

April 29th 2019

The Revd Paul Benfield
Registrar of the Diocese of Blackburn
The Registry
Naphthens LLP
Darwen House
Walker Business Park
Blackburn
BB1 2QE

Dear Revd Paul Benfield

Public Notice - Calderstones Cemetery

I wish to make representation to the Bishop of Blackburn regarding the application made on March 30th 2019 by the Archdeacon of Blackburn for part-deconsecration of Calderstones Cemetery.

My interest in this matter stems from a long-standing interest and involvement in the lives, and histories, of people with learning disabilities. I am a member of Pathways Associates, an organisation which works with people with learning disabilities, autism or both and their families in North West England. More specifically, I have recently led a Pathways Associates' Heritage Lottery Funded project on the histories of the twentieth century learning disability institutions of Calderstones and Brockhall (www.lancslearningdisabilityinstitutions.org.uk). In addition, I am a member of the Friends of Calderstones Cemetery, as well as Visiting Fellow with the Social History of Learning Disability Research Group at the Open University.

I make this statement in the light of the Public Notice, with its 'conditions', the application by the Archdeacon, and the associated site plan.

Calderstones Cemetery is the consecrated final resting place of over 1100 individuals, the vast majority of whom would now be labelled as having learning disabilities or difficulties. I am extremely concerned that this site, with its burial plots and Garden of Remembrance, is given every respect possible to honour the dignity of those who whilst alive were largely hidden away and forgotten.

People labelled as having learning disabilities, as reports¹ continue to confirm, represent one of the most maligned and discriminated groups in our society. Any development or decision which threatens sites of interments in Calderstones Cemetery re-inforces the discrimination which many people with learning disabilities have experienced whether in the past, or indeed in the present. In terms of Calderstones Cemetery, this devalued status has been thrown into sharp relief by the pristine condition of the adjacent War Graves Cemetery. The latter, which of course is due its own

¹ The Learning Disabilities Mortality Review (LeDeR) Programme (2017). Annual Report December 2017; Mencap, (2012). Death by indifference: 74 deaths and counting: A progress report 5 years on; Gravel Carwyn. (2012). Loneliness and Cruelty, People with learning disabilities and their experience of harassment, abuse and related crime in the community; Parliamentary Committee on Human Rights (2008) A life like any other? Human rights of adults with learning disabilities

respectful treatment, contrasts markedly with the neglect accorded in recent years to the hospital graveyard.

The Diocesan response to the current application offers a critical opportunity to uphold the egalitarian, and arguably Christian, values of a genuinely compassionate society.

My underpinning concern, that the remains of those interred are afforded the utmost respect, translates into a request that two key questions are addressed:

1. Have *all* sites of interment in the cemetery been established?

As stated in his application, the Archdeacon of Blackburn appears to be *certain* that the building of a crematorium, with its roadways, car parks and landscaping will NOT disturb the remains of any people buried in the cemetery. He says this because of an independent archaeological survey.

The Archdeacon claims that the survey proves that: The *precise* location of the Garden of Remembrance has now 'been established'; and that '... there is no evidence of human remains being buried anywhere else on the parts of the site on which the developers wish to develop, apart from the Garden of Remembrance.'

One of the conditions in the 2018 public notice, which was withdrawn, was a request to the developers to ensure that, 'if any human remains are found work is immediately stopped'. By way of contrast, the current public notice makes no such demand. The Archdeacon appears to be absolutely confident that the proposed crematorium plans will not threaten any human remains.

In contrast, I support The Friends of Calderstones Cemetery assertion that strong doubts persist as to whether the location of *all* the human remains have been found. I would really like to share the confidence and certainty expressed by the Archdeacon, but feel unable to do so because of research carried out by the Friends, as well as the viewpoints of the archaeologists themselves. More specifically:

- **The Garden of Remembrance may still be at risk**

Unlike last year (2018), there is now an agreement as to its general whereabouts, namely near the chapels. However, doubts remain regarding the Garden of Remembrance's *exact* location and extent. Under the current proposals human remains may be still unprotected and built over. My concerns are based upon the following evidence:

