

Site search

Introduction

The directors of Hooton Paddocks Ltd have particular experience of developing new crematoria having built 21 in the past 17 years. With one exception all of these facilities were built on green field sites in the countryside with three established in the Green Belt.

These new crematoria offer state of the art facilities with green landscapes and calm surroundings. The aim is for the bereaved to leave with memories of green spaces, flowers and trees rather than the image of a building. Access arrangements are carefully designed to avoid bottlenecks and queuing. The modern, high-quality facilities are then matched by the best possible care by staff and the provision of well-kept and attractive surroundings.

Identification of a gap in the provision of cremation services

Ellesmere Port and the South Wirral has long been identified by the bereavement profession as poorly served for cremation services and I have particular knowledge of this deficiency having been born and raised in west Cheshire.

The existing crematoria at Landican and Blacon were designed to serve Birkenhead and Chester respectively but their catchments have grown to cover the whole of the Wirral peninsula. Landican is the 4th busiest crematorium in the UK with its position set to climb higher still as new permitted crematoria are built to relieve pressure on the existing busiest facilities elsewhere. Blacon is also relatively busy for a single chapel crematorium and has similar capacity constraints to Landican. This quantitative and qualitative need for a new crematorium is examined in more detail within my accompanying Proof of evidence.

This report includes isochrones based on the existing drive times for funeral parties from existing crematoria.

Funeral corteges travel at lower speeds than normal traffic partly due to reverence to the bereaved and also to try and keep the cortege together so that the whole party arrives at the same time for the funeral service. Even in the absence of other mourners, the cortege will travel at their usual speed as a matter of respect and tradition.

The 30-minute threshold has been established as a limit to an acceptable journey time for the bereaved by a number of appeal decisions. One such decision was at Camborne, **CD 6.3**, where the inspector ruled:

'29. In previous crematorium cases an industry standard, or "rule of thumb", has been applied at 30-minute travel time for the funeral cortege. It has not been rigidly applied in all cases and in this area, with its dispersed, low-density population, I consider it need not be definitive of the populations served by the facility. Nonetheless it provides a starting point for the assessment of the quality of service provided to the bereaved.'

Site search for a new crematorium

The accompanying need report shows that the communities of Ellesmere Port, Eastham, and Hooton lie on the very edge, if not beyond, the 30-minute threshold. The report also confirms how the two existing crematoria are unable to meet existing demand and that additional capacity is required to ensure that bereaved families have a reasonable level of care.

A new crematorium within this area would be able to relieve pressure on both Landican and Blacon by sitting between the two as well as providing a more accessible facility to those communities in Ellesmere Port and South Wirral.

Crematoria in Flintshire, Liverpool and other parts of Cheshire are more remote and not capable of meeting the needs of bereaved families in Ellesmere Port and the South Wirral.

The search for a new crematorium to meet this need started over twenty years ago as part of Crematoria Management's (a subsidiary of the Westerleigh Group) application to develop a new facility on Waterworks Lane, Hooton. I led this application as CEO of Westerleigh and was the key witness on need at the public inquiry.

Whilst that application was turned down at appeal in 2008, I have continued the search for a suitable site, firstly whilst at Westerleigh and more recently as an independent crematorium company, Hooton Paddocks Ltd. The need for a crematorium has also continued to grow with the CWAC's planning officer now recognising that it represents the very special circumstances to allow development in the Green Belt, as confirmed in the officer reports to the planning committee.

Search criteria

There are a number of unique restrictions which apply to crematoria, most notably section 5 of the Cremation Act 1902, **CD 8.1**, which states that:

‘No crematorium shall be constructed nearer to any dwelling house than 200 yards (182 metres) except with the consent, in writing, of the owner, lessee and occupier of such house, nor within 50 yards of any public highway.’

The 200-yard rule effectively rules out residential urban areas and usually forces new crematoria to be located beyond the urban envelope, but reasonably close to the population centres they are intended to serve.

Other factors which affect the choice of a site include:

- The site should be approximately 10 acres in size.
- The site needs to be reasonably close to a main road to allow safe and convenient access for bereaved families.
- Close to main centres of population to be considered a convenient alternative to existing crematoria and to meet a need for new facilities.
- Well screened with existing landscape features.
- Ideally any site should be relatively flat. Heavily sloping or undulating areas are unsuitable.
- A secluded and quiet setting.
- Development should avoid areas where there is an elevated risk of flooding.
- Sites of high ecological value would also be avoided.
- Other planning constraints. Areas where the landscape is especially protected, such as the AONB, would be avoided if possible, as would development within the Green Belt. Sites in such areas would only be put forward if there were no suitable alternatives elsewhere which could still meet the criteria.
- Finally, the land must be available.

These criteria are in line with the advice published by the Federation of Cremation and Burial Authorities (FBCA) in 2019, “Recommendations on the Establishment of Crematoria”, **CD 8.10**. The document provides this general advice at the beginning of its recommendations on site selection:

‘SITING OF CREMATORIA

The process of site selection should be aimed at achieving quietness and seclusion. A woodland or parkland setting, or an area of undulating ground with good natural features and mature trees, would enable the establishment of a good natural setting with a minimum of horticultural treatment. A visual impact assessment will help to identify any attractive views beyond the boundaries of the site that could be usefully preserved as part of the overall landscape design.’

