



Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

Wednesday, 19 July 2023

Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium

Report of the Director – Development and Economic Growth

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. Rushcliffe Borough Council have been working over the past five years to deliver a crematorium for its residents that offers an alternative to the existing choices and has the environment at its heart. Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium opened on 3 April 2023 located on Main Road, Stragglethorpe, on the edge of Cotgrave.
- 1.2. This report provides the background to the project, updates Members on the current position and provides information on future plans. There are a few areas for development and input from Members is requested.
- 1.3. There have been previous reports to Cabinet on the Crematorium on 13 November 2018, 9 December 2019 and 14 July 2020.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group:

- a) Provide comment on the operation of the Crematorium to date based on the information provided by officers and feedback from residents
- b) Share their aspirations for the future development and growth of the Crematorium.

3. Supporting Information

Background

- 3.1. The report to Cabinet in November 2018 identified the opportunity for the construction of a Crematorium in the Borough and a potential site. Catchment areas of existing crematoria in the Rushcliffe and neighbouring boroughs were analysed and demonstrated a geographical gap in Rushcliffe which was not being served by access to a crematorium within a 30-45 minute drive time (acceptable industry and compassionate standards). This, alongside future demand linked to population growth and trends in death care (i.e., preference for burial or cremation), led to the conclusion that there was a compelling case to be made for the development of a new crematorium in Rushcliffe.

- 3.2. Wilford Hill was previously the only crematorium in the borough and is run by Nottingham City Council. Drive-time catchment analysis undertaken indicated that a new crematorium in Rushcliffe could expect to undertake in excess of 1000 cremations annually, without accounting for the projected population increase both nationally and in the borough. Therefore, a new crematorium in the borough was considered both a necessary piece of community infrastructure and a financially viable proposition.
- 3.3. Planning permission for the development was approved in September 2019 and the land purchase completed in early 2020.
- 3.4. As set out in the report to Cabinet in July 2020, Rushcliffe's carbon neutral targets are embedded in all aspects of the crematorium. This included a recommendation at that time for officers to investigate new technologies to enable the delivery of a greener crematorium within the project budget. One area of focus was the cremator itself and following investigations, the decision was made to install an electric cremator rather than the more traditional gas option, reducing CO2 emissions by up to 85%.
- 3.5. At this time, there was only one other electric cremator in the UK. At the time of opening, Rushcliffe Oaks were the fourth in the UK and the decision to invest in the new electric technology, rather than the traditional method of gas, has played a huge part in being operationally carbon neutral. The excess heat from the cremator is also used to heat the building and hot water.
- 3.6. The construction of Rushcliffe Oaks began in November 2021 and was expected to take 48 weeks with a view to opening in the Autumn of 2022. There were however several delays to this timeline with supply chain issues, covid 19 still being present and unexpected issues that came up during the process, including the supplier of the cladding having a factory fire and no longer being able to fulfil the order. However, these barriers were overcome and the Crematorium opened on 3 April 2023.
- 3.7. The total budget for the build, including land purchase and provision of the cremator, was £8.5m, although the final account is still being finalised, it is anticipated that there will be savings due to VAT recovery.
- 3.8. As well as reports to Cabinet throughout the build process, a cross party Member Working Group was also established. This enabled the team to update members and get a steer on key decisions throughout the programme delivery including on aspects such as levels of fees and charges.

Operating the Crematorium

- 3.9. There are four members of staff working at the Crematorium (Manager, Senior attendant and two attendants) who were recruited into post over the last two years. Recruiting them prior to opening allowed time for training to be undertaken and meant that the team were all involved in the programme delivery ahead of opening, including setting up all the required processes,

procedures and risk assessments. A member of the Streetwise Team is based at Rushcliffe Oaks full time to look after the grounds maintenance.

3.10. Setting up the operational side of the crematorium was a big piece of work and one that involved a variety of workstreams. These included:

- the procurement of a booking system
- a website
- the identification and supply of the chosen memorialisations
- all cremation paperwork required to enable the team to carry out a cremation
- the operating permit
- pricing structure
- uniforms
- policies and procedures
- signage and marketing material.

3.11. Since the doors of the crematorium opened, there has been a steady rise in take up of cremation services month on month. As with any new business or facility, the first few months are focused on building an excellent reputation and a strong working relationship with partners who the team work alongside daily e.g., funeral directors and celebrants to provide the highest quality of service for the families at the most difficult time.

3.12. Figures for cremations so far:

Month	Full Service	Direct (no service)
April	18	4
May	28	3
June	36	6

3.13. Feedback received from funeral directors and celebrants so far has been very positive, with some travelling from a distance and returning to use Rushcliffe Oaks over other crematoriums nearer to them. However, the most rewarding feedback has come from families following a service. The team have so far supported nearly 100 families and have been surprised that following such a traumatic event, family members have felt compelled to get in touch by phone, email and calling in to say thank you for the service in beautiful surroundings.

