

Neighbourhood Services Committee



11th November 2021

Title	Cemetery Capacity
Purpose of the report	To note
Report Author	Karine Codd - Cemetery & Health & Safety Officer Jackie Taylor - Group Head of Neighbourhood Services
Ward(s) Affected	All Wards
Exempt	No
Exemption Reason	<i>n/a</i>
Corporate Priority	This item is not in the current list of Corporate Priorities.
Recommendations	Committee is asked to: Note the report

1. Key issues

- 1.1 Spelthorne has four open burial grounds in Staines-upon-Thames, Sunbury, Ashford, and Stanwell. Burial plots in all four cemeteries are available to both residents and non-residents of the borough. We also maintain five closed churchyards in Shepperton, Staines-upon-Thames, Stanwell and two in Lower Sunbury.
- 1.2 Spelthorne has discretionary powers to provide cemetery services and chooses to do so.
- 1.3 The open burial grounds in Ashford, Staines-upon-Thames, Stanwell, and Sunbury all have areas allocated solely for children's burials. There is little demand for the use of these areas and undertakers are of the view that this is mainly due to parents' preferences in having children cremated rather than buried.
- 1.4 Pre 2015, anyone wishing to purchase a plot within a cemetery was allowed to without any restrictions, other than if they were a non-resident, whereby the fees were tripled. This created issues in that it was impossible to anticipate burial use in future years and created an unstable income stream. To stabilise the situation, this practice was stopped and now those wishing to purchase an additional plot can only do so within one month of a close relative being buried.
- 1.5 Burial grounds are historically sited next to allotment sites with the view that once burial sites are full use would be made of the allotment site for an extended cemetery. Before any such use could be changed on Spelthorne's owned allotment sites the Secretary of State would have to grant this change. Given that more people of different ages are now very active in our allotment

sites which are also seen as healthy outdoor activity, it is unlikely that any such permission would be granted without a very strong case for such a proposed change of use.

- 1.6 Several boroughs in Surrey have introduced Woodland Burial sites, these sites are for residents who request environmentally friendly burials. Coffins are made of wicker, paper, and wood from managed forests. Woodland Burials offer an environmentally friendly, cost-effective alternative to traditional burials in cemeteries and graveyards and remain as such in perpetuity, unlike most cemeteries that may eventually be re-used or developed.
- 1.7 Research on other Woodland Burial sites suggests that charges for cemetery services are the same for this type of burial. As the site requires little maintenance, future costs will be lower and provision for this type of burial may encourage people away from the existing cemeteries giving us more capacity in terms of years.
- 1.8 During 2020, cemetery records and mapping have been modified and updated to provide an accurate picture of burial availability and we now have detailed maps of Ashford, Staines, Sunbury, and Stanwell cemeteries.
- 1.9 A full analysis of burial space was undertaken in 2020, to quantify available plots across all sites. This analysis has identified additional burial space in each of the four open cemeteries. It has also provided information and mapping on all pre-purchased and used plots. Two methods were used to establish this information, physical measuring of quantities and GIS mapping to scale.
- 1.10 Having undertaken this detailed analysis of available plots the current capacity identified in 2020 in each cemetery for the two main types of burial is as follows: -

Site	Available burial plots	Available cremated remains plots
Ashford	200	120
Staines	850	180
Sunbury	900	180
Stanwell	700	100

- 1.11 Based on an average annual use for each type of burial it is anticipated that each cemetery has future capacity as follows: -

Site	Future capacity of burial plots	Future capacity of ashes plots
Ashford	10-15 years	20 years
Staines	35-40 years	25-30 years
Sunbury	40-45 years	25-30 years
Stanwell	60-80 years	20 years

2. Financial implications

- 2.1 Currently there are no financial implications as all sites have capacity for at least the next 10-15 years.
- 2.2 If the situation changed and there was a greater uptake for burial space than anticipated this would create the need to reassess site capacity and explore land options within the Borough for new cemeteries and/or options for a Woodland burial site.
- 3. Other considerations**
 - 3.1 Given the information contained within this report we do not at this stage feel there is a need to identify new areas of land for burial purposes.
- 4. Equality and Diversity**
 - 4.1 The Council is committed to equality of services provision to its residents We have already an established section in Sunbury Cemetery which caters for the need for 24-hour burials or burials that for many reasons may need to take place out of the standard Monday to Friday bookings. The need could be for many reasons including religious faiths and/or general family wishes and is open for use to all residents and non-residents.
- 5. Sustainability/Climate Change Implications**
 - 5.1 It is accepted that mature cemeteries, churchyards, and burial grounds such as those in Spelthorne contribute to carbon capture. With the correct management in place to encourage habitat diversity, these locations can be serene and highly restorative places for quiet contemplation and engagement with nature. These elements have been recognised year on year with the awards of nationally recognised awards for each of our open cemeteries.
- 6. Timetable for implementation**
 - 6.1 This report is to note only

Background papers: There are none