

CEMETERY SITE OPTIONS APPRAISAL

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Wards affected: All High Wycombe Town wards

PROPOSED DECISION

That the Committee consider the options, and agree which of the options as set out in paragraphs 35 to 38 of the report to recommend to Cabinet.

Corporate Implications

1. A Local Authority has the statutory power to acquire and maintain burial grounds and cemeteries under the Open Spaces Act 1906. It also has the power to provide and contribute to the expenses of maintaining cemeteries under section 214 of Local Government Act 1972. If burials in the town ceased, the crematorium or cemeteries outside the town could be used as the Council is obliged to pay for these costs in the event of a public health funeral.
2. Purchase of additional land for use as a cemetery would have significant capital and revenue costs, which will be estimated as part of the site appraisal.
3. The estimated cost of a feasibility study is £20,000. This would be funded from Special Expenses reserves.

Executive Summary

4. On 4 March 2014 a report was presented to High Wycombe Town Committee on site options for an additional cemetery. The report considered by the Committee sought Members' views on suggested sites for consideration by officers for the provision of an additional cemetery for High Wycombe. Members were informed that the current High Wycombe cemetery capacity was sufficient for some 20 to 25 years. A site options appraisal has now been completed and this report provides options for progressing the project for Members to consider.

Background and Issues

5. On 4 March 2014 a report was presented to High Wycombe Town Committee on site options for an additional cemetery. The report considered by the Committee sought Members' views on suggested sites for consideration by officers for the provision of an additional cemetery for High Wycombe. Members were informed that the current High Wycombe cemetery capacity was sufficient for some 20 to 25 years. During discussions, Members suggested that Abbey Barn and Terriers Farm be considered as potential sites for a cemetery. A Member suggested the possibility of working in partnership with Parish Councils without burial space which has also been investigated.

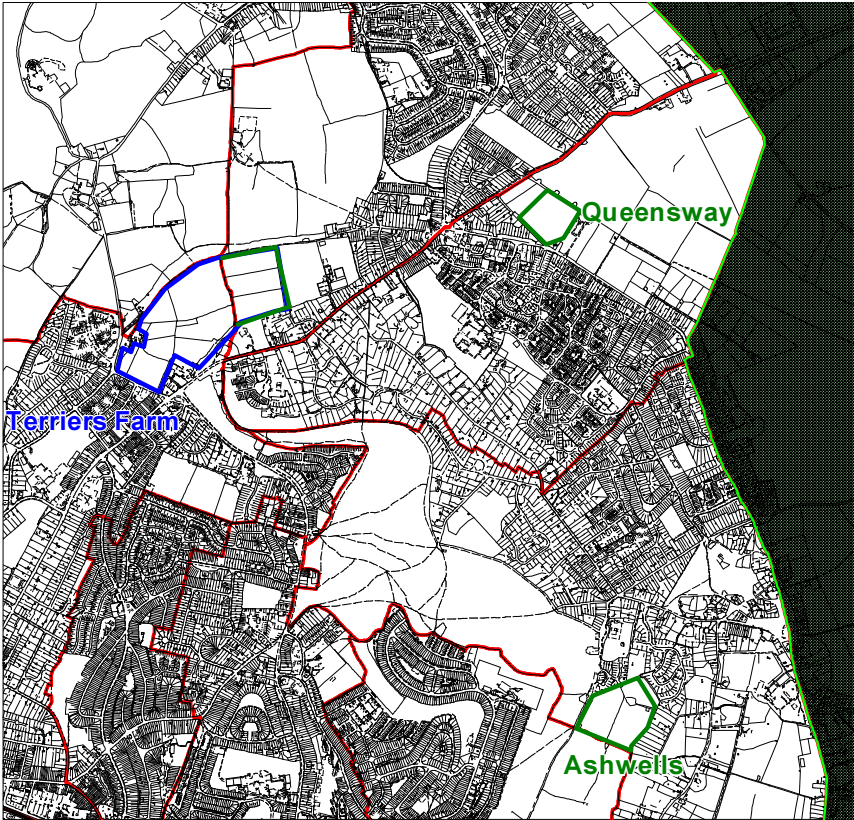
6. It was not clear which part of Abbey Barn might be suitable, so one part has been selected. Members may, however, wish to propose other sites in the Abbey Barn area if they feel it is appropriate. As well as the two sites proposed by Members; a number of other potential sites for a new cemetery for High Wycombe were considered by officers. These are both inside and outside of the High Wycombe unparished area. Although a new cemetery is needed in the unparished area of High Wycombe, land which might be both available and suitable is limited.
7. Six parish/town councils were also asked whether they were interested in a joint scheme with the Town Committee and could identify potential sites within their areas (Downley, Chepping Wycombe, Hughenden, Hazlemere, Greater Marlow and Marlow). Downley and Hazlemere expressed interest in a joint scheme and Hazlemere suggested the use of the Queensway site.