The document also acknowledges the difficulty of finding an appropriate site and how this may ultimately lead to development within the Green Belt:

'Ideal sites are rarely to be located in urban areas and it is emphasised that suitability of setting is of greater importance than is location in close proximity to population centres. Often, this will involve the consideration of sites within the Green Belt.....'

Method

I have been aware of the existing gap in Ellesmere Port and South Wirral for over 20 years having led the application to build a crematorium in Hooton which was eventually determined by appeal in 2008.

Nonetheless, time was taken to freshly assess the situation with investigations carried out to establish the travelling distances between the neighbouring crematoria from various settlements to identify the gap. This included the new crematorium in Flintshire.

This research confirmed that the Ellesmere Port and South Wirral area remained underserved by the existing crematoria network as it was the most distant from existing facilities and on the brink, or beyond, the 30-minute funeral party threshold. This was confirmed by the use of drive-time isochrones to show the journey length from existing crematoria. Testimony from local Funeral Directors provided supportive evidence. The new crematorium in Flintshire had not improved this situation and there were no other more accessible crematoria in Liverpool, Wales or other parts of Cheshire.

Following the unsuccessful appeal, efforts concentrated on searching for sites within defined urban areas, as a first priority. Land agents were contacted to put forward any potentially suitable sites within Ellesmere Port and the South Wirral, the area of interest, which were outside of the Green Belt. A number of sites were put forward, many of which were in the ownership of Peel Properties and included parcels of land on the eastern edge of Ellesmere Port in the industrial areas along the river Mersey. Other commercial sites were considered off the junctions of the M53 motorway such as Pioneer Park.

At the same time, some eleven years ago, contact was made with the Ellesmere Port Regeneration Team who advanced possible brownfield sites to be considered. This included land off Newport Road as well as Rossmore Road. Sites were also independently investigated including land close to the Vauxhall Motors factory at Hooton Hangers. Land allocated for housing was also considered but all of these designations were subsequently developed by house builders.

During this period, from the appeal decision in 2008 until the beginning of 2019, only sites outside of the Green Belt were considered. As a result, and also because of the prominent and unsuitable location (as well as flooding issues), the site now put forward by Horizon cremation

on Hooton Road, application 21/03663/FUL, was discounted when it was promoted for sale in 2016-17.

Contact was made with Paul Friston, the planning officer who had dealt with the Waterworks Lane application, in September 2019 to confirm to him that a search for an alternative was continuing but that no suitable non- Green Belt sites had been found. The search had also been extended to previously developed land (PDL) within the Green Belt over the course of 2019 in recognition of the lack of opportunities within settlement. Mr Friston was asked to highlight any potential options which he could put forward for review. No suggestions were received but this did not delay the search which continued to search for urban or PDL options. This included considering land at Holme Farm (with the potential re-development of Helms coach park) as well the Hooton Arms Hotel. Golf courses had been approached too as it was felt possible to convert or redevelop the existing club houses into the crematorium building. Significant landscaping was already in place within the actual courses with only a fraction of this space needed for the crematorium grounds, the rest could remain for recreation. No responses were received though.

A further email to Mr Friston in January 2021 asked again if there were any additional brownfield sites that the planning authority would be able to put forward. This led to a discussion in late February where Mr Friston was unable to highlight any new possibilities. An email on the 1st March 2021 confirmed as such and provided a summary of the extensive site search which had taken place since the appeal. This email was passed to Mr Steven Holmes in advance of a further discussion at beginning of April 2021 to review the principle of the development and the search for a site. Mr Holmes also passed on the Authority's brown field register with a number of sites considered. It was also around this time that the site at School Lane was identified as a potential candidate.

Countryside setting

New crematoria are typically developed in the countryside because of the unique set of criteria faced by crematoria development and the need to provide a tranquil and secluded setting for funerals. The most notable restriction is the 1902 Cremation Act which prohibits development within 200 yards of housing. This effectively rules out many sites within the urban area although it is necessary to cover a thorough review of potential sites within urban areas; or if not fruitful, preferably sites within countryside that is not designated Green Belt, before looking to land within the Green Belt as a last resort.

Given the restrictive criteria, numerous appeal decisions have confirmed the suitability and likelihood of new crematoria being developed in the countryside:

Lach Dennis (APP/A0665/A/12/2186911) **CD6. 11:** '12..... *My attention has been drawn to two appeal decisions concerning sites in Cornwall and Eastleigh in which reference has been*

made to the Cremation Act. The constraints arising from the particular requirements of a crematorium are also acknowledged, and I agree that it would be more difficult to find a suitable site within or immediately on the edge of a built-up area.

13. The need to find a suitable site for a crematorium in grounds of sufficient size to provide suitable garden areas for the disposal of ashes and reflection, in addition to parking space, indicates that a rural location may often be appropriate.'

