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# NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

29 August 2023

## Cabinet

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**Title:** Memorial benches, plaques and other memorial opportunities

**Purpose:** To provide an overview and seek Cabinet approval of the appropriate options to be supported for memorials for members of the public to remember a loved one.

**Recommendation:** That Cabinet approves the range of options in respect of memorials.

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## 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 North Ayrshire Council has a longstanding history of providing memorial benches and plaques to offer bereaved families an opportunity to remember their loved ones in a lasting and meaningful way. Over time, the large accumulation of benches and plaques together with challenges with suitable locations, maintenance and sensitivities associated with the removal of floral tributes led to the ongoing temporary suspension of the service and investigation of alternative approaches.
- 1.2 Elected Members and enquiries from the public have indicated there is an appetite for an enhanced and bespoke suite of memorial alternatives that could be offered to bereaved families. The Streetscene Strategy Team has identified potential solutions that could offer an enhanced service to meet these needs and requirements.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 North Ayrshire Council has a longstanding history of providing memorial benches and plaques to offer bereaved families the opportunity to remember their loved ones in a lasting and meaningful way. Over time, the large accumulation of benches and plaques, challenges with suitable locations, maintenance, and sensitivities of removing tributes, led to the temporary suspension of the service and the investigation of alternative approaches.
- 2.2 It is recognised and acknowledged that there is a desire of many members of the public to remember loved ones with a memorial in the surroundings with which they were familiar. These requests are agreed and accommodated wherever possible, but any decision must recognise the needs of the wider public. The Council therefore requires to ensure that the memorial process is managed and regulated for the mutual benefit of all. This can also be to the benefit of the community if the memorial enhances or makes the location more attractive by helping to maintain the character of the area. The principles to be adopted will ensure that requests for memorials are responded to in a consistent efficient and sympathetic manner.

## Objectives

2.3 The objectives of a memorial offer are to ensure that:

- Unique remembrance spaces for local people are provided to celebrate and mark the lives of loved ones;
- The memorial offer and service is clear and easily understood;
- The response to contrasting needs is balanced and appropriate;
- The use of public spaces is not compromised and ensure the quality of attractiveness is maintained for the use of all residents and visitors;
- Any memorial is appropriate for the location in which it is placed;
- All memorials are cost-neutral and low maintenance for the Council;
- Costs of supply and installation are affordable and are covered by the applicant of the memorial.

## Responsibilities

2.4 The following responsibilities and requirements are proposed for the options.

- The location and types of memorials for individuals will be agreed with applicants.
- Priority will be given to applicants that are resident in North Ayrshire or have a direct connection with the area. Other applications will be considered on a case by case basis;
- Memorials should have some community benefit either as street furniture or by enhancing the appearance of the local area;
- The cost of supply and installation of any memorial will be covered by the applicant and paid for prior to installation;
- The responsibility for the maintenance of any memorial is clearly defined and communicated prior to installation;
- The Council will accept no responsibility if a memorial is damaged, vandalised or stolen;
- In the event of damage by accident, vandalism or it becomes unsafe and beyond economical repair, the Council reserves the right to remove and not replace the memorial;
- Once installed the memorial can only be repositioned with the agreement of the Council;
- Any plaques or wording must be a suitable size, colour and type face and agreed with the Council in advance;
- Once installed the memorial will become the property of the Council and any routine maintenance costs will be covered by the Council.
- Any plaques will remain the property of the applicant and must be maintained in good condition;
- No additional structures or mementoes e.g. fencing, wreaths, flowers, can be placed on or at the memorial at any time.

## **Options**

### **Memorial Benches and Plaques**

- 2.5 The existing memorial option of procuring a memorial bench and/or attaching plaques to benches is nearing saturation point and it is proving difficult to support the wishes of individuals in specific locations such as Largs Promenade.
- 2.6 To provide this service in the future, consideration must also be given to the length of time a memorial stays in place and to consider potentially bringing assets back into circulation after a period of time.
- 2.7 Alternatively, the option to purchase a bench with a prefabricated memorial could remain. However, the asset would be placed in a location identified by the Council and agreed with the applicant, such as parks and open spaces rather than the already congested coastal areas.
- 2.8 North Ayrshire Council will be responsible for all installation work. If the bench is to be placed on grass it will usually be fitted to a concrete base. Memorial plaques will require to be made of brass, stainless steel or aluminium and will be a maximum agreed size. Any inscription on plaques will require approval by the Council prior to fitting. The engraved plaque will be fitted to the bench by the Council.
- 2.9 It is proposed that this would be cost neutral to the Council with actual costs paid by those requesting the bench and/or plaque. It should be acknowledged that the costs of a memorial bench could be significant as the bench will be placed in a public space and will need to be durable, hard wearing and be of a higher specification than a typical bench used in someone's garden.

### **Living Memorial Tree**

- 2.10 Dedicating a tree provides a living, growing memorial to a loved one and a poignant way of remembering them.
- 2.11 The Woodland Trust offer this facility across the UK and can range from individual trees to whole areas of woodland. It is proposed that North Ayrshire consider a similar initiative and identify, and set aside, areas that will be suitable for this.
- 2.12 This would not only provide a remembrance to a loved one but also contribute to the global climate challenge. This would complement the Council's tree planting strategy 'North Ayrshire's 2030 Woodland' with areas of woodland/open space be set aside for memorial trees.
- 2.13 To recognise Climate Change and the Cost of Living Crisis, and the work done by the Council to reduce the impact of this, it is proposed that living memorial trees be provided free of charge to residents. The only cost to residents would be the purchase and installation of a plaque. This will be funded from the Tree Planting Strategy Investment Fund budget until the budget is fully committed.