Sites for assessment

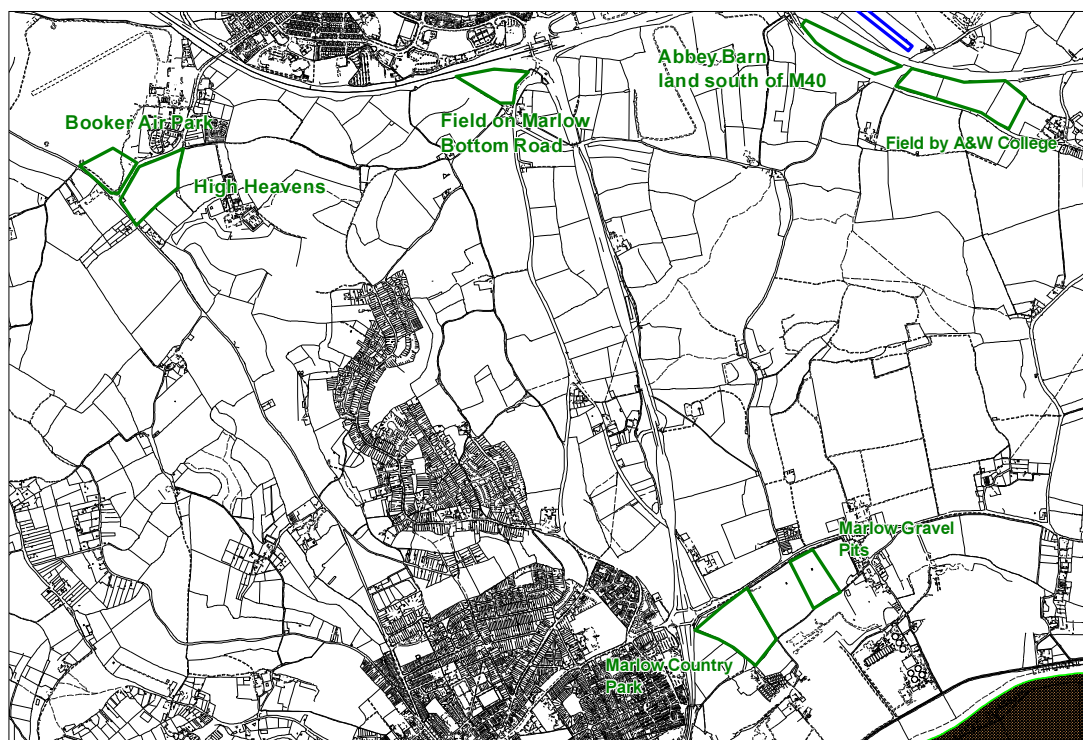
8. The sites included in the options appraisal are
 - Abbey Barn area – land south of the M40 (outside of the potential development area)
 - Abbey Barn South – between tree belt within the potential development area
 - Ashwells
 - Bassetsbury allotment site
 - Booker Air Park site
 - Fields by Amersham & Wycombe College at Flackwell Heath
 - Field on Coates Lane
 - Land by High Heavens
 - Marlow Country Park
 - Marlow Gravel Pits
 - Queensway
 - Roundwood Recreation Ground
 - Terriers Farm
 - Top of Wycombe Road at Handy Cross
 - West Wycombe (by football pitches)
9. The following maps show the locations of the sites under review.
10. Sites within unparished area of High Wycombe are shown in blue on the map overleaf. Note: Part of the Terriers Farm site is within the unparished area and part is in Hazlemere.



