

Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management



**A report for Watford Borough Council**



***A Review of the Cemetery Service in  
Watford***

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August 2015**

# A REVIEW OF THE CEMETERY SERVICE FOR WATFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL

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# **A REVIEW OF THE CEMETERY SERVICE FOR WATFORD BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Executive Summary**

The service provide by Watford Borough Council in their cemeteries service is generally very good. There are dedicated, experienced and well trained staff in post who clearly care about the level of service they provide and who are committed to not only providing the highest level of service they can but also in working towards improvements to the service in the future.

The core activities of the service are well provided such as grounds maintenance and grave digging. The service does however need to consider modernising its service in some areas and improve on its accessibility to the public and overall customer experience.

There are a number of income generating opportunities that have been identified which could not only help move the service into a more financially favourable position but would also provide additional services and benefits to the bereaved.

This review has also examined some key issues currently affecting the cemetery service in Watford. This includes consideration around an enhanced out of hours burial service and the need to update to the current Cemetery regulations. These issues together with many others identified in the original brief have been addressed to provide a transparent and unbiased overview based on experience and current best industry practice.

This review has identified a number of issues and recommendations that would enhance the already good service currently provided at Watford. Whilst there is

much to consider it is strongly recommended that this report and the recommendations contained within it form the basis for a bespoke **Watford Cemeteries Strategy** which would provide a clear direction of travel for the service and enable delivery of a number of actions over future years and furthermore ensure the service is positioned to continually improve. This strategy should be structured over the long term with short, medium and long term objectives included that are reviewed annually and form part of the Councils key aims to ensure that it can provide the very highest standard of what is a very sensitive service that is utilised by many of the local population every year. Structured properly and endorsed by Elected Members such a document will prove to be invaluable in the future improvement of the Cemetery service.

It has been a genuine pleasure to visit Watford and meet the staff and management responsible for the service and the ICCM would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the staff for their time and assistance in providing support and information to assist with this review.

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## **Background & Introduction**

In March 2015 Watford Borough Council requested that the ICCM undertake a review of its cemetery service and provide a detailed report and recommendations to further improve and modernise the service.

This report covers all of the points identified in the original brief and provides specific recommendations for the Authority to consider

Watford Borough Council have stated in their brief that:

*'The service is one of the most important aspects of service provision that we provide, yet it is an area we currently know little about in relation to what the customer perceives of it, including "the bereaved", funeral directors, cemetery visitors. The Council now wishes to carry out a full review of this important area that will be used to shape the service taking into account current and future needs'.*

This review will cover the following subject headings as defined by Watford Borough Council:

### **Management**

- Staffing and Cover issues;
- Relationship with West Herts Crematorium (WHC);
- Hours of opening;
- The visitor experience;
- ICT and Records Management;
- Lone working policy;

- Income opportunities;
- Updating of Regulations for Management of Cemeteries; and
- Muslim and other faith Burials (weekend burials).

### Perception

- Consultation and Engagement – identifying service demands;
- Benchmarking; and
- Marketing of Cemeteries.

### Infrastructure and Environment

- Quality of the grounds and cemetery as a green space

Watford Borough Council provide a burial service through its two main cemeteries located at Vicarage Road and North Watford and also maintains and manages 2 closed sites at All Saints Cemetery and St Mary's Church Grounds.

The grounds maintenance at the sites is of a very good standard and the staff associated with this work should be congratulated for their efforts. Both North Watford and Vicarage Road sites were extremely well presented and welcoming. No obvious issues were apparent, bins were emptied and no litter was seen around the site.

Veolia currently hold the contract with Watford Borough Council to provide Grounds Maintenance across the Borough after it was outsourced in 2013. This extends to both the grounds maintenance at the cemeteries and the grave digging functions provided.

The day to day management of the service is provided by an onsite manager based at North Watford Cemetery who is

responsible for all of the key elements of the service including bookings for funerals, dealing with the public, maintaining statutory cemetery records, marking and identifying graves for excavation, dealing with the grounds staff and monitoring of the contract with Veolia.

### **Key Statistical Information**

**Sites:** 4 No. – (1) North Watford Cemetery; (2) Vicarage Road Cemetery; (3) All Saints Cemetery;(Grounds Maintenance only); (4) St Mary's Church Grounds (Grounds Maintenance Only).

