



Executive
10 December 2012

**Report from the Director of
Environment and Neighbourhood
Services**

Wards Affected: ALL

Brent's Cemeteries Strategy

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides the Executive with an overview of Brent's Cemeteries Strategy. The strategy concerns the four cemeteries owned and managed by Brent Council and will enable the council to provide an inclusive and cost effective service to meet current and future demand for burial.
- 1.2 The strategy was produced following a comprehensive consultation process and sets out a clear vision, set of objectives and action plan for cemetery provision in Brent.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Executive note the findings of the strategy and agree its vision to "meet the needs of bereaved people and the wider community within the borough" by
- Conducting the burial and commemoration of the dead of the diverse community in a secure, sustainable and well-maintained environment.
 - Offering burial options at a choice of four cemeteries.
 - Enabling local communities to access cemeteries as valuable historic green spaces which promote wellbeing, biodiversity, learning and recreation.

- 2.2 Agree the three inter linked objectives which have been formed to deliver the vision of the strategy, as set out in paragraphs 3.19, 3.20 and 3.21.
- 2.3 Agree the action plan to deliver the strategy (attached as Appendix 2)
- 2.4 Approve the principle of using Invest to Save funding to increase the availability of burial space.

3.0 Detail

Background

- 3.1 Brent Council is a burial authority under the Local Government Act 1972 and is legally obliged to maintain its cemeteries 'in good order and repair'. It is not 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. If the council does not continue to provide new burial space to meet demand, maintenance costs will still have to be met, creating a budget shortfall.
- 3.2 The council owns and manages three cemeteries within the borough; Alperton, Paddington Old and Willesden New. It also jointly owns Carpenders Park Cemetery, located outside the borough within the area of Three Rivers District Council near Watford. Harrow Council owns approximately 25% of the burial land at Carpenders Park with Brent managing the whole cemetery as part of a joint delivery arrangement. In addition, there are two cemeteries where no burials take place, but where the Council manages the site:- Wembley Old Cemetery and Willesden Old Burial (appendix 1 to the strategy explains the legal position). The council is currently exploring options for the grounds maintenance and management of its cemeteries as part of its Managing the Public Realm project.
- 3.3 The three cemeteries in Brent are traditionally laid out with memorial stones while Carpenders Park is a lawn cemetery with graves grassed over apart from horizontal memorials. New land for graves is available at Carpenders Park but not at any of the cemeteries in the borough. These cemeteries can provide new graves by using space within or above existing graves. This applies to both purchased and common graves and can be achieved without the disturbance of old burials. A number of planning designations apply to Paddington Cemetery as it includes a listed building, is on the register of historic parks and gardens and is a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation. Any developments will need to be agreed with the council's Planning service to prevent any potential damage to the historic environment.
- 3.4 There is no crematorium within Brent, but there is a wide choice of crematoria available within reasonable travelling distance including at Golders Green, Hendon, Islington, Kensal Green, Mortlake, Ruislip and St Marylebone. Kensal Green Cemetery is a privately owned facility located just south of the borough and offers a choice of burial or cremation.

- 3.5 Approximately 1,500 Brent residents die each year and 75% of resident funerals take place outside the borough. The majority of these funerals are cremations although the exact figure is not available. Demand for local burial space is relatively high with 25% of Brent residents who died in 2011 being buried in a Brent cemetery. Within Greater London burials represent an average of only 14% of all funerals.
- 3.6 Burial space in Brent cemeteries is predicted to last until 2041 at current levels of demand if no action is taken. It is possible that space could be exhausted by as early as 2030 if demand transfers fully to Carpenders Park when space is no longer available at the other three cemeteries. The key challenge facing the council is how to manage its cemetery service in a sustainable manner to continue to provide local burial space to meet demand.
- 3.7 A number of options are available to the council to create new burial space, including at cemeteries that no longer have any new ground. Practices which could be adopted are outlined in the strategy, including the reclamation of grave space, mounding soil over old graves to create new space and installing burial vaults. Recommended actions for improving service management and administration are also outlined in the strategy.
- 3.8 The four cemeteries comprise 43 hectares of green space and fulfil an important recreational role while contributing to increasing biodiversity.
- 3.9 A comprehensive glossary of terminology is included in Section 1 of the strategy. A brief explanation of key terms used in this report is listed below
- Purchased grave (private) – the exclusive rights of burial have been purchased for a specific period of time within which the purchaser may decide who is buried in the grave.
 - Unpurchased grave (common) – no rights of burial have been purchased and the council may decide is buried in the grave
 - Exclusive rights of burial – the council currently sells burial rights for fifty years with the option of renewal for a further fifty years
 - Reclaimed grave - the council may reclaim and resell the space within or above purchased graves upon expiry of the exclusive burial rights.

