

POLICY DEVELOPMENT PANEL – BEREAVEMENT SERVICES

Subject: Summary of Issues Demonstrated on Cemetery and Crematorium Site Visits

Date: 14 January 2014

Report by: John Paterson, Head of Operational Services

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 This paper is intended to inform the Policy Development Panel and invited stakeholders of issues affecting the Bereavement Service

1.2 The purpose of the site visits to the various burial grounds, was to allow the members of the Policy Development Panel (PDP) to see and experience at first hand a number of the issues affecting service delivery within Bereavement Services.

1.3 In response to issues identified, draft policy is proposed and the views of the Policy Development Panel and stakeholders invited to give evidence, are sought. It should be stressed that this paper is intended to inform the development of future policy and does not constitute policy at this stage. The views and comments of the Policy Development Panel (including consideration of stakeholder's evidence and views) will be incorporated into a future paper to the Executive of Falkirk Council, which will decide upon future policy.

1.4 The four cemeteries visited, provided the PDP with a selection of both traditional mature burial grounds and churchyard of Slamannan Cemetery to the more modern and newer extensions of existing burial grounds at the Hills of Dunipace and Camelon. Within each cemetery, there can be specific local issues however the majority of issues encountered can be found throughout all of Falkirk Councils active burial grounds to varying degrees.

1.5 Cemeteries visited were;

- 1. New Grandsable Cemetery**
- 2. Slamannan Cemetery**
- 3. Hills of Dunipace**

4. Camelon Cemetery & Falkirk Crematorium

2.0 New Grandsable Cemetery

- 2.1** This cemetery could be classified as a new modern cemetery in that it has only been in existence since 2006 and forming the new extension area to Grandsable cemetery.
- 2.2** Within this cemetery, it is very noticeable the differences in the heights of memorial headstones albeit the majority are approximately 1m (3ft 3ins) in height. There are exceptions to this whereby a small number of families have not erected a headstone whilst others have chosen to erect large dominant headstones covering four lairs in length (4m) and more than six feet in height with one single piece of stone. These large memorials dominate the burial ground and impose their presence over neighbouring lairs. These large memorials (a granite memorial headstone measuring 1015 x 305 x 100mm will weigh approx 255Kg) pose the greatest potential risk in years to come if they are not actively maintained by the lair owners as we have seen in some of our older burial grounds.

3.0 Slamannan Cemetery

- 3.1** Slamannan Cemetery contains three distinct phases of development, from the initial burial ground associated with the church, the older section of the cemetery adjacent to the churchyard and then the current active burial ground.
- 3.2** Within the churchyard, there were widespread examples of fallen headstones (highlighted in recent media interest), most notably from areas of sloping ground where soil had been naturally eroded from the base of the foundations undermining the foundations making the headstone unstable and falling over. Within the older section of the cemetery there was less evidence of fallen headstones and this could have been attributed the improved topography of the area (less sloping ground) and probably of a greater influence, is the lack of headstone borders containing exposed soil. This particular area had the grass sward growing up to the base of each memorial headstone thereby protecting each foundation from soil erosion as seen in the churchyard. This feature also projected a more uniform, effective and aesthetically pleasing maintenance regime in contrast to the churchyard area.
- 3.3** Within the newer active area of the cemetery headstones were mostly uniform in height (approx 1m) with headstone borders in place. The memorial headstones in this site are being installed and erected on a singular concrete foundation immediately prior to the headstone being erected. This causes varying sizes and shapes of foundations to be prepared and very little in the way of clear definition

of the designated area for each lair to be clearly identified. It also leaves areas of exposed soil to be maintained with the possibility of soil erosion in the future resulting in the same potential issues experienced in the churchyard.

3.4 Slamannan Cemetery also highlighted another issue whereby lair owners are encroaching onto the burial space with a variety of tributes including; concrete slabs and edgings, flower vases, timber log fencing, metal fences, gravel, soft toys etc. These all have a direct impact on general maintenance operations; grass cutting, spraying and edging. More importantly, they cause major difficulties and inconvenience when preparing a grave or the neighbouring grave for a burial or opening a grave for a second or third interment. All the items placed in the burial space can also often hinder the day to day grounds maintenance operations being undertaken, can lead to conflict with families of neighbouring lairs, it can result in allegations of theft or vandalism being directed to operational staff and projects a lack of proper management of the burial ground.

