

Natural Conclusion

Marketing Plan

October 2009



1.0 Executive Summary

This report seeks to define Natural Conclusion's products and outline how to develop and market them.

Ethos: Natural Conclusion links people to green burial sites and products whilst building a permanent endowment for local communities. We promote the ethos of an eco-responsible, low-carbon approach to burial.

Marketing features include establishing quality benchmarks (site conditions); publishing carbon-cost comparisons assessed by our own research team; building a customised website; broad promotion of the green burial ethos & the spin-off endowment benefit; targeted marketing to bereaved families and to longer-term customers (planning for a green future).

The People: We have a strong team with commercial, charitable and social enterprise experience and a range of technical and social skills.

The Market: The natural burials market has grown rapidly since 1993.

Attitudes have changed; we've got greener. Coincidentally, we're running out of traditional cemetery space. Now there are 200 plus green burial sites in the UK – mainly private, some Council run.

In Lincolnshire there are just two low-profile sites and they are poorly marketed. Only one of them has a (fairly amateur) website – though, increasingly, customers seek on-line, instant, comprehensive information.

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats: We're offering a unique portfolio, delivered by a strong creative team working for a high-integrity charity, attacking an expanding market.

To succeed we need to communicate effectively, get the timing right and sideline or neutralise the competition.

Year 1 **objects** are to establish a Lincolnshire Burials Trust (for quality assurance, protocols and central record keeping), open 3 sites and host our first 16 green burials.

Branding: Ideas on logo, colour scheme, fonts, slogan and key statements. All promotional materials (including the website, brochures and advertising) adhere to this strategy will reinforce the brand identity.

Product strategy: Natural Conclusion will develop and market sites strategically placed across Historic Lincolnshire, from the Humber to the Wash. Each site will promote its unique identity: ancient woodland, windswept heath, secluded glade and so on.

Sites will be managed to maintain safe access, protected habitats, indigenous flora and, ideally, shelter for mourners.

Pricing: Prices will offer good value (in comparison to competitors) and be fair (similar prices wherever you live) and affordable to local communities.

Whilst we do want to create "profit", our strategic objects are to plough surplus back into improving services and building endowment.

Distribution: We will be developing channels of distribution including: website, funeral directors info packs, leaflets to NHS & 3rd sector outlets, like Age Concern.

Promotion: Advertising – We have planned and costed a series of adverts in the local press, to appear regularly in “births, deaths & marriages”. Ads will be complemented by press releases. Response will be monitored as the basis for changing and improving our approach.

Networks - We will be developing links with a wide range of organisations to help promote Natural Conclusion to raise awareness at low cost.

The website is a cornerstone of our awareness raising efforts.

Price incentives: There may be a discount available when purchasing multiple plots or reserved plots. We can also market our “grassroots challenge”, where endowment contributions can be matched.

Action Plan: Sets out timetabled targets for setting up a burials trust, recruiting partners (land owners and funeral directors), developing sites, defining and commissioning green memorial products, conducting product research (carbon life cycle analysis), working on branding and marketing materials, building a website and planning and executing our advertising and marketing strategy.

2.0 Current Market Position

2.1 Product

Natural Conclusion will provide a gateway to all aspects involved in a natural burial. Features of this include:

- Access to burial plots in a natural environment at quality assured sites across Lincolnshire.
- A more “eco-friendly” approach to death which helps to offset the carbon footprint left by traditional burials and cremations, and improves the local environment for generations to come.
- Part of the money generated from the sale of plots is managed as permanent endowment by the Lincolnshire Community Foundation and used to help fund future local green projects.
- Encourages farm diversification and fuels the local economy.

2.2 Place

As indicated in our research the first port of call for finding information on green burials is likely to be the internet, so a clear and comprehensive website is essential. We are framing a specification which will be put out to tender once finalised.

2.3 Price

£700 where £450 (minus administration costs) goes to lasting legacy.

2.4 Promotion

We will not be promoting Natural Conclusion until we have the first site up and running.

2.5 People

There is a strong team present with a wealth of skills and experience in many areas of business, including the voluntary sector. There are also strong links with experts in industries such as I.T. and media.

3.0 Market Overview

The natural burials market has grown rapidly from its introduction in 1993 to there now being over 200 sites nationwide. New sites are opening all over the UK to cater for changing attitudes to burial and the environment, and also the lack of burial space in inner city graveyards.

Many of the sites operating now are private land owners, although there are some council sites. Most offer just the burial plot and some other basic services, with the rest of the funeral arrangements organised by Funeral Directors, although there are some sites which offer to take care of everything.

In Lincolnshire there is very little awareness of the two local natural burial sites, but interest in and knowledge of green burials is creating a desire for more information.

Customers expect to have all the information they need to hand straight away on the internet. They want to know about the background and ethos of natural burials, information on the site including pictures, how to arrange a burial and the costs involved. Some burial sites provide this information on a professional, polished website. Of the Lincolnshire burial sites only one has a website, and this is poorly produced with an amateur feel to it.

4.0 SWOT Analysis

4.1 Strengths

- Unique bundle of benefits.
- Part of a well established, regulated charity, trustworthy.
- Staff and partners experienced in a wide field of expertise.

4.2 Weaknesses

- Keeping to timescales.
- Communication and understanding of individual responsibilities.

4.3 Opportunities

- Credit crunch easing off – people have more money to spend.
- Increasing interest in natural burials and eco-friendly alternatives.
- Rising costs of traditional burials and cremation.