Development of the Strategy

- 3.10 The strategy was developed following a review undertaken by a specialist consultant, widely experienced in cemetery work and options development. The review served as a basis for the draft strategy. It included a detailed analysis of how Brent's cemetery service currently operates, including levels of demand and availability of burial space, plus a benchmarking exercise which provided a range of comparative data with other London boroughs. A comprehensive two stage consultation process was then undertaken to inform the production of the final strategy.
- 3.11 To inform the draft strategy the first consultation stage was undertaken through a survey of people who had been bereaved within the last two to five years and

a series of meetings with council officers, funeral directors and other key stakeholders.

- 3.12 Over 120 questionnaire responses were received from people who had been recently bereaved. The survey results supplied usage data, e.g. frequency and pattern of visits to cemeteries, and customer satisfaction scores. A large majority of respondents agreed that cemeteries are well maintained and safe places to visit. Areas sited for improvement included grave maintenance, grass cutting and signage. Almost a third of respondents expressed an interest in being part of a "Friends of the Cemetery" and provided their contact details.
- 3.13 Consultation meetings were held with key stakeholders
- Brent Council service areas – Sports and Parks (including operational managers and officers, grounds maintenance staff, registration and booking officers), Safer Streets and Planning.
 - Funeral directors, Officiants and Memorial Masons
 - Administrator of Hendon Mosque and users of Carpenters Park Cemetery.
- 3.14 The findings from the first consultation stage directly informed the draft strategy and draft action plan which went out to public and stakeholder consultation from 2nd July to 29th September 2012. This consultation was undertaken through:
- An online questionnaire with paper copies available on request
 - Officer attendance at all five Area Consultative Forums and three Service User Consultative Forums
 - Officer attendance at a committee meeting of the Brent Multi Faith Forum.
 - Officer attendance at a Funeral Liaison Meeting
 - Consultation documentation available at libraries, sports centres and Brent Contact Points
 - Notification letters distributed to a random sample of 500 people who had buried relatives in a Brent cemetery more than a year previously.
 - Coverage in the Brent Magazine and the local press.
- 3.15 Approximately 320 people attended a meeting or forum where the draft strategy was discussed and 45 people completed a questionnaire. The latter number was slightly lower than anticipated but it is reasonable to conclude that this was a consequence of having undertaken a first stage consultation process. An average of 82% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the draft vision, individual objectives and action plan. 71 additional comments were submitted by 20 of the respondents. Where relevant and appropriate the strategy and action plan have been revised to reflect the feedback received.

Key Findings

3.16 From the background research and two stage consultation process it has been possible to identify a number of headline findings which have influenced the vision, three objectives and action plan priorities. These include:

- Individual management plans should be produced for each cemetery to include future burial space provision, grounds maintenance and asset management
- A five to ten year rolling programme can be implemented for the reclamation of space in old purchased graves where the exclusive rights of burial have been extinguished
- Options should be explored for the creation of burial space at Willesden and Paddington cemeteries through mounding and/or the provision of burial vaults
- Communication of burial options to funeral directors requires improvement
- Greater flexibility of funeral times will increase income generation
- Further consultation should be undertaken with the Muslim community on possible alternatives to single depth burials
- Friends of Groups should be set up for each cemetery and liaison meetings with funeral directors should be held every six months
- Greater use of technology should be made to enable online payments and facilitate improved record administration and grave identification
- Emergency planning arrangements should be reviewed
- The wider benefits of cemeteries as recreational green spaces of historical and cultural value should be promoted through a programme of activities
- Cemeteries play an important part in increasing biodiversity which can be increased by reducing pesticide use and creating wildlife zones.

Vision and Objectives

- 3.17 The overarching vision of the strategy is “to meet the needs of bereaved people and the wider community in the borough by
- Conducting the burial and commemoration of the dead of the diverse community in a secure, sustainable and well maintained environment.
 - Offering burial options at a choice of four cemetery sites
 - Enabling local communities to access cemeteries as valuable historic green spaces which promote wellbeing, biodiversity, learning and recreation.
- 3.18 Three key objectives have been identified in order to achieve the vision:
1. Meet current and future needs in respect of local burial options, while providing accessible green space and encouraging biodiversity and sustainable environmental practices.
 2. Deliver a value for money cemeteries service that is at least self-financing.

3. Provide a supportive and inclusive service that fully reflects the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of the borough and supports the wellbeing of bereaved people.

Objective 1: Meet current and future needs in respect of local burial options, while providing accessible green space and encouraging biodiversity and sustainable environmental practices.