- Witness statements of former members of Calderstones staff
Five former members of Calderstones staff witnessed and, to differing degrees, were involved in interments of former residents of Calderstones in the Garden of Remembrance. Two of these five, independent of each other, have *consistently and independently* stated that interments took place in locations further south and east than is claimed in the latest plans.
- Limitations of the archaeological survey carried out by SUMO
I appreciate the Archdeacon's intervention last year, which led to the owners commissioning a survey from one of the leading archaeological companies in the UK. After studying the survey, on behalf of the Friends, I contacted SUMO directly with a number of outstanding questions. Based on its responses, and the survey itself, there are strong grounds for taking a far more cautious approach to the survey findings than the one apparently adopted by the Archdeacon:

SUMO, for instance, acknowledge the general limitations of ground penetrating radar (GPR), especially with reference to invasive techniques. In their survey report, the company state:

'The performance of the technologies employed in non-invasive surveys can be adversely affected by factors outside of SUMO's control. Whilst Sumo uses all due diligence and reasonable endeavours it does not warrant that 100% detection can be achieved. Irrespective of the information provided by

a geophysical survey, any ground works should be undertaken with extreme caution.'

This 'extreme caution' appears to be at odds with the Archdeacon's tone of certainty.

Furthermore, SUMO used two types of GPR of different strengths. The lower strength (MIRA) was used over the whole of the survey area, the stronger radar (Dual Frequency or DF) only over what was *assumed* to be the Garden of Remembrance. Ensuring that the survey would cover the whole of the garden, SUMO took a slightly larger area than that suggested by the owners, *without* input from the Friends. There are further questions about what they claim to have found in this area, since the number and layout of what are termed 'probable' (not definite) urns does not tally with burial records. Indeed, at a meeting attended by the Friends, the diocesan archaeology advisor admitted that the survey's 223 "soundings, they could be urns, they could be anything". This viewpoint is lacking in the Archdeacon's current application to the Bishop of Blackburn.

In addition, the stronger radar (DF) was not applied to the locations of interments claimed by the two witnesses. Again, even though the Archdeacon has insisted that the owners plan for a small margin of error around the assumed Garden of Remembrance, how is it possible to know (based on current evidence) that it extends far enough.

- **Human remains at risk in other parts of the cemetery**

As well as the Garden of Remembrance, strong doubts still exist as to whether all other burial sites in the parts of the graveyard proposed for lifting the legal effects of consecration have been located. In particular, there are concerns over:

- Likely burial sites identified by the SUMO survey

In the area proposed for deconsecration, the survey identified 6 other "probable burials" and 17 other sites of "possible burial activity" which have not been investigated further or explained. On behalf of the Friends I wrote to SUMO, asking why it had not done further research on these 23 sites. Peter Barker, a director, gave me a very direct reply:

'The MIRA data is not processed on site so viewing and analysis is not possible until this is done back in the office. There was therefore no opportunity to select further targets for survey with the DF whilst we were on site.'

DF refers to 'Dual Frequency', the stronger strength radar tool. SUMO suggested that, at a cost, they could return to the site to explore these 'probable' and 'possible' burial sites.

- Three interments in unknown locations

In 2011 Laurie Manton, a graveyard photographer, posted online a photograph of three small memorial stones in Calderstones cemetery: Harry and Agnes Arkwright; Elsie Hand; and Colin Stanworth. Although the latter may have been buried near to the Garden of Remembrance, this requires further research. It is unclear exactly where the Arkwrights and Elsie Hand are interred. All three sites may be vulnerable to the proposed developments.

- Interments made by a previous owner

Between 2000 and 2004 Colin Arkwright, a previous owner of the cemetery, operated it as a well-maintained graveyard and there were burials that took place during that period. However, the Friends have no record of who was buried or where they might have been buried.

So, although the Archdeacon appears certain that his application will respect all the interments of people with learning disabilities in Calderstones Hospital Cemetery, I am unsure how he can make such confident claims. There appear to be grounds for further investigation or at the very least far more stringent conditions, than currently proposed, imposed on any development on such a sensitive historic site.