11. Sites to the north of the unparished area of High Wycombe are shown below. Note: the northern part of the Terriers Farm site is outside of the unparished area.



12. Sites to the south of the M40 and outside of the High Wycombe unparished area are shown below.



Methodology

13. The 15 sites were assessed by a combination of desk research and site visits. The full criteria and scoring used to assess the suitability of the proposed sites for a new cemetery are set out in Appendix A.

Initial desk-based assessments

14. In order to reduce the number of potential sites for investigation a desk based assessment was done initially. Sites which did not meet the criteria set out below would automatically be rejected as being unsuitable.
- i. Size of site – sites were mapped on MapInfo and their area measured using the mapping tools.
 - ii. Flood Risk – this assessment was done using MapInfo Environment Agency layers
 - Flood Zones 2013
 - Historical Flood Maps 2013
 - Surface Water Flooding 2009
 - iii. Impact of use on nature / geological conservation or heritage / archaeological interests - sites were assessed using the Policies, Constraints & History MapInfo workspace which includes layers for the following:
 - Biological and Geological sites and their 15m buffer zone

- Registered Common Land
- Open country
- Ancient Woodlands and their 15m buffer zone
- Special Area Conservation 2km buffer
- Listed buildings and their buffer zone
- Priority habitats

Site visit assessments

15. The second stage of the assessment was carried out by visits to those sites which met the criteria in the initial assessment to look closely at the following
- iv. Proximity to main urban area and accessibility by differing transport modes – sites were assessed in terms of proximity to main roads. Bus routes were also looked at with reference to bus timetables for Arriva and Carousel buses.
 - v. Ability to create safe highway access – a visual inspection at the sites identified where existing roads could provide access and where there might be the potential to improve access if the current situation made this difficult.
 - vi. Groundwater resources & site drainage – this aspect was difficult to assess visually unless standing water was visible.
 - vii. Suitability of ground conditions – a visual inspection of the sites was made in terms of trees, slopes etc.
 - viii. Access to services – a visual inspection determined whether there was access to services such as power, water and sewerage. In some cases there were service markers but in some the proximity of housing meant that there were services nearby.

Third stage - on site assessment

- ix. Impact of cemetery on adjoining land uses / impact of use of adjoining land on proposed cemetery use – a visual inspection of what the land use was around the sites was made.
- x. Visual impact of use on landscape/townscape – the visual impact of a cemetery was assessed by looking at the surrounding area and its current land use.
- xi. Security and site safety issues – an assessment of security and safety issues mainly related to the potential for natural surveillance of the site from nearby houses, roads, open spaces etc.

Final assessment

- xii. Site availability – WDC land ownership was looked at on MapInfo and potential development sites included the Council's emerging New Local Plan and existing Core Strategy were identified.

