

NEXT PHASE OF CONCRETE BURIAL CHAMBERS

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Wards affected: All High Wycombe Town Wards

PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET

That the Committee decides which of the three available options (paragraphs 17-19 of the report) to recommend to Cabinet; (Option 1 best matches known local requirements for Muslim burials)

Reason for Decision

As the current chambers are anticipated to be fully utilised within the next 2-3 years installing additional vaults will enable the service to be continued at High Wycombe Cemetery.

Corporate Implications

1. The Council, as a burial authority for the purposes of section 214 of the Local Government Act 1977, is authorised by the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1972 (as amended) to charge such fees as it thinks proper and, in fixing fees, may take account of the fact that costs in connection with High Wycombe town cemetery are designated as Special Expenses.
2. Any costs associated with this project will need to be met from the Special Expenses Account for the High Wycombe Town Area. At the end of 2015- 6 this had a balance of £801,000. There are therefore sufficient funds available to meet the projected costs of this scheme pending recovery through increased fees and charges. Each burial would continue to be provided on a full cost recovery basis.
3. Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 places a duty (“the public sector equality duty”) on the Council, in the exercise of its functions to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act; to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not; and to foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not. One of the protected characteristics is religion or belief. The report outlines steps taken to comply with this duty.

Executive Summary

4. The current burial chambers at High Wycombe Cemetery are predicted to be fully utilised by early 2019. Additional burial chambers will need to be purchased and installed to allow this preferred form of burial to continue to be available for the town’s Muslim residents.

Sustainable Community Strategy / Council Priorities - Implications

5. This project fits with the Cohesive and Strong Communities theme of the Sustainable Community Strategy by meeting the specific requirements of Wycombe's Muslim residents.

Background and Issues

6. The current burial chambers were installed in 2012 with further work to respace them being undertaken before use started in June 2014. 111 chambers have been installed and as at 31 July 2016, 49 chambers have been used. At the current rate of burials, an average of 25 per year, additional chambers will be required by early 2019 at the latest. From the time the order is placed and without significant adverse weather it should take 16 to 20 weeks to complete installation, though it should be noted that this will be dependent on the ability of the contractor to start on site at the time the order is placed.
7. Muslim Burial Vaults were introduced in 2012 to meet community requirements expressed by the Wycombe Islamic Mission (WIM) group of mosques. When the proposal was developed all mosques were written to but only WIM responded. Following their introduction further feedback was received from WIM representatives and the vaults were respaced. The proposal this time takes account of both the additional spacing requested and the additional depth requested.
8. The proposal is to install chambers in the terrace below the current upper level (see photos in Appendix A) which will provide an estimated 76 chambers. The supplier has estimated that the capital cost of installing 76 burial chambers will be c£115,102. However this number may not be possible on site as the footings of the retaining terrace walls may restrict the number of chambers that can be installed. This can only be determined when the ground is excavated.
9. The proposed spacing between chambers is based on the current respaced layout of chambers, namely 45cm between each chamber and 1m between each row. A plan has been attached in Appendix B.
10. Following feedback on the current depth of the single chambers from Muslim residents a deeper double ring chamber installation has been investigated. The current single ring chamber would cost £68,819.52 to install. The double chamber is 1530mm deep and the single chamber is 809mm deep. The width and length remains the same at 2420mm by 990mm. There is a plan in Appendix C.
11. High Wycombe Town Committee funded the original installation of the chambers as a capital project and the funding is now being recouped from income as the burial cost includes the relevant cost of each chamber's installation alongside the actual costs for an interment.
12. The current cost (2016/17) of interment in a burial chamber is £1,070. This includes: £756 returned to reserves to meet the cost of the capital project and enable funds to be available for the next tranche of chambers; and £314 for the interment. It should be noted that the fee is reviewed by the Committee on an annual basis. In addition, for any new burial in the cemetery there is a Right of Burial charge which is currently £706. Therefore the total cost of burial in a chamber is currently £1,776 for residents of High Wycombe town.

13. The cost of an interment in double depth burial chamber, based on current contractor and WDC costs, would be £1,828.50, The total cost of burial in the in a double depth chamber, including the Right of Burial charge of £706, would be £2,534.50 for residents of High Wycombe town.
14. The cost of an interment in a single depth burial chamber, based on current contractor and WDC costs, would be £1,219.52. The total cost of burial in a single depth burial chamber, including the Right of Burial charge of £706, would be £1925.52 for residents of High Wycombe town.
15. Officers are aware that the use of burial chambers for Muslim burials is a cultural requirement of some Muslim residents, though a number of traditions allow for unchambered burials.

Options

16. There are three options.
17. Option 1 – This option would provide an estimated 76 double depth burial chambers in the next terrace at a capital cost of £115,102. This will provide the additional depth requested by a number of Muslim residents.
18. Option 2 - This option would provide 76 single depth burial chambers in the next terrace at a capital cost of £68,819.52.
19. Option 3 – The Committee always has the option to do nothing. This would enable Special Expense funds to be allocated elsewhere but would mean that the provision of the current service is very unlikely to continue from c2019. This is likely to be unacceptable to a number of residents. As the project is self-financing over time this option is not recommended. Delaying the project is not recommended as the cost of installation is likely to increase and the ground would have less time to settle before use is necessary. There is a further risk that the number of burials in chambers may continue to increase above past burial rates.

Conclusion

20. In conclusion the Committee is asked to select a preferred option to enable the chambers to continue to be provided for residents who require this service.

Next Steps

21. The Committee's recommendation will be considered by Cabinet. Once determined by Cabinet, an order can then be placed and arrangements made for the installation of the additional burial chambers.

Background Papers

Previous High Wycombe Town Committee reports.