

TITLE	Burial Capacity - Update
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13 January 2020
WARD	None specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director of Locality and Customer Services - Sarah Hollamby

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To ensure there are sufficient burial plots available at WBC owned cemeteries to meet the current and projected demand.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee note the report and offer comment.

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. However the Local Authority is responsible for the burial or cremation of any person who dies within its boundaries and for whom no other funeral arrangements are being made.

Current Position & Trends

The Council currently operates two cemeteries – Shinfield and St Sebastians which between them have just over 1,800 plots.

The intention is for WBC to continue as a Burial Authority with the grounds maintained to the current high standard within the existing ground maintenance contract.

In addition to the two Council sites there are around 20 further burial sites spread across the Borough. Most of these are operated by the Diocese of Oxford with other individual sites owned and/or operated by town or parish councils (eg Mays Lane Burial Ground which is owned by Early Town Council).

At present we do not have information on overall capacity across all burial sites but do recognise that much will depend on demand. Whilst cremations currently account for around 80% nationally trend predictions suggest an environmental backlash against 'standard' cremations. There is also a growing demand for other options such as 'green' or 'woodland' burials, memorial tree planting and benches and 'strewing areas' (such as the recently completed strewing area in Shinfield Cemetery).

In Wokingham the level of new housing development in the Borough's SDLs (Strategic Development Locations) suggest that overall demand will increase – using the Local Plan provision requirement of 14.4 plots per 1,000 population. However statistics show that many residents are choosing alternative provision out of the Borough.

Potential Additional Provision

Currently we have between 8-12 new burials per year in the 2 WBC owned cemeteries (9 in 2018/19) and, following a recent review of capacity, have identified 165 new potential plots between those cemeteries. However these are subject to ground conditions with particular concern around ground water levels in certain areas.

In addition the Council has been in discussions for a number of years with the Diocese of Oxford about purchasing an area of land in Ruscombe with the potential to provide a further 172 burial plots. Further investigative work is planned in 2020 to address concerns raised about water table levels before any final planning application is made prior to completing any purchase.

Finally the Council is considering options for building its own eco-friendly crematorium facility within the Borough. Not only would this serve the existing and future needs and requirements of the Borough's residents it would also allow us to offer a range of eco-friendly cremation and burial options to a wider population. Depending on final plans there may be opportunities to include some burial plots if required as well as woodland burials and strewing areas.

Provided a significant proportion of the above can be delivered it should be sufficient to meet local demand and so no further burial capacity would be required in the medium term.

Background

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. However the Local Authority is responsible for the burial or cremation of any person who dies within its boundaries and for whom no other funeral arrangements are being made. The Council intends to continue as a Burial Authority, operating and maintaining its own cemeteries.

Trends

Whilst cremations currently account for around 80% nationally trend predictions suggest an environmental backlash against 'standard' cremations. As highlighted elsewhere in this report this does open up a potential market for more eco-friendly cremations such as that proposed for a potential new facility in Wokingham Borough.

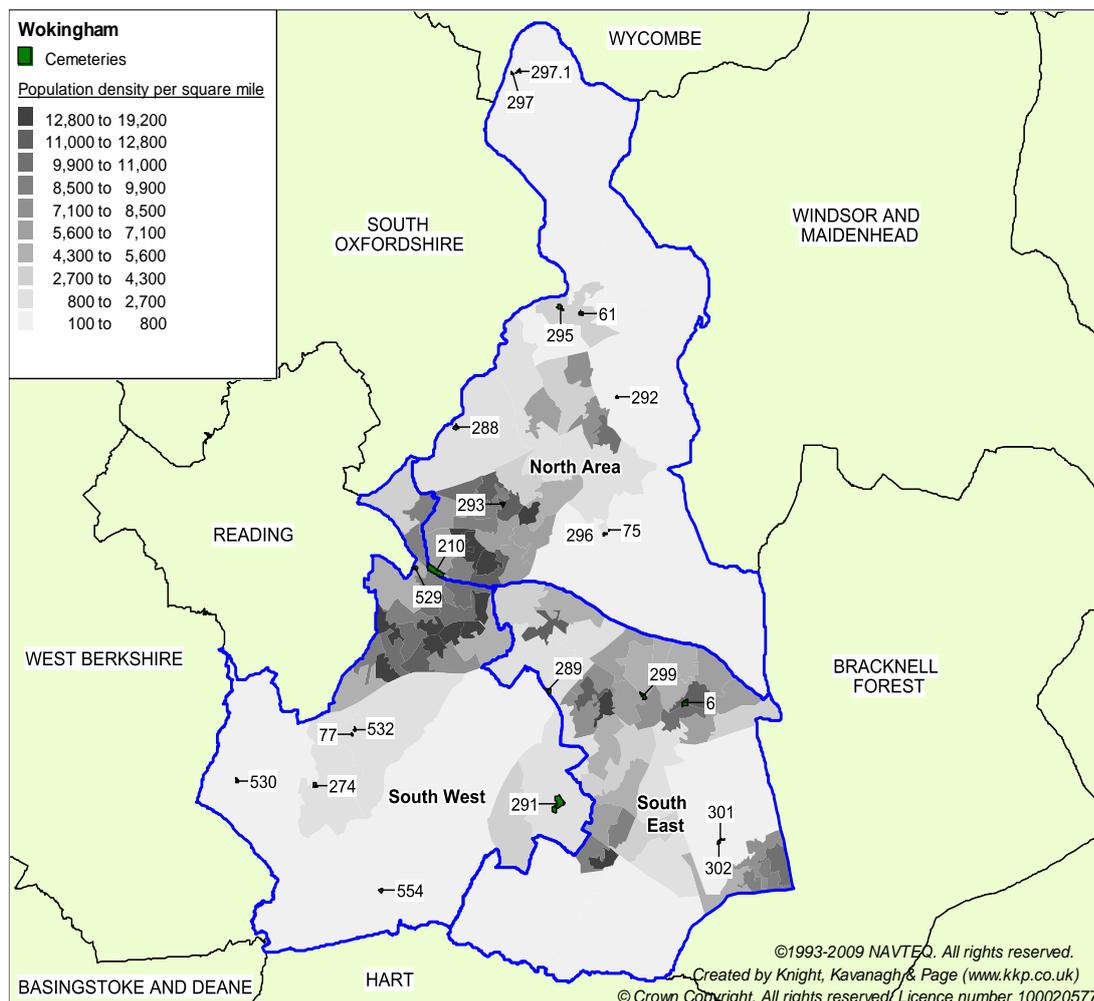
There is also a growing demand for other options such as 'green' or natural burial sites, including 'woodland' burials, memorial tree planting and benches and 'strewing areas' for cremated ashes.