Individual site assessment results

16. The following is a summary of the main results of assessments of the sites against the criteria.

Sites within the unparished area of High Wycombe

17. **Abbey Barn South – tree belt**
This site measures 2.6ha and is within the Abbey Barn South reserve site identified in the Council's Adopted Core Strategy and in the recent New Local Plan options consultation. Access to the site is currently difficult but this may change once the Daws Hill development has been completed. There is a minimal risk of flooding but the main issue with this site is the impact of tree roots which would make burials difficult and the fact that the site is part of an area reserved for future development and the comprehensive development of the site could be prejudiced by a cemetery. For these reasons this site was rejected.
18. **Bassetsbury allotment site**
Although the site was of a reasonable size at 2.3ha there would be no opportunity to extend to 4ha. Different options for the site were put forward in the recent New Local Plan options consultation including residential development and community use. There is evidence of surface water flooding across the site and an area to the west of the site is in a flood zone. Because of this, this site was rejected at the initial assessment stage.
19. **Field on Coates Lane**
The site only measures 2.6ha but there is the potential to extend to 9ha if an adjoining field was acquired. The site is on a slope which might require terracing and there is a slight flood risk by the road. The site is within 2km of a special area of conservation as well as being in the AONB and Green Belt. Cemeteries are an appropriate use in the Green Belt but the impact on the AONB would have to be assessed further.
20. **Roundwood Recreation Ground**
This is a small site measuring just 2.1ha with no potential to extend. It is within the 15m buffer zone of an Ancient Woodland and a biological/geological site, and is designated as a Green Space in the adopted Delivery and Site Allocations Plan. The impact of any detailed proposals on the ancient woodland would have to be considered. The site is on a slope but there is access to services. It is owned by Red Kite and is currently used as a recreation ground with a play area. The removal of the play area would lead to a play area deficiency. The main problem is that access is limited as there is just a single lane access road leading up to the site. For this reason this site has been rejected.

21. Terriers Farm

The site measures 23.8ha and so would be large enough for a new cemetery and the majority of the site falls within the unparished area of High Wycombe. There is evidence of surface water flooding across the middle of the site but there are large areas at the east of the site adjacent to Hazlemere Recreation Ground and to the west of the site which would be suitable. The site is flat with good access to services and roads although accessibility to the area at the west off Kingshill Road is easier than at the east. The site is not owned by WDC and is identified as a reserve site for future development in the adopted Core Strategy and a potential housing site in the recent New Local Plan options consultation. As such the purchase price is likely to be unaffordable and it is in any event already reserved for development so should be rejected.

Sites to the north and west of High Wycombe

22. Ashwells

The site measures 6.9ha which is of sufficient size. It is within 15m of the Ancient Woodland and biological/geological buffer zones and an archaeological notification site and as such the impact on these would have to be assessed. There is no evidence of flooding or surface water but the site is on a slope which may mean that terracing would be needed. The site forms part of the wider Gomm Valley reserve site for future development in the adopted Core Strategy and a potential housing site in the recent New Local Plan options consultation. Access from High Wycombe is relatively poor as the most direct route to the site is through a cul-de-sac off Cock Lane which is single track just to the south of that point. A new more direct route to the site from High Wycombe is not possible and the site is also reserved for development so this site was rejected.

23. Queensway

This is a flat site measuring 3.6ha in the AONB and Green Belt. There is access via Queensway however a new access could potentially be made off Penn Road which has good local transport links. There is access to services such as water and power and there is natural surveillance from surrounding roads and houses. The land is owned by WDC and is currently open space. Cemeteries are an appropriate use in the Green Belt but the impact on the AONB would have to be assessed further.

24. West Wycombe (by football pitches)

The site measures 6.5ha and so would be large enough to accommodate a new cemetery but there is evidence of surface water flooding along one side of the narrow site so this site was rejected at the initial assessment stage. The site is in the Green Belt and AONB. Cemeteries are an appropriate use in the Green Belt but the impact on the AONB would have to be assessed further.

Sites to the south of High Wycombe

25. **Abbey Barn area – land south of M40**

The site measures 6.0ha and there is no evidence of flood risk. It is an archaeological notification site and in the Green Belt and adjoins (but is just outside) the AONB. There is a slight slope but terracing may not be necessary. The site is on a main road with good access to public transport. There is evidence of nearby services. It is however by the motorway which may make it noisy. The land is currently agricultural so negotiations would be needed with the land owner if this option were to be progressed. Cemeteries are an appropriate use in the Green Belt but the impact on the AONB would have to be assessed further, even though it is just outside the designated area.
26. **Booker Air Park**

At 5ha the site identified was of sufficient size to accommodate a large new cemetery but there is evidence of surface water flooding in the centre of the site. There would be no opportunity to work around this so the site was rejected at the initial assessment stage. The site is also being considered as an option for future business development in the recent New Local Plan options consultation and as such it is not appropriate to pursue this option whilst wider development options are being considered for the area. Therefore this site has been rejected.
27. **Fields by Amersham & Wycombe College at Flackwell Heath**