**Average No of Burials Per Year:** 160 Full Burials 27 Cremated Remains

**Services Offered:** Full Burials; Cremated Remains Burials

**Population:** 93,700

**No of Registered Deaths in Watford 2013:** 695

**Current Death rate:** 0.74% per year



## **Part 1 Management**

### **Staff and Cover Issues**

*At present, the Cemetery Manager is responsible for all aspects of cemetery management and works a 37 hour week as well as some Saturday working. However, when she is on leave, attending training or is unexpectedly ill, cover is provided by a former colleague who is undergoing training via the ICCM but is now employed by Veolia. This cover is generally effective but comes at a cost and does not provide cover when the Manager is on site attending to funerals and also relies on the Veolia colleague being available at short, medium and long term notice. Cover has also recently been provided by West Herts Crematorium as part of the SLA but again cannot always be guaranteed.*

***Brief response*** – *to look at current cover arrangements and assess staffing needs as part of ensuring a more comprehensive service is provided for the bereaved, funeral directors, members of the public and cemetery visitors.*

On visiting North Watford Cemetery and discussing this issue with the Manager it is clear that the current arrangements are hampering the provision of a better service for the bereaved and key service users of Watford's cemeteries.

As a lone worker the Manager is required to close and lock the office at various times throughout the day to either attend burials, meet with visitors or deal with any other issue outside of the office which also includes visiting and attending other sites.

In this modern age the current arrangements can seem antiquated and not those expected by residents of a busy and progressive Borough. While the office is closed visitors with enquires need to wait outside

until the manager returns, the telephone is not answered (however an answer phone service is in place), this can lead to a direct impact on the bereaved if a funeral director is trying to book or confirm a burial time on their behalf.

A further issue is that of covering the service during periods of sickness and leave. Whilst arrangements are in place to cover leave in some instances this can be problematic. The current options are a member of staff contracted to Veolia however the cost for this service is £180.00 per day (£900 per week), an alternative option is the use of West Herts Crematorium Staff.

It would appear that neither of the 2 options above are 'guaranteed' in any way. There is a service level agreement in place between West Herts Crematorium and Watford Borough Council which states that WHC '*will endeavour to provide holiday and sickness cover when required subject to availability and sufficient notice*'. There is no charge for this service. Veolia do not appear to have a similar SLA in place but do charge a significant fee if their staff are utilised to manage the cemetery service.

It is clear that alternative arrangements should be considered to ensure that during periods of absence from the office by the manager (either short or long term) a degree of continuity in the service can be maintained and a full time and professional service offered.

However, whilst there is clearly a case to increase the staff within the service it is arguable as to whether an additional full time post could be justified given the numbers of funerals occurring each year. Additional staff resources however would assist in addressing some of the other current issues within the service such as backfeeding of historical records and implementing income regenerating initiatives.

## **Relationship with West Herts Crematorium (WHC)**

*The Council recently signed an SLA with WHC as detailed above. Considerable technical expertise is available locally within WHC and there are opportunities that have been identified for closer working relationships with them to assist and support the Council in relation to the day to day management of the Cemetery Service.*

**Brief response** – *to look at how closer working relationships can be developed with WHC as well as wider management opportunities for a more comprehensive service at NWC and VRC.*

A good and healthy working relationship exists between West Herts Crematorium and Watford cemeteries service. Both managers clearly have a high level of mutual respect for each other and the services they both provide, however both realise that their skills and background lie in cremation and burial services respectively.

The manager at West Herts Crematorium is regularly available to offer help and support to the cemeteries manager when asked. She has an extensive knowledge of dealing with the bereaved having worked in the industry for around 20 years.

The service level agreement currently in place to provide cover when required by WHC to Watford Cemeteries is neither robust nor ideal in its current format.

The manager at WHC provides the cover herself when requested and if she is available, unfortunately this is not always convenient, particularly when looking to cover short notice sickness, and she has been known to alter working arrangements at WHC in order to accommodate Watford cemeteries requests.

When the manager is absent from WHC she needs to ensure adequate cover exists at the crematorium and often can only cover part days for Watford. Whilst the WHC manager has more than adequate skills to deal with the bereaved on a day to day basis her operational knowledge of cemeteries is limited, this is further compounded by not being regularly placed at NWC in order to gain more knowledge and experience about the service. It is also noted that WHC receive no financial contribution for the cover they provide.

The current situation is unacceptable from both a customer service perspective and a business perspective for West Herts Crematorium and a more robust solution needs to be considered. As identified above an additional member of staff to work alongside the manager at NWC would help alleviate this issue with the current service level agreement remaining in place to provide cover in extreme circumstances.

