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| <b>Committee(s):</b>  | <b>Date(s):</b>          |
| Port Health and Environmental Services<br>Corporate Asset Sub (Finance)   | 08/03/2016<br>11/03/2016 |
| <b>Subject:</b><br>Operational Property Review – Cemetery and Crematorium | <b>Public</b>            |
| <b>Report of:</b><br>Director of Open Spaces                              | <b>For Decision</b>      |

### **Summary**

The Operational Property Review is a cross-cutting Service Based Review which is taking a more strategic view of the operational assets the City of London Corporation has, with the aim of identifying opportunities to rationalise the Corporation's operational property portfolio and reduce the high and rising cost of property. In addition, Standing Orders require Committees to declare surplus any facilities not required for operational use.

This Report sets out the buildings and land at the City of London Cemetery that have been highlighted as underutilised or surplus to requirement and sets out options and recommendations for their long-term use or disposal.

### **Recommendations**

It is therefore recommended that the Port Health and Environmental Services Committee approves the recommendations as set out below that:

1. The South Gate Toilet Block be demolished and the foundations removed to allow the land to be used for new graves.
2. The parcel of land known as the Rabbits Road Bridge Plot be declared surplus to the Open Spaces Department's requirements and be presented to Corporate Asset Sub Committee.

Further, it is recommended that, subject to Port Health and Environmental Services declaring it surplus, the Corporate Asset Sub Committee declare Rabbits Road Bridge Plot as surplus to the City of London Corporation's requirements.

### **Main Report**

#### **Background**

1. The Operational Property Review is a cross-cutting Service Based Review which is taking a more strategic view of the operational assets that the City of London Corporation has, with the aim of identifying opportunities to rationalise the Corporation's operational property portfolio and reduce the high and rising cost of property. The general fabric and condition of many of our operational properties is starting to deteriorate which impacts negatively on the

experience of the users of those properties and the Corporation's reputation as a consequence.

2. In November 2015 a report was brought before your Committee for information, advising of the Operational Property Review across the City of London property portfolio which highlighted the £40m 'bow wave' of maintenance costs we are currently pushing out year on year across all City of London Corporation assets.
3. As part of this process each department was asked to look at operational property and to challenge whether the property was fit for purpose, whether it was being used effectively and ultimately whether it was necessary to the operation of the service. In this case, the Cemetery and Crematorium team have suggested areas for consideration.
4. The identified sites or buildings at the cemetery are; The South Gate Toilet Block and the Rabbits Road Bridge Plot.
5. Standing Order 55 requires Committees to consider the effective and efficient use of all operational property assets.

## Current Position

6. **The South Gate Toilet Block** – This building was not part of the original cemetery infrastructure and was built in the 1960s. It is a wooden clad brick building with a toilet at each end and two seated areas in the middle, and has no electrical supply. The building has been closed for eight years and the seated areas have been boarded over to stop it being used by rough sleepers and vagrants. This building is no longer used. (A photograph is attached as Appendix A).
7. **The Rabbits Road Bridge Plot**– This is a parcel of land that formed part of the original cemetery plot but became separated for the main body of the site when a bridle path was added around the cemetery in the 1870s. The area has not been used for burials. This parcel of land was then leased to East Ham Corporation by the City Corporation Burial Board in July 1911. The Land was returned to The City in 2001. (Photographs and maps of the area are attached as Appendix B)

## Options

8. The options with regard to the two items set out above are to demolish, dispose of or retain and the risks and benefits for each are set out below.
9. **The South Gate Toilet Block** – this building is of a 1960s wood and brick design, it has no gas or electricity supply and due to its exposed position near the south (un-staffed) entrance to the site, adjacent to the bridle path, it is open to misuse and vandalism. Due to this and the general lack of use, the toilet has been closed for eight years, with the seating areas closed off and boarded up. The building is in a state of disrepair and serves no purpose to the cemetery but has a bow wave maintenance cost of £141k over 20 years.

10. The Cemetery has eight operational toilets spread across the site and there have been no complaints regarding the closure of those at the south gate in the last 5 years.
11. The areas around this toilet block have all been used for burials and the footprint of this building would provide space for 40 private traditional graves (with a current value of over £405k). It is therefore recommended that this building is demolished and the foundations removed to allow the area to be used for burials.
12. **The Rabbits Road Bridge Plot** – This is the parcel of land that now sits just outside of the cemetery boundary and between the bridle path and the railway line that leads from Liverpool St into Essex. The parcel of land is triangular in shape and is approximately 0.2 acres (0.08 hectares) in size. The land has recently been cleared of saplings and brambles as it was being used by rough sleepers. Thames Water searches show that there is a water main 4ft in diameter operated and maintained by Thames Water passing under the centre of the site.
13. Due to the water main and the sites position outside the boundary fence and in a rather vulnerable position, the land is of no use to the cemetery. The preferred option is that the land is declared surplus to operational requirement.
14. Where a site is declared surplus to operational requirements, to achieve alternative use, the Corporate Asset Sub Committee would first be asked to consider other uses by the City Corporation and failing this the intention would be to offer the property to the open market for disposal on terms that would be subject to the approval of the Property Investment Board.

## Proposals

15. The proposal of the Operational Property review and those of the Cemetery management team are set out in the table below.

| Opportunity              | Bow Wave Reduction<br>(20 year Period) | Proposed Action |
|--------------------------|--|-----------------|
| South Gate Toilet Block  | £141,000                               | Demolish        |
| Rabbits Road Bridge Plot | Nil                                    | Declare Surplus |

16. Subject to your Committee approval to the recommendations in this report, the next steps will be for the City Surveyor to begin work in costing the demolition of the toilet block and works to achieve an accurate evaluation of the value of the Rabbits Road Bridge Plot.

## Corporate & Strategic Implications

17. The efficient and effective management of the City of London Cemetery supports City of London Corporation's strategic aim "to provide valued

services to London and the nation” and the key policy priority of “maintaining the quality of our public services whilst reducing our expenditure and improving our efficiency”.

## **Implications**

18. The aim of the Operational Property Review is to encourage the more effective use of operational property and where reasonably practical to identify sites as surplus to operational requirements so that alternate uses can be found for them which reduce the cost of the City’s portfolio.

## **Conclusion**

19. The City of London Cemetery has highlighted an area of land and a building that is surplus to requirement and therefore recommends that this surplus land be disposed of and the building demolished.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix A – South Gate Toilet Block
- Appendix B – Rabbits Road Bridge Plot photograph and plan

## **Background Papers:**

**Operational Property Report of the City Surveyor – 24<sup>th</sup> November 2015**

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## *Appendix A - South Gate Toilet Block*



## *Appendix B - Rabbits Road Bridge Plot*