The field is 12ha in size and is on a slight slope within the Green Belt. There is no evidence of surface water flooding but it is in close proximity to a number of springs. Further work would need to be undertaken to identify the precise location of these springs as these could present a problem. It is on a main road and access is good. Like the adjacent Abbey Barn (south of M40) site it is agricultural so its use would need to be negotiated with the land owner. The site is part of an area being considered for a possible business park and new motorway junction as part of the recent New Local Plan options consultation and as such is not appropriate to pursue this option whilst wider development options are being considered for the area. Therefore this site has been rejected.
28. **Land by High Heavens**

This site measures 8.0ha and is in the Green Belt and AONB. There is some surface water flooding across the site but this would not necessarily exclude it. The problem with this site is its proximity to the adjoining landfill site which would make its use as a cemetery incompatible. This site was therefore rejected on the basis of the impact of adjoining uses.
29. **Marlow Country Park**

The site is 5.0ha and lies in the Green Belt and adjoins the AONB. There is good access off the Marlow Road and good access to services as it adjoins the new athletics track. The site is within an area identified in the Local Plan and subsequent guidance as an area for a country park, also an area identified in the New Local Plan options consultation for a possible new business park – compatibility with these uses/options would have to be

considered. There is evidence of surface water flooding through the middle of the site which means that this site is rejected.

30. Marlow Gravel Pits
Although the site is very large at 10.7ha there is evidence of historical flooding which would make it unsuitable for a cemetery. It was therefore rejected at the initial assessment stage.
31. Top of Wycombe Road at Handy Cross
Although the size would be large enough at 5.0ha there is surface water across the far end which slopes down towards the motorway. The site is in the Green Belt and AONB. There is good access but the site is very noisy as it lies between the M40 and the Wycombe Road. Because of this impact of adjoining land uses the site has been rejected.

Site Options Appraisal Summary

32. From the initial list of 15 potential sites 5 were rejected after this first stage of the assessment because of flood risk and surface water issues (Bassetsbury allotments, Booker Air Park, West Wycombe, Marlow Gravel Pits and Marlow Country Park).
33. As a result of the site visits a number of other sites were rejected for access reasons (Ashwells, Roundwood Recreation Ground), suitability of ground conditions (Abbey Barn South tree lined avenue) and impact of adjoining uses (High Heavens, top of Wycombe Road) and lack of compatibility with current and/or emerging planning policy and related deliverability issues (eg land price) (Terriers Farm, Flackwell Heath by A&W College).
34. Three sites therefore have potential to be used as an additional cemetery. Their scores (out of a maximum of 10) based on the assessment criteria are
 - Abbey Barn area – land south of M40 +2
 - Field on Coates Lane +2
 - Queensway +5

Options

There are a number of options to consider.

35. Option 1 – Carry out a detailed feasibility study of Queensway - the highest scoring site.
 - The advantage of this option is that it is WDC land and could be developed as a cemetery quickly. There would be a cost implication (estimated cost is £20,000) because of the need to engage consultants to carry out a feasibility study and cost bringing it into use.
36. Option 2 – Hold discussions with landowners of the other short-listed sites about site availability. This would also include a cost analysis of acquiring the sites (if necessary), setting up as a cemetery and revenue costs.

- This option would not involve any additional cost at this time but a feasibility study would be necessary in the future if any of the sites were deemed suitable.
37. Option 3 – Carry out a detailed feasibility study of one of the other sites.
- There would be a cost implication because of the need to engage consultants to carry out a full feasibility study.
38. Option 4 - As the cemetery still has capacity for a further 20 years, defer this work for 5 years.
- There are no financial implications of this option.

Conclusions

39. A site options appraisal has been completed on 15 sites. Three options have been highlighted as a result of the appraisal and Members' are requested to agree which option to progress. If options 1 or 2 are supported then funding will need to be allocated to undertake the feasibility study.

Next Steps

40. Dependent on the option supported by Members, a report will be submitted to Cabinet if required for approval.

Background Papers

None