

## Grounds and Environmental Services Committee

**Date:** 5 December 2022

**Title:** Cemetery Service Update

**Purpose of the Report:**

To update Members on the recent activities of the cemetery service.

**Contact Officer:**

Ian Haynes - Head of Grounds and Environmental Services

Corporate Objective/s	LLTC Five Year Plan – Aim 2. Objective 19	
<b>Implications:</b>		
<b>Financial</b>	Yes	Within existing budget
<b>Human Resources</b>	No	
<b>Operational/Service delivery</b>	No	
<b>Procedural/Legal</b>	Yes	
<b>Risk/Health and Safety</b>	Yes	

### 1 RECOMMENDATION

Should the Grounds and Environmental Services Committee be minded: -

1.1 To note the report.

### 2 BACKGROUND

2.1 In March 2014, work began on creating a cemetery extension at Vandyke Road Cemetery. The extension now provides the parish with its only secured future burial space.

2.2 The Town Council's burial capacity should be classed as **PROBLEMATIC**. This is based upon the capacity status used in a recent audit of London burial provision undertaken by the University of York, which defines: -

- **FULL:** There are no burial spaces available/existing cemeteries deemed to be full. There are fewer than 100 interments in the borough in cemeteries, mostly re-opens and in created graves.
- **CRITICAL:** Reliance on created graves only (i.e. graves only available in parts of the cemetery not originally designed to accommodate interment; in space created through the addition of topsoil or constructed above-ground burial vaults; in existing capacity above common graves; or reclaimed graves) and/or space is limited and unlikely to meet demand as indicated in the estimated demand for virgin space, and the space is likely to be exhausted within the next ten years.
- **PROBLEMATIC:** The borough has some virgin space remaining, but insufficient to meet the demand for the next twenty years.
- **ADEQUATE:** There is sufficient new space available to meet the estimated demand for virgin space, and/or an extension is likely to be brought into use
- **SUSTAINABLE:** Grave reuse in the borough has extended the capacity of an existing cemetery infinitely.

2.3 It was noted that although the eastern urban extension development included a cemetery provision, this small provision would only come forward at the very end of the site development. The land in question is also outside the parish boundary.

### 3. CONTEXT FOR THE PROVISION OF CEMETERIES

3.1 Historically, the purpose of a cemetery has been the proper provision of facilities for the deceased by those left and is an essential part of the bereavement process. For over 1,000 years, burial was the only permitted way in which to dispose of the dead and was the exclusive preserve of the Church within churchyards, governed by ecclesiastical law.

3.2 The urbanisation of society in the industrial period and population growth meant that these churchyards could not cope. New cemeteries were created, which often became the responsibility of the emerging local authorities.

3.3 During the same period, new secular laws were introduced to govern cemeteries, which remain largely in place today. Cremation as a form of disposal became increasingly popular in the 20th Century. Cremation now accounts for over 80% of all funerals in the British Islands.

3.4 However, while considered the most environmentally friendly disposal method, concerns have recently been raised regarding waste products produced by the cremation process, particularly mercury. This has led to the

growth of Green or Woodland cemeteries, some of which are provided by local authorities.

#### **4. OBLIGATIONS ON THE TOWN COUNCIL**

4.1 Leighton-Linslade Town Council is a burial authority by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972 and is legally obliged to maintain its cemeteries 'in good order and repair'. It is not legally obliged to provide new burial space, but the sale of space generates income that funds the maintenance of cemeteries and provides a service to residents.

4.2 If the Town Council does not continue to provide new burial space to meet demand, maintenance costs will still have to be met, creating a significant budget shortfall.

4.3 Although not a statutory responsibility of the Town Council, it is felt that public expectation is that cemetery facilities should be available within reasonable proximity to residents and within the Town.

#### **5. DEMAND FOR BURIALS VS CREMATION**

5.1 As indicated above, cremation remains the most common form for the disposal of remains, but the evidence available to the Town Council indicated that whilst nationally approximately 476,210 cremations take place a year, there are still some 112,409 burials (19.07% of total deaths). The proportion of burials within the Town remains close to the national average of circa 20%. This demonstrates a current and ongoing need for cemeteries to be available to residents.

#### **6. MAUSOLEUM UPDATE**

6.1 Currently, we have 19 names on the waiting list for a potential second mausoleum. Our first mausoleum has 36 chambers and was built with zero public money, as each owner paid a deposit to fund the construction. Officers believe it would be appropriate to wait until we have 36 interested parties meaning a second mausoleum would be in keeping with the existing structure.

6.2 Officers keep in regular contact with the interested parties on the waiting list. We will update them shortly on our position, asking them to speak to friends and family members who may be more interested in purchasing a chamber.

#### **7. CONCLUSIONS**

7.1 In accordance with paragraph 2.2, the Town Council is still classed as "problematic" in burial space terms. Therefore, in order for it to continue to be a burial authority, additional capacity is required. Given the limited level of provision that may come forward as part of the east land development, the Town Council should remain active in securing additional capacity should and when the occasion arise.

