

For discussion
on 20 April 2000

**LegCo Panel on Environmental Affairs
Subcommittee on Matters Relating to Environmental Hygiene**

**Cremation Service and
Replacement of Cremators at the Kwai Chung Crematorium**

PURPOSE

To brief Members on (a) the provision of cremation service by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, and (b) the replacement of cremators at the Kwai Chung Crematorium.

BACKGROUND

2. Sections 124A to 124H of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) (“the Ordinance”) and the Cremation and Gardens of Remembrance Regulation (Cap. 132 sub. leg.) govern the operation and management of Government crematoria and gardens of remembrance. The legislation covers the application procedure for cremation permit, the opening hours of the Government crematoria, restriction on cremation of human remains and disposal of ashes after cremation.

3. Before the re-organization of the provision of municipal services, the cremation service covering the management of crematoria, columbaria and gardens of remembrance was provided by the then Urban Services Department and the Regional Services Department in the urban areas and the New Territories respectively. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has taken over the responsibility for the provision of cremation service

since 1 January 2000.

CREMATION FACILITIES

4. It is Government policy to promote cremation and to provide efficient yet dignified cremation service. Over the years, there has been a gradual and growing acceptance of cremation by the community as a dignified practice for disposal of the dead. Statistics on deaths, cremations and burials from 1996 to 1999 and the number of cremations in each month of 1999 and 2000 are at **Annex I**.

5. At present, there are six Government crematoria in Hong Kong, namely, the Cape Collinson Crematorium (CCC), Diamond Hill Crematorium (DHC), Kwai Chung Crematorium (KCC), Fu Shan Crematorium (FSC), Wo Hop Shek Crematorium (WHSC) and Cheung Chau Crematorium (ChCC). The CCC was commissioned in 1962, DHC and KCC in 1979, FSC in 1985, WHSC in 1990, and ChCC in 1991. Service halls form an integral part of the crematoria for relatives and friends of the bereaved families to pay their last respect and/or to hold the last rites for the deceased. At the wish or request of the deceased family, the ashes of the deceased may be scattered in a garden or deposited in the niches at the gardens of remembrance.

6. The six crematoria operate a total of 32 cremators. Due to heavy usage, cremators need to be maintained and overhauled on a regular basis. Maintenance service is provided by the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department. To maintain undisrupted cremation service, cremators are closed down for maintenance or major overhaul on an annual rotational basis. The average time for repair and maintenance is about 45 days. As a result, about 23 cremators are available for cremation service at any one time. The average time taken for each cremation is about 2½ hours, which enables three sessions to be arranged for each cremator every day.

7. Cremators have a service life of about 15 to 20 years and a replacement programme for old and timeworn cremators is in place to ensure

the provision of efficient and environmentally-friendly cremation facilities. For example, a replacement programme for eight cremators in the CCC, which have been in use since 1962, was completed in 1995 and two additional cremators were installed in the same year. Replacement of another two cremators at the CCC is scheduled for completion in mid-2000. Replacement of old cremators in other crematoria will be carried out in accordance with the scheduled programme. The most imminent project is the replacement of cremators at the KCC. We plan to seek funding from the Public Works Subcommittee before the end of this legislative session. Details of this project are in paragraphs 20-29.

OPERATION OF GOVERNMENT CREMATORIA

8. Crematoria are open daily from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., except on Lunar New Year's Day. The first cremation session starts at around 9:30 a.m. and the last at around 3:00 p.m. After performing the last rite for the deceased in the service hall in the crematorium, the coffin containing the deceased will be conveyed to the crematory for cremation. A flow chart showing the cremation process is at **Annex II**.

9. For monitoring and security reasons, Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) systems have been installed in the CCC, WHSC, DHC, FSC and KCC. The whole process of cremation is closely monitored and the recorded videotapes are kept for a minimum period of three months.

BOOKING SERVICE

10. To facilitate members of the bereaved families to make all related arrangements, FEHD operates in conjunction with Department of Health and Immigration Department two joint offices. The Hong Kong Office is located at the Wu Chung House and the Kowloon Office is located at the Canton Road Government Offices. The Department of Health is responsible for the issue of cremation permits / cremation orders and the Immigration Department is responsible for death registration and the issue of death certificates.

