

TITLE	Burials Review – Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel
DATE	8 September 2014
LEAD MEMBER	Angus Ross, Environment
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR	Heather Thwaites, Director of Environment

OUTCOME

To update Members on action taken in relation to the recommendations of the Burials Task and Finish Group, submitted to the Executive in 2007 and the subsequent progress reports to the Scrutiny Panel.

This will result in increased understanding of the issues facing the Council and the potential ways forward. The report demonstrates that improved capacity for burials and greater choice and value for money for residents of the borough is being delivered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the Scrutiny Panel considers progress against each of the recommendations from the Burials Task and Finish Group and the Executive, as set out in the report.
2. That the Scrutiny Panel considers any other options or areas for further consideration.
3. That a further progress report be submitted to the Scrutiny Panel during the 2015/16 municipal year.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Council does not have a statutory duty to provide cemeteries but it does have a duty to maintain any sites under its control in a fit and proper state. Members have agreed that they wish to continue delivering a cemetery service which will require new capacity to be identified across the borough to meet demand in future years.

The Council currently operates two cemeteries – Shinfield and St Sebastians (Wokingham Without). Both sites have limited capacity. This reflects the position across the country with, for example, two London boroughs, Hackney and Tower Hamlets, running out of space completely and no longer providing the service.

The nearest crematorium is located at Easthampstead Park in Bracknell. Nationally, cremation accounts for around 70% of all disposals.

In September 2007 the Scrutiny Committee Burials Task and Finish Group submitted its report to the Executive. The Task and Finish Group was asked to examine:

- whether there was sufficient burial and cemetery capacity to meet future demand across the borough;
- whether greater provision was needed for non-traditional and non-Christian burials.

The Executive accepted the majority of the Task and Finish Group's recommendations (set out below) and tasked officers to report back on progress relating to their implementation. The most recent update was submitted to the Corporate Projects Overview and Scrutiny Panel in August 2013. Recent progress against each of the recommendations is set out below.

Update on Task and Finish Group Recommendations

1. That the options for increasing capacity in current WBC cemeteries at Shinfield and St Sebastian's be explored further in consultation with local stakeholders.

Update – Work was carried out in August 2014 at St Sebastians cemetery to increase capacity. The works involved the removal of a small section of pathway in order to create approximately 33 additional burial spaces. The section of pathway involved was chosen to have minimal impact on adjacent burial plots. Further areas of St Sebastians can be used in future to increase capacity further.

2. That the options for identifying new burial sites be explored further in consultation with local landowners and Town/Parish Councils.

Update - Discussions have taken place about a new burial site in the borough. Latest developments are set out in the Part II paper attached to the report.

3. That the development of natural burial sites, either stand alone or within WBC sites, be considered further.

Update – A private provider has contacted the Council informally about the potential for developing a green burial site in the borough. Any formal proposal will be subject to public scrutiny as part of the planning and licensing process. To date no formal application has been submitted.

4. That other service initiatives aimed at saving space and widening choice, such as Columbarium Walls and Gardens of Remembrance be pursued.

Update – Investigations have been undertaken about the potential for columbarium walls at Shinfield and St Sebastians cemeteries. The potential introduction of columbarium walls remains under review. Should the Council decide to move forwards with this option, new fees have been included in the fees and charges list with effect from 1 April 2014.

5. That the current burial space requirements in the Core Strategy be amended to reflect the proposed space requirements via the Managing Development Delivery Development Plan Document (MDD DPD).

Update – This recommendation has been implemented through the MDD DPD which was approved by the Executive in 2012.

6. That other service providers inside and outside the borough be approached to explore opportunities for partnership working in order to deliver new capacity, achieve efficiencies and develop best practice.

As described in the report, discussions have continued with potential providers.

7. That the current adequate provision of burial space for Muslim and non-Christian burials be noted.

Update – The capacity for Muslim burials at Shinfield cemetery remains adequate.

The report indicates that the Council's two cemeteries (Shinfield and St Sebastians) have burial capacity for a number of years. It also shows that there is scope to deliver additional capacity within the two sites. Finally, it demonstrates progress in developing a new site or sites within the borough which will be funded by SDL developer contributions.

BACKGROUND

Statutory Duties

Local Authorities do not have a statutory duty to provide cemeteries and crematoria. Under the Local Government Act 1972 (and subsequent orders) a Local Authority may provide and maintain cemeteries inside or outside its area. Under the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order (1977) a Local Authority must keep any cemetery under its control in good order and repair. The legislation provides for the Council to own and operate cemeteries and to charge fees as it sees fit. In addition, the legislation extends to statutory requirements relating to the keeping of registers and plans of sites.

Current Provision

Since 1925, the Council has provided a burial service through Council owned cemeteries at St Sebastian's (Wokingham Without) and Shinfield. An assessment of the current capacity at the two cemeteries indicates:

- Shinfield cemetery had space for 114 full burial graves; 60+ cremated remains plots (potentially more) and 12 Muslim burial plots (potentially more). This indicates that the cemetery has capacity for a further 14 years of usage.
- St Sebastians cemetery has space for 6 full burial graves plus the additional 33 spaces created by the recent pathway works and 13+ cremated remains plots (potentially more). This indicates that the cemetery has capacity for a further 7 years of usage.

There are a number of other burial grounds in the borough operated by the local churches and the Mays Lane cemetery which is operated by Earley Town Council. Mays Lane also includes an area for Muslim burials.

SDL Implications

The four Strategic development Locations will deliver 11,000 dwellings which equates to 26,400 new residents. Using annual mortality rates it is calculated that the SDL

developments will generate demand for an additional 952 burial spaces in the period up to 2026. Space for new graves is estimated at around 1,730 plots per hectare.

The table below outlines the requirements for additional burial space relating to the four Strategic Development Location sites and other non SDL developments.

Table - Proposed SDL Burial Space Requirements

Strategic Development Locations(number of Dwellings, population)	Burial plots required	Area required
North Wokingham (1500, 3600)	130	0.03ha/300m ²
South Wokingham SDL (2500, 6000)	216	0.05ha/500m ²
South of the M4 (2500, 6000)	216	0.05ha/500m ²
Arborfield SDL (3500, 8400)	303	0.07ha/700m ²
Other non SDL development (1000, 2400)	87	0.02ha/200m ²
Totals	952	0.22ha/2,200m ²

The requirement as calculated above is 36 burial plots per 1000 population. Approximately 1,730 burial plots can be accommodated within 1 hectare which equates to 4,325 people on the basis of 2.5 people per plot.

Combining the burial requirements for the borough set out by the Task and Finish Group and the requirements projected for the SDLs results in a total requirement of around 1.9 hectares for borough for the period up to 2029. This additional capacity will have to be met by the Council and the range of other providers operating in the borough. Ideally, the SDL provision will be integrated within the wider strategic solution.

Further details of the SDL implications and discussions with the SDL developers are set out in the Part II paper. The Part II paper also gives details of the projected S106 monies to be delivered through the SDL process.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The net cost of the Council's cemeteries service is around £23k per annum.

In 2007 the Executive resolved that a review of income achieved through the sale of burial rights, cost of interment, memorials, etc. be conducted to ensure that revenue goes as far as possible towards meeting the ongoing maintenance costs of existing plots. In line with that recommendation adjustments were made to WBC's Fees and Charges based on benchmarking against comparable authorities.

List of Background Papers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report of the Scrutiny Committee Burials Task and Finish Group – September 2007 • Environment Agency Guidelines – Assessing Groundwater Pollution • Update reports to the Corporate Services Scrutiny Panel

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