

HUNTINGDON'S NEW SUSTAINABLE CREMATORIUM AND CEMETERY



Philip Peacock PSLCC, Clerk to Huntingdon Town Council, shares details of their ground-breaking crematorium and cemetery project.

THERE ARE ONLY TWO THINGS CERTAIN IN LIFE...

As Benjamin Franklin stated, there are only two things certain in life: death and taxes. We complain about taxes and keep silent about death.

We plan and celebrate all of our major family events, but no one wants to plan a funeral, especially for a loved one or our own. The Victorians cast a shroud over death and we still carry on with many of their traditions today.

Bereavement is a multi-million-pound industry, which local councils play their part. For many councils, it is the provision of the burial ground and its maintenance. With income generated from exclusive burial rights and the erection of head stones.

CERTAINTY ONE - DEATH

In Huntingdon, we faced decreasing burial capacity, meaning a location for a new cemetery needed to be found. Members acknowledged that a new burial site was required, and they also agreed to the provision of a crematorium.

To meet the environmental objectives, we needed to think outside of the box and look at new initiatives to meet our challenging aims.

Building work on Huntingdon Town Council's innovative new crematorium commenced in March 2020 and continued throughout the pandemic, to deliver the first purpose built all-electric, carbon neutral cremator in the UK by April 2021. The project comprises of a 120-seater crematorium building, café/function building, a 2,000 burial space cemetery, along with a depot building and glasshouse, which will utilise waste heat from the cremators to allow plants to be supplied for the town.

Rainwater will be harvested to water the plants on site, with solar panels installed on the building to generate electricity, which will charge the battery-operated maintenance equipment and on-site vehicle charging.

The composting of the floral tributes, flowers, grass cuttings and hedge trimmings will be undertaken on site using an 'eco-green composter', with the compost used across the crematorium and in the town's flower beds and containers.



CERTAINTY TWO - TAX

Questions often faced by burial authorities are what damage are we doing to the environment with our practices and how can we follow best practice to reduce the carbon footprint to help protect our planet? The changes we are implementing in Huntingdon can be replicated across the UK.

● COFFINS

The majority of coffins used by undertakers are made of veneered faced chipboard or MDF. The construction of these products involves the use of formaldehyde and other resins to bind the materials together. We, as the burial authority, need to inform undertakers and funeral directors that these will not be permitted in future and if they are used a Carbon Tax will be imposed by the Council and used to plant trees etc. There are alternatives; LifeArt Coffins use less timber than chipboard and are made from sustainable timber. In addition, willow and cardboard coffins can be used.

● FLORA TRIBUTES

Whilst flowers give great comfort to the bereaved family, we need to address an eco-alternative to the current practice. Many floral tributes are formed using single use plastic wreath rings or letters. This plastic is then filled with flora foam, which is made up of thousands of small plastic particles. It takes over ten years for the foam to breakdown, which in turn infiltrates our water course with micro plastics. There is an alternative so called Enviro Floral foam, which breaks down in two/three years, but this still contains the harmful plastic micros. Florists can be encouraged to return to the traditional forms of floristry. Funeral directors and florists can encourage families to have bouquets tied with jute or raffia, all of which can easily be composted. The use of single use plastic frames can be discouraged and when used, the frames should be returned to the florist to reuse or dispose of responsibly.



● HEADSTONE AND MEMORIAL PLAQUES

Across the UK, 90% of all headstones erected use imported granite from either China or India, creating a huge carbon footprint of approximately 2,390 tonnes of CO₂ per year. Research has shown that if only UK-sourced granite was used, the carbon reduction would be 500%. In addition, by using stone sourced from UK quarries, this would protect jobs in that industry. Stonemasons need to encourage families to use UK stone and we as the burial authority need to impose a carbon Tax on non-UK sourced headstones and plaques.

● EMBALMING

Approximately 55% of all bodies buried are embalmed. How many of us ask when a burial plot is requested, has the body been embalmed? Why in the 21st Century do we still allow embalming to take place? It is a throw-back to the Victorian era when refrigeration was not an option and families would wish to view the deceased body. With today's technology, is there any need for mass embalming? Embalming involves the removal of the body fluids and replacing with formaldehyde, a toxic chemical, carcinogenic and genetic disruptor. This is harmful to aquatic life when this has leached into groundwater and water courses. Funeral directors need to be directed away from this harmful practice and if need be a Carbon Tax imposed.

These are some of the changes we are implementing in Huntingdon. It is time for local councils to work together in a united front and challenge the funeral industry sector, nationally and locally, to deliver their bereavement services in an environmentally-friendly and sustainable manner. If we all work to the same action plan, we can all contribute to the reduced carbon footprint of funerals.



LOCAL COUNCIL CONSULTANCY



AN SLCC ENTERPRISE

Local Council Consultancy (LCC) Associate, Reg Williams, shares how the LCC has supported this innovative project.

The crematorium project at Huntingdon Town Council is one of the most exciting and innovative initiatives undertaken by a council in the sector for many years.

It was, therefore, a real privilege for LCC to be asked to lead the recruitment process for the staff required. I was a City Clerk at Salisbury City Council, which includes a successful crematorium and had previously undertaken a substantial project for HTC, setting up the new facilities in Summer 2019, looking at staffing levels, salary options and ancillary issues.

The recruitment of the new Manager was undertaken first, as this person would form a key part in the interview process for the other staff required. Recruitment packs were designed, adverts placed via the ICCM, FBCA and Indeed, and a timetable agreed. This resulted in 36 enquiries and 20 applications. These were assessed and six candidates were invited to interview in November 2020, via Zoom calls.

This brought about an entirely different approach to the process, but by being well organised and structured, the interviews went extremely well, culminating in the appointment of an excellent and experienced Manager. A further three posts were then recruited for – the Assistant Manager, Crematorium Officer, and Crematorium Technician. These posts attracted over 70 applications in total.

An excellent team has been put in place despite the challenges of Covid-19. LCC was delighted to lead on this aspect of the project and it demonstrates LCC is highly capable of undertaking projects, despite the restrictions being faced.

Should you have any queries regarding this, or another project you may be considering, please contact LCC Associate Manager, Debra Harper: consultancy@slcc.co.uk | 01823 253646 www.slcc.co.uk/consultancy