11. The booking of cremation sessions is processed on a first-come-first-served basis and made available for 15 days in advance. Details of the booking arrangement are at **Annex III**. These procedures, which were drawn up after consultation with the Independent Commission Against Corruption, ensure that cremation bookings are implemented in an open, transparent and fair manner and at the same time enable each applicant to book a cremation session.

12. Our performance pledge is to arrange cremation service within 15 days of application. Members of the public can visit either joint office to book cremation service in urban or New Territories area. The average time for arranging such service is 12 days from the date of application in the past three months (January to March). The length of time for an applicant to obtain a cremation session is affected by a number of factors. First, the demand of cremation sessions at the time of application. Based on past experience, the demand in the winter months is normally higher than that in the summer months. Second, the preferred location of the applicants. More easily accessible urban locations such as the DHC, FSC and KCC are more popular and thus the available cremation slots are relatively taken up faster. Third, the preferred time and date of the applicants. For various reasons, some applicants may have specific preference for the cremation to take place at certain time, and they may choose, for example, late cremation sessions even though early sessions are available for booking. Fourth, time needed by an applicant to plan and finalize detailed funeral services arrangements.

13. FEHD will monitor closely the demand for cremation service and will meet the increased demand by arranging an additional session from 5 p.m. to 9 p.m. for all cremators currently in operation for booking by members of the bereaved families. In the past three months, we have arranged 1 383 additional cremation sessions and this measure has proved to be useful in meeting additional demand.

MEASURES TO IMPROVE CREMATION SERVICE

(a) Improvement of the Booking Offices / Service

14. To provide a more customer-orientated and efficient booking service, FEHD is in the process of introducing improvements to the two computer booking systems of the urban and New Territories areas so that cremation sessions could be booked at the same counter for any location in the territory. In planning the new computer booking system, we will take the opportunity to identify other areas where more application of information technology can be used to enhance the existing booking system.

15. Since February this year, we have improved the waiting facilities at the joint office at Canton Road Government Offices as well as installed two additional booking terminals at the counter. We are also working with the Department of Health and the Immigration Department for a new and more spacious joint office at the Cheung Sha Wan Government Offices to replace the old office at Canton Road. The new office is more conveniently located and more easily accessible by the applicants.

(b) Upgrading of Service Halls

16. It is our pledge to provide efficient and dignified cremation service for our community. As it is both a tradition and practice for family members to pay their last respect at the service halls, we are working with the Architectural Services Department (Arch SD) for a phased programme to upgrade the service halls of the crematoria. Refurbishment work in the CCC will commence shortly and is scheduled for completion before the end of this year.

(c) Planning of new cremation facilities

17. With the aging of the population, the growing acceptance of and demand for cremation service, we are aware of the need for early planning of additional cremation facilities. Finding suitable sites and gaining local acceptance of the facilities, however, have been difficult. Replacement

proposals sometimes have to be shelved and reconsidered because of strong local objections.

18. To ensure the timely provision of these much needed facilities on one hand and to allay residents' objections, which are mostly related to environmental concerns, on the other, FEHD will proceed with new planned projects by working closely with Arch SD and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD). As a general rule, we will ensure that the design of the new cremation facilities is tasteful and does not spoil the local surroundings. We will also carry out environmental impact studies to ensure that all required environmental standards are fully complied with. In addition, we will consult the concerned District Council (DC) well in advance and keep them regularly informed of the progress.

19. In the planning of new cremation facilities or replacement of old facilities, we will explore the use of newer technology which can increase the capacity and shorten the time required for cremation, as well as measures to minimize environmental nuisances as far as possible.

REPLACEMENT OF CREMATORS IN KWAI CHUNG CREMATORIUM (KCC)

Background

20. The existing KCC is located at Wing Hau Street in Kwai Chung. It was built in 1979 and comprises a crematorium building with 4 cremators and 2 service halls, a columbarium with 3508 niches, and a piece of lawn area. The site plan is at **Annex IV**. There is no residential building within 500 metres of the KCC. To the north and northeast of it is a piece of land for industrial use, to the east the Gin Drinkers Bay Landfill, to the south the Airport Express and Tung Chung Line and a cargo handling area, and to the west the Tsuen Wan Chinese Permanent Cemetery.