### **Hours of Opening**

*Current opening hours for the cemetery are:-*

<i>Month</i>	<i>Open</i>	<i>Close</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Open</i>	<i>Close</i>
<i>January</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>4pm</i>	<i>July</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>8pm</i>
<i>February</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>4pm</i>	<i>August</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>8pm</i>
<i>March</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>6pm</i>	<i>September</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>7pm</i>
<i>April</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>7pm</i>	<i>October</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>6pm</i>
<i>May</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>7pm</i>	<i>November</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>4pm</i>
<i>June</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>8pm</i>	<i>December</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>4pm</i>

*Office opening times are however 9.30am to 2.30pm from Monday to Friday. Office opening hours do not reflect cemetery opening hours and the Cemetery manager as a lone worker often has to balance*

*administration work, taking bookings, attending funerals as well as the needs and availability to members of the public and funeral directors. Informal feedback has indicated that the office opening hours are not long enough and need to be reassessed. The manager is in the office from 7.30 – 3.00 daily and often sees customers outside office opening times. Calls also come into the office out of office opening times especially for Muslim burials which need to be arranged by 9.00am. Cemetery staff from Veolia are on site from 7.30 am and the manager uses that time to ensure graves are picked and ready for digging before the first burial which can be at 10.00am.*

**Brief response** – *to assess current opening hours against the needs of cemetery users and propose hours of opening based on local benchmarking, best practice and feedback from the local community.*

It is not unusual for cemetery grounds opening times to vary from the cemetery office opening times around the UK. It is generally accepted that during the summer and lighter evenings cemeteries should remain open for longer hours for the benefit of visitors, it is not however necessarily cost effective or essential that the administration and enquiries office remains open for the same hours.

In Watford there is only one office available which is located at North Watford Cemetery. There was an additional office located at Vicarage Road Cemetery however this was closed and converted back to living accommodation some years ago.

The office at North Watford Cemetery opens to the public between the hours of 9:30 am until 2:30 pm Monday to Friday. In addition to this due to the lone worker issue at this site the office can be closed for other periods of time during these hours.

The opening hours are acceptable however not ideal. It could be very frustrating for visitors who have travelled from far away to visit to find the enquiries office closed when they arrive. In addition to this local funeral directors are restricted as to when they can ring to book funerals.

The manager works between the hours of 7:30 am and 3:00 pm Monday to Friday and often deals with phone calls and visitors after these hours. This would indicate a need for longer opening times. It would however be beneficial to undertake consultation with key service users such as funeral directors, religious groups, visitors and memorial masons to gauge their views.

It may be a viable option to extend the office opening hours to something more traditional such as 9:00 am – 5:00 pm Monday to Friday and amend working arrangements or incorporate additional staffing resources to cover the period.

It should be further reviewed if there is a need for the manager to start at 7:30 a.m.. Whilst time is required to undertake administrative work and liaise with grave digging staff this could be done at a later time in the day providing that the office is manned for public enquires and to receive telephone calls.

## The Visitor Experience

*When visitors arrive at NWC, they park in a small car park by the Cemetery Lodge / Office. The Cemetery office is based in the main Cemetery Lodge where the Manager lives. The office is however perceived to be dated and old-fashioned. It does not appear especially welcoming and as a reception, does not function well.*

**Brief response** – to review the current office environment / reception area and make recommendations for improvements to enable a more welcoming environment for customers and clients.

The entrance to North Watford Cemetery is very welcoming and signage at the entrance is of a high quality and clear to read. Toilets are available to the left, with the office to the right and car parking is clearly signed.



The entrance is nicely landscaped and the high quality of maintenance apparent throughout the site starts here.

On entering the office it is clear that the reception takes the form of a previous room



of the cemetery lodge. Again this is not uncommon around the UK and whilst it does not offer perhaps the best perception of a site does serve its purpose as being a point of contact for the public and is better than no office on site at all.

The office is of a good size and incorporates the



usual desks, PC, telephone, printer and records storage that would be expected in any office environment. There is limited space for people to wait to be seen or any sort of private area which may be required to deal with some more emotional visitors. Most of the records pertaining to the service are stored within this office against the walls in fire proof safes; however it would appear some other non-statutory records are stored elsewhere.

