

TEWKESBURY BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to:	Executive Committee
Date of Meeting:	31 August 2016
Subject:	Cemetery Provision in Tewkesbury Town
Report of:	Simon Dix, Finance and Asset Management Group Manager
Corporate Lead:	Rachel North, Deputy Chief Executive
Lead Member:	Councillor D J Waters
Number of Appendices:	None

Executive Summary:

The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the limited capacity at Tewkesbury Town Cemetery which is estimated to be full within three years if no action is taken. It includes future obligations, how these could be met and any opportunities that could be investigated to attract additional income to ensure sufficient resources for the future management of the cemeteries.

Recommendation:

That the Executive Committee RESOLVES to:

- 1. agree to the permanent suspension of the presale of burial plots at Tewkesbury Cemetery;**
- 2. agree that the provision of burials at Tewkesbury Cemetery be transferred to Bishop's Cleeve Cemetery as an alternative when Tewkesbury Cemetery is full; and**
- 3. delegate authority to the Finance and Asset Management Group Manager, in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance and Asset Management, to:**
 - agree areas within Tewkesbury Cemetery for additional burials that have no impact on previous burials, tree roots or footpaths; and**
 - agree future sundry items such as columbarium's where a business case is prudent and all necessary permissions are sought.**

Reasons for Recommendation:

Tewkesbury Cemetery has limited capacity with an estimated three years remaining for the interment of bodies. Therefore the recommendation extends the space available and provides an alternative option for future burials within Tewkesbury Borough.

The recommendation also allows Officers to investigate securing long term opportunities that generate income for the long term benefit of the site.

Resource Implications:

Income generated from Tewkesbury Cemetery will dramatically reduce once all burial plots are

full although there will be an ongoing requirement for the maintenance of the site. Therefore, a review of the operational requirements at this site will need to be undertaken to ensure the facility can be maintained at a cost neutral position.

Legal Implications:

Contained within the report at Paragraph 2.1.

Risk Management Implications:

Failure to proactively manage the reducing capacity and plan for future maintenance costs could damage the operational capability of the service as well as causing a reputational issue.

Performance Management Follow-up:

The number of available spaces at the Cemetery will be monitored on a regular basis.

Environmental Implications:

None.

1.0 INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

- 1.1** The Borough Council is the freeholder owner of two Cemeteries within the Borough, Bishop's Cleeve Cemetery which opened in 1991 and Tewkesbury Cemetery which opened in 1857. These are managed and operated by one full-time Sexton and one part-time Property Officer of the Council with Ubico cutting and maintaining the grounds in partnership with the full-time Sexton.
- 1.2** The cemeteries have a back office function and a full-time Sexton who works across both sites. The Sexton manages the day to day management, onsite enquires and maintenance including directing interments. The back office function maintains the records and processes applications for interments, permits for memorials and general items for the cemeteries.
- 1.3** The Cemetery provision currently operates at a zero cost to the authority with the current cost being covered by the income generated through the sale of burial plots, interments and memorials.
- 1.4** The cemeteries have an average of 35 interments of bodies across the two sites per annum plus interments of ashes with various general items for example memorial trees and benches. In addition to the interment of bodies we offer additional services including memorial gardens where loved ones can have a plaque installed and their ashes interred or scattered, memorial benches and trees.
- 1.5** Tewkesbury Cemetery was originally 1.84ha and was extended in 1880 to the south with an additional area of 1.56ha and a further extension was made to the south in 1932 bringing the total area to 3.81ha. The primary buildings of the Cemetery are two Gothic Revival style chapels, linked by a porte-cochere, dating from 1856. One chapel is currently used by the Sexton as a site office with staff welfare and storage of grounds maintenance and grave digging equipment. Whilst the second chapel can be used for funeral services but has only been used twice in the past two years.

2.0 LEGAL OBLIGATION

- 2.1** The principal legislation governing burials and cremations is contained in Section 214 of the Local Government Act 1972, which gives certain authorities (including Tewkesbury Borough Council) the power, but not the obligation, to provide cemeteries and

crematoria. The Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 sets out more detailed provisions regarding the authorities' powers and duties in respect of such cemeteries. There are currently no plans for the government to make the provision of burial grounds an obligation. Section 25 of the Burials Act 1875 restricts removal of bodies from places of burial (i.e. exhumations) without a faculty from the Church authorities (where the ground is consecrated) or the Secretary of State (where the land is un-consecrated).

- 2.2** Whilst there is currently no statutory obligation for Local Authorities to provide burial grounds any proposal to remove the direct provision for burials within the Borough would have reputational implications for the authority.

3.0 CURRENT PROVISION

- 3.1** Bishop's Cleeve and Tewkesbury cemeteries currently provide the interment of both ashes and bodies with a number of sundry items such as memorial trees, benches and plaques. Bishop's Cleeve Cemetery has in excess of 500 plots remaining for interments of bodies. Tewkesbury Cemetery has approximately 25 plots remaining. All plots are sold on a 100 year lease and whilst the income covers the immediate cost and elements of the future maintenance, this income does not cover the cost for the term of the lease.

- 3.2** Tewkesbury Cemetery layout has designated areas for Roman Catholic, children's, military and pauper graves. Bishop's Cleeve Cemetery currently has no designated areas although children tend to be buried within an area at the front of the cemetery.