Communication and Engagement

3.14. Prior to the construction phase and during the build. Work was undertaken to start to build relationships with all stakeholders. This included:

- Community days prior to and during the build to update local residents and hear feedback. Both of these were held at Cotgrave and attracted a mix of local residents and industry colleagues
- Regular meetings with local businesses to give updates and deal with any issues as required

- Meeting Managers from the other local crematoriums and setting up a peer group who now meet regularly to share best practice and lessons learned (whilst remembering it's a very competitive industry)
- Prior to opening, site tours were organised for all Members, Rushcliffe Borough Council staff, local businesses and industry colleagues
- A funeral director pack was prepared detailing all information needed to access services including step by step instructions on how to create an account and make bookings on the booking system via the funeral director portal. These were hand delivered by the team to all local funeral directors before opening.

3.15. It is still very early days and over the next few months the plan is to build on the positive start by:

- Continuing to build close relationships with industry colleagues in particular funeral directors and celebrants
- Engage with the community by having an open day on Saturday 22 July 2023
- Set up a Friends of Rushcliffe Oaks group with help from the Notts Wildlife Trust to engage local residents in the management and maintenance of the extensive grounds and to maximise the biodiversity
- Regular posts on our dedicated Facebook and Instagram pages
- Adverts placed in local brochures and magazines, for example Cotgrave connections.

Memorialisation

3.16. An important area for the family to consider is how they would like to remember their loved one, often this is through a memorial on site. Great consideration was given to this to ensure families are offered a wide choice of options at a range of price points. This aim was also to ensure memorialisations were made from natural materials, produced locally and in keeping with the local environment. Memorials on offer at present include: an inscribed leaf on a memorial tree; a variety of plaque options including kerbstone plaques along either side of the oak avenue; an engraved wooden slat on the circular bench; columbarium niches; and either rock and log orbs.

3.17. There is also an option for a free entry in the online book of remembrance. This allows family members to add details of the deceased to be available to view online.

3.18. The team are looking at the further opportunity of tree planting for memorials and other options for the interment of ashes.

3.19. The option for taking memorialisation's away is an area yet to be developed e.g., ashes into glass. Funeral directors do offer many options of this type of memorialisation, however, we are looking to offer some items for those family members who visit us, perhaps after a service and would like to see a choice.

Collation of customer feedback

- 3.20. Excellent customer service is an integral part of service delivery at Rushcliffe Oaks and options for how to monitor and measure this are being explored. A simple survey for those who have visited the facility it is felt may not be appropriate therefore other options are being looked at.
- 3.21. The team have had a lot of good feedback verbally and by emails, social media posts or cards and are keeping a record of these. However, it's difficult to get any measurable information.
- 3.22. An option that is being considered is gaining feedback from funeral directors themselves (this is being done on a more informal basis currently) as they are customers of the Crematorium and have, in most cases, more contact with the families. Any additional ideas from members of the Growth and Development Scrutiny Committee would be welcome.

4. Risks and Uncertainties

- 4.1. Cremation bookings and memorialisation sales are unpredictable, especially in the first year of opening. As mentioned above the team are working on a variety of different ways to market the crematorium to mitigate the risk. Based on projections going forward of an average of 60 cremations a month for the next 9 months this would result in a loss of income of £156,750 against projections.
- 4.2. As can be seen in the table at paragraph 3.12, a proportion of the services are direct, which are offered at a reduced cost as they don't include service. This presents a risk to income and the number of direct funerals compared to overall numbers will be monitored. However, it does also represent an opportunity for additional income generation as these can be accommodated around existing service times.
- 4.3. Recent increases in the cost of energy are putting significant pressure on the budget. This is being closely monitored and software has been installed in the building so that energy consumption can be viewed remotely on an hour-by-hour basis. This will enable the team to ensure the building is being operated as efficiently as possible.

5. Implications

Financial Implications

- 5.1. The business model has a target of 4 cremations per day plus 4% of cremations will become memorialisation sales. At present, this target is not being met (see paragraphs 3.12 and 4.1). Rushcliffe Oaks has opened at a quieter time of year and work continues to establish the reputation of this new facility within the local and wider area with funeral directors and residents as another option available to families. Income is being closely monitored. In addition, there are other budget pressures. Budget is required for grounds

maintenance (paragraph 3.9) and there is significant pressure on the electricity costs.

5.2. Performance monitoring is a key area of focus to ensure action is taken, where possible, to meet the business model targets.

5.3. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

5.4. Equalities Implications

Rushcliffe Oaks is fully accessible facility and open to all faiths.

5.5. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 Implications

There are no crime and disorder implications associated with this report.

6. Link to Corporate Priorities

Quality of Life	Rushcliffe Oaks provides a service for its residents at one of the most difficult times in life in beautiful, tranquil surroundings.
Efficient Services	These recommendations make no contribution towards this corporate priority.
Sustainable Growth	These recommendations make no contribution towards this corporate priority.
The Environment	Rushcliffe Oaks is an environmentally conscious crematorium using an electric cremator which reduces emissions by up to 90%.

7. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group:

- a) Provide comment on the operation of the Crematorium to date based on the information provided by officers and feedback from residents
- b) Share their aspirations for the future development and growth of the Crematorium.

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Background papers available for Inspection:	Cabinet report 13 November 2018 Cabinet report on 9 December 2019 Cabinet report on 14 July 2020

List of appendices:	None
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