



Growth and Development Scrutiny Group

Wednesday, 17 July 2024

Review of Rushcliffe Oaks Crematorium

Report of the Director for Development and Economic Growth

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. Rushcliffe Borough Council's ambition to build an environmentally conscious crematorium that offers a different choice for the residents of the Borough has been realised and Rushcliffe Oaks opened on 3 April 2023.
- 1.2. This report follows the update to Growth and Development Scrutiny in July 2023. It reviews the first operational year of Rushcliffe Oaks and provides an update on the various opportunities and areas for further exploration identified by the Scrutiny Group at the meeting in July 2023.

2. Recommendation

It is RECOMMENDED that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group:

- a) Review the actions taken in response to the Group's suggestions in July 2023
- b) Identify new opportunities to further promote and develop the offer at Rushcliffe Oaks.

3. Supporting Information

Background

- 3.1. In November 2018, Cabinet identified the opportunity for the construction of a Crematorium in the Borough and a potential site for this. Catchment areas of existing crematoria in 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 business 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 do 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 focuss 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 that time there was only one other crematorium in the UK with an electric cremator. By the time of opening, Rushcliffe Oaks was the fourth in the UK and the decision to go with electric rather than the traditional method of gas has played a huge part in the facility being operationally carbon neutral. The excess heat from the cremator is used to heat the building and 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 currently being finalised, and it is anticipated that the project will generate a saving of £1.24m.
- 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 Councillors and get a steer on key decisions throughout the programme delivery.

Review of year one

- 3.9. Rushcliffe Oaks carried out 506 cremations in year one which generated a total income of £485,640. This means that in year one a surplus of £61,000 was achieved. This is incredibly positive for a first year of business.
- 3.10. The Manager of Rushcliffe Oaks recently met with all funeral directors who have been regular users of the Crematorium over the past year to obtain feedback. Feedback received was outstanding from all, without exception, commenting that they were finding it hard to identify any areas for improvement. Stand out comments were about the team and the care for families throughout the process and in particular finding ways to accommodate all requests, even those that are out of the ordinary. Funeral Directors have offered a few ideas for

enhancing the site for example, showing the hymn words on the television screen (this has now been done). The walk from the flower court to the family cars can be too far for people who are disabled or elderly (the team are looking at quotes to extend the path from the flower court to the drive and add a gap with a dropped kerb to make this distance much shorter). All feedback is being reviewed and implemented where appropriate. The outcome will be fed back in the quarterly newsletter that the team send to Funeral Directors.

- 3.11. Along with all the local funeral directors that you would expect to use Rushcliffe Oaks i.e. AW Lymn, Coop, AM Buckingham funeral services. There are several funeral directors who travel a distance and actively encourage families to come to Rushcliffe Oaks, in some circumstances travelling past other Crematoriums. For example, G Gamble and Son at Quorn are 5 minutes from Loughborough Crematorium and Butterfly Funeral Services of East Goscote who are closer to Loughborough and Gilroes.
- 3.12. The Manager has been approached by the NAFD (National Association of Funeral Directors) to ask if our venue can be used for a future meeting which has been agreed and will be a great opportunity to showcase the facility to more funeral directors.
- 3.13. The Ministry of Health and Welfare in Korea brought 34 delegates to visit Rushcliffe Oaks on 26 June (during the week the Crematorium is closed for maintenance). They are all civil servants related to welfare for the elderly and funeral culture. They chose Rushcliffe Oaks after looking at the website and said how beautiful it looked. They would like to learn about the concept and how the operation works, as well as the technologies used and a full tour of the crematorium and grounds. Their hope is this will help with learning for the Korean Cremation Culture.
- 3.14. It is very early into year two but growth on the previous year can already be seen. In April 2023, 22 services took place. As a comparison, in April 2024, 52 services took place. Projected income for 2024/25 is £710,556 and the team are working with colleagues in finance to profile this over the year to reflect the trend identified in the first year e.g. lower numbers of cremations in summer months. The following table shows the income generated each month since opening to the end of May 2024:

Month	Crematorium Income generated	Target income
April 23	£18,924	£51,300
May 23	£31,951	£57,000
June 23	£38,954	£62,700
July 23	£45,657	£59,850
August 23	£37,034	£62,700
September 23	£33,607	£59,850
October 23	£28,955	£62,700
November 23	£43,777	£62,700
December 23	£40,126	£49,400
January 24	£65,622	£62,700

February 24	£61,149	£52,250
March 24	£55,805	£57,730
April 24	£59,339	£53,730
May 24	£49,189	£58,705

Memorialisation income and sales to date.

3.15. In addition to income from services, there are also a range of memorialisation options available. For the purposes of budgeting, an assumption is made that income generated from memorialisation will equate to 4% of income from cremations. This is based on information from The Cremation Society which shows that around 4% of families choose memorialisations at the Crematorium where the service took place. There may also be families who choose memorialisation options at Rushcliffe Oaks who did not have a service there. In year one, the following memorialisations were sold:

- Stone Orbs x 4
- Plaques x 3 – bench and slate
- Oak Avenue kerbstone x 2
- Memory tree memorial leaf x 1.

