

Statement from Salisbury Area Greenspace Partnership (SAGP) re. Salisbury City Council's proposed changes to the grounds maintenance regime at the Crematorium Garden of Remembrance

1. Both the building and the Garden of Remembrance are listed (Grade II) as having national importance for their unique design and are included in the English Heritage Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. The citation includes the following statement about the designed landscape (see attached plan): *This commemorative landscape demonstrates real sensitivity in its design, reflecting the purpose of the site. As an influential work by Brenda Colvin, a renowned landscape architect and theorist on crematorium landscapes, it is clearly distinguished from the majority of crematorium landscapes of the period, and merits inclusion on the Register.* Clearly Salisbury has something quite special, special enough for both the building and the Garden of Remembrance to be listed Grade II.

2. The original plan (see attachment) dating from 1956/58 indicates that Brenda Colvin's intention with the landscape design was to provide an attractive and appropriate setting for the very distinctive Crematorium building. There are mown grass lawns around the building which acts as a focal point for the wedge shaped blocks of woodland trees that fan out beyond into the wider landscape. From the lawn area broad mown paths through tall grass are shown to radiate out between the blocks of woodland to allow people to freely access the whole site.

3. Unfortunately the change in the grass maintenance regime 2 years ago was poorly implemented without the original plan being adapted for the current situation. It was difficult to get to the seats or gain access to the areas under the maturing trees where ashes can be scattered, the mown paths were not wide enough for easy circulation, it was difficult to understand the new path layout without a plan, or to appreciate the benefits of taking a more sustainable and wildlife friendly approach to the management of parts of the grassland areas or to appreciate how having access to nature could contribute to people's experience of peace and tranquility. The more recent removal of the rose beds is, however, a great improvement to the appearance of the lawn areas immediately in front of the Crematorium building and to the entrance area, the wildflower sowings in the former rose beds between the access roads have been effective and it is understood that some woodland management is planned following the recommendations of a recent arboricultural report but we have no details to date.

4. The Greenspace Partnership is concerned that decisions are being made in a piecemeal way without the benefit of a comprehensive **landscape management plan** and long term strategy for the Garden of Remembrance to secure the future of this important asset. Without such a plan and the Britain in Bloom judges have picked up on this point, it is difficult for those responsible for decision making and management to consider the site as a whole or to provide a long term framework for addressing the day to day maintenance tasks or the longer term management and development issues.¹

¹ SAGP undertook a detailed review of the landscape assets and potential of the Crematorium site to assist the City Council with its deliberations in 2013.

5. The Greenspace Partnership acknowledges the sensitivities around the use of the site including the management of memorials, problems with deer and the fact that people can tend to perceive tall grass as untidy when the wildflowers have gone to seed. The difficulties with the appearance of the tall grass areas could be overcome by cutting as early as late June. An alternative would be to establish more late summer flowering plants within the grass sward to extend the interest and then take a cut in early autumn once the flowers have dropped their seed. There are a number of options that could be explored to enhance the biodiversity and interest of the grassland. Reverting to a more formal management and maintenance regime – in other words mowing all grass areas on a regular basis, is a retrograde step not only because it is out of line with the original design intention but because it is unsustainable and out of line with what other local authorities and public bodies are successfully doing which is taking a more extensive and sustainable approach to grassland management. A good local example is Arnos Vale Cemetery in Bristol.

6. Whilst SAGP appreciate that current resources are limited, information from the recent Parks South West: Call to Action Conference in Exeter indicates that the Heritage Lottery Fund's Parks for People grant programme is now supporting the revitalization of designed landscapes including cemeteries as well as parks, with substantial funding. A 'Friends Of' group is one of the criteria and the partnership would urge the Council to explore this further because a grant could secure major funding to support the ongoing development of this important and special landscape and could potentially include the adjacent cemetery.

Summary

Salisbury Area Greenspace Partnership does not support the proposal to return to regularly mowing all the grass in the Garden of Remembrance. However, it would be happy to support the City Council to achieve a more sustainable approach to grounds maintenance which should be developed within the context of an overall strategy for this site, and include a landscape management plan that looks at adapting the management and maintenance to reflect the maturing landscape in a sensitive way.

But this is not just about grass mowing. We would urge the City Council to be proud of this special place and have a greater ambition for it because a broader and longer term vision is needed to secure the future of the Garden of Remembrance as an important community asset.

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Aerial View of Site

To see all the details that are visible on the screen, use the Print link next to the map.



Brenda Colvin's Layout Plan