Swanwick (APP/M1005/A/12/2188880) **CD6.4:** *'36....it is noteworthy that of the 25 planning permissions granted since 1996 for new crematoria all fall outside of settlements.'*

Countesthorpe (APP/T2405/A/13/2210523) **CD6.9:** *'8. I consider these requirements reduce the likelihood of finding a suitable urban site, a conclusion which has been reached in a number of appeal decisions where inspectors have found a rural location to be acceptable.'*

Halstead (APP/G2245/A/14/2217055) **CD6. 10:** *'25: because of the requirements of the Cremation Act of 1902 the likelihood of a suitable site in the urban area is remote.'*

As explained previously, the key area of focus was identified as being the South Wirral as populations in this area were the most distant from the existing crematoria. This included the town of Ellesmere Port with a population of over 60,000 along with other significant communities in Neston, Eastham and Hooton. All of these settlements lay at the edge, or beyond, the 30-minute drive time of existing crematoria. Furthermore, a new crematorium in the vicinity of (say) Landican would not provide the relief to the communities served by Blacon and would still be around a 30-minute drive time from South Wirral communities – in all likelihood leading to pressure in the short term for a further new crematorium proximate to Blacon.

Following the dismissal of the appeal at Waterworks Lane a new site search was undertaken which concentrated on urban sites around Ellesmere Port. Local land agents, planning officers and the Ellesmere Port regeneration team assisted in this exercise before it was widened in 2019 to include previously developed land within the countryside of the search area. All of this land was classified as Green Belt.

A number of PDL sites were considered before the plot on School Lane was identified as the most suitable in the spring of 2021.

Detailed Site search

The search for a suitable site started twenty years ago when Westerleigh first embarked on this exercise. As described above, the search continued after the appeal at Waterworks Lane was dismissed with a thorough examination of urban sites before the search was widened to include PDL in the Green Belt of the search area.

Sites were examined against the special criteria that apply to crematoria, as previously detailed.

Twenty one sites were originally considered as part of the 2006 application. This included Horizon Cremation's proposed site on Hooton Road as well as the then application site at Waterworks Lane. The inspector provided this summary of the site search at that time within his decision:

'128. The appellants investigated a number of sites in EP & N before selecting that at Hooton and no alternative locations were promoted at the Inquiry by other parties. The area of search was not extended outside EP & N as this represented the main overlap between the two existing catchments and other sites would have been too close to the established crematoria. Locations further afield in Flintshire or Vale Royal would be too remote to serve the main catchment area effectively. I am therefore satisfied that a proper site search was undertaken and that this is a factor in support of the proposed development.'

It is notable that the inspector agreed that any site would be placed within the borough boundary of the previous Ellesmere Port & Neston (EP & N) Council as other sites would otherwise be too close to the existing crematoria and beyond the key area of need.

The inspector also concluded, following a site inspection, that the appeal site at Waterworks Lane was preferable to the alternatives at that time which included the field north of Hooton Road. This is the chosen applicant site now advanced by Horizon Cremation.

This site along with the other twenty sites relating to that initial search are detailed first in this report. A further 40 sites have been considered in detail since 2008 with a total of 61 sites reviewed over the course of the past twenty years. The site search has continued during the current application and appeal process but no site which is preferable to School Lane has been identified.

Site search for a new crematorium

Site 1; land to the south of Hooton Road (opposite the Horizon Cremation applicant site)

Greenfield site within Green Belt

The plot was entirely greenfield and within the green belt around Hooton. It was therefore well positioned to meet the area of need. There was also the potential for a satisfactory access to be established off Hooton Road.

The field though was relatively large, flat and open with long views into the surrounding Countryside, and in prominent location along Hooton Road. A low roadside hedgerow emphasised its openness with few mature landscape features within the field either.

It would therefore be difficult to create a sensitively designed landscape to help screen the development and provide a suitable setting for funerals. It would also represent entirely new development in a greenfield.

As a greenfield site in the Green Belt, it has no inherent preference over the School Lane site, especially given the existing development situated on the latter.



Site search for a new crematorium



Site 2; land to the north of Hooton Road (Horizon site)

Greenfield site within Green Belt

The field on other side of Hooton Road was also entirely greenfield, within the green belt of Hooton and exhibited similar characteristics. Indeed, the field was an even larger, open expanse with landscape features contained to its outer extremities. In particular there was a thin belt of woodland on its western boundary partially shielding the field from the neighbouring business park.

Extensive residential housing overlooked the field from the eastern boundary and the back of the field bordered the M53 motorway with the passing traffic clearly visible and audible. The field is also predominantly flat with a low hedge on the roadside boundary allowing clear views into the field off Hooton Road. The site's prominent location along Hooton Road makes it an inappropriate choice.

As a consequence, it would be difficult to sensitively landscape such a field, or screen any development, given the lack of existing features and its openness and scale. The proximity of the M53 and the neighbouring housing overlooking the site would also diminish the possibility of creating a secluded and peaceful setting for funerals.

