

Appendix 3 - Cemeteries Strategy Consultation Report

A two stage consultation process was undertaken; a first stage to gather feedback and data to inform the production of the draft strategy, followed by a full public and stakeholder consultation on the draft strategy and action plan.

Stage One Consultation Summary

A targeted consultation exercise was undertaken with recently bereaved people and 120 responses were received. The responses are summarised below:

- 70% of respondents named either Carpenders Park or Alperton as the cemetery they visited most often.
- The majority of respondents were regular visitors to Brent cemeteries with 87% of respondents visiting at least once every six months and 71% visiting at least once a month or more frequently.
- 41% of respondents didn't have a regular visiting pattern with Saturday (38%) and Sunday (35%) being the most popular days. The pattern across Monday to Friday visits was evenly spread with responses ranging from 9% to 12%.
- 87% of respondents visited for up to an hour at a time with 57% visiting for an average time of between 30 minutes to an hour. Two hours was the maximum time that respondents cited for average length of visit and only 4% of respondents didn't have a regular pattern.
- 85% of respondents felt either safe or very safe when visiting a cemetery.
- 91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that cemeteries are clean and well maintained.
- 72% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that a sufficient level of information was provided in cemeteries.
- There was a very high percentage of good/very good satisfaction responses for watering facilities (92%), footpaths (86%), seats and bins (86%), car parking (83%), and flower and shrub beds (82%)
- The highest percentages of poor/very poor satisfaction responses were received for signage (20%), grave maintenance (20%), and grass cutting (18%).
- 37 respondents expressed an interest in being part of a "Friends of the Cemetery" group and supplied contact details.
- 50% of respondents had a preference for their own funeral arrangements with traditional burial lawn cemetery (52%) being the most popular preference.

Consultation interviews were held with the following key stakeholders:

- Brent Council service areas – Sports and Parks staff (including operations, registration and booking and memorials), Safer Streets and Planning.
- Six Funeral Directors, one Memorial Mason and two Officiants at a Funeral Liaison meeting. In all, comments were received from eight directors who were responsible for 63% of all funerals in Brent during 2011.
- Administrator of Hendon Mosque and stakeholders at Carpenders Park.

The key findings from these interviews are listed below:

- Brent Council should communicate available burial options more clearly, so that stakeholders are aware of what is available and bereaved people can make better informed choices. For example, up to date information about the availability of vaults and spaces made available through mounding would be helpful to bereaved people unwilling to accept reclaimed space.
- Improvements could be achieved by increasing flexibility to provide burials at requested times and clarifying contact arrangements for Saturday funerals.
- There is a reported demand for increased provision of burial vaults that is not currently being met.
- Brent's cemeteries are generally well kept and staff are good at their jobs.
- A reported resistance to reusing memorials may reflect strong principles and a perception that it would reduce demand for new memorials.
- In view of the lack of new ground at three cemeteries, Muslim people would consider the use of depth remaining above old interments for new burials. However, this would need to be available in areas exclusively for Muslim burial and the orientation of graves would need to comply requirements.*
- Demand for Muslim burial in London appears to be increasing as lower numbers of families choose to repatriate their dead to their place of birth.

* In ground not consecrated by the Church of England, for legal reasons.

Stage Two Consultation Summary

A three-month consultation period on the draft strategy was undertaken through:

- An online questionnaire with paper copies available on request
- Officer attendance at Area Consultative and Service User Forums
- Officer attendance at a Funeral Liaison and Multi-Faith Forum meeting.

Questionnaire Survey

The survey was available on the Consultation Portal and 45 completed questionnaires were submitted. Although this response was slightly lower than anticipated, the draft strategy reflected the feedback during the first stage of the consultation.

- 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the vision of the draft strategy. Those who disagreed felt that cemeteries are places for quiet contemplation rather than a place for recreation.
- Agreement with the three objectives varied from 72% for Objective 2 to 86% for Objective 3. The main reason for disagreement related to a perception of high cemetery fees and charges rather than the aspiration of the objective.
- 85% and 87% of respondents agreed that the draft strategy and action plan respectively covered the key issues relating to cemetery provision in Brent.

71 additional comments were received from an estimated 20 respondents and the full list of comments and responses will be available on the consultation portal. Several comments echoed those received during the first stage of the consultation; particularly clearer communication of burial options, operational issues such as grass cutting, the need to review fees and charges, and the need for comprehensive maintenance and management plans for each cemetery.

Where relevant and appropriate the strategy and action plan have been revised to reflect the comments received.

Service User Consultative Forums

Over 40 people attended the three meetings at which the strategy proposals were outlined to specific groups of users.

Area Consultative Forums

Presentations were made at all five Area Consultative Forums which offer residents and stakeholders the opportunity to have their say on services provided by the council and other agencies. Approximately 250 residents attended the forums to hear about the strategy and about how they could provide feedback.

Brent Multi Faith Forum

The Brent Multi Faith Forum was established in 2007 to promote co-operation between Brent's diverse communities. Ten people attended a meeting to provide feedback on the draft strategy, including representatives of the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Islam, Sikh and Zoroastrian faiths. The key issues discussed were:

- More information on the popularity of the burial vault option.
- Queries on grave reclamation and reuse procedures
- The importance of being able to bury quickly, particularly to Muslims.
- More information available on crematoriums in the absence of a facility in the borough. It was also stated that if the opportunity arose to develop a local cremation facility, this option should be explored.

Funeral Liaison feedback

Feedback was received from eight funeral directors (responsible for 61% of funerals in Brent in 2012) and two officiants. The key points raised were:

- The main comments received centred on the need for the council to communicate available burial options more clearly to funeral directors. Suggestions included a DVD or a 'plain English' booklet to dispel misunderstandings around exclusive rights of burials and reclamation options.
- There is a need to improve contact arrangements for Saturday funerals, in particular to cater for the requirements of the Muslim community.
- Support was expressed for a mechanism for regular communication, possibly through council officers attending at least two National Federation of Funeral Director Liaison meetings a year.

Conclusion

Over 450 people engaged with the two stage consultation programme with 165 people completing a questionnaire and approximately 290 people attending a meeting where the strategy was presented. In summary, the following key issues were identified as being central to the future development of cemeteries in Brent:

- Improved communication of available burial options
- A need to implement the recommendations of an operational service review particularly in relation to funeral times, administration of records and memorial testing
- Individual cemetery management plans should be produced to include provision of burial space, grounds maintenance and asset management
- Options should be explored for engaging with stakeholders including 'online' Friends of Groups and attendance at Funeral Director Liaison meetings.
- Further consultation should be undertaken with members of the Muslim community on options for double depth burials and for using space remaining above old interments for new burials.

A detailed listing of all consultation feedback is available on the council's Consultation Portal

<http://brent-consult.objective.co.uk/portal>