2. How will the current owners ensure a respectful and dignified future?

The Archdeacon his application appears to show great faith in the current owners. He views, for instance, them as being better custodians of the cemetery than previous owners, who removed many of the gravestones and markers. In saying this, he omits to mention that the current owners allowed the cemetery to fall into a state of neglect for many years. Furthermore, if the crematorium proposals go ahead, the Archdeacon appears convinced by the commitment of the present owners:

'to respect all existing graves, to retain the remaining grave markers, to maintain this area to a very high standard, and to provide a memorial and virtual book of remembrance in one of the original brick chapels.'

Unfortunately, I have serious concerns about the current owners, who have demonstrated:

- **A lack of transparency and openness**

The Friends sent the owners a list of nine questions last August. These have never been answered. Both the planning authority (Ribble Valley Borough Council) and the Archdeacon had copies of these questions. Indeed, the former explicitly promised to follow them up with the owners. Even so, the Friends have had no response.

On behalf of the Friends, I contacted SUMO directly about the archaeological survey, and Peter Barker, one of its directors responded openly and generously to our queries. Furthermore, the director stated that he would 'be happy to answer any further queries'. However, when we sent 4 or 5 follow-up questions, he apologised, saying he would not be able to respond because the owners (SUMO's client) had stopped him doing so. One of our questions was:

'Based on your GPR survey of the former Calderstones Hospital Cemetery, is it possible to say with impunity that all human remains (whether cremated or buried) have been identified either in the area of the Garden of Remembrance, or on the site overall?'

This key question still remains unanswered.

- **A lack of sensitivity and respect**

Even if we discount the tarmacking over the grave of John Newton (a former Calderstones' staff member) as an honest mistake, then there is still the considerable damage which may have been inflicted on the Garden of Remembrance itself.

Sometime in late 2017/early 2018 the developers laid a stone road, as the Archdeacon himself states, on a 'significant part of the Garden of Remembrance'. The SUMO report describes this as 'modern disturbance'. Peter Iles, the archaeological advisor to Blackburn Diocese, who witnessed the SUMO survey, described (in a meeting attended by myself) the surveyors as 'being upset at what happened' in this area. Also, the Friends had photographic evidence, passed on to the Archdeacon and the owners, of what appears to resemble broken urns.

SUMO was not informed in advance of their survey about the possible broken urns, and they were inconclusive about possible damage to existing urns below the new road. However, the Archdeacon, in his current application, describes the surface disturbance as nothing more than 'most unfortunate'. In addition, he claims that there is no evidence of damage below the surface. Support for such an assertion appears to be missing from the public domain, and is unsupported by anything in the archaeological survey. Again, I do not share the Archdeacon's certainty. The way in which interred remains of people with learning difficulties in this segment of the Garden of Remembrance have been treated undermines confidence in the current proposals.

Especially in the light of this track record, how does the Bishop propose to enforce practical and legal transparency and accountability with regard to any conditions imposed upon the owners? Why is there no condition, as previously proposed, that if 'any human remains are found work is immediately stopped'?

In summary

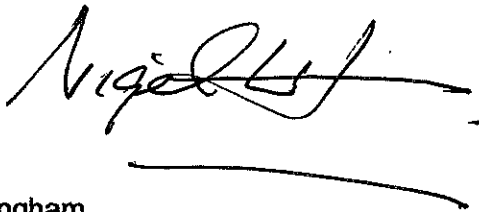
My objections to the Archdeacon of Blackburn's application (to partially lift the legal effects of consecration relating to Calderstones Cemetery) hinge on three key concerns:

- That a respectful approach to the dignity of the lives of those interred, and their families, lies unequivocally at *the heart* of any Diocesan response regarding the future of Calderstones Cemetery.
- That there are strong empirical grounds for doubting that the sites of all human remains have been established.
- That clear, legal and *practically* enforceable governance protocols would be installed to ensure full compliance by the developers with any conditions.

In terms of a future for the cemetery, it would be wonderful to think that its welfare and careful maintenance is possible with named markers for each individual grave, an attractively landscaped Garden of Remembrance (in its true location), a memorial which acknowledges and values the lives of those interred and easy access for family and friends. Although a private graveyard, the church is in a position to advocate that this future can be achieved in a spirit of collaboration, involving all interested parties who care about the cemetery. The historical significance of this profoundly sensitive site, particularly with its wider learning disability connections, goes way beyond a narrow proprietorial or commercial interest.

Thank you.

Yours truly,



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