Developing a crematorium in such close proximity to a business park would also be contrary to the advice published by the Federation of Cremation and Burial Authorities (FBCA) within their "Recommendations on the Establishment of Crematoria." At page 3 the advice states: 'Careful consideration should be given to the siting or subsequent development of crematorium facilities in close proximity to any schools, factories, trading estates, sports grounds or other facility which may be deemed incompatible within the vicinity of a crematorium.'

The site was also known to flood with an extensive part of the field subject to an elevated risk of flooding from surface water and runoff from Hooton Road.

As a greenfield site in the Green Belt, it has no inherent preference over the School Lane site, especially given the existing development situated on the latter.

Site search for a new crematorium

In conclusion, there are multiple reasons why this site would not be a suitable candidate for the potential development of a crematorium, both on its own merits and by comparison with the School Lane site.



Site search for a new crematorium

Site 3; Land at Rivacre Valley Country Park

Local nature reserve and amenity space

The site was originally investigated at the invitation of the previous Ellesmere Port and Neston Council given its proximity to Ellesmere Port and, in theory at least, the extent of available land. It was though discounted because of its designation as a local nature reserve as well as a key amenity space for residents.

Site 4; Land at Rossmore Road

Employment development plot

This site was originally considered before the Waterworks Lane application as the land was undeveloped and marketed for sale.

The land borders the M53 and was within the western side of Ellesmere Port, adjacent to built up residential areas. The size of the plot was relatively limited as a result but there was sufficient space and the position was within the area of need.

The land was also designated for employment use as brownfield land.

Landscaping the site, to create a suitable setting for funerals, would be challenging though given the proximity of the motorway and the built-up urban areas consisting of both residential and commercial uses. Further investigations were carried out with contact made with the promoter when it was confirmed that the land was unavailable for crematorium development. The site has since been developed for further housing and commerce and whilst a patch of land exists close to the motorway all of the area is within 200 yards of the new housing and cannot therefore be considered.



Site search for a new crematorium

Site 5, land behind Overpool Cemetery

Brownfield land, Ellesmere Port

Again, in line with the FBCA's recommendations, land within existing cemeteries should be reviewed as part of any site search for a crematorium.

A parcel of unused land lay adjacent to Overpool Cemetery, the main cemetery serving Ellesmere Port. It was therefore well positioned to meet the defined need.

An initial review confirmed though that all of the land lay within 200 yards of housing and could not therefore house a crematorium. The land has since been developed for further housing.



Site 6, land behind Neston Cemetery

Greenfield, Green Belt

Again, this site was considered in line with the FBCA advice as it was adjacent to the existing cemetery in Neston.

There were difficulties with the site though. Access would need to be through the existing cemetery on its narrow single lanes. It was also a greenfield plot within the Green Belt bordering significant residential areas. The proximity of this housing meant that there was no space left for development outside the 200-yard rule and the site had to be discounted as a result.

Site 7, land behind Roften Industrial Estate

Brownfield

This site was discussed at length with Planning officers in 2006 as a potential alternative to Green Belt development.

The land was within Hooton and therefore well placed to meet the need. It was also just off the Hooton Road and in close proximity to the rail station.

A meeting was held with the proposed developers of the site, Burfords, regarding a possible allocation for a crematorium alongside their plans for housing and commerce. Burfords rejected the idea and the land is now being solely developed for housing.

Site 8, land off Hooton Road, west of Roften industrial estate.

Greenfield, Green Belt

Again, this land was well placed to meet the need for a new crematorium and benefitted from reasonable access of the Hooton Road. It was also of sufficient size with an attractive existing landscape.

An approach was made to the landowners who were not prepared to consider sale for a potential crematorium. The land has subsequently been developed for housing.



Site 9, land at Hadlow Road, Willaston

Greenfield, Green Belt

The land was initially reviewed in 2004 as it was understood to be available.

Discussions with the landowner were held but the site was not considered a strong option. Whilst close to the area of need the site is further west than Hooton, so less desirably located. It is also relatively open without the greater landscape features offered by the School Lane site.

Road access would require much of the funeral traffic to drive through the centres of Hooton and Willaston. These considerations still apply and as a greenfield site in the Green Belt, it has no inherent preference over the School Lane site, especially after the existing development situated on the latter.

Site 10, Land at Dunkirk

Greenfield, Green Belt

Planning officers requested that a large tract of open, greenfield land was considered at Dunkirk. The site was blighted by large overhead power cables with no landscape features of note. It would therefore have been difficult to create a sensitively designed landscape to help screen the development and provide a suitable setting for funerals. It would also represent entirely new development in a greenfield.

The site was also relatively close to Blacon crematorium and less able to offer relief to Landican and meet the need. The land has since been developed for housing.

Site 11, Ledsham Road

Greenfield, Green Belt – allocated for housing.

This area was better positioned to meet the need but was designated for housing within the Local Plan and investigations in 2006 confirmed that it was unavailable for sale. The fields have since been developed as a substantial housing scheme.

Site 12, Dunstan Lane, Neston

Greenfield, Green Belt

Dunstan Lane is a residential road directly off the main Chester Road, A540. Consequently, there are few fields free of the 200 yards rule until some distance down the lane, deeper into the countryside.