4.4 Threats

- Emerging competitors.

5.0 Objectives

5.1 Mission Statement

Promoting and providing access to natural burial environments for the people of Lincolnshire whilst creating a permanent endowment to fund future green projects.

5.2 Year One Objectives

Year One runs from October 2009 (month 1) to September 2010 (month 12).

- Decide on structure of and relationship between Burials Trust – Natural Conclusion – LCF by end of month 1 and implement by end of month 3.
- Open three sites:
 - Site 1 end of month 4;
 - Site 2 end of month 8;
 - Site 3 end of month 12.
- Achieve £30,000 of endowment income at the end of month 12 comprised two thirds from site 1 and the remaining third from site 2.

6.0 Strategy

6.1 Target Markets

- Bereaved families purchasing plots for immediate use.

We will be able to liaise with families and Funeral Directors to arrange access and sufficient time for the services required at the site, as well as options as to where on the site the burial can take place (where possible).

- Individuals/families reserving plots for future use.

This could include people updating their wishes in a Will, those planning their own funeral (terminally ill patients for example) or even a family wanting to reserve a group of plots for future use.

6.2 Positioning Statement

Natural Conclusion – a lasting, living memorial.

We will provide our customers with access to green burial sites throughout Lincolnshire.

Sites will be quality assured and regularly audited to ensure they continue to adhere to the set guidelines.

Products and processes will undergo a lifecycle analysis to ensure they hold up to the eco-friendly ethos of Natural Conclusion.

The money generated will be used to help fund future local community projects, specifically those with “green” objectives.

6.3 Branding Strategy

Natural Conclusion will develop itself as a strongly recognised brand. This will include a logo, colour scheme, fonts, slogan and key statements.

We will use elements of the marketing mix to establish Natural Conclusion’s position as suppliers of access to natural burial grounds with lasting benefits for the environment and the local community.

Ensuring all promotional material (including the website, brochures and advertising) adheres to this strategy will reinforce the brand identity.

6.4 Product Strategy

Natural Conclusion will build a portfolio of sites available throughout the County of Lincolnshire.

Each site will have its own benefits, be it ancient woodland, beautiful heathland or something else.

Sites will be managed to maintain safe access, as well as providing the best environment for indigenous flora and fauna to thrive.

Where possible sites may be able to develop areas so as to increase the services offered, for example a building where a funeral service or wake can be held.

As sites begin to reach capacity we will develop additional sites to keep up with demand.

6.5 Pricing Strategy

The price of services at our sites should represent what is fair in relation to other burial sites (including traditional sites) and what is affordable to the majority of people of Lincolnshire.

We are offering a unique product, but that does not give us the right to mark up our prices in order to increase profit.

The prices will be the same no matter what site the burial plot is at – it would not be fair for a customer to pay more because they live in a different geographical area to someone else.

6.6 Distribution Strategy

We will be developing channels of distribution including:

- Natural Conclusion website.
- Providing site information to Funeral Directors.
- Providing information (where appropriate) to health services, hospitals and GP surgeries.
- Links with organisations offering information on death and burial.

6.7 Promotional Strategy

- Advertising

The local newspapers in Lincolnshire are all very popular, and conveniently the majority are run by just one company. We will run an advert at the beginning of the “Classified” section which appears next to the “Births, Deaths and Marriages” pages from the end of month 3. Response from the advert will be monitored, and the advert copy changed as and when necessary.

- Public Relations

We will provide Press Releases whenever appropriate, as well as providing editorial and comment on the subject of green burials and the endowment fund being built.

We will be developing links with a wide range of organisations to help promote Natural Conclusions (see above, Distribution Strategy), a move which will generate a lot of awareness at little/no financial cost.

We will use existing links to promote Natural Conclusion through community radio.

The website will provide clear and concise information about Natural Conclusion, and will be designed to appear in a variety of relevant search results.

- Personal Selling

There will be very little in the way of personal selling, however the Funeral Directors will to some extent be responsible for informing their clients about the options available, and therefore selling plots at a Natural Conclusion site.

- Sales Promotion

There may be a discount available when purchasing multiple plots or plots in advance.

Although not strictly a sales promotion, until April 2011 the Grassroots top up scheme could be marketed as such.

6.8 People

All staff involved need to be made aware that Natural Conclusion will be dealing with sensitive issues and grieving families. It is therefore important that they maintain a high level of professionalism at all stages of customer contact. It may be necessary to hold regular refresher sessions, perhaps in partnership with a local Funeral Director, on appropriate staff conduct.

6.9 Process

A set of guidelines for each site to follow will be essential in ensuring consistent service. These will include requirements that need to be followed by law, as well as information on how the site and staff should be presented, appropriate products, access and booking processes.

6.10 Next Steps

Who	What	When
IP & GH	Structure of and relationship between Burials Trust – Natural Conclusion – LCF	30/10/09
IP	Talk to the Whittons about transfer of land and effect transfer of HPAC.	31/12/09
GH	Aid Hill Holt Wood in development of Big Wood & portfolio of memorial products.	31/12/09
JM	Lifecycle analysis of various products.	27/11/09
JM	With input from rest of the team design Natural Conclusion logo.	27/11/09
AH	Branding strategy	27/11/09
AH	Website specification and commission.	27/11/09
AH	Draft promotional materials.	27/11/09