

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT TEAM'S REPORT TO CABINET

Cabinet
14 October 2020

Report Title: Proposed Extension to Newcastle Crematorium Grounds and Development of Adjacent Land off Chatterley Close

Submitted by: Head of Operations – Roger Tait; Executive Director - Commercial Development & Economic Growth – Simon McEneny

Portfolios: Environment and Recycling

Ward(s) affected: Bradwell directly; All indirectly

Purpose of the Report

To seek the approval of Cabinet to extend the grounds of Newcastle Crematorium into adjacent land within the Council's ownership, and to develop the remainder of the adjacent land for residential use with associated green infrastructure and community facilities.

Recommendation

That;

1. The Masterplan to extend Newcastle Crematorium and to redevelop the remaining Council owned land off Chatterley Close is received.
2. The scheme to extend the grounds of the Crematorium is approved in principle.
3. The Executive Director - Commercial Development & Economic Growth is authorised to consult with appropriate stakeholders on the proposals in accordance with the Asset Management Strategy 2018-21 and to report the results to a future meeting of the Cabinet.
4. The Executive Director - Commercial Development & Economic Growth is authorised to engage consultancy support to prepare a hybrid planning application for the extension to the crematorium grounds (full) and, subject to the outcome of the consultation with stakeholders and public, residential development to the remainder of the site (outline).
5. Subject to a detailed financial analysis, the scheme to extend the crematorium grounds is funded from the capital receipt gained from the sale of the remaining land for development.
6. The Head of Operations is authorised to engage consultancy support to prepare an outline business case for an improved memorialisation offer in the crematorium grounds with a view to generating increased revenue and provision of £14,000 is made available for this support in the General Fund Capital Programme/Borough Growth Fund in 2020/21.

Reasons

To ensure that Newcastle Crematorium can continue to meet the needs of the residents of the Borough for a further 30 years and that the Council's land assets, where appropriate, are used to facilitate the meeting of identified housing, community facility and green infrastructure needs to encourage economic growth.

1. **Background**

- 1.1 Newcastle Crematorium, situated on Chatterley Close in Bradwell, was opened in 1966. As well as the crematorium building and offices, it consists of extensive grounds which have been laid out in phases over the last 50+ years to accommodate the burial of cremated remains and various forms of memorialisation, including small headstones, benches, trees, shrubs and scattering of ashes into lawned areas.
- 1.2 The grounds are now nearing capacity for burials and memorialisation and it is considered appropriate to seek to extend them onto an adjacent open space, which is in Council ownership, thus creating additional capacity of an estimated 30 years. The extension would take up approximately 2.64ha of the adjacent 6.77ha site, leaving approximately 4.13ha which currently contains a children's play area, MUGA, and general amenity open space.
- 1.3 The Council's Open Space Strategy, adopted in 2017, identifies this site as suitable for master-planning to facilitate alternative uses and in September 2018, Cabinet approved the commissioning of a study to explore this. Consultants were appointed and a Vision and Viability Appraisal was produced. The study was completed in July 2020 and concluded the following:– the site offers the opportunity to extend the crematorium whilst creating new play and recreational facilities in the retained green spaces and the development of new homes. The crematorium shall expand into the site, improving its access and movement as well as providing space for new memorial gardens. The green infrastructure would cover almost 40% of the residential area of the site. It would accommodate an enhanced and refurbished play area and MUGA, develop new ecological habitats, retain the existing woodland and re-provide green space. The remaining site would provide the opportunity to build high quality homes.

2. **Issues**

- 2.1 The proposed extension to the crematorium grounds would consist of boundary treatments (railings/hedges/gates), a new egress road facilitating a one way access and egress system, additional car parking, footpaths, drainage, hard and soft landscaping and associated minor structures. The estimated capital cost of this scheme is approximately £1.3 million, inclusive of fees and it is proposed to fund this from the capital receipt gained from the disposal of the remaining land.
- 2.3 Memorialisation is a popular choice for bereaved families at the crematorium and a range of modest options are currently offered for sale or lease by the Council, including small headstones, benches, trees and shrubs. However, it is anticipated that there may be a latent demand for further options in this area and it is therefore proposed to commission a feasibility study to explore the market and determine the range that could be incorporated into the layout of the extended grounds. The estimated cost of this study is approximately £14,000 and it is proposed that provision of this amount is made in the General Fund Capital Programme/Borough Growth Fund in 2020/21.
- 2.3 The existing play area and MUGA on the site is aged and in need of updating to reflect current needs in relation to play and recreation for children and young people. The masterplan provides the opportunity to facilitate this as part of a comprehensive site redevelopment and improvement.
- 2.4 The masterplan provides for a range of new homes with a mix of two, three and four bedroom houses, and 25% affordable housing. These are only indicative figures and would be firmed up during the planning process. The Joint Local Plan identifies the need for 27,800 new homes between 2013 and 2033 (1,390 new homes per year) as a minimum across the plan area. In the latest consultation version (February 2018) insufficient development sites were identified to meet the need in the Newcastle-under-Lyme authority area. These homes, if built, would contribute to this shortfall.