It is essential to stress that Cemetery Records are covered under the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 Article 9 which states:

*(1) A burial authority shall maintain a plan showing and allocating distinctive numbers to—*

*(a) all graves or vaults in which burials are made after the coming into operation of this order or are known to have been made before that event; and*

*(b) the grave spaces subject to the specified rights.*

*(2) A burial authority shall also maintain records, by reference to the numbers in the plan, of—*

*(a) the burials made after the coming into operation of this order in any graves or vaults; and*

*(b) the specified rights existing in any graves or vaults, or grave spaces, and the names of the grantees thereof as recorded in the register maintained under Part II of Schedule 2 or in the registers described in paragraph 2(b) of that Part.*

The Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 is also clear as to how records should be stored under article 12 which reads:

*The following, namely—*



- *the plan maintained under article 9(1);*
- *the records maintained under article 9(2);*
- *the register of burials maintained under article 11(1);*
- *any register of burials in the cemetery maintained before the coming into operation of this order;*
- *the record of disinterments maintained under article 11(5);*
- *the register maintained under Part II of Schedule 2;*
- *the registers described in paragraph 2(b) of the said Part II; and*
- *the records of memorials made and kept under paragraph 16 of Schedule 3,*

*shall be stored so as to preserve them from loss or damage and be in the charge of the officer of the burial authority appointed for that purpose.*

The storage of the records in the fire proof safe is good and compliant, however site plans are not protected in the same way and consideration should be given to this issue urgently.



The reception area is not as welcoming as

would perhaps be wanted by the service but it is clear that the manager has to 'make the best of what she has available'. There are only 2 real options to to improve the current office and reception area.

**Option 1** – Refurbish to a modern standard and ensure that adequate storage is provided for all required items



and avoid keeping boxes etc on top of safes and cupboards. Whilst refurbishment would make the area more welcoming, space is clearly the issue and therefore option 2 below should be seriously considered.

**Option 2** – Extend the current office area to the left hand side into the garden of the tied accommodation. This could provide an ample storage area for all of the records, plans and other necessary office supplies. This would free up the existing office to be



refurbished as a much more attractive reception area, which would have enough space to provide a small seating/waiting area for families and or a private interview area.

There is no available waiting area for families congregating before a funeral service, whilst the office is not currently suitable to offer this a mourners shelter could be considered to be placed in the corner of the car park close to the office and main entrance as a designated waiting area for those attending funerals. A covered wooden structure would suffice with bench type seating underneath larger enough to provide a waiting area for up to 20 mourners. This would be relatively inexpensive to provide and provides an enhanced service for visitors.

## **ICT and Records Management**

*At present, the Cemetery Manager uses the Gower Cemetery Management Software which is backed up locally at NWC by the Cemetery Manager. The current system is not linked into the Council's main frame. Many records are also stored at the cemetery as old paper records and require digitising. They are currently stored in a nearby building opposite the Cemetery Office.*

**Brief response** – *To assess current ICT provision and make recommendations for upgrading the system, backing up and records management.*

North Watford Cemetery has the Epilog system provided by Gower as its electronic administration system. The Gower system is used for the storage of records and recording of bookings, however a manual diary is also used and the information transferred across. The manager states that all records dating back to the late 1990's are held on the computer system and the index data which consists of the name and date of death of the deceased for all other graves has been back fed into the system prior to her appointment, it is not known if all of this data is accurate. The system also holds details of the graves at Vicarage Road Cemetery including the basic indexing data.

Not all of the historical records have been completely backfed into the computerised system. This is work that should be considered which would not only provide a more robust record keeping system but could also in time allow for income generation through making the records available online whereby charges could be made for accessing the information either directly or in partnership with a commercial company who deal with family history and death records.

It is of concern that the Gower system is only backed up locally and the back-up CD's stored in the office. Whilst it is not essential that the Gower system link to the

Councils mainframe it would provide a much better failsafe if the records held on the system were backed up remotely and centrally at an alternative location. Connectivity may be an issue and options should be discussed with the Councils own IT department and Gower around the best options available. At the very least the current back up disks should be stored off site at another location.

The Authority should consider working with the current supplier of the computerised system (Gower) to explore what updates may be available which would help modernise and streamline the current service. Options such as remote bookings available out of hours should be considered to provide a better service to local funeral directors and families. At present if a death occurs on a Friday after 3:00 pm no time can be arranged for a burial until 9:30 am at the earliest on the following Monday. An online system would help but needs to be well managed by the staff.

The Authority may also want to consider further testing of the market and look at other software packages currently available and decide if in their view something more suitable is already available.

Digitising of the plans also needs to be considered. Gower do provide a mapping option to their Epilog system (Epic) and enquiries should be made as to this being integrated with the current operating system. This would not only provide a robust back up of the cemetery plans but also provides additional data that can be utilised by both staff and visitors much easier than photocopying existing section plans.