Scope of the project

21. This project involves the replacement of four existing cremators by constructing four new ones at the lawn area, with ancillary facilities such as staff office, service halls, etc. Our plan is to demolish the existing cremators after commissioning of the new ones in a separate project.

Justifications

22. We need to implement the project for the following reasons:

(a) To upgrade the cremation facilities

23. The existing cremators at the KCC have been in use for about 20 years and have almost approached the end of their serviceable lives. Their performance is unsatisfactory and frequent repairs are required. During the past five years, the average repair and maintenance time for these cremators took about 70 days per year, which far exceeds the normal average of about 45 days. This has affected the normal provision of services to the public.

(b) To minimize pollution to the surroundings

24. As cremators age, air pollution caused by their emissions would increase. The installation of the new cremators will resolve this problem and significantly reduce any impact on the environment.

(c) To meet the increasing demand for cremation services

25. As a result of the Government's efforts in promoting cremation, the number of cremations has been rising steadily at about 1 to 2% per year. The percentage of cremations to the total number of deaths registered rises from 47.1% in 1979, when the KCC was commissioned, to 76.8% in 1999. Furthermore, due to the increase in overall population and change in demographic profile, it is anticipated that the number of deaths in the coming two decades will increase by about 1 200 every year. New cremators are therefore required to meet the demand.

26. While extending the operational hours of the existing cremators to cope with the increase in demand can be a temporary measure, it is not a long-term solution as operating cremators continuously for long hours will shorten their life span and will increase the frequency of breakdowns.

27. Because of the use of newer technology, the cremation time of the new cremators can be shortened from the present 2½ hours to 1¼ hour. In other words, the total capacity of the cremators will increase and thus be able to provide more cremation sessions every day.

Public Consultation

28. The former Regional Services Department (RSD) consulted the Kwai Tsing Provisional District Board (PDB) on the proposed project on 8 January 1998. Members supported the project, but requested RSD to report back to the PDB after completing the relevant environmental impact assessment. On 14 April 2000, FEHD briefed the Food and Environmental Hygiene Subcommittee of the Kwai Tsing District Council on the latest position of the project. Members were advised that the findings of the Preliminary Environmental Review (PER) conducted by the consultants engaged by Arch SD concluded that the project would not cause adverse environmental impact to the surroundings. A detailed Environmental Impact Assessment therefore would not be required as advised by EPD. We and Arch SD would also carry out the mitigation measures identified in the PER, for example, installation of air filtering and monitoring systems, to ensure that the air pollutant concentrations and health risk resulted from the operation of the future cremators would be within the EPD's established standards. Members raised no objection to the project.

Way Forward

29. We are now applying for the environmental permit according to the relevant provisions under the Environmental Impact Assessment Ordinance (Cap 499). We aim at submitting the project to the LegCo Public Works Subcommittee (PWSC) and Finance Committee (FC) for approval before the end of

this legislative session. We plan to commence the work in November 2000 for completion in April 2002.