2.6 In accordance with the Asset Management Strategy 2018-21 the public and ward Councillors should be consulted on any proposal to dispose of a surplus asset of this type. The primary purpose of the consultation is to identify any physical, technical or other constraints that might affect the scope/opportunity for alternative use or development being pursued. The outcome of such consultation exercises, taken together with desktop technical assessments, allows the Council as a landowner to consider its options.

The consultation process involves Ward councillors being notified prior to the start of the process; notices being placed on site and the adjacent property owners being notified along with the Parish/Town Council, where relevant. Within the Strategy there is a consultation timetable, for a site that is accessible green space that is over 0.5 ha Ward councillors should be given 3 weeks to consider the proposals prior to a further 6 week consultation with the general public. Therefore, subject to the approval of Cabinet, the consultation period will commence on or around 19th October 2020 and run for 9 weeks up to the Christmas period in accordance with the approved process in the Asset Management Strategy.

3. **Proposals**

- 3.1 The Masterplan to extend Newcastle Crematorium and to redevelop the remaining Council owned land off Chatterley Close is received.
- 3.2 The scheme to extend the grounds of the Crematorium is approved in principle.
- 3.3 The Executive Director - Commercial Development & Economic Growth is authorised to consult with appropriate stakeholders on the proposals in accordance with the Asset Management Strategy 2018-21 and to report the results to a future meeting of the Cabinet.
- 3.4 The Executive Director - Commercial Development & Economic Growth is authorised to engage consultancy support to prepare a hybrid planning application for the extension to the crematorium grounds (full) and, subject to the outcome of the consultation with stakeholders, residential development to the remainder of the site (outline).
- 3.5 Subject to a detailed financial analysis, the scheme to extend the crematorium grounds is funded from the capital receipt gained from the sale of the remaining land for development.
- 3.6 The Head of Operations is authorised to engage consultancy support to prepare an outline business case for an improved memorialisation offer in the crematorium grounds with a view to generating increased revenue and provision of £14,000 is made available for this support in the General Fund Capital Programme/Borough Growth Fund in 2020/21.

4. **Reasons for Proposed Solution**

- 4.1 To ensure that Newcastle Crematorium can continue to meet the needs of the residents of the Borough for a further 30 years and that the Council's land assets, where appropriate, are used to facilitate the meeting of identified housing, community facility and green infrastructure needs to encourage economic growth.

5. **Options Considered**

- 5.1 The Vision and Viability Appraisal explored a number of options before arriving at the current proposal.

6. **Legal and Statutory Implications**

6.1 The Council has a duty, both fiduciary and operationally to utilise its Assets for the benefit of the community.

6.2 Local Government Act 1972 – Section 123 - the Council has a duty to achieve best consideration for its assets.

6.3 Local Government Act 2000 - powers to promote the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the Borough

7. **Equality Impact Assessment**

7.1 Not applicable at this stage.

8. **Financial and Resource Implications**

8.1 The financial appraisal which formed part of the commissioned Masterplan estimated the capital receipt for the residential development land to be in excess of £2.5m. This is based on the assumption that there are no abnormal costs relating to the site and Covid does not have an impact moving forward on land values.

8.2 It is estimated that £100,000 is required to cover the fees for commissioning consultants to prepare and submit a planning application and any associated reports.

8.3 The estimated capital cost of the works to extend the crematorium grounds is approximately £1.3 million inclusive of fees. It is proposed to fund the work from the capital receipt gained from the sale of the residual land.

8.4 The cost of the various fees associated with the seeking of planning permission and the preparation of a business case for memorialisation options will be derived from the capital programme.

8.5 This would result in an estimated residual capital receipt of approximately £1.2 million, subject to the assumptions above.

9. **Major Risks**

9.1 There is a risk that there will be community and political resistance to the proposals, to mitigate against this the masterplanning seeks to consider issues and potential ways in which they can be mitigated. The proposals seek to find a way to extend the Crematorium so that the needs of the local community can be met for the next 30 years, deliver community benefits and needed housing within the locality. Without development within the Borough the Council would need to find additional resources to provide the additional Crematorium space. The consultation on the masterplan as part of the Asset Management Strategy seeks to identify any physical, technical or other constraints that might affect the scope/opportunity for alternative use or development being pursued, hence it is recommended to proceed to this stage.

10. **Sustainability and Climate Change Implications**

10.1 Any issues will be considered through the planning process.

11. **Key Decision Information**

11.1 The report is referred to in the Forward Plan.

12. **Earlier Cabinet/Committee Resolutions**

12.1 12th September 2018 – Asset Management Cabinet report

13. **List of Appendices**

13.1 Copy of Masterplan of the site

14. **Background Papers**

Asset Management Strategy 2018-2021 – available to view on Council's website
Confidential Vision and Viability Statement – Land Chatterley Close, Bradwell – July 2020
Consultation letters and background information – available on request from Property Section