There are possibilities to the east of the Lane but these are large and open, offering long distance views across the surrounding countryside. It would therefore have been difficult to create a sensitively designed landscape to help screen the development and provide a suitable setting for funerals. It would also represent entirely new development in a greenfield. As a

Site search for a new crematorium

greenfield site in the Green Belt, it has no inherent preference over the School Lane site, especially given the existing development situated on the latter.



A brownfield site had become potentially available in more recent times with the closure of a garage on the junction of Dunstan Lane and the A540. The land though is unsuitable for crematorium development as it is within 200 yards of housing.



Site search for a new crematorium

Site 13, Mill Lane

Greenfield, Green Belt

Access to this lane would also be off the A540.

Possible fields exist on both sides of the lane but are similar in character to Dunstan Lane with long open views over the countryside. It would therefore be difficult to create a sensitively designed landscape to help screen the development and provide a suitable setting for funerals. It would also represent entirely new development in a greenfield.

Both Dunstan Lane and Mill Lane are also west of the key area of need and would not offer a significant time saving to the key population of Ellesmere Port when accessing a new crematorium.

The site was therefore not considered a strong candidate. As a greenfield site in the Green Belt, it has no inherent preference over the School Lane site, especially given the existing development situated on the latter.



Site 14, Hans Hall Road

Green Belt

Several sites were investigated along this road as part of the 2006 application with none proving suitable because of the 200-yard rule.

A barn did become available for sale in early 2021 and was investigated as part of the more recent site search but was ruled out due to the 200 yards rule (see site 40).

Site search for a new crematorium

Sites 15 and 16, New Hay Lane

Greenfield, Green Belt

Two sites were investigated on New Hay Lane but both were discounted due to the 200-yard rule. The area is also blighted by large dominating electricity pylons which severely damage the potential to create a tranquil setting for a crematorium.

Site 17, field off Hooton Road, west of Roften

Greenfield, Green Belt

This field was well positioned off the Hooton Road as well as being in the area of need. It was also of sufficient size, reasonably flat and with the benefit of mature landscaping features which would have assisted the development of an appropriate setting for a crematorium. However, as a greenfield site in the Green Belt, it has no inherent preference over the School Lane site, especially given the existing development situated on the latter.

Sites 18 and 19, Benty Heath Lane

Greenfield, Green Belt

The area on the junction between Benty Heath Lane and Hooton Road was also considered given the good access off Hooton Road and their ability to serve the area of need.

The two fields closest to the junction on the western side of Benty Heath Lane looked most promising in theory but were relatively flat and open with little screening off the road. Further investigation confirmed that the areas of both fields were within 200 yards of neighbouring dwellings and therefore had to be ruled out.



Site 20, Street Hey Lane

Greenfield, Green Belt

This was the final site considered as part of the original site search relating to the Waterworks Lane application.

A field was considered at the end of this residential road but the access was narrow and restricted due to residential development. The majority of the field was also ruled out due to 200 yards and its position within the heart of Willaston Village would also have an unnecessary impact on local residences.



Site 20a, Waterworks Lane

Greenfield, Green Belt

The conclusion of the 2006 site search was that the most suitable site available was located on Waterworks Lane opposite Hooton train station. The School Lane site was not identified as available as part of that search and I have no reason to believe that it would have been at that time.

The field on Waterworks Lane had a number of advantages:

- Good access off Hooton Road within the area of need.
- Sufficient area beyond the 200 yards of neighbouring dwellings to comply with the 1902 Cremation Act
- Relatively flat with mature landscape features which would assist the ultimate creation of a suitable landscape setting.
- The landowner was at that time willing to allow development.

There were some ecological difficulties as a significant Great Crested Newt population was discovered in the pond within the site but careful management could allow the scheme to go ahead. Overall, at the time, the site was considered on balance to be the most suitable to meet the need for a new crematorium in the area. It would though represent greenfield development.

Ultimately the application to develop this site was dismissed at appeal in 2008 as the inspector felt that the need for a new crematorium at that time was insufficient to outweigh the harm to the Green Belt. As a consequence, the site search that followed the appeal concentrated on urban and brownfield sites around Ellesmere Port, the largest community within the area of need. This town also included the majority of urban and brownfield possibilities.

More recent inquiries of the landowners have indicated that the Waterworks Lane site is no longer available. In any event, as a greenfield site in the Green Belt, it has no inherent preference over the School Lane site, especially taking account of the existing development on the latter.

Further search since 2008

21. Newport Development Land, Ellesmere Port: Non- Green Belt

This site was advertised for sale within an established 'industrial area'.

CWAC's property team were contacted so that this site could be reviewed more closely but the site could not be developed for a crematorium due to the proximity of housing and the 200-yard rule. The site has since been developed as Newport Business Park.



22. Land at North Road, Junction 7 of the M53: Non-Green Belt

This plot was directly off junction 7 of the M53 and close to the North Road industrial estate with the resulting frequent movement of lorries alongside. Despite its rather industrial setting the site was well wooded with a natural bowl at its heart, and it was felt that a suitable setting for a crematorium could be created with the right design and commitment.

