

Title: **Provision of Cemeteries**

Portfolio Holder: **Cllr Rosemary Brown - Environmental Services**

Reporting Officer: **Peter Woodcock, Corporate Director**

Key Decision: **Yes**

Purpose

This report is intended to brief Cabinet on the cemetery space currently available, how long this is likely to last, and give some options for the future. The main intention is to agree the best long term approach, although some minor short term options are also proposed.

Background

Nearly all district and unitary councils provide cemeteries and keep records of burials, even though there is no statutory duty to do this. Local authorities are finding it increasingly difficult to provide sufficient cemetery space to meet demand.

This appears to be due to three factors: increasing costs, shrinking capital budgets, and the perception that this is not a priority given the other demands on local authority resources. In West Wiltshire we face a particular difficulty as we have five towns and a number of substantial villages which, up until now, have had their own cemeteries. This reflects a strong cultural perception that people should be able to be buried in the community they lived in.

Most local authorities provide a number of cemeteries, but few do so at every significant settlement in their area. Councils are increasingly facing the need to restrict the numbers of cemeteries they provide, and a few London boroughs have stopped providing this service altogether.

Main issue

We have been conscious that burial space is running out at Bradford on Avon and Melksham cemeteries. Bids for capital resources to buy additional land have been made but there have been doubts about the wisdom of spending substantial sums in this way.

We have negotiated with landowners and reached initial agreements for the purchase of land so we can extend these cemeteries. No binding agreements have been reached as yet.

Cemetery space currently available

The following table sets out the number of spaces available for burials and cremations. It also indicates the number of years these are likely to last.

Cemetery	Burial spaces available	Cremated remains spaces available	Spaces available for children's burials	Estimated time until cemetery full
Melksham	88	142	n/a	3 years
Bradford on Avon	80	53	13	3 years
Trowbridge*	3,000	350	n/a	10 years +
Westbury*	3,000	250	n/a	10 years +
Warminster	1,800	158	n/a	10 years +
Hilperton	144	252	n/a	10 years +
Holt	59	27	n/a	10 years

*The figures above assume that infrastructure works (drives, paths and drainage) at Warminster and Trowbridge are carried out.

Consultation with potential partners

Officers have discussed the possibility of local funeral directors or the Crematorium playing a role in providing a burials and cemeteries service.

The initial indication is that the Crematorium operators might be interested in providing a cemetery if they could acquire land and planning permission for this adjacent to their existing site. They would not want us to extend Melksham cemetery if they did this.

There has been some interest from local funeral directors, on the basis that the Council provides the land and probably the infrastructure.

Long term options

Option 1: Don't extend Bradford on Avon and Melksham cemeteries. Negotiate with the Crematorium to provide cemetery space. Once Bradford on Avon and Melksham are full, we only offer burial spaces in Trowbridge, Westbury, Warminster and Hilperton. If we start publicising this approach now, there will be time for people to come to terms with the lack of provision in Bradford on Avon and Melksham.

Option 2: Explore the possibility of transferring the burial service to the private sector, along with the existing cemeteries. Do not provide additional space at Melksham and Bradford on Avon.

Option 3: Buy additional land at Melksham and Bradford on Avon. Invest in the necessary infrastructure. This work would have to be started in 2006/07. Continue to provide the current service.

Financial implications – long term

Below is a chart setting out the potential income and costs for each of the 3 long term options which were described above.

It also shows a fourth option (Part Investment) which shows the financial implications of putting in the infrastructure at Warminster and Trowbridge (shown as short term option six above), but not extending Bradford on Avon or Melksham. This has been included to help us compare the available options.

The line in the chart titled "Net Revenue Cost" is perhaps the most significant. It shows the net revenue costs for each option for year 5, then for year 10, and then for years 15 and 20. Immediately following that the cost over the whole 20 year period is shown. It can be seen that the net revenue cost is lowest for Option 3.

This is because Option 3 involves investing capital in our cemeteries so that we lengthen the time over which income will be generated - because there is more cemetery space available for burials in the future. If we do not extend these cemeteries income will dwindle to next to nothing. Quickly if we do nothing (Option1), more slowly if we make some investment (Option 4).

Looking at the costs over 20 years, and taking into account the increased maintenance costs, if we extend the cemeteries (Option 3) it is likely to have a revenue cost that is approximately £780,000 less than doing nothing (Option 1), and £440,000 less than the limited investment (Option 4).