3.16. The sale of these generated £15,920 in year one against a target of £19,425 (based on cremation income of £485,640). As Councillors will appreciate, it can take time for families to decide what they would like to do with the ashes and therefore it was anticipated that sale of memorialisations would increase over time. In the first quarter of 2024/25, £8,000 income has been received from memorialisation orders.

Marketing and communications

3.17. A key area of discussion at the Growth and Development Scrutiny meeting in July 2023 was opportunities to further promote Rushcliffe Oaks. The team have been working incredibly hard over the last year on this and some key highlights include:

- Advert placed in the bereavement brochures at both QMC and City Hospital (only crematorium in the booklet)
- Funeral director/Celebrant newsletter (quarterly)
- Continual liaison with Funeral directors including one to one visits by the team and the Manager
- Open days and Christmas event
- Regular posts on social media
- Introduction of the first comfort dog at a crematorium
- Donations of £14,000 split across three charities raised from being part of the OrthoMetals scheme.

3.18. Relationship building with the funeral directors is ongoing. The Rushcliffe Oaks team want the funeral directors and celebrants to feel welcome and the team are keen to promote a one team approach. Building strong relationships is a key part of our strategy and will encourage funeral directors and celebrants to promote our service over another.

- 3.19. The introduction of Maisie as the first crematorium comfort dog has led to exposure via an interview on Radio Nottingham, a piece on East Midlands Today and ITV news central. Maisie has also been selected as a finalist for a BBC Make a difference award and the winner will be announced at an awards ceremony in September.
- 3.20. The Manager will be looking for future opportunities for communications and marketing that are in conjunction with partners. This is a good opportunity to raise awareness of Rushcliffe Oaks and what it has to offer in a more sensitive approach.

Customers of Rushcliffe Oaks

- 3.21. At the July 2023 Growth and Development Scrutiny Group Councillors asked who is using Rushcliffe Oaks. The team keep a record of this data and the table below shows the number of residents using the facility, compared with customers outside of Rushcliffe:

Rushcliffe Residents	376
Out of area	130

- 3.22. As can be seen, the majority have been from the Borough, however those from out of the area reflects the location of the facility and proximity to neighbouring areas, as well as the reputation of the facility and the willingness of families and Funeral Directors to travel.
- 3.23. The team carried out a piece of work to identify all local funeral directors and those from further afield. Following identification, all the funeral directors identified were visited in person by a member of the team to introduce Rushcliffe Oaks and talk about what the offer is, invite them for a tour, to drop off brochures, funeral director packs, chocolates and pens.

Next steps

- 3.24. To support the growth of the business the team have plans for this year including:
- Continued liaison with funeral directors including acting on the feedback provided
 - Social media posts
 - Advertising in bereavement brochure (as above)
 - Christmas service and open day later in the year
 - Opportunities to hold further relevant meetings (offered to ICCM, Obitus and NAFD)
 - Attend local community events as appropriate
 - Improvements to the bottom third of the site to improve drainage and enable use of the site with installation of footpaths. This will create an additional area for memorialisation
 - Developing memorialisation options
 - Installation of bee hives once work to site completed

- Review of fees ahead of 2025/26 to ensure right level compared to others (this is done every year)
- Continuing to learn about other faiths and how to ensure Rushcliffe Oaks can meet their needs
- Ensuring resilience in the team, particularly in the winter months.

4. Risks and Uncertainties

- 4.1. During the past year many funeral directors have commented that whilst the trends are following their general seasonal pattern, the death rate is still lower overall compared with the years pre-covid and they expect it will take some time for the numbers to revert to their usual levels. Rushcliffe Oaks will continue with the marketing strategy and expects that the number of people choosing Rushcliffe Oaks will grow in the coming year.
- 4.2. The target growth in income for 2024/25 is approx. £200,000. This is a stretching target and there is a risk that this will not be achieved however, as Councillors will see there is a lot of work taking place to build the business but there are factors outside of our control that will influence the delivery of this.

5. Implications

5.1. Financial Implications

The original business model has been revised to reflect what we now know about the legacy impact of Covid and industry trends e.g. quieter during school holiday periods. These revisions had a minimal impact on payback period which was extended from 14 years to 15 years. This now needs to be revised again with actuals achieved in year 1 which will be done over the coming weeks.

As already noted (paragraph 3.9) the Crematorium made a surplus in year one of approx. £61,000. The year two target of £710,556 (this figure includes memorialisation sales) represents approx. £200,000 growth on income achieved in year one.

5.2. Legal Implications

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

5.3. Equalities Implications

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

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

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

5.5. Biodiversity Net Gain Implications

Rushcliffe Oaks is net zero carbon, but continually looks for ways to improve. For example, bee hives are being added to the site later this year.

6. Link to Corporate Priorities

The Environment	Rushcliffe Oaks is an environmentally conscious crematorium using an electric cremator which reduces emissions by up to 85%.
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	No links
Sustainable Growth	No links

7. Recommendations

It is RECOMMENDED that the Growth and Development Scrutiny Group:

- a) Review the actions taken in response to the Group's suggestions in July 2023
- b) Identify new opportunities to further promote and develop the offer at Rushcliffe Oaks.

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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 Growth and Development Scrutiny report on 19 July 2023
List of appendices:	