## Metallic memorial trees

- 2.14 Metallic memorial trees positioned in high amenity areas would offer a unique opportunity to remember family members and loved ones.
- 2.15 Metallic memorial trees are able to provide up to 640 memorials in one location, creating a focal point for visitors and a single point of focus for families. The assets could become an attraction to visitors, require little to no maintenance, have a reduced impact on resources and would be cost-neutral.
- 2.16 Officers have identified an opportunity to promote this as a memorial offering. Once installed, the tree then has anodised gold-effect aluminium 'leaves', engraved with a loved ones' details, affixed securely to its branches over time. Leaves would be attached by Streetscene maintenance operatives. Similar trees have been installed successfully in other locations including across the UK and internationally. Example images of the tree and the leaves are provided below.



- 2.17 The tree is manufactured from laser cut steel, stands at 3.2m in height, and has 640 spaces for memorial leaves. The tree is fixed to the ground with a two-part concrete foundation. The materials and manufacturing process are designed to withstand all weather conditions including exposed locations. Having purchased a memorial leaf, people can arrange the engraving of names, dates of birth and death with the possibility of a personalised message on the reverse and return it to be attached to the memorial tree. The tree memorial acts as a striking piece of public art, large enough that most leaves remain out of reach but still providing legibility of the messages engraved.
- 2.18 As with any public realm asset, the risks from anti-social behaviour must be considered. If this is an offering that members are keen to promote, potential locations for this will be discussed further with local ward members. The tree is exceptionally robust, and the leaves themselves are securely fixed to the tree with pop rivets.
- 2.19 It is estimated that the cost of implementing this initiative could be cost neutral over a 5-7 year period.

## Memorial Rocks

- 2.20 Memorial rocks and stones offer a simple natural way to remember loved ones. Rocks can be placed on a beach or thrown into the sea, potentially being washed up for others to find. They can be placed in a park or open space where loved ones enjoyed or potentially into areas specifically created to house the memorials.

## Digital Remembrance

- 2.21 Not all bereaved family and friends are local and may not be able to easily visit physical memorials.
- 2.22 A digital page of remembrance would offer people from all over the world the chance to log in and view memorials at any time.

## Options from other organisations/charities

### Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)

- 2.23 The RSBP offer bereaved families the opportunity to remember their loved ones by making a gift In Memory to the RSPB this will help protect birds and wildlife in the UK and abroad, whilst continuing the memory of loved ones.

### National Trust for Scotland, Plant a Memory

- 2.24 Plant a Memory helps bereaved families celebrate the life of their loved one whilst remembering them in a special way. It also helps National Trust for Scotland to protect the places that loved ones visited and explored, creating many fond memories.

## Approach from other Local Authorities

- 2.25 Councils around the UK have implemented a varied memorial offer. Officers have researched a number of offerings via the Association of Public Sector Excellence (APSE) and other desk research. The proposals contained within this paper align with best practice across the UK.

## **3. Proposals**

- 3.1 The existing memorial offer is nearing capacity in North Ayrshire. Throughout the country, practical alternatives are being considered and implemented that offer a range of affordable options with minimal resource implications to Councils.
- 3.2 It is proposed that the North Ayrshire Council memorial offer provides a range of affordable options to bereaved families and friends to assist them to celebrate a life and remember a loved one. Choice and affordability will be key with responsibilities made clear from the outset. It is proposed that North Ayrshire Council will limit prices to the actual cost of each memorial selected with living trees provided free of charge. Therefore, the Council will not generate any surplus from its memorial offer.
- 3.3 It is proposed that Cabinet approves a balanced range of memorial options for implementation including:
- Benches and Plaques
  - Living Memorial Trees
  - Metallic Memorial Trees
  - Memorial rocks
  - Digital Remembrance

#### **4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty,**

##### **Financial**

- 4.1 It is proposed that memorial offerings are cost neutral through full cost recovery with no surplus incurred. The offer of living memorial trees free of charge will be met from the Tree Planting Strategy Investment Fund.

##### **Human Resources**

- 4.2 This initiative will be delivered from existing resources from the Council's Streetscene service.

##### **Legal**

- 4.3 This proposal is fully aligned to the duty to promote Wellbeing and Best Value contained in the Local Government (Scotland) Act 2003.

##### **Equality/Socio-economic**

- 4.4 None.

##### **Environmental and Sustainability**

- 4.5 In respect of the living memorial tree option this will contribute to the Council's declaration of a Climate Emergency and to help reach net zero.

##### **Key Priorities**

- 4.6 The proposal supports the Council Plan's strategic priority on Climate Change through the Living Tree memorial. The offer of no cost/low cost options also supports the Council's desire to reduce the impact of the Cost of Living Crisis.

##### **Community Wealth Building**

- 4.7 The proposals align to the Council's Community Wealth Strategy through the Land and Assets pillar.

#### **5. Consultation**

- 5.1 Consultation took place with the Policy Advisory Panel on 2 February 2023 and each of the six Locality Partnerships in March 2023.

RUSSELL McCUTCHEON  
Executive Director (Place)

For further information please contact **Thomas Reaney, Head of Service (Neighbourhood Services)**, on **01294 324570**.

#### **Background Papers**

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