Rounded to £'000	Annual Cost Year 5	Annual Cost Year 10	Annual Cost Year 15	Annual Cost Year 20	TOTAL Costs for 20 years	Average Annual Cost over 20 year period
<u>Option 1 – Do Nothing</u>						
Revenue expenditure	213	244	280	321	5,015	251
Income from fees	-81	-94	-103	-105	-1,992	-100
Net revenue cost	132	150	177	216	3,023	151
Capital expenditure						
<u>Option 2 – Outsource Burial Service</u>						
Revenue expenditure	144	166	191	221	3,409	170
Income from fees	0	0	0	0	0	0
Net revenue cost	144	166	191	221	3,409	170
Capital expenditure					0	
<u>Option 3 - Investment</u>						
Revenue expenditure	241	277	319	367	5,655	283
Income from fees	-148	-172	-193	-210	-3,412	-171
Net revenue cost	93	105	126	157	2,243	112
Capital expenditure					478	
<u>Option 4 – Part Investment</u>						
Revenue expenditure	223	256	294	338	5,245	262
Income from fees	-124	-144	-160	-101	-2,562	-128
Net revenue cost	99	112	134	237	2,683	134
Capital expenditure					83	

Option 2 - to outsource the service - has not yet been properly market tested due to the lack of interest shown by the industry and the high costs. Consequently the figures shown are estimated. Revenue costs remain as a commercial operator would probably expect the Council to cover the maintenance costs.

The recommended investment of £478K now will result in the longevity of the income to the extent that over a period of 20 yrs the net revenue cost of not investing is outweighed by around £780K.

Short term options

This section addresses some of the things we should consider doing in the short term.

Option 1: Make capital available in the 2006/07 budget to put in the necessary infrastructure to make the extension to Warminster cemetery usable (we have already purchased the land). Without doing this, we only have capacity for a year or two at Warminster. Carry out infrastructure works at Trowbridge in the current year.

Option 2: The Property and Estates Manager allocates one of the Section's officers to take responsibility for managing our cemeteries, providing support to the Burials Administration Officer. Extend the Burials Administration Officer's hours from 18.5 to 29.6 hours. Her manager recommends that this is necessary to provide an acceptable level of customer service.

Option 3: Allocate resources in 2006/07 to assemble the old burial records and compile a complete computerised database. This will provide comprehensive records showing which areas of our cemeteries have already been used, and make it easier to provide information to customers.

Option 4: In Bradford on Avon and Holt, establish whether there are unused private graves, neglected graves over 100 years old, and available depth in areas used for public graves. This only applies for areas of those cemeteries used for 75 years or more. The work on the records mentioned in Option 3 above would be required. There would also need to be some on-the-ground investigation. Also investigate whether the grass areas in these cemeteries (which may have been used in the distant past) have been used or are available. This will tell us how many more graves we can accommodate within these existing cemeteries.

Option 5: Implement the recommendations of the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (report of March 2005) to improve administration and records.

Option 6: Consider charging more for burials in general, with an additional charge for deeper graves and graves beside paths. Our current charges and those proposed for 2006/07 are attached as Appendix I. Our current charges are compared with other nearby authorities in the chart in Appendix II.

Financial implications - short term options

Option 1: The estimated cost of putting the infrastructure in place at Warminster and Trowbridge cemeteries is £81,000. The annual income from these two cemeteries, which would otherwise dry up quickly, will offset the investment as illustrated in the chart above.

Option 2: This can be done partly within existing resources, plus £6,500 per year for the additional hours.

Option 3: Probably the most economical way of improving our records is to use existing, or past, staff rather than consultants. We estimate £7,000 will cover costs of additional staff time. Because this work will be time consuming, it seems unlikely that existing staff can do it within the contracted hours proposed above.

Option 4: This will require an examination of records (as improved under Option 3 above) and investigations on the ground. The latter is likely to need a specialist contractor. Costs are estimated at £10,000.

Option 5: Improving our administrative procedures and records as recommended by the Institute should be achievable with existing resources - subject to the hours being increased under Option 3 above.

