



Economic Statement in support of new planning application to replace existing garage and store shed with extension to existing building

Background

Dignity Pet Crematorium was established in 1992 when a bespoke cremator was placed within a grade 2 listed Brick Kiln Planning Ref. No: 91/21166/FUL & Ref. No: 91/00846/LBC.

The purpose of the crematorium was to provide a service for the community where they could have their much-loved domestic pet individually cremated with the care and respect that they deserved instead of being taken for disposal via their veterinary surgery.

In 1999 planning permission was obtained for a bespoke pet crematorium building to increase our capacity as a result of sustained growth as well as better accommodate the clients that wanted to collect their pet's ashes or bring their deceased pet to the crematorium in person. (99/01436/FUL). No restrictions were imposed by the council as to clients attending the crematorium.

In 2011/12 we were granted permission to extend the premises further to increase both office space and client areas; at the same time building a covered walkway, charity well and improving safety by widening the existing gateway to the main entrance. (11/00698/FUL & 12/00694/FUL)

In 2021 we were granted permission to build a detached two storey outbuilding for ancillary purposes including new reception area for clients collecting their pet's ashes and more office space to accommodate our expanding team. (21/00881/FUL)

The Current Situation

Our service has continued to grow steadily each year at a rate of approx. 15%.

Although we are well within our capacity for the physical process of individually cremating the pets that are referred to us we have outgrown the pet crematorium building due to increased staff and visitor numbers. Since 2011 our staff numbers have increased on average 10% year on year.

Since our humble beginnings in 1992 Dignity has become one of the most respected pet crematoria in the country. We have won and been a finalist in numerous local and national awards including being awarded "Best Pet Crematorium" at the Cemetery of the Year Awards 2009. In 2021 we won the Service Excellence award at INSPIRE21. Kevin, Dignity's owner, was also recognised with an honorary fellowship from the University of Winchester in 2014 for the ethics driven values of Dignity's service; both to pet owners and the environment. To maintain our position at the forefront of our industry we need to offer the best facilities possible to our clients and the proposed works would allow us to continue our mission to be the best independent pet crematorium in the UK.

The veterinary industry has changed massively in the past 10 years with many local vets having been purchased by national companies, some of whom now also own pet crematoria. These companies automatically refer pet owners to their in-house service or to a national firm, based out of the local area, who they are contracted to. As a result, we have focused on providing personalised pet funeral services direct to the public which has led to a steady increase in daily visitors.

Due to the continued expansion of our team and service we gained permission for a two storey support building that will be used for the increasing amount of clients that choose to collect their ashes from Dignity.

We have been using a single skin garage as temporary office space and for a purpose built cool room to house the pets in our care prior to cremation. This building is not fit for purpose.

As cremation numbers have also steadily increased over time we have begun to see a strain on our capacity to respectfully store people's pets in our existing cool rooms.

The temporary office space is not suitable for our team. We have had to bring in portacabins to cope with our staff numbers until the new developments are completed. We also use the old garage as a meeting space, this too is not suitable as it is too small and not private.

At present the team is having to share the client toilets as we have outgrown our staff toilet facilities.

We are also at capacity with the storage of items essential to the day to day running of the business including caskets, urns, coffins and an assortment of other crucial supplies.

Local Economy

For several years we have offered popular “Same Day” and “Attended” cremation services; enabling pet owners to stay in the local area whilst their pet is individually cremated so that they can return home with their ashes later the same day. Owners are given an information pack on the local area giving details of local eateries, shopping & garden centres as well as local walks such as the Basingstoke Canal. The local economy therefore directly benefits because of our service. We now employ up to 40 staff as both employees and contractors from the local area to work as part of the Dignity team.

Benefits of the proposed works

The proposed new building will allow us to:

- Increase the office space to reduce the current overcrowding and accommodate the greater volume of staff now required to operate the crematorium
- Provide much needed additional toilet facilities for staff (including disabled facilities)
- Create a new area for team meetings
- Create additional storage area for stock and essential supplies.
- Create additional cool room capacity, which is essential for us to maintain the respectful storage of pets prior to cremation.
- Provide a new area for us to take client’s pre cremation wishes. This is where we take a paw print or fur clipping for a client before cremation.
- Provide an office area for our driving team
- Create a better working environment for the team who are currently sited in the temporary office area.
- Provide increased employment opportunities.

Parking & Traffic

To limit the impact on local traffic flow and control off-road parking at the site customers are asked to visit by prior appointment only. This means the proposed works will not significantly increase the number of vehicle movements.

The pet crematorium operates 4 collection vehicles that responsively collect pets on a daily basis. The proposed works will not increase the movement of work vehicles.

Onsite parking for both staff and the public has been increased in recent years to accommodate the needs of the business.

“Pet Crematorium” road signs were installed by Hampshire County Council and “SLOW” signs have been painted on the carriageway.