



Grounds and Environmental Services Committee

Date: 6 December 2021

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	
Implications:		
Financial	Yes	Within existing budget
Human Resources	No	
Operational/Service delivery	No	
Procedural/Legal	Yes	
Risk/Health and Safety	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 the creation of a cemetery extension at Vandyke Road Cemetery. Now complete, the extension is providing 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 re-use 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 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 been raised in more recent times 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 on 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 493,525 cremations take place a year, there are still some 115,846 burials (19.01% 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. NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND LOCAL TRENDS IN BIRTHS AND DEATHS

- 6.1 Covering 716 square kilometres, Central Bedfordshire currently has a population of approximately 294,100 (according to the 2020 mid-year estimate) and is the 12th largest Unitary Authority in England by area and the 16th largest by population.
- 6.2 Central Bedfordshire is one of the least densely populated Unitary Council areas and is classified as predominantly rural with just over half the population living in the rural area. Approximately 63% of the population are within the working age group, being between 16 and 65 years of age, although 81% of the population are considered to be economically active (aged 16-74).
- 6.3 The Luton and Central Bedfordshire SHMA (May 2017) identifies population growth of 19.5% over the plan period to 2035 for Central Bedfordshire compared to a 13.4% increase identified for England over the same period.
- 6.4 In line with national trends, Central Bedfordshire is also projected to have a rise in older age groups over the period (age ranges 70+), but also is projected to have rises in the 55-69 aged range. It is also likely that the delivery of new

starter homes and family homes together with skilled jobs will also attract younger people and families which may have a significant effect on the age profile in Central Bedfordshire. This will put additional pressure on public services, including burial provision.

- 6.5 Central Bedfordshire residents are generally healthy and the life expectancy for both men and women is longer than it is in England as a whole. However, residents of Central Bedfordshire do experience inequalities in health outcomes.

7. LOCAL GUIDANCE

- 7.1 In the Recreation and Open Space Strategy for Central Bedfordshire, the current projections indicate that death rates are likely to increase by the year 2035, and there will be higher requirements for burial space. The projected population growth will further see the number of burials per annum increase.
- 7.2 There is a strong emphasis on the provision of local burial space in Central Bedfordshire and as a consequence, almost all settlements have cemeteries and/or churchyards.
- 7.3 Several existing sites are approaching capacity and new space will be required to accommodate ongoing and increasing demand. Whilst most sites are well maintained, there is a requirement to improve some sites and to retain appropriate maintenance regimes in other areas.

8. ANALYSIS OF NEED

- 8.1 Figures from the Central Bedfordshire website gives the number of deaths in Central Bedfordshire in 2015 as 2,050. With a population of circa 294,100, this represents a Crude Death Rate as 6.97.
- 8.2 If this Crude Death Rate of Central Bedfordshire is applied to the population of Leighton Linlade (44,800 population), the number of deaths in 2015 would be approximately 312. This is a little lower than the number of funerals declared by both the funeral directors in Leighton Linlade. However, the figures quoted are approximate and based on a current year.
- 8.3 In addition there would have been a population increase and the funeral directors may well run funerals for non-residents of Leighton Linlade also.
- 8.4 Leighton-Linslade has a slightly higher than national average burial compared with cremation at approximately 33% and 67% respectively. Anecdotally, the local funeral directors expressed the increase in popularity of burials.
- 8.5 The Luton and Central Bedfordshire SHMA (May 2017) identifies population growth of 19.5% over the plan period to 2035 for Central Bedfordshire compared to a 13.4% increase identified for England over the same period.

- 8.6 If the population increased by 19.5% to the year 2035, it would be 39,300 + 7,663 = 46,963. At the Crude Death Rate of 7.5, there would be 352 deaths in the parish each year.
- 8.7 These estimates should be treated with caution as a 'best guess', but they do provide a working indication of the level of provision that needs to be planned for. Given the limited remaining capacity of the Council's own cemeteries, this data does indicate that there will be a shortfall of burial provision in the medium term as measured against the anticipated demand.
- 8.8 A standard grave is approximately 2.88m sq in area. Theoretically, a one hectare site would be able to accommodate 3,472 graves of this size if all available land was used and a site of approximately 2-3 hectares would be the minimum required to meet the estimated demand of 7,132 spaces (Roughly a 61 year capacity).
- 8.9 The figures do not take account of land required for access roads, parking, pathways and necessary buildings on site. Said infrastructure would reduce the net area available for graves. The layout and style of cemetery would also significantly affect the usable area available together with site specific factors such as the water table.
- 8.10 Another factor that would influence the capacity of a cemetery is the interment of cremated remains. A large proportion of cremations have ashes interred in small plots within a cemetery. Although smaller than burial plots, capacity will need to be allowed for cremated remains also.

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 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 land east development, the Town Council should remain active in securing additional capacity should and when the occasion arise.