Food and Environmental Hygiene Department
April 2000

Annex I**(A) No. of Cremations from 1996 to 1999**

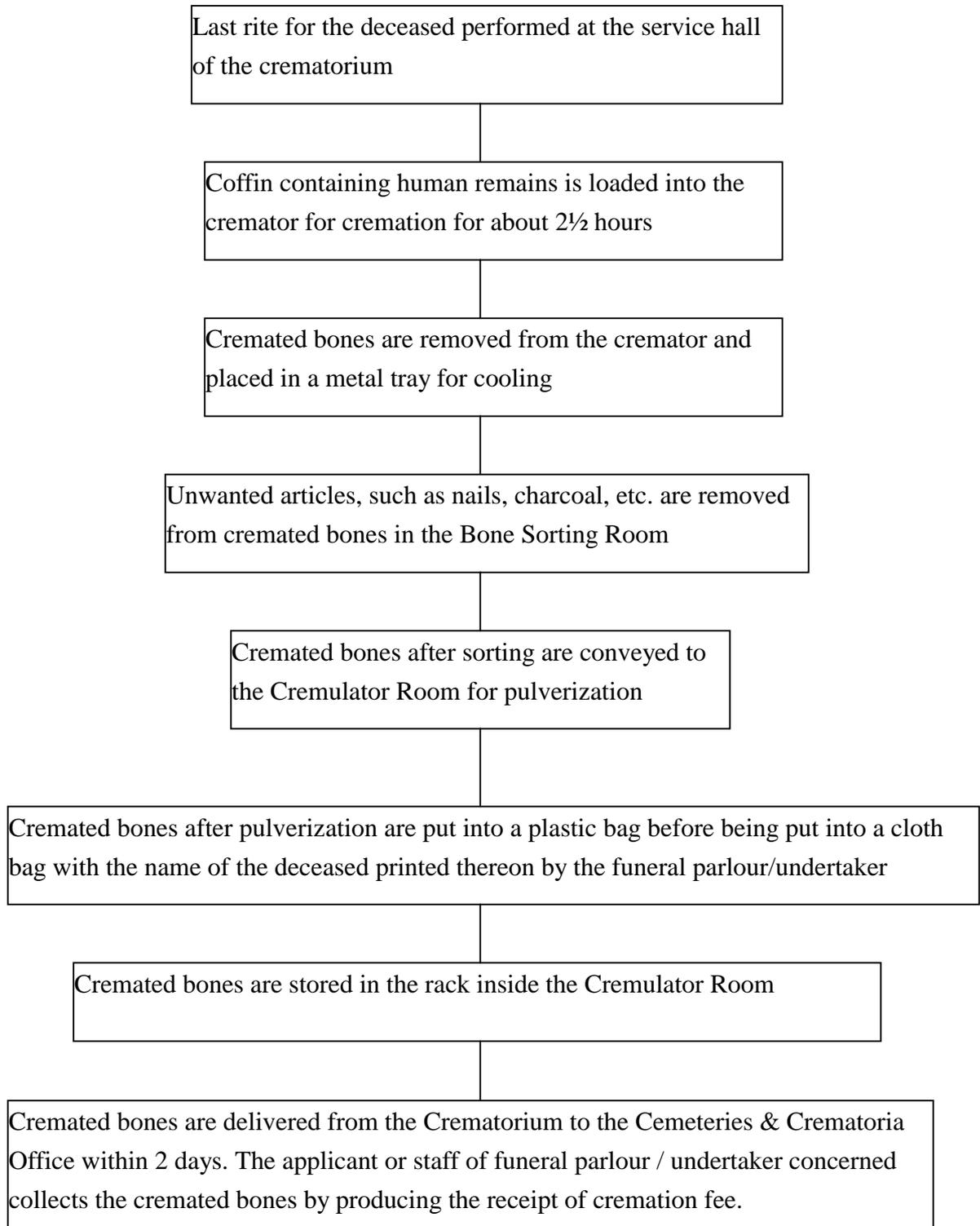
Year	Registered Deaths	No. of Cremations (%)	No. of Burials (%)
1996	32,049	24,052 (75%)	7,997 (25%)
1997	32,079	24,573 (76.6%)	7,506 (23.4%)
1998	32,680	25,328 (77.5%)	7,352 (22.5%)
1999	33,387	25,658 (76.8%)	7,729 (23.2%)

(B) No. of Cremations by month in 1999 and 2000

Month \ Year	1999	2000
January	2261	2511
February	2171	2205
March	2442	2602
April	2298	-
May	2249	-
June	1976	-
July	2142	-
August	2064	-
September	1967	-
October	1926	-
November	2057	-
December	2105	-
Total	25,658	7318

