

Site Options for an Additional Cemetery

Supporting documents:

- [20140217141518_001461_0005022_CommitteeReportTemplate , item 43. PDF 28 KB](#) 

Minutes:

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 felt that the possibility of
43. working in partnership with Parish Councils in need of their own cemeteries should be investigated.

It was mentioned that land in the town should be safeguarded as a potential cemetery site and that a proportion of the Council's CIL income should be reserved to meet the potential costs of bringing a future town cemetery into use. This would be funded from the Community Infrastructure Levy sum allocated to the Committee.

The Chairman requested that Members forward any suggestions to the Head of Community for consideration.

RESOLVED: That the Committee request officers to consider Abbey Barn and Terriers Farm as potential sites for a cemetery

SITE OPTIONS FOR AN ADDITIONAL CEMETERY

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Wards affected: All High Wycombe Town wards

PROPOSED DECISION

That the Committee proposes sites for consideration by officers, in respect of the provision of additional burial space in High Wycombe.

Corporate Implications

1. Providing a burial service is not a statutory responsibility. The Council must ensure the legal disposal of any person who dies within its boundary where no suitable funeral arrangements have been made. 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. Maintaining cemeteries in its ownership is a statutory responsibility of the local authority.
3. 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.

Executive Summary

4. The High Wycombe Cemetery currently has capacity for 20 – 25 years of new burials. However, in order to ensure that the town has sufficient space for burials into the future High Wycombe Town Committee is asked to suggest sites which could potentially be used for an additional cemetery for High Wycombe.

Background and Issues

5. On 25 September 2012 a report was presented to High Wycombe Town Committee which reviewed the available burial space at High Wycombe Cemetery. It identified that there is currently capacity for new burials at the cemetery for a further 20 – 25 years. While this gives the cemetery a reasonable mid-term future it was considered timely to consider the potential options available for providing additional burial land for the town. It should be noted that the 20 – 25 years is the overall remaining capacity of the cemetery, but this does vary for specific designated sections. For example there may only be the capacity for up to 18 years for burials in current sections within the cemetery designated for Muslim burials but 40+ plus years for the burial of cremated remains.
6. A number of options were presented, as follows:
 - a) re-use of common graves;
 - b) re-use of private graves;
 - c) share a cemetery elsewhere or buy graves from a private supplier;

- d) cease Council burial service provision in High Wycombe;
 - e) identify a new site within High Wycombe; and
 - f) monitor burial rates over the next five years and report back to the Committee at a later date.
7. The Committee considered these options, but at that time they proposed that:
- i. a recommendation be made to the Planning Portfolio Holder that, at the next opportunity, a percentage of the land in the town currently designated as 'protected' should be safeguarded as a potential cemetery site;
 - ii. a proportion of the Council's CIL income should be reserved to meet the potential costs of bringing a future town cemetery into use.
8. In response to the first recommendation above a further recommendation was tabled at the Committee meeting in January 2013.
9. To date no specific land within the town has been highlighted as being available for a cemetery. In terms of setting aside CIL monies to fund additional cemetery space, a proposal was submitted to the Member and Officer group determining the 2014-15 developer contribution spending programme but this was refused. Their recommendation was that any funding needed to provide an additional cemetery should come from High Wycombe Special Expenses as it would be a facility serving the unparished area.
10. In order to ensure that the town has sufficient space for burials into the future High Wycombe Town Committee is asked to suggest sites which could potentially be used for an additional cemetery for High Wycombe. Work will also be undertaken with Planning to identify appropriate sites for inclusion in a full site options appraisal.

Key Site Criteria

11. There are a number of issues in relation to possible sites which need to be considered. These include:

11.1 Size and level of the site

The site must be of a sufficient scale to accommodate burial needs for 50 years. The proposed minimum size requirement for a new cemetery would be 2 hectares, with a preference for a site with the potential to expand up to 4 hectares. Ideally the land should not be on a slope as, while free draining, the cost of terracing greatly increases capital requirements for laying out the site for use.

11.2 Groundwater resources, site drainage and flood risk

The presence of land drains may result in burials contaminating surface water and cause operational difficulties. The Environment Agency will normally refuse applications for burials within 10m of field drains; 30m of a spring, ditch or watercourse; and within 250m of a spring, well or borehole used for potable

supply. Also, the flooding of a cemetery may result in contamination of surface waters; therefore any sites in a flood zone would be unsuitable.

11.3 Proximity to the main urban area and accessibility by differing transport modes

Preference would be for a site within the unparished area of High Wycombe. Good public transport accessibility is seen as essential. Although not a pre-requisite, a cemetery office/toilets would be preferred which would require services such as water, sewerage, gas, electricity and a telephone line, and also an external water supply for people visiting graves and bringing flowers.

11.4 Compatible use of adjoining land to the proposed cemetery

The impact of adjoining uses must be compatible with and not adversely impact upon cemetery. Basic constraints such as noise from railways, roads, and schools plus proximity of industrial/waste type uses need to be considered.

11.5 Security and site safety issues

It is important that the safety and security of visitors and those working at the cemetery are considered if a burial ground is to be fit for purpose. Preference should be given to sites where there is natural surveillance from adjoining uses and/or on site management can be linked to other activities to provide increased presence during out of hours.

11.6 Site availability

Sites that are unlikely to be available for burial use due to an existing use continuing would be unsuitable. Also sites where there is likely to be an alternative use of the site which is preferable to burial use then this should be avoided.

12. It should be noted that a cemetery is not considered an inappropriate use of land in the Green Belt and AONB, although consultation would be needed before taking any development of the nature forward on this type of land.

Options

13. Option one: sites proposed for appraisal

The process of creating a new Cemetery will take a number of years, and the first stage is to conduct a site options appraisal.

14. Option two: defer work for a number of years

As the Cemetery will not be full for some time work could be deferred

15. Option three: decide not to provide a cemetery once the current cemetery is full

This option is not recommended due to the equality impacts on those belonging to faith groups that do not permit cremation.

Conclusions

16. In conclusion, the Committee is requested to propose sites for consideration by officers as additional burial space.

Next Steps

17. Once sites have been proposed a full site options appraisal will be carried out and results brought to a future High Wycombe Town Committee.

Background Papers

None