

# **Report title: Middleton Crematorium**

Report to: Cabinet

Date of meeting: 17th December 2024

Cabinet Portfolio Holder: Councillor Tricia Ayrton

Report of: Martin Taylor

Public or private: Private

Key Decision: Y

Published on the Forward Plan: Y

## **Report summary**

* 1. The Crematorium at Middleton is utilised by local residents but requires updating to accommodate the services held there. In addition the cremator and ancillary equipment is at an age where it is unreliable, noncompliant, and potentially dangerous. This report is to consider all future options following advice from independent consultancy reports.

## **Recommendations**

* 1. Members are asked to delegate to the Director of Economy and Place to engage in consultation with the public and contractors the options listed in the report to ensure future viability of the facility.

## **Reason for recommendation**

* 1. Middleton’s Cremator and ancillary equipment is approx. 30 years old and is unabated in terms of Mercury Emissions. Aged and now obsolete computer software has ceased working and we are unable to report on emissions as required by Defra regulations PG5/2 (23). This is directly due to the age and design of the current equipment which cannot be adapted to have abatement retrofitted to allow it to comply with regulation changes, which are due to come in to force in January 2027.
  2. The current equipment regularly fails and is extremely difficult to source parts for – only recently we have had major incidents relating to equipment failure resulting in attendance by the local fire service. Similar incidents have occurred last year and in 2019.
  3. Due to the latest incident, which took place on 14 Nov 2024, the cremator has been temporarily decommissioned by management pending a full independent engineer's condition report, as it is potentially unsafe for staff and visitors to continue cremations. Funeral services are still taking place with cremations completed at Rochdale Crematorium.
  4. The Middleton Crematorium is currently one of the lowest attended in the country due to the small chapel, memorial viewing / waiting areas, and limited parking facility.
  5. An independent report in 2019 recommended the Council cease using the cremator and carry out all cremations at Rochdale as it was the most economical option.
  6. As the chapel is small, redeveloping could potentially double the capacity to around 80 seated + 20 standing. Coupled with an upcoming proposed Capital bid to extend the cemetery to provide future burial space, improve car parking and memorial space would potentially allow Middleton to seriously compete with other local crematoria such as Blackley and Bury in terms of quality customer service, environmental quality and carbon reduction, alongside financial efficiency and further income generation in future years.
  7. Rochdale’s newly fitted cremators have the capacity to carry out all the Borough's cremations including any increase in numbers and are significantly more fuel efficient, safe, and reliable due to the age of the equipment.

## **Alternatives considered**

* 1. Stop using the cremator and leave the chapel as it is. No cost with savings of approx. £40k primarily from reduction in utility costs and no maintenance costs.

* 1. Replace the cremator and install new cremator with abatement – cost approx. £740k – this would involve potentially closing the chapel or reducing service time to accommodate any building works and equipment install. This would in turn limit any opportunity relating to the increase in chapel and waiting area/memorial viewing facility size.
  2. Invest in the chapel and parking facilities to give a better ongoing offer to residents with no replacement cremator having this part of the service conducted at Rochdale. Cost are c £350k capital investment and ongoing revenue saving of c £40k.

## **Key information**

* 1. The cremator and equipment are approx. 30 years old, and the manufacturer no longer exists. The cremator does not comply with PG5/2 (23) emission’s reporting and cannot be adapted to comply, as was the case with Rochdale Crematoria, due to its age and model/manufacturer.
  2. The crematorium has one of the lowest uses in the country at around 450 cremations per annum. An independent report from a Bereavement consultant suggests it was not financially viable to continue operating at Middleton, and that a private crematorium would not replace the cremators and would utilise Rochdale’s new cremators.
  3. Remove the cremator and all ancillary equipment and utilise the space occupied by the cremator and ancillary equipment to redevelop the space and increase the size of the chapel as part of a wider piece of work to increase patronage of this under-utilised but local highly valued facility. This wider piece of work aims to directly affect the current loss of patronage to nearby, (out of borough) crematoria and Cemetery due to evidenced dissatisfaction in relation to the space limitations on the chapel, related parking, and wider memorial facilities.

## **Finance**

* 1. **Option 1** – Cease using the cremator and take no further action - Savings of approx. £40k per year on fuel and maintenance. No costs to mothball the cremator and leave the chapel its current size savings years 25/26 onwards.
  2. **Option 2 -** Remove existing cremators and replace with new cremator with abatement approx. cost £740k. Chapel would remain its current size. No savings.
  3. **Option 3 -** Remove cremator and develop the chapel £350k – Savings of approx. £40k p/a on fuel, maintenance.

6.4

**Option 1** - £40k ongoing saving

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Efficiencies 2025/26**  **£m** | **Efficiencies**  **2026/27 £m** | **Efficiencies 2027/28**  **£m** |
| Employees |  |  |  |
| Savings on Utilities and maintenance | 0.040 | 0.040 | 0.040 |
| Income lost |  |  |  |
| **Net Efficiencies** | **0.040** | **0.040** | **0.040** |
| Additional income |  |  |  |
| **Total Efficiencies** | **0.040** | **0.040** | **0.040** |
| Implementation costs |  |  |  |
| **Total savings less implementation costs** | **0.040** | **0.040** | **0.040** |

**Option 2** – No savings – no table

**Option 3 -** £350k capital investment 25/26, ongoing saving £40k

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Efficiencies 2025/26**  **£m** | **Efficiencies**  **2026/27 £m** | **Efficiencies 2027/28**  **£m** |
| Employees |  |  |  |
| Savings on Utilities and maintenance | 0.040 | 0.040 | 0.040 |
| Income lost*)* |  |  |  |
| **Net Efficiencies** | **0.040** | **0.040** | **0.040** |
| Additional income |  |  |  |
| **Total Efficiencies** | **0.040** | **0.040** | **0.040** |
| Implementation costs (Capital) | (0.350\_ |  |  |
| **Total savings less implementation costs** | **(0.310)** | **0.040** | **0.040** |

## **Legal**

7.1 The Government has introduced legislation PG5/2 to address mercury pollution from crematoria equipment. New crematoria are required to fit abatement plant to remove mercury and dioxin.

## **Human resource**

* 1. There are no relevant Human resource implications resulting from the recommendations in this report.

## **Sustainability impact**

* 1. Impact report to be undertaken

## **Other considerations (corporate priorities, risks)**

* 1. Risk to staff using potentially dangerous / outdated equipment. Breach of Defra emissions PG5/2 regulations.

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