

PAPER NO. 2

REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE MEETING OF JULY 13th

Meeting: Executive
Date: July 13th 2015
Subject: Burial Space Strategy
Report of: Matthew Bills
Portfolio Holder: Councillor Bannister
Status: For recommendation

Relevant Ward(s):

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform Executive of the Scrutiny Commission's request that funding be provided for external specialist advice to be provided to the Council to review burial space provision across the Harborough District and prepare a cemetery and burial space strategy.

2 Recommendation:

- 2.1 **Executive agree that the scope detailed in Appendix A should be the basis for the review**

3 Summary of Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 Officers do not have the appropriate skills or capacity to help project the future requirement for burial provision and consider how best additional burial space will in future be funded and how sites will be managed, during the next year.
- 3.2 The meeting of Scrutiny Commission on 1st June supported a proposal that specialist external advice be commissioned from a consultant with experience of open space forecasting and management to project the requirements for cemetery provision over the long term (potentially to 2036 which matches understanding of housing growth), thus allowing the District Council to plan for burial ground provision in the future, allocate land for future cemetery use and consider the financing and management of additional burial grounds.

4 Key Facts

- 4.1 A Cemeteries and Open Spaces Member Task Panel has in the past considered cemetery provision throughout the District but no longer meets. The Council as a whole should now consider how to address the future shortfalls in burial space which can be alleviated by new sites being identified and managed.
- 4.2 Previous enquiries with Town and Parish Councils have provided officers with an overview of existing burial ground provision, and allowed the Cemeteries and Open Space Task Panel to assess where the areas of greatest need potentially exist. This information has been provided to members in previous reports ([see below in previous reports](#))
- 4.3 Officers however do not have the appropriate skills or capacity to help project the future requirement for burial provision and consider how best additional burial space will in future be funded and how sites will be managed, during the next year.
- 4.4 It is considered therefore that specialist external advice be commissioned from a consultant with experience of open space forecasting and management to project the requirements for cemetery provision over the long term (potentially to 2036 which matches understanding of housing growth), thus allowing the District Council to plan for burial ground provision in the future, allocate land for future cemetery use and consider the financing and management of additional burial grounds.
- 4.5 A programme of work and anticipated timescales is set out at Appendix A

Current Provision in Harborough District

- 4.6 The District Council is responsible for six cemeteries located at Market Harborough (Northampton Road), Great Bowden, Foxton, and additionally at Saddington, Great Easton and Blaston.
- 4.7 It is also a statutory requirement of District Council to maintain 21 closed churchyards in Harborough District (churchyards not longer open for burials), under Local Government Act 1972 c.70 part IX, Miscellaneous functions, section 215.
- 4.8 An additional cemetery has been secured at Leaders Farm in Lutterworth. It is anticipated that Lutterworth Town Council may be responsible for the future management and maintenance of this facility.
- 4.9 There are many other burial grounds throughout the District. Either Parochial Church Councils or Parish Councils generally manage these sites. The Kibworth Joint Burial Committee manages the burial facility at Kibworth and there is a natural burial ground at Scraftoft, which is privately owned.

- 4.10 Extensions were approved by Executive to Foxton and Great Bowden Cemeteries in 2009. These have now been completed and are being used for burials relieving pressure on burial space in these settlements.
- 4.11 Planning permission has also been granted for a crematorium at Great Glen. This site will also incorporate a lawn cemetery, thus relieving some of the pressure on burial space in the north and central part of the district. The proposed developer is Co-op Funeral Services but there has been a new crematorium recently built at Countesthorpe and it is not certain that this site will be developed.

Assessing the future of burial provision in the District.

- 4.12 To develop a strategy concerning future cemetery and burial ground provision it will be necessary to undertake a review of cemetery services.

This will involve gathering data on the following areas of burial service delivery:

1. The burial process
2. What do the public expect from a burial service?
3. Health and Safety – memorials
4. Operational Issues – cemetery and burial ground contract
5. Provision through partnership
6. Strategic Issues – land use and planning ahead
7. Infrastructure and capital investment

Much of the background work will need to be undertaken by HDC officers (burial services, contracted services, asset management and strategic planning) to provide up to date and relevant information to the consultant.

- 4.13 A procurement process will need to be undertaken to appoint a suitably qualified consultant and an outline of the requirements for this work and potential timescale is shown at Appendix A. An estimated cost by officers to appoint a consultant for this work is between £12,000 and £17,000 based on previous studies of open space development. This will be confirmed through a procurement exercise.

5 Legal Issues

- 5.1 It is currently not a statutory obligation for District Councils to provide burial facilities, although this situation has been under review by the Ministry of Justice.

6 Resource Issues

- 6.1 This work will be funded from the 2015/16 approved budget..

7 Equality Analysis Implications/Outcomes

- 7.1 There are equality implications in terms of service provision and access and burials of a variety of Faith Groups. An Equality Analysis will be carried out during the course of the strategy.

8. Risk Management Implications

- 8.1 Management and maintenance of cemeteries and closed churchyards involves old structures (walls, headstones) which may be liable to collapse. A review and strategy of the management of burial space may help to reduce risk by providing a comprehensive assessment of condition and future management approaches.

9 Consultation

- 9.1 There was an ongoing dialogue with the Cemeteries and Open Space Task Panel concerning cemetery provision for the district between 2006 until the task panel completed its work in 2010.
- 9.2 Consultation to date has been limited to dialogue with local Councils where a need for additional burial space has been identified.
- 9.3 A consultation concerning the Open Spaces Strategy and Provision for Open Space Sport and Recreation was held between 24th Feb 2015 and 13th April 2015. Through this consultation, and the forthcoming Open Space Strategy / Provision for Open Space, Sport and Recreation documents which will be considered by Executive prior to wider public consultation in July 2015, the need for additional burial provision will be identified along with minimum provision thresholds and details of appropriate planning obligations towards provision of burial space when new development is proposed. The completion of a Cemetery and Burial Ground Strategy will help inform the final Open Space Strategy. The responses concerning cemetery provision can be found at Appendix B.
- 9.4 The Corporate Services Manager has consulted with Faith Groups to determine the type of burial provision that is required in the future. The information from these consultations will be provided to the selected consultant.

10. Options

- 10.1 To not operate a burial strategy. This is inappropriate because of the reputational risk to the Authority.

11 Background Papers

- 11.1 None

Previous report(s): Executive - Cemetery provision in Harborough District
Dec 2009.
Scrutiny – Cemetery Provision in Harborough District Nov
2014.

Information Issued Under Sensitive Issue Procedure: N

Ward Members Notified: N

Appendices:

- A. Scope of Work Required and Proposed Timescale**
- B. Comments arising from consultation on Open Space Strategy**