Current Provision

There are over 20 burial sites spread across the Borough with 2 operated by the Council. Most of the others are operated by the Diocese of Oxford with other individual sites owned and/or operated by town or parish councils. (eg Mays Lane Burial Ground which is owned by Early Town Council).

The table below shows current provision and ownership with the map over the page showing the distribution.

KKP ref	Site	Ownership
6	All Saints Church, Wokingham	Diocese of Oxford
61	Cemetery off Baybrooke Road, Wargrave	Other
75	Church Hill, Hurst	Diocese of Oxford
77	Church Lane Cemetery, Shinfield	Diocese of Oxford
210	Mays Lane Burial Ground, Earley	Earley Town Council
274	Shinfield Cemetery, Spencers Wood	WBC
288	St Andrews Church and Graveyard, Sonning	Diocese of Oxford
289	St Catherine's Parish Church Bearwood	Diocese of Oxford
291	St James' Church Barkham	Diocese of Oxford
292	St James the Great, Ruscombe	Diocese of Oxford
293	St John the Evangelist, Woodley	Diocese of Oxford
295	St Mary's Church, Wargrave	Diocese of Oxford
296	St Nicholas Church, Hurst	Diocese of Oxford
297	St Nicholas Parish Church, Remenham	Diocese of Oxford
297.1	St Nicholas Parish Churchyard, Remenham	Diocese of Oxford
299	St Pauls Church, Wokingham	Diocese of Oxford
301	St Sebastian's Cemetery, Wokingham Without	WBC
302	St Sebastian's Church, Wokingham Without	Diocese of Oxford
529	St Peter's Church, Earley	Diocese of Oxford
530	Holy Trinity Church, Grazeley	Diocese of Oxford
532	St Mary's Church, Shinfield	Diocese of Oxford
554	Nutbean Cemetery, Shinfield	Swallowfield PC



Unfortunately we have no up to date information on overall capacity across the non-WBC owned sites.

Current WBC Provision & Future Capacity

The Council currently operates two cemeteries – Shinfield and St Sebastians. Shinfield Cemetery is located in Spencers Wood and has 1,167 current plots including an area dedicated for Muslim burials. St Sebastians Cemetery is in Wokingham Without and has 644 current plots.

Both cemeteries are well maintained and recent improvements to Shinfield Cemetery have included the creation of a dedicated 'strewing' area for cremated ashes which is already proving popular.

Currently we have between 8-12 new burials per year across the 2 WBC owned cemeteries (9 in 2018/19) and, following a recent review of capacity, have identified 165 new potential plots between those cemeteries (148 additional lots in Shinfield and 17 in St Sebastians). However these are subject to ground conditions with particular concern around ground water levels in certain areas.

In addition the Council has been in discussions for a number of years with the Diocese of Oxford about purchasing an area of land in Ruscombe with the potential to provide a further 172 burial plots. Further investigative work is planned in 2020 to address concerns raised about water table levels before any final planning application is made prior to completing any purchase.

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Conclusion

Provided a significant proportion of the above can be delivered it should be sufficient to meet local demand and so no further burial capacity would be required in the medium term.

However if the new Ruscombe provision and the proposed new crematorium are not progressed for whatever reason then further work would be needed to assess overall future burial demand and options for additional new provision to meet it.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	N/A
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	N/A
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	N/A

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None relevant

Cross-Council Implications
N/A

Public Sector Equality Duty
Should any decision regarding an increase in burial plot provision or the creation of a new eco-friendly crematorium be made, the Council's duties shall be considered as appropriate.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
Not applicable

List of Background Papers
None

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