



**Committee and Date**

**Communities Overview  
Committee**

**25 January 2021**

**Item**

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**Public**

**Bereavement Services: Update On Provision Of Burial Space, Cemetery Extension  
And Service Related Developments.**

**Responsible officer**

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**1.0 Summary**

1.1 Bereavement Services last reported to Communities Overview Committee in February 2019. This paper briefly details progress since made on the following strands of work;

- Development of new areas for burial within Longden Road Cemetery,
- Provision of burial space for Muslim faith community,
- Extension of Minsterley and Church Pulverbatch Cemeteries,
- Installation of the Infant Ashes Memorial,
- Future cemetery provision,
- Countywide burial provision and collaboration during the pandemic,
- Environmental impact, resource use and ecology.

**2.0 Recommendations**

2.1 That Overview Committee consider the report on progress made and current position and identify any future course of action or work programme required.

**3.0 Opportunities and risks**

3.1 Elements of the bereavement service are statutory, attract constant demand and minor operational and legislative risk. Finite and diminishing new burial space, particularly to serve Shrewsbury is an issue to be addressed.

#### **4.0 Financial assessment**

- 4.1 There is no immediate significant financial impact and the service generates steady revenue from provision of services. Minor expenditure to fund the progress reported upon has been met from Bereavement Services budget. If it becomes necessary to acquire land for cemetery development this will require funding from the council's capital programme.

#### **5.0 Report**

##### **5.1 Development of new areas for burial within Longden Road Cemetery.**

Since the last report in 2019 burials have commenced in new areas referred to as Extensions 27 and 28 (see appendix 1 – Pink area). In the 12 month period from 1<sup>st</sup> January to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, 37 new grave spaces have been provided at Longden Road Cemetery, this is typical of annual demand, fees generated are retained by the council.

- 5.2 Extensions 29 and 30 are yet to be utilised. Extension 30 (see appendix 1 – Green area & appendix 2) is nominally identified as an extension for Muslim faith burials. As a municipal cemetery, areas are already set aside for Christian, Catholic, Romany and nonconformist burials.

- 5.3 Extensions 25 and 26 flank the entrance road (see appendix 1 – Orange area) and provide in the region of 210 new grave spaces in total. During March 2020 a large quantity of soil was removed from the rear of Extension 20 (see appendix 1 – Blue area). Removal of soil from this area has created further space that can be utilised for burial, improved the aesthetics of this area and improved access to maintain the trees that form the site boundary. The space created will provide for around 100 new graves.

- 5.4 Further small areas exist around the cemetery where landscaping changes would enable further grave spaces to be created. However, a new cemetery is required to provide for the need beyond the short-term future.

##### **5.5 Provision of burial space for Muslim faith community.**

The committee will be aware that for many years Shropshire's Muslim community has been petitioning for dedicated burial space that meets their faith requirements, specifically in terms of the orientation of graves. This has been a particular issue in south Shropshire although there is a lack of provision throughout the county.

- 5.6 Landscaping changes made at Longden Road Cemetery has created new space to provide for 41 graves orientated as required. Constructive consultation and site meetings took place with the Church of England Diocese of Lichfield and Muslim community leaders to agree arrangements for this provision.

5.7 Space exists for 41 graves for Muslim faith community in Extension 30, plus 18 graves orientated conventionally, sold at the point of need. There is an understanding that other faiths or those of no faith might need to also be buried in this section, depending on the availability of space.

5.8 **Extension of Minsterley and Church Pulverbatch Cemeteries.**

In recent weeks the authority has completed on the legal transfer to the authority of a parcel of land adjoining the current Minsterley Cemetery. I should like to record on behalf of Shropshire Council grateful thanks to the family of the benefactor. Assessment will be necessary to determine site characteristics and suitability for burials. This will require installation of boreholes, geological and ground water assessments, all of which will take time to complete. Subject to the site survey being positive and obtaining the necessary consents it is hoped the site will be developed for burial in line with conditions set by the transferor.

5.9 Drainage works and works to reinstate the boundary to a parcel of land adjoining Church Pulverbatch Cemetery and owned by the authority were completed over the course of 2020. The adjoining land has the requisite planning consent in place for use as a cemetery. Further works to improve landscaping and the quality of the aesthetics will be beneficial and will commence as the appropriate growing seasons and weather conditions permit.

5.10 **Installation of the Infant Ashes Memorial.**

A memorial to commemorate the lives of babies sadly passed away and then cremated at Emstrey when ashes were not routinely produced and recovered has been installed in the cloister garden at Longden Road Cemetery. Parents have also been offered memorial name plaques and inscriptions within the book of remembrance. The memorial has generally been well received. A further memorial is planned for those parents who wanted a different design and location.

5.11 **Future cemetery provision.**

As detailed earlier in this report progress is being made to optimise the existing space at Longden Road Cemetery. Extensions at Church Pulverbatch and Minsterley are also in progress. Unused space exists at Emstrey Cemetery although currently there are restrictions limiting the use of this space. Further assessment is being made of the Emstrey site to see what may be achievable, this would require Environment Agency agreement.

5.12 The search continues to identify a new site to develop as a cemetery to serve Shrewsbury's long-term need. A number of potential sites already within the council's estate have been considered for development as a cemetery over the last year or so, two sites have merited further investigation, one on the northern fringe of Shrewsbury and one east of the town and east of the A49, neither site displayed great prospect. Site options within the council's current estate are

limited meaning it may become necessary to acquire a site, this will require capital monies for both the acquisition and development. The primary concern is to identify a site with the right environmental credentials.

**5.13 Countywide burial provision and collaboration during the pandemic.**

Two rounds of surveying Shropshire Town and Parish Council has yielded data on the countywide provision of burial space. The dataset is incomplete as not all councils have responded, despite repeated contacts.

5.14 In addition to municipal provision, faith and private providers also operate within the burial sector. Each Church of England parish church has an idea of the burial space it has but this is not currently grouped or collated into an overview such as at Deanery or Diocesan level. Over the last 12 months Bereavement Services has received communication from and assisted Bridgnorth, Broseley and Highley council's where it is known there is a low supply of new burial space.

5.15 In the early weeks of the Covid-19 pandemic Bereavement Services initiated significant contact with partner councils, the Diocesan Offices of the Church of England covering Shropshire and various contractors. The result has created a useful contact list and inventory of who has what equipment and resource. The aim being to facilitate the pooling of such resource in times of significant need. It is apparent that provision of the county's bereavement service would benefit from a combined, collective overview due to the small resource active in the sector and our large and mainly rural county.

**5.16 Environmental impact, resource use and ecology.**

The Bereavement Services estate comprises of several cemeteries and maintenance responsibility for several rural closed churchyards, combining to form in region of 75 acres of green space. The service is keenly aware of the environmental, resource use and ecological impacts it has both positively and negatively.

5.17 In recent months the service has worked with tree planting groups, seeking to identify where further trees can be planted. Rechargeable battery powered hand tools are now in use by volunteer groups marking a shift away from petrol powered tools. The old part of Longden Road Cemetery continues to be managed for the benefit of its wildlife and numerous bird and bat boxes have been installed. The service is reviewing use of water, imported soils and the management of green wastes with the aim to lessen the negative environmental impacts of the service.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

Bereavement Services Report to Communities Overview Committee – 10th September 2018.

Bereavement Services Report to Communities Overview Committee – 4th February 2019.

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)**

Dean Carroll - Adult Social Services and Climate Change.

**Local Members**

All

**Appendices**

BSR – MF- 25-01-21 Appendices 1 & 2