the subsequent Council Cabinet response. The fall back option would be to add a small office extension as the same time as the crematory extension is built.

**Reasons for recommendation 7** One of the drivers for the capital project is to expand and improve office accommodation. This may be only one ingredient but it does contribute to bringing the scale of expenditure close to £2m. The staff accommodation has been empty since October 2008. Cllr Naitta was admirably direct in saying he would prefer the accommodation to be re-let to derive the stream of rental income. The Sub Group believe that allocating the building for office accommodation would be a good case of 're-use and recycle' if it provides space *and* is fit for the proposed new purpose. However, that assessment means suitable, rather than ideal: tight capital budgets have meant many local authority buildings have been recycled for other uses than originally intended.

Having the option fully explored need not equate to delay. It is unfortunate that the crematorium was broken into during week commencing 12 April. It is acknowledged that the manager believes that re-letting to a tenant would bring the deterrent of an out-of-hours presence on the site.

If, following full exploration of the issue, use of the staff house proves unworkable the alternative would be to add a small office extension at the same time as the crematory extension is built, as at recommendation 2.

**Recommendation 8** i) prompt attention should be given to the introduction of a one way system for cars entering and leaving the main car park and ii) further consideration should be given by Highways and Transport officers to improve the junction between Markeaton Lane and Ashbourne Road.

**Reasons for recommendation 8** Regarding i) the current arrangement is that the first entrance (when travelling from the Ashbourne Road direction) is reserved for corteges. Other mourners are directed past to the second entrance. This causes a traffic conflict between vehicles leaving and arriving at the small car park. This point is acknowledged by officers and there was a willingness to address the issue as part of the overall scheme. The Sub Group would like to see it addressed, if practical, ahead of the larger scheme.

Regarding ii) traffic leaving Markeaton Lane at its western point faces a simple T-junction to turn left toward Derby or right toward Ashbourne. Put another way, Markeaton Lane is a side road going off from the east of the busy Ashbourne Road. Mr Hopkin had previously requested that some junction control be introduced but had been told this was not warranted. Outside of the crematorium's operational hours that may be the case; but there is a real problem, particularly for corteges heading from the south needing to turn right. Some part time controls would be appropriate.

**Recommendation 9** The Project Team should fully explore the option of using an existing Framework Agreement as the procurement route

**Reasons for recommendation 9** One of the reasons given for the long time line - and reported need to have an early decision - was the requirement to go through the full OJEU procurement process. The information gathered during this review identified two examples of Framework Agreements. One route – used by Bedford – led to a 'finance lease' arrangement, rather than immediate outright purchase of the abaters. As Derby's approved capital allocation includes the ring fenced abatement pot of about £450,000 outright purchase is likely. The North West Framework Agreement could be an appropriate vehicle on which to 'piggyback'. Comprising 10 lots, numbers 1 to 6 relate to the 6 original participating authorities; lots 7 to 10 are of general application and – despite the geographical element in the name – are available to be piggy-backed by any UK council. The lots cover:

- abaters
- cremator
- building work and
- maintenance

A local authority can choose to use one, all four or any combination Use of the Framework avoids the use of OJEU tender notice and prequalification questionnaire and so enables a council to go straight to Stage 3, the issuing of tenders and then evaluation and award of contract. Mr Williams, of Fylde Borough Council, recommends that financial checks are made even though not required. The Framework covers 7 - ie most - of the UK suppliers. The

key point is that the use of this or other Framework Agreement can save three to four months.

**Recommendation 10** Chris Edwards be invited to be personally involved in the Project Team

**Reasons for recommendation 10** The Sub Group believe that given the scale of this project – both in value and prestige – the Assistant Director should be directly involved in the decision making and bringing the scheme to a successful conclusion.

**Conclusion 3** There is no objection to adopting the now widespread practice of next day cremations by the over night storage of coffins.

The Sub Group had instinctive misgivings about any change from cremation on the same day as the funeral service. The survey conducted by the Bereavement Services Manager demonstrated that the practice is now widespread. Of the responses 66 did not have any next day cremations, but the surprise was that 56 do. Locally, Bramcote, Bretby and Stoke all have next day cremations. Mr Daffurn said that for his company there had never been any problems. And the wishes of families can easily be met: 'If requested via the funeral director that the cremation should be on the same day that is accommodated'.

To quote our manager, holding over could dramatically affect the amount of fuel resource used and could also affect the cooling period of the cremators. If the cremators were not allowed to get cooled, the lifespan of the hearth and inner bricks would be extended thus saving on service and replacement charges. As Mr Daffurn commented, efficient operation is generally understood [by families] as being an environmentally-friendly policy.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Appendix A is comprised of the following documents.

- a) Environmental Services Capital Programme 2010/11 -2012/13  
*Extract from report submitted to the Community Commission on 19 January 2010.* [Pages 3 to 6]
- b) Topic Review report from the Planning and Environment Commission – November 2005 [7 to 38]
- c) Notes of meeting between the Planning and Environment Commission and Council Cabinet Member – 6 Dec. 2005 [39 to 42]
- d) Crematorium Review – Peter Mitchell Associates – October 2009 [43 to 52]
- e) Markeaton Crematorium – Refurbish or New Build – Peter Mitchell Associates – December 2009 [53 to 70]
- f) Markeaton Crematorium – Retain or Replace Cremators – Peter Mitchell Associates – February 2010 [71 to 80]
- g) Site Plans – 4: current layout plus options E), F) and G) [81 to 86]
- h) Mercury Abatement Information Sheet [87 to 91]
- i) Images of the Facultative Technologies cremator designs [92 to 95]
- j) Notes of the Sub Group meeting held 24 February 2010 [96 to 104]
- k) Notes of OSCer telephone discussions 24 Feb to 1 March [105 to 109]
- l) Answers to questions posed by the Sub Group [111 to 112]
- m) Notes of the Sub Group meeting held 1 March 2010 [113 to 114]
- n) Notes of the Sub Group meeting held 15 March 2010 [115 to 120]
- o) Letter from DEFRA to Local authority Chief Executives dated [121]
- p) Scheme G costings [123]
- q) Bereavement Services Manager's Survey of Crematoria [125 to 133]
- r) Revised financial estimates as suggested by OSCer [134 to 136] and response from Mr Mitchell
- s) E-mail correspondence on 14 April 2010 with Mr Peter Mitchell on whether a single 3 abater or two twin abaters should be fitted. [137 to 138]

- t) Disability Access Report – February 2010 [139 to 140]
- u) Property Services Memoranda regarding extension options and costs - 15 March 2010 [141 to 144]
- v) Lay out plan by FT showing current cremators with two twin abaters installed [145]
- w) Property Services Memorandum regarding extension costs - 19 April 2010 produced in light of document v) [146]
- y) Discussion with Bob Coates, Mortlake Crematorium - 19 April [147]