Initial designs were drawn up in consultation with local planning officers who started an initial round of early consultation. An ecological objection emerged due to the sensitivity of the woodland habitat and the site had to be ruled out on the advice of planning officers.



23. Hooton Trust: Non- Green belt

It was felt that it may be possible to renovate part of the historic Hooton Hangars site to provide a new crematorium as the land was well positioned, close to Ellesmere Port and with good access links. It was also relatively secluded despite its proximity to the M53. Numerous attempts were made to contact the owners with no response ever received. The site is therefore unavailable.



Sites 24- 26: Non- Green Belt sites

Three sites were advertised by Legat Owen in 2019 for potential development alongside the Waterways Museum. Two of the sites were taken up for commercial use whilst site 2 remained available. Its size, 4 acres, was too small to be considered for a crematorium and suffered from being within a very industrial landscape with access via an existing warehouse off Oil Sites Road. It was consequently dismissed as a possibility.



27. Junction 8, Pioneer Park: Non-Green Belt

The agents, B8 real estate, promoted several pieces of land, much of it on behalf of Peel Properties. This included sites close to Junction 8 which were not suitable because of their open frontage onto the M53 and the large-scale commercial units immediately alongside. Other light industrial units were discounted because they were within 200 yards of housing. Ultimately none of the available sites within Pioneer Park were able to meet the criteria for a new crematorium.

28. Eastham Lodge Golf Club: Green Belt

The golf course is within the area of need and in Green Belt. The owners were approached during the early part of 2019 to see if part of the course could be sold along with the club house. It was proposed for the crematorium building to be developed on the footprint of the existing club house. No response was received from the owners despite reminders and so it is assumed that the land is not available.



29. Rivacre lounge, North Road: Non-Green Belt

This site was a former public house, Rivacre Lounge and was considered a possibility as it was in the area of need, on the edge of Ellesmere Port.

The site was cramped though and creating an appropriate setting would have been challenging despite the existence of some helpful existing landscape features. Ultimately though the site had to be discounted because all of its area was within 200 yards of existing housing.



30. Development plot for sale on Ferry Lane, Eastham.

A small plot of previously developed land was advertised in Eastham. The plot itself was too small but a field next door could provide the additional space required for the crematorium. Access would need to be through the village of Eastham but it was well placed to meet the need. Both the plot and neighbouring field were though within 200 yards of housing and could not therefore be progressed. It has since been acquired for a new house build.



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Photo of the field next door:



31. Eastham, Ferry Road:

Greenfield, Green Belt

Another field was investigated further down Ferry Road on the junction with Bankfields Drive. The plot was sufficiently large and capable of development. Access was problematic given that it would have to be through Eastham village and there were strong views of the Queen Elizabeth Dock, including the very substantial tankers stationed there. The adjoining Oil terminals added a further considerable eyesore and, in totality, it was considered that it would not be possible to create a suitable setting for a crematorium within that environment. Consequently, the site was discounted.



Site 32, Follyfields Nursery

Brownfield, Green Belt

The Follyfields nursery was approached in early 2019 and again at the beginning of 2021 to ask if the owners would consider a possible sale. The site was well positioned on the opposite side of Benty Heath Lane to sites 18 and 19 and satisfied the other key criteria relating to crematoria.

The site had the benefit of being an existing development. Some of the neighbouring landscape is also part industrial and so could be argued of less sensitivity. No response has ever been received from the owners though and so it is assumed that the land is not available.



33. Mayfields cemetery: Green Belt

The existing woodland cemetery, Mayfields, in Eastham was considered as part of the continuing review of cemetery land. Mayfields also benefitted from having an existing chapel with some, albeit limited, car parking.

The building though would need to be significantly expanded, if not replaced, as there was no existing space to include a crematory. The car parking would also need to be extensively expanded and an initial assessment indicated that there was likely to be insufficient space for this expansion given the proximity of the burial ground. In any case, the current building, and any possible new position for a subsequent crematorium, would be within 200 yards of housing and so it was not possible to progress these investigations. The site was discounted.

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34. Helms Coach Park

Brownfield site

This site offered some potential being well positioned in the area of need and benefitting from existing development. The plot was also within 200 yards of housing and, ultimately, it is understood that the site has been sold and is consequently unavailable.



35. Park Farm

Part-PDL Green Belt

The farm opposite Helms Coach Park was also considered especially as there appeared to be some unused barns capable of conversion into a crematorium. The entire plot though was within 200 yards of neighbouring housing and the owners did not want to consider a sale.



36. Land South of Coach Park

Greenfield, Green Belt

A further parcel of land was considered to the south of the coach park but it did not have the benefit of existing development and would have represented greenfield development. The landowner was also unwilling to consider a sale.

As a greenfield site in the Green Belt, it has no inherent preference over the School Lane site, especially given the existing development situated on the latter.

