

Burial Plot Capacity

Update note to Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee June 2020

From: Nigel Bailey – Asst Director Housing & Place Commissioning

The following is a brief bullet point update on the report previously prepared for Scrutiny Committee in March 2020.

- Burial plot capacity has been continually monitored as part of the Council's Local Death Process Management Group (DPMG) – feeding in to the wider Berkshire and Thames Valley Groups and also up the Council's own Covi-19 Gold emergency planning group
- Further review of capacity carried out early April identify c340 full burial plots (ground conditions permitting) and c1,000 cremation plots across all cemeteries in Wokingham Borough
- Latest public health projections of excess deaths in Wokingham as a result of the pandemic result in project total deaths in the Borough through to the end of June (included non-covid related deaths) of around 35-40 per week.
- Previously around 20% of deaths resulted in full burials rather than cremations therefore the burial plot need currently estimated at around 8 plots per week. However to date this demand has not materialised – potentially because the restrictions on attendance etc may have resulted in more families choosing cremation. However these figures do not include any potential second 'spike'.
- Through Berkshire DPMG crematorium capacity across Berkshire monitored and currently no issues at all at either Reading or Bracknell crematoriums. Also monitoring locally and Berkshire-wide funeral director and grave-digging capacity and again currently all well within capacity.
- Recognised shortage of Muslim burial plots across the Borough and works now completed at WBC's Shinfield cemetery to provide an additional 50-60 potential full burial plots. Other plots available across Borough in particularly at Mays Lane in Earley.
- Whilst current provision is sufficient to meet worst-case predicted demand for the next 12 months (although as highlighted above the predicted figures are currently well above actuals) the local Wokingham DPMG agreed to progress options for additional future provision.
- Unfortunately proposals to purchase land at Ruscombe to provide an additional 172 burial plots have not been able to be progressed due to unsuitable ground conditions.
- Instead proposals have been drawn up to clear some of the boundary areas within St Sebastians cemetery in Wokingham Without to provide 250-300 additional plots plus a new strewing area. Quotes have been received and are currently being reviewed with the preferred proposal being within the capital

funding already in the budget for the Ruscombe additional provision. It is hoped to complete the works over the next few months.

- Further opportunities are available at St Sebastians in the future to create even more additional plots by potentially reconfiguring the entrance road and parking area.
- Throughout the current pandemic we have been liaising with Earley Town Council regarding Mays Lane where there remains current capacity. However the Council have announced plans to extend the current cemetery to provide several hundred additional full burial plots as well as specific additional areas for Muslim burials, child burials and strewing area.
- Other cemeteries across the Borough have also identified potential additional plots that they could bring forward.
- A further review of overall capacity is planned to be carried out in the Autumn.