

MUSLIM BURIAL VAULTS – INTERIM REPORT

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Wards affected: All High Wycombe Town Wards

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET

- (i) That £35,360 for 52 additional burial vaults from the Special Expenses Account be approved; and
- (ii) Delegated authority be given to the Head of Community, in consultation with the Chairman of the High Wycombe Town Committee, to make amendments to fees and charges relating to new concrete chambers for Muslim burials.

Reason for Decision

To purchase and install additional burial vaults to be made use of by Wycombe's Muslim community. These are needed as the Cemetery service will run out of available vaults by summer 2018. Purchasing additional vaults enables the service to continue uninterrupted while the Task and Finish Group completes its work. The alternative is to move to standard earth burials until the Task and Finish Group has reported to the Committee and any recommendations are implemented.

Corporate Implications

1. The Council, as a burial authority for the purposes of section 214 of the Local Government Act 1972, 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 be met from the Special Expenses Account for the High Wycombe Town Area. At the end of 2017-18 the forecast balance is £898k. The Committee has allocated £404k to the Queensway Cemetery in 2018/19. There are therefore sufficient funds available to meet the projected costs of this scheme pending full cost recovery through increased fees and charges.

Executive Summary

3. In 2011 the Committee resolved to fund the installation of concrete burial chambers, following requests from Muslim community representatives. These chambers were identified by them as more suitable for Islamic burial practices than the metal frames supplied by the Council up to that date.
4. The new vaults are deeper and will be installed as previously, i.e. grave spaces laid out head to foot with a 1m path along the foot of the grave and 450mm gaps between graves for access around as a minimum.

Sustainable Community Strategy / Council Priorities - Implications

5. The provision of concrete burial vaults fits within the Cohesive and Strong Communities theme of the Sustainable Community Strategy by meeting the specific requirements of Wycombe's Muslim residents.

Background and Issues

- a. The Town Committee has established a Member Task and Finish Group to review the Muslim burial vaults the Council is using as concerns had been raised by representatives from Wycombe Islamic Mission. The main concern was that the vaults were not deep enough. Ideally the representatives want burials at seven feet deep, as for earth burials. However this depth of concrete would be costly and would need to be very thick to give it structural stability, which would again increase costs.
 - b. The other continuing concern is about cost.
6. Two vaults were sourced from other suppliers as follows.

Grangewood 4ft Chamber

The Chamber is 2287mm long and 878mm wide internally at the top at ground level and will be 2135mm long and 726mm wide at the bottom of the chamber.

The price of the liners will be £560.00 each plus vat and this includes the lids and there is a £30.00 delivery charge on each liner.

Cost of each chamber with installation is;

£1130.00 +vat each for 76 chambers installed

£1100.00 +vat each for 150 chambers installed

We will also need a mould ideally more than one – these are £4500 each

Greenacre (Gem Precast) 4ft Chamber

The anticipated measurements when the chambers are constructed are 2460mm long and 1110mm wide externally, internally measurements are to be confirmed but should be in the region of 2260mm long and 912mm wide.

The chamber would be 1220 mm (4ft') deep and bottomless

Pricing is subject to the numbers ordered and installed as follows

£700.00 +vat each for 1-30 chambers installed

£680.00 +vat each for 31-75 chambers installed

£670.00 +vat each for 76-150 chambers installed

7. Concrete burial chambers are widely used elsewhere as these now meet the most up to date requirements of local Muslims of a Pakistani heritage. Wycombe Islamic Mission informed the Council that ‘the usage of concrete chambers for Muslim burials is the current practice in other graveyards around the country...’, and is ‘in accordance with the wishes of local Muslims and in compliance with Islamic teachings’.
8. The current cost (2017/18) of interment in a burial chamber is £1,070. This includes £756 pay back into reserves for the chamber installation and £314 for the cost to the contractor and WDC costs. This part of the fee is reviewed by the Committee on an annual basis. In addition, for any new grave burial in the cemetery there is a Right of Burial charge which is currently £706. The total cost of a current burial in a chamber is therefore £1776 for residents of High Wycombe town.
9. Including all relevant charges the two vaults are priced below.

		2017/18 cost of a vault burial	2017/18 interment cost + Right of Burial	2017/18 Total interment cost	2018/19 cost of a vault burial	2018/19 cost of interment + Right of Burial	2018/19 total interment cost [S1]
1	Existing concrete chamber	£756	£1020	£1776			
2	Greenacre vault				£680	£1,050	£1,730
3	Grangewood vault				£1,130 +£59 mould fee per burial	£1,050	£2,239

Options

10. There are few options.
11. Option one – install a new area of vaults. The capital cost of new vaults would need to come from Special Expenses and would be repaid by income received for vault burials.
12. Option two – cease to provide vault burials, in which case earth burials will be the only option.

Conclusions

13. The Committee is requested to recommend to Cabinet the funding for new Muslim burial vaults, to be supplied by Greenacre; and the resultant proposed fees.

Next Steps

14. To proceed with implementation after Cabinet as the current supply of burial vaults are anticipated to be in full use within the next few months.
15. The next steps that the Task and Finish Group wishes to take are: a) to agree an engineering specification for a concrete vault along with a testing regime; b) to approach the local building market for quotations; c) to bring back its recommendations to the Committee.

Background Papers

High Wycombe Town Committee minutes to its meeting of 13 September 2016 (agenda item 5, title: 'Next Phase of Concrete Burial Chambers', minute number 11).