37. Land at Hooton Green

Greenfield, Green Belt

This plot was well positioned to meet the area of need and benefitted from reasonable access. A woodland belt at the back of the site was also a helpful landscaping feature although the site was relatively open with clear views over to the M53. Noise from the motorway could be quite strong at times and it would be difficult to suitable setting for a crematorium given the proximity of the motorway and the openness of the site.

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The approach road also suffered from reasonably extensive street parking which would have hindered access and the proximity of the housing was also a detraction. The site was not considered to be a strong candidate overall.



38. Chimneys pub

Part-PDL, Green Belt

The adjacent field was considered too although it also suffered from being an open site in close proximity to the M53 which is both clearly visible and audible.

The site though backed onto the Chimneys pub which was closed at that time due to lockdown with some uncertainty whether it would be re-open. There was therefore some potential for the crematorium to replace the footprint of the pub with part of the field behind being used for the grounds. After further investigations it became clear though that the pub was being restored with the owners determined to carry on the existing business. The site was therefore discounted as unavailable. Its prominent location in Hooton also makes it unsuitable.



39. Hooton Arms Hotel

Part-PDL, Green Belt

The potential redevelopment of The Hooton Arms into a crematorium was considered when the pub was advertised for sale in 2019. The site is surrounded by housing with all of the plot within 200 yards of neighbouring residences. There is also no available adjacent land for a crematorium building to be built, in order to be beyond the 200 yards rule, with the Hotel demolished as a compensatory measure. The Hotel is now being redeveloped for housing.

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40. Barn conversion, Hanns Hall Road

Part-PDL, Green Belt

The land was advertised for sale in February 2021, details attached within the appendices, but was within 200 yards of housing and so was discounted.



41. Other plot on Hanns Hall Road

Part-PDL, Green Belt

A further piece of land was considered on this road as there was some existing development which could potentially be redeveloped for a crematorium. All of the land was within 200 yards of housing and therefore had to be discounted.



42. Land off Liverpool Road, Backford.

Greenfield, Green Belt

A plot with the Green Belt was advertised by the land agents Rostons, details attached, but was not well positioned to serve the area in need. The site was also relatively open and exposed and did not benefit from any existing development. As a greenfield site in the Green Belt, it has no inherent preference over the School Lane site, especially taking account of the existing development on the latter.

43. Rivacre business centre, Mill Lane, Great Sutton

Brownfield

This plot was listed with the CWAC's brownfield register but ultimately, its size, 1.34 hectares, was too small for crematorium development. The entire plot was also within 200 yards of housing.

44. Land south of Meadow Lane (former Van Leer/Hansteen site)

Brownfield

This plot was approximately 10 acres in size and therefore capable of crematorium development but was unavailable. It is understood that the plot is subject of a planning application for alternative development.

45. Rossfield Park Development, Rossfield Road

Brownfield

This site was listed within CWAC's brownfield register but could not be developed, see site 7, due to the proximity of 200 yards. The plot is also unavailable and is subject of a planning application for an alternative development.

46. Brackenwood Golf course

Green Belt

This site was previously advertised for sale but is not well positioned to meet the area of need, being relatively close to Landican crematorium.

47. Numerous plots around Clatterbridge and Poulton

Greenfield, Green Belt

A number of sites were put forward by the agent, Fisher German, for consideration close to Poulton Hall. All of the sites were within the Green Belt and were slightly north of the main area of need, being relatively close to Landican crematorium.

The fields benefitted from good access and mature landscaping although they were also expansive sites with long views over the countryside. None had the benefit of existing development i.e. they were entirely greenfield.

Photographs of two of the fields are provided below as an illustration.

None of the sites were considered to be strong candidates principally due to the open landscapes, and as greenfield Green Belt sites, neither would have any inherent preference anyway compared with the part-developed School Lane site.



48 Land close to Barnston

Greenfield, Green Belt

The same agent promoted land close to Thingwall on the Barnston Road but this was very close, just three minutes, from Landican Crematorium and so was not in the area of need. The site was therefore discounted.

49. Land at A41/M53 junction, Bebington.

Greenfield, Green Belt

This site was well positioned to meet the area of need and benefitted from excellent access being at the junction of the A41 and the M53. The site suffered from noise as a result and it

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would also be difficult to establish a suitable landscape for a crematorium given the expansive character of the field with few mature features.

Whilst the site was flat and had sufficient area beyond the 200 yards of neighbouring houses it was not considered a strong candidate given its proximity to the motorway and open landscape.



50. Land opposite Burleydam Nursery

Greenfield, Green Belt

This land was considered as it was in a good position to meet the area of need and was well served by the A41. There were also some significant landscape features although the field was still relatively large and open and entirely greenfield.

Further investigations were curtailed as the landowner was not willing to consider a sale.



51. Education centre, Acre Lane Bromborough

This site was visited in 2019 as there was some evidence of previous use (hardstanding, fencing, signage). Further investigations forced it to be ruled out because of its proximity to neighbouring houses with all of its area within 200 yards.