Option 6: Currently the income from selling grave spaces and undertaking burials is £128,000 pa. Looking at our current charges, as compared with other authorities, there is some scope for increasing charges, particularly for triple graves (which are deeper and more expensive to dig) and plots by paths, which are at a premium. Appendix I shows some proposed charges for 2006/07. They include a few charges for services that we have not priced previously. These charges would make us somewhat expensive as compared to similar authorities (Bath and Swindon are not wholly comparable). However the increases could yield £14,000 per year, which will help us cover the costs of providing a better service in the future.

Service Development Bids

Capital / Revenue	Option	Amount
Capital	Long Term Option 3 Extending Cemeteries	£395,000
Capital	Short Term Option 1 Infrastructure at Warminster	£48,000
Revenue	Short Term Option 2 Additional Hours	£6,500 pa
Revenue	Short Term Option 3 Improving records and customer service	£7,000 06/07 only
Revenue	Short Term Option 4 On the ground investigation	£10,000 06/07 only

Legal Implications

There are no particular legal implications.

Conclusions

- If we invest capital over the next 2 years in additional infrastructure and extending Bradford on Avon and Melksham cemeteries (Option 3) we can maintain, and enhance, the current service to customers.
- The capital investment will mean a substantially lower revenue cost over the next 20 years.
- Consequently investing in infrastructure and extending our cemeteries is probably the best approach.

Recommendation

- We proceed with all the short term options - subject to successful service bids for the necessary resources.
- Implement long term Option 3 above - again subject to a successful bid for the necessary capital.

Human rights

The human rights implications of this report have been considered and taken into account in the developing the options and recommendations.

Background papers

Those contents of the cemeteries files that are available to the public under the Freedom of Information Act (excluding material relating to the cemetery lodges).

Plain English

This report has been checked for plain English.

Key Decision

Statement of reason for key decision.	To address the lack of space in some of our cemeteries.
Options considered and rejected.	See long term options above – 1, 2 and 4 have been rejected.
Date of implementation (not less than five days after date of decision).	Implementation will start five days after the decision.

Proposed Cemetery Fees for 2006 - 2007

	<u>Current</u>	<u>06-07</u>
<u>Purchase of Full Coffin Grave Space</u>		
Exclusive Right of Burial – Initial purchase for 40 years	£300	£350
Exclusive Right of Burial – Initial purchase next to a path	No fee set	£550
Exclusive Right of Burial – Renewal/extension for 10 years	No fee set	£80
<u>Coffin Interments</u>		
Stillborn or any child not exceeding 15 years	Free	Free
Body exceeding 15 years - Single depth	£361	£300
Body exceeding 15 years - Double depth	£361	£350
Body exceeding 15 years - Triple depth	£361	£400
Body part - tissue	No fee set	Free
Extra fee outside normal hours & Saturdays Incl' child add	£140	£150
<u>Purchase of Cremated Remains Grave Space</u>		
Exclusive Right of Burial - Initial purchase for 40 years	£103	£140
Exclusive Right of Burial – Initial purchase next to a path	No fee set	£215
Exclusive Right of Burial – Renewal/extension for 10 years	No fee set	£30
<u>Cremated Remains Interment</u>		
Stillborn or child not exceeding 15 years	Free	Free
Body exceeding 15 years	£138	£140
Pouring or scattering ashes within the grave	£40	£50
Body part - ashes	No fee set	Free
Extra fee outside normal hours & Saturdays incl' child add	£138	£100
<u>Exhumations, Searches and Use of Chapel</u>		
Exhumation of coffin	No fee set	£1,400
Exhumation of Cremated Remains Casket	No fee set	£260
Search fee	£25	£25
Use of Chapel	£43.30	£50

Fees are doubled for non-residents of West Wiltshire district

	COFFIN		CREMATED REMAINS	
	INTERNMENT	EX' RIGHT (PURCHASE)	INTERNMENT	EX' RIGHT (PURCHASE)
SWINDON	£325.00	£325.00 £534.00 (by the path - easy access)	£97.00	£97.00
SALISBURY	£250.00	£280.00	£85.00	£90.00
	(To be reviewed on completion of new cemetery)			
BATH	£475.00	£550.00 (50 years)	£135.00	£275.00
KENNET	£121.00	£221.00 - single £340.00 - double	£57.00	£45.00 (Tablet) £91.00 (Headstone)
NORTH WILTS	£170.00	£112.00 1 year-12 years £170.00	£117.00	£117.00
WWDC	£361.00	£300.00	£138.00	£103.00