3.19 Key actions include:

- Reviewing options for mounding and/or providing burial vaults above old purchased and unpurchased graves at Willesden and Paddington cemeteries
- Revising the cyclical reclamation of old purchased graves, initially at Alperton and Willesden cemeteries, to provide burial space for a rolling period of at least five years ahead on a continuous basis
- Reviewing emergency planning arrangements for dealing with an unknown number of excess deaths, including undertaking consultation with neighbouring boroughs.
- Producing individual management plans for each cemetery.
- Researching options for the reuse of memorials from graves where the exclusive rights of burial have been reclaimed.

Objective 2: Deliver a value for money cemeteries service that is at least self financing

3.20 Key actions include:

- Introducing online payment facilities.
- Implementing a fully electronic system for bookings and record administration.
- Reviewing assets to identify income generation opportunities.
- Developing and maintaining good communication links with funeral directors, memorial masons and funeral ceremony officials.

Objective 3: Provide a supportive and inclusive service that fully reflects the religious, ethnic and cultural diversity of the borough and supports the wellbeing of bereaved people.

3.21 Key actions include:

- Ensuring the continued provision of a range of burial options at each cemetery to meet the needs of the diverse community e.g. the setting aside of specific areas for different faiths
- Reviewing day of funeral procedures and providing greater flexibility in the time slots available for funerals
- Undertaking further consultation with members of the Muslim community on options for future burial space provision.

- Establishing a Friends Group for each cemetery facilitated by a combination of online communications and meetings.

4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The strategy aims to deliver a value for money cemeteries service that is at least self financing. The council is obliged to maintain its cemeteries 'in good order and repair'. The service has to ensure that there is sufficient burial space available in order to generate income to contribute towards the cost of the grounds maintenance and to achieve the budgeted income targets. The strategy has identified that alternate burial methods, through grave reclamation, mounding and burial vaults, will need to be implemented when the land becomes available in order to keep generating income. If we cannot create and sell burial space we cannot generate any income. It is not possible for the service to fund the creation of these burial spaces from within existing revenue budgets.
- 4.2 A section of Paddington Cemetery was previously identified as suitable for the provision of new burial space through mounding. All exclusive rights of burial have been extinguished and approximately three quarters of the mounding work has been completed. No burials can take place on the basis of the work undertaken to date and an estimated £75k is required to complete the mounding work and provide the necessary access paths and drainage arrangements. Approximately 520 new grave spaces, each offering the opportunity for double burials, will be provided by September 2013 if this work is completed. It is proposed to produce a business case to use Invest to Save funding to complete the works and make new burial space available. Borrowing £75k over three years will require three repayments of £26,180 per annum. This will be repaid from existing revenue budgets, partly due to the increased number of burials at Paddington Cemetery.
- 4.3 In future years as land becomes available further requests for Invest to Save funding will be necessary to fund the provision of new grave space. It is not possible at present to state how much and in what years the funding will be required as this will depend on the demand for burial space and the availability of large areas with extinguished rights of burial.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The council is a 'burial authority' under the Local Government Act 1972. Under the Act the council has a power, but no duty, to provide cemeteries in or outside its area. Under the Local Authority Cemeteries Order 1977 the council is required to keep such cemeteries as it does have in good order and repair. The power to reclaim old, unused graves or those which have not been fully utilised is set out in Appendix 1 to this report together with further details regarding the use and maintenance of cemeteries. This report focuses on the council's use of its cemeteries but so far as it comments upon residents' use of cremation, members are advised that the council also has a power, but no duty, to provide crematoria under the Local Government Act 1972

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 The Equality Act 2010 section 149 requires the council to have due regard to the equalities duties when considering how to exercise its functions, which includes the exercise of its powers to provide and manage cemeteries. In the context of this strategy the equalities issues raised primarily concern the ability of the various religious and ethnic groups in Brent to have access to burial arrangements which are consistent with their beliefs. These matters are set out in more detail in the attached Equality Impact Assessment. The assessment did not identify any negative impacts of the strategy but did identify some unmet needs for specific groups. These have been addressed in the strategy and the action plan which accompanies the strategy as Appendix 2 and relate mainly to providing greater flexibility in opening times and reviewing day of funeral arrangements, along with a review of services available for cremated remains and commemoration.
- 6.2 There is no crematorium in Brent and this is unlikely to change in the foreseeable future due to the lack of a suitable location and obtaining planning permission. A number of faith groups which are heavily represented in the borough opt for cremation but there are several crematoria within easy travelling distance of Brent. The council will review the position should a suitable location become available in future although the cost of building and operating a crematorium would have to be taken into account

7.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications

- 7.1 None

Background Papers

Cemeteries Strategy
Appendix 1: Legal Background and Statutory Powers
Appendix 2: Action Plan
Appendix3: Consultation Report
Equalities Impact Assessment and Annex 1

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