52. Little Al's Barn, A 41, Eastham

Brownfield

This site was considered as a brownfield site with some potential for redevelopment as a crematorium. It was within the area of need with access directly off the A41. The business was closed at the time of the original visit due to lockdown but further investigations were curtailed given the proximity of housing which was within different ownership. The site was therefore discounted.



53. New School Lane

Greenfield, Green Belt

This plot was able to meet the area of need as well as being relatively flat and of sufficient size. The back part of the site was also beyond 200 yards of nearby housing and so able to satisfy the 1902 Cremation Act. It was though close to a primary school. The field was also quite open and expansive so it would be difficult to create a sensitive landscape scheme suitable for a crematorium. Further investigations revealed that it was not available for sale and so it was discounted.



54. Land off New School Lane

Greenfield, Green Belt

The field on the opposite side of the road was also briefly considered but it was in closer proximity to the school and nearby housing with an absence of existing landscape features to help create a sensitive landscape for a crematorium. The two fields shared a common landowner with this plot unavailable too.



55. Land off School Lane, Hooton (applicant site)

Part -PDL, Greenbelt

A further piece of land was considered on School Lane, in the section between Welsh Road and Hooton Road.

The site was well positioned to meet the area of need and benefitted from good access with junctions off Hooton Road and the A550 (Welsh Road). The A41 was within close proximity too and converged with the A550 at Hooton near to the junction with the M53. Expert highways advice confirmed the acceptability of the final part of the access route via School Lane itself.

The site also had the benefit of existing development with a residential property, stables and other development already in place.

The field was more contained than alternatives with a strong roadside hedge alongside other mature boundaries. There were a number of established trees too, especially in the northeast corner alongside a pond. It was also relatively secluded and quiet, being off the main Hooton Road and some distance from the M53. These conditions would readily allow an attractive and appropriate setting for funerals.

The plot was of the right size and there was sufficient area beyond the 200 yards of nearby housing for the crematorium to be developed.

The site was free of material flooding constraints.

Overall, the site met all of the necessary criteria for a new crematorium.

56. Land off Raby Park Road, Neston

Greenfield, Green Belt

This field was well positioned to serve Neston but not well positioned to serve the rest of the area in need.

The field was flat and sufficiently large to accommodate a crematorium but was particularly open with long views into the surrounding countryside. A low roadside hedgerow emphasised its openness with few mature landscape features within the field either. It would therefore be difficult to create a sensitively designed landscape to help screen the development and provide a suitable setting for funerals. It was also situated next to a school which is unhelpful.

Consequently, the site was not considered to be a strong candidate.



57. Land at the northern end of Benty Heath Lane

Greenfield, Green Belt

A further position was considered at the northern end of Benty Heath Lane, away from the cluster of housing.

The field benefitted from some helpful undulation but was still relatively expansive and open. It was also in close proximity to the M53 with a clear view of the traffic and resulting noise. It would therefore be difficult to create a suitable environment for funerals.

Access was possible off the highway but the field was more remote than other options and not well served by public transport links. It was therefore not considered to be a strong candidate.

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Further, as a greenfield site in the Green Belt, it has no inherent preference over the School Lane site, especially taking account of the existing development on the latter.



58. Land off Rivacre Road, Eastham

Greenfield, Green Belt

This field was well positioned to serve the area of need, it was also of sufficient size, free of the 200-yard rule and with reasonable access off Rivacre Road. The site benefitted from some landscape features on its boundary but its appeal was damaged by strong views of the neighbouring oil refinery which would be impossible to screen. Further investigations were carried out before the landowner confirmed that the land was not available.



59. Land at Puddington Lane on the junction with the A540

Greenfield, Green Belt

This plot was reasonably well positioned to serve the area of need and benefitted from good access off the A540. The junction with Puddington Lane had also been significantly improved, presumably at the time that the nearby hotel was opened, with a right hand turn lane in place off the A540.

The field at the top of the lane was considered the most suitable given the mature landscape features in place at the boundary. The land further down the lane was much more open although it was also possible to have long views out of this corner plot across the surrounding countryside and it would be difficult to create a sensitive landscape screen to fit sympathetically into this wider setting. The proximity of the A540 also created significant road noise which would be impossible to screen and damage the setting for funerals. Consequently, the site was not considered a strong candidate.



60 Land to the west of Thurstaton

Greenfield, Green Belt

A parcel of land to the west of Thurstaton was put forward by the agent, Fisher German, on behalf of one of their clients. The position was close to Landican Crematorium though and not able to serve the area of need fully. Further, as a greenfield site in the Green Belt, it has no inherent preference over the School Lane site, especially taking account of the existing development on the latter. The site was therefore discounted.

Conclusion

A comprehensive assessment of potential sites within the area of focus has been carried out over the course of the past twenty years.

Following the unsuccessful appeal at Waterworks Lane an exhaustive review of urban and brownfield sites was carried out with the assistance of local planning officers as well as land agents and the Ellesmere Port regeneration team.

When that search failed to produce a suitable site, attention turned to consider sites outside urban areas, which meant within the Green Belt. PDL was seen as a priority. Ultimately this led to the site on School Lane being identified as the most appropriate when assessed against the unique set of criteria for a crematorium.