The Gower system is not used as the only diary for the booking of funerals and a manual diary is utilised. This does offer the manager flexibility to offer times suited to the funeral director however a more structured diary with set times for burials would allow increased booking provision.

## **Lone Working Policy**

*The Cemetery Manager currently works at the cemetery primarily as a lone worker. Although the office is based within the manager's residence and Grounds Maintenance operatives are on site daily, the lone working policy for this staff member needs to be reviewed.*

**Brief Response** – *assess the requirements for a lone working policy but also take into account public accessibility, design of the reception and staffing / cover issues as highlighted previously.*

As a Lone Worker the manager is in a vulnerable position in the office should they have to deal with an irate or upset member of the public which can occur when they are affected by grief.

Fortunately no significant incidents have occurred to date. The manager has access through a door to her left directly back into her home which she keeps open whilst she is alone in the office. This she would utilise in the event of an unpleasant situation arising. She is also partly protected by a long desk however this has no screen and would be relatively easy to move.

In terms of access out of the office should the main door be blocked the only option is through the exit into the house to the left. An issue does arise however should the manager be on leave or sickness as this door would then be unavailable and whoever is in the office to provide cover is effectively trapped from exiting the office should the need arise.

There also appears to be no sort of personal alarm system in place to alert anyone else of a problem. There are grounds staff on site employed by Veolia however they are not based in the office but do call in throughout the day.

A review of the layout of the office needs to be completed and should the decision be taken to refurbish and/or extend the final design should consider the health and safety of the staff and in particular acknowledge that staff do have to work alone at this site.

Some sort of alert system should be considered that could inform other staff on site of a potential problem in the office so that they can attend quickly. This would be relatively cheap and easy to implement and whilst it is recognised that no issues have occurred to date prevention is clearly better than cure in regards to the health and safety of staff.

## Income Opportunities

*The Council derives income from the cemetery service in relation to a range of burial services but with more people turning to cremation, this income stream is under pressure. Charges were recently significantly increased in 2011 but are now in line with average costs elsewhere. Charges are however significantly cheaper than most of the London Boroughs.*

**Brief Response** – *to assess all current income opportunities, pricing structures and any further opportunities for deriving income e.g. family history searches are currently not charged for and provided by the cemetery manager free of charge but take up some time.*

The main sources of income for the service are derived from the sale of Exclusive Rights of Burials and Interment Fees. Other income is received in the form of permit fees for the permission to erect memorials on grave spaces.

The cost for the purchase of Exclusive Rights are trebled for non-residents of the borough, with the exception of one parish area who pay NWC around £25k per year to allow their residents to be charged only resident fees.

Interment fees however are charged at a single rate in all instances regardless of depth to be dug.

It is not clear from the brief provided what the Authority is being charged by Veolia for the provision of gravedigging services it is expected however that the charges are less than the cost charged to the public.



North Watford Cemetery is an attractively and well laid out site and does have the opportunity to provide additional services which could attract a charge. Vicarage Road Cemetery has more limited options given the lack of space within the site but there are still options to consider.

There are no other options for cremated remains except burial or scattering on a grave. Consideration should be given to the provision of above ground niches for cremated remains, there are various suitable locations around the site and also at Vicarage Road Cemetery that could be utilised. Modern niches can accommodate a large number of remains within a very small area and further research should be undertaken and invite suppliers to look at the site and provide ideas and costs.

Clearly a large number of residents choose cremation and would utilise the services of West Herts Crematorium, however they also only have a limited number of memorial options and it would appear that there is a relevant market in the area for alternative options.



There is a large grassed area at the far end of the car park which could potentially be landscaped into a formal garden of remembrance providing a range of memorial options.

It was noted that a number of benches (some of which may well be unauthorised) are in situ in some areas of the cemetery. Again benches could be provided with dedicated memorial plaques on 10 year leases to provide a sustainable income stream. There are some beautiful areas within North Watford Cemetery which would be ideal to place dedicated seating areas which could attract a charge.



Tree dedication schemes could also easily be introduced by using current tree stock and planting new trees in designated areas. A plaque on a post in front of the tree could be provided again on a lease basis for a fixed fee.



It is essential to consider however that the above ideas will only succeed if they are effectively marketed to both the public and funeral directors. It should also be noted that at present a number of the options above including that of Columbaria Niches for the housing of cremated remains is not offered at West Herts Crematorium.