Annex II

Cremation Process at Government Crematoria



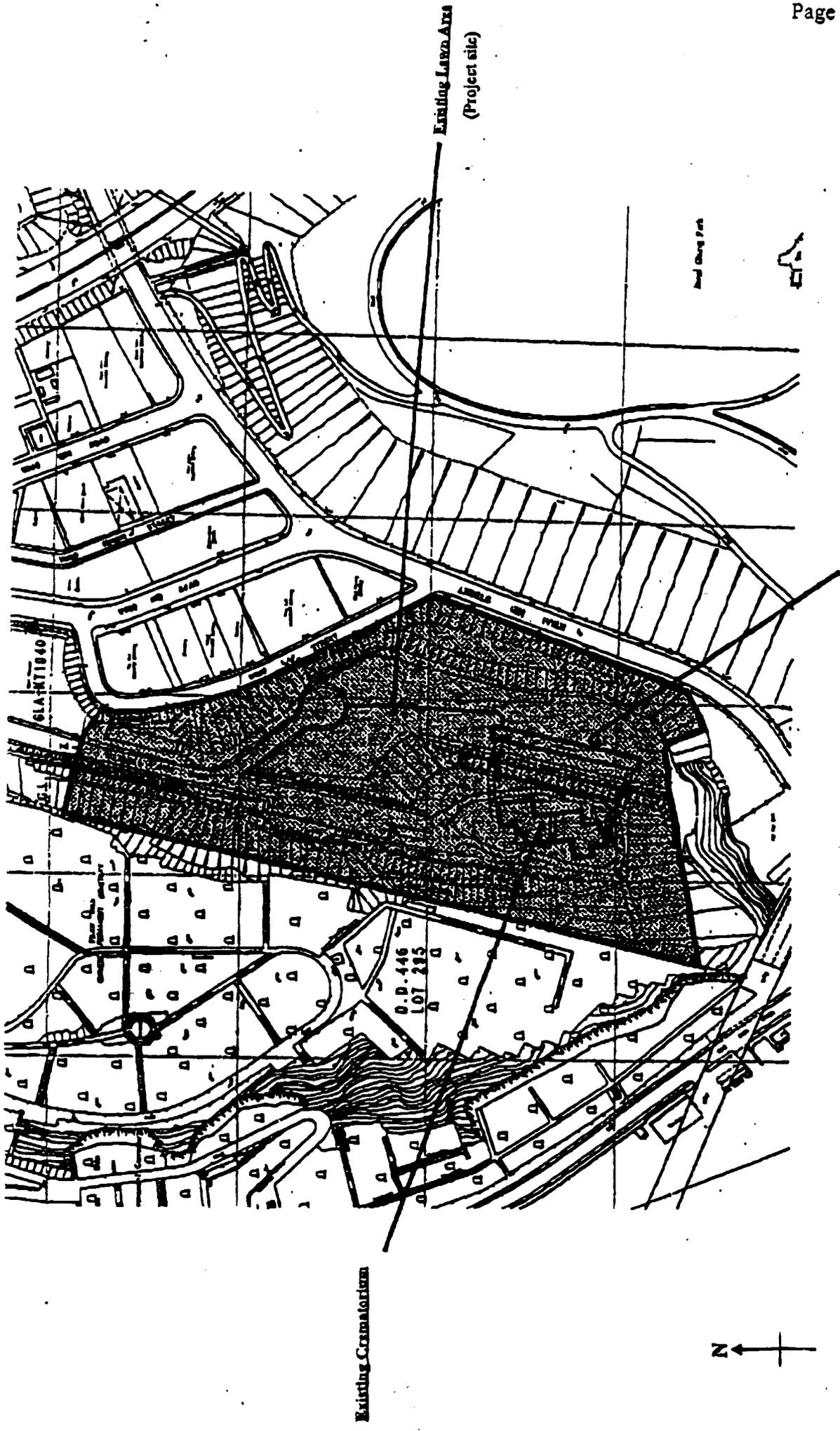
Annex III

Booking Procedures for Cremation Session

The booking procedures for cremation sessions in any Government crematorium have been cleared with ICAC and are implemented in an open, transparent and fair manner as set out below:

- ◆ Booking of cremation sessions are processed on a first-come-first-served basis. Staff of the Department in the joint offices will issue the applicants with number cards and each application will be processed according to the priority of the number card.
- ◆ An applicant can book any unallocated regular session within 15 calendar days from the day following the date of application.
- ◆ When the regular sessions within the 15 calendar days are almost fully booked, overtime sessions on the 5th calendar day will be made available for booking. When overtime sessions on the 5th calendar day are fully booked, the overtime sessions on the next calendar day will be opened for applications and so on, until all the overtime sessions on the 15th calendar day are fully booked.
- ◆ When all the overtime sessions on the 15th calendar day are fully booked, regular sessions on the 16th calendar day will be opened immediately for applications and so on, until all the applicants are entertained.

Site Plan of Kwai Chung Crematorium



Existing 2 Storey Cobaltorium

Boundary of Kwai Chung Crematorium

SCALE 1:2000