- 3.3** Interment plots are currently sold to all members of the community although anybody residing outside the Borough upon death or purchase of the grave plot is required to pay double fees. Fees were set by Members following a review into the service a number of years ago. The review aimed to bring the service to break even over a three year period, which it has achieved, with inflationary increases being applied following break even.

- 3.4** Both cemeteries offer the opportunity to pre purchase plots for future burials. Due to the limited space in Tewkesbury Cemetery, in June 2016 Officers in consultation with the Lead Member for Finance and Asset Management, suspended the service of pre-purchasing plots.

There are currently 109 graves that have been pre-purchased prior to June 2016 that have currently not been used for burials. There could be a number of years before these are used although Tewkesbury Borough will need to ensure it meets the obligation for these pre-purchased burial sites.

- 3.5** A summary of activity across the two sites for the previous 12 months is shown below:

	Tewkesbury	Bishop's Cleeve
Ashes	25	28
Trees	6	10
Plaques	15	7
Burials	24	22
Purchase of plots	16	13
Memorials	29	33

4.0 FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

- 4.1** The following opportunities have been investigated by Officers regarding the future opportunities and options for burials.

- 4.2** The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) was commissioned in July 2016 to investigate the need for a crematorium within the Tewkesbury area. From the initial findings it appears there would not currently be a demand to support a crematorium based in Tewkesbury itself. The review demonstrates that, to enable a crematorium to be commercially viable, there must be a throughput in the region of 650 to 700 cases per annum. There are currently 635 cremations per annum from Tewkesbury Borough, although due to the proximity of Cheltenham and Gloucester a number of these would continue to use Cheltenham and Gloucester crematorium, and a small number would be gained from Worcestershire and Herefordshire. The potential growth from the Joint Core Strategy could make the option marginally viable although there is no allowance for the capital costs of the new build and purchase of land. The detail of the review will be shared with the Transform Working Group.
- 4.3** Due to the lack of capacity at Tewkesbury Cemetery, Officers have investigated the possibility of reburial on sections of Tewkesbury Cemetery and did identify an area where a majority of the exclusive burial rights and leases had exceeded 100 years and had expired. Under Section 25 of the Burial Act 1857 burial authorities require a licence from the Secretary of State for reburial. In July 2012 the junior Justice Minister had ruled that, whilst there is a limited circumstance for reburial within London authorities, a view was taken that it was not critical to introduce a policy for reusing graves for the rest of the country. Experience within the London authorities who have been given consent have found that the process from initial inception to first reuse of the ground takes an average of 10 years. Therefore there is not an option to rebury on parts of the Tewkesbury site.
- 4.4** Further investigations have been made into the possibility of burials in various small areas around the cemetery between trees and along the edge of roads and pathways. This exercise has identified approximately 40 additional graves and would give approximately an additional two to three years of burials, therefore extending the current capacity to approximately 2022.
- 4.5** Officers have also considered the option of purchasing a new site for burials within the close proximity of Tewkesbury Cemetery. Land within Tewkesbury town that isn't susceptible to flooding or of historic interest is at a premium, therefore the capital cost of the land and the likely cost of plots wouldn't make the option to purchase viable. In addition to the land and cost implications there are additional environmental restrictions including burials near to water courses and within the water table, further restricting the opportunities for finding a suitable parcel of land.
- 4.6** When Tewkesbury Cemetery is full, currently estimated at 2022, Tewkesbury Borough Council will be able to offer interments of bodies at Bishop's Cleeve Cemetery as an alternative whilst still allowing the interment and scattering of ashes at Tewkesbury along with the previous obligations of interments in pre-purchased plots. Whilst Officers could attempt to source alternative land supplies, these are likely to be some distance from the current provision in Tewkesbury town and given the supply of land at the facility in Bishop's Cleeve it would not seem to make financial or operational sense to invest in a third facility.
- 4.7** Officers have made initial enquires into opportunities of other interment options and sundry items for example above ground interments of ashes within columbarium. These can be sited along fence lines and under trees and can be sold in ten year leases therefore securing a long term income for the future maintenance of the site. Further

work is required for the suitability and demand for this option.

5.0 ONGOING COSTS

- 5.1** Once the Cemetery is full there will continue to be an ongoing obligation for the repair and maintenance of the buildings and grounds. This includes the fortnightly grass cutting from March until October and the annual winter works of cutting hedges, trees and overgrown vegetation.
- 5.2** In the fourth quarter of 2016/17 the Property Team will be reviewing the process and procedures of the cemetery provision to ensure the efficient operation whilst maintaining the current high standards. It will investigate any digital opportunities, processing of applications for interments, memorial permits, general items and the requirements of a full time Sexton and part-time back office function.
- 5.3** A commercial review of the service will also take place in the second half of the year to understand if there are other potential opportunities within the service provision.

6.0 CONSULTATION

- 6.1** Consultation will be required should the Council agree to bring in other service activities or offers where a fee is charged.

7.0 RELEVANT COUNCIL POLICIES/STRATEGIES

- 7.1** None.

8.0 RELEVANT GOVERNMENT POLICIES

- 8.1** None.

9.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (Human/Property)

- 9.1** None.

10.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS (Social/Community Safety/Cultural/ Economic/ Environment)

- 10.1** None.

11.0 IMPACT UPON (Value For Money/Equalities/E-Government/Human Rights/Health And Safety)

- 11.1** None.

12.0 RELATED DECISIONS AND ANY OTHER RELEVANT FACTS

- 12.1** None.

Background Papers: None.

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Appendices: None.