3.5 Within the active burial ground area of Slamannan Cemetery, it was noted that a number of families have planted living tributes (trees and shrubs) in some of the headstone borders. What probably started out as small “dwarf” conifers had now grown to a height and spread that they were covering entirely neighbouring headstones and lair space. This causes potential damage to the foundations of the memorial headstones by the root system contracting and causing movement in the foundation. Their growth and spread above ground can cause the trunk or branches to lean on neighbouring headstones and also to prevent or hinder day to day maintenance operations on the grass areas or headstone borders. In most occasions the Council have to deal with the issue prior to an interment and the burden of the costs involved.

4.0 Hills of Dunipace

4.1 Hills of Dunipace could be identified as a newer modern cemetery. Within the cemetery there is a large proportion of the site consisting of newly created/used lairs highlighting it as one of the busiest cemeteries within the service. The layout of the site and the regimental layout of the sections with concrete raft foundations provide a sense of formality and order not seen in the previous cemeteries visited. However due to the large numbers of recent interments in the new area, there was a large volume of tributes noted in this area of the cemetery, especially raised vases, personal tributes, soft toys, lanterns, solar lights etc which had started to encroach off the concrete headstone border on to the grass burial space.

- 4.2** Within Hills of Dunipace cemetery we have the Councils only designated Muslim burial space. The orientation of lairs within this section are aligned in accordance with the Muslim faith, in that the deceased persons head is facing the “Qibla” (the direction of Mecca). This physical need for lairs to be orientated in a particular alignment is unique to this particular faith.
- 4.3** There is also a desire from this faith that the deceased are interred within short timescales than that of other faiths. This can result in requests to have an interment carried out within shorter timescales than normal and can have resource implications for the service in having the grave prepared on time. During the committal, from the point where the deceased is carried to the graveside, it is important to members of this faith to partake in the carrying of the deceased to the graveside and to assist in the backfilling of the grave.
- 4.4** It was noted in a number of the headstone borders small trees had been planted in addition to and in place of memorial headstones. As with the above comments in Slamannan Cemetery, it would be proposed existing Cemetery Regulations are reviewed and strengthened to prevent this from occurring due to the potential future damage to headstones and grounds maintenance implications from maturing trees.
- 4.5** There was good evidence of tree planting in the newer sections of the cemetery where they had been placed in areas that a full coffin interment could not take place. This also offers a bio-diversity value and counter balances the large open expanse of space and hard memorial headstones with soft landscape features.

5.0 Camelon Cemetery & Crematorium

- 5.1** This is one of the larger burial grounds and also contains the Councils Crematorium. The cemetery consists of an old established burial ground close to the entrance with the newer extension adjacent to the Crematorium.
- 5.2** The older burial ground has the same issues as identified in Slamannan Cemetery; fallen memorial headstones, potential unsafe headstones, large trees growing next to headstones all having a direct impact on the safety and aesthetics of the site.
- 5.3** Whilst there is a new and very active extension, it appears that there are no concrete raft foundations installed in this area.
- 5.4** Whilst on site, we were able to note the condition of a number of benches that were of varying types and sizes. Whilst visiting Hills of Dunipace cemetery, we noted the presence of a number of uniform hardwood timber benches in the new extension area, all placed on a slab base. This provided continuity throughout

the cemetery on the size, style, quality and colour of bench in the cemetery. This allows for effective management and maintenance of this asset whilst presenting a uniform appearance.

6.0 Camelon Crematorium

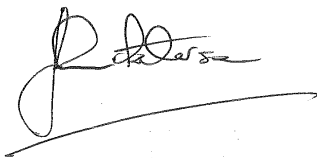
- 6.1** A walk around the Crematorium allowed the panel to inspect both the public areas and the operational areas of the facility.
- 6.2** The panel members were appreciative of the building (built in the 1960's) with the various features style and feel of the facility and the recent work undertaken in the Chapel of Remembrance.
- 6.3** Various aspects of the building fabric were highlighted in relation to the ongoing Capital bid to address those areas in need of attention to make the building rain and water tight and to address some of the works identified in the most recent Condition Survey Report; a new roof, replacement windows, internal doors, toilet provision and access and egress to the building for mourners.
- 6.4** In addition to the building fabric, the three cremators are coming to their end of life with various replacement options being prepared along with considerations for how the Council will address mercury abatement in the future. This will be the subject of a separate paper to PDP.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1** A number of Bereavement Service issues have been highlighted that relate to day to day operations within our cemeteries and churchyards. The majority of the issues relate to the burial space, how cemeteries are used by users and the associated memorial headstones. To address those issues a change or amendment to the Cemetery Regulations will need to be considered or the creation of a new Bereavement Services policy.

8.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 8.1** Members are asked to note the issues highlighted during the course of the site visits.
- 8.2** Stakeholders giving evidence to the Policy Development Panel are invited to comment on the issues contained within this report.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'P. D. S.', with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the signature.

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7 January 2014