The current price list details a charge for searching records and providing an extract which is £35.00. Not everyone will require an extract and some family history firms may be profiting from NWC records by undertaking research on behalf of paying clients.

A reasonable charge should be introduced for the searching of records and provision of information as several hundred searches are carried out each year by the manager. In the main this information is provided by either email or post, however a charge should be decided on based on the amount of time on average the manager spends undertaking this task. The price needs to be reasonable but should not be seen to be excessive and added value to this element of the service could be introduced with the digitising of plans and backfeeding of data into the computer system, both could be then be given to customers making an enquiry.

Grave maintenance schemes could be introduced however this would be dependent on available staff resources from Veolia to carry out additional works to individual

graves. This could include a range of chargeable services perhaps grouped into Bronze, Silver and Gold services and would range from the basic of a monthly wash down of the memorial, removal of weeds through to additional mowing/weeding, placing fresh flowers on a grave space on specific dates and a photograph sent to the grave owner.

At the entrance to North Watford Cemetery on the left hand side there are public toilets and a small office/mess room currently utilised by staff of Veolia (Park Rangers) however these staff are not connected to the Cemetery Service. This building



is in a prime location to offer ancillary services to the bereaved such as a florist. Exploratory work should be undertaken with local businesses to gauge interest in opening a florist at this site, the Authority could then generate income through a lease agreement.

The Authority sells the exclusive Right of Burial for new graves for a fixed period of time. An option to consider is to use these existing sales to look to both generate income and keep in touch with grave owners (which is particularly useful when dealing with memorial safety issues). A simple exercise of sending out a standard letter to grave owners after a period of 5 years offering to extend the lease period for a further 5 years for a fixed fee could be considered. This letter could also be used to inform service users of any changes or events connected to the cemetery and assist with longer term marketing and build on improving customer relationships.

There are clearly a number of options to be considered that could generate additional income for the service but they will require effective marketing and initial investment for them to be a success.

With the increase in cremation as a choice for the bereaved Watford Borough Council must look to how it can generate income from these families by offering high quality final resting places for cremated remains in local cemeteries.

## **Updating of Regulations for the Management of Cemeteries**

*A number of regulations exist for the management of cemeteries in Watford that were adopted many years ago. An example would be the acceptable height of memorial stones which is no longer in line with national ICCM guidance. The adoption of these regulations is some years previously but with no apparent date as to when they became policy. They require a complete review and new policy guidelines re-written in line with current national policy.*

**Brief Response** – *to assess current Regulations and update in accordance with ICCM guidelines.*

It is not clear when the current regulations for Watford Cemeteries were published however it is recommended that a complete re-draft be considered to ensure they are fully up to date.

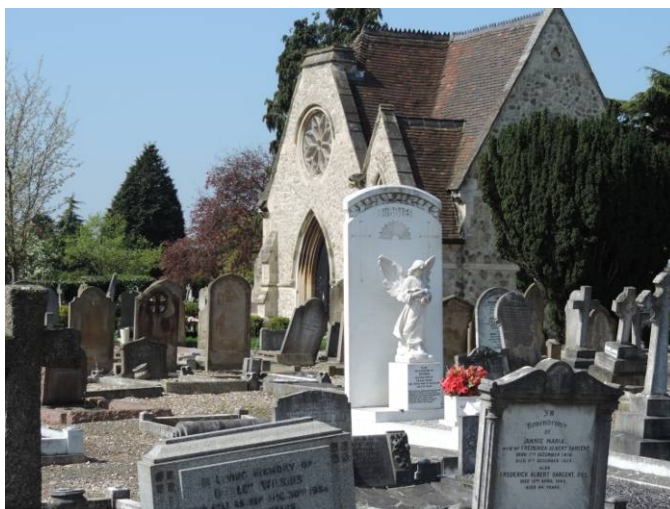
The inclusion of any regulation should be justified and its purpose clearly stated within the regulations. Best practice is also to undertake a thorough review of cemetery regulations every 3 years to ensure that they remain current and fit for purpose.

The current regulations are in need of a review as in some instances could be seen to be unenforceable or overly restrictive with no justification. They also do not take into account current needs of the bereaved or any modern practices, it is therefore recommended that new regulations are prepared and introduced for the effective management of the service.

## Memorial Safety

Whilst a complete review of regulations is required it is essential to raise the issue of memorial safety at this point. Whilst it is recognised that the Authority does undertake memorial safety testing the current regulations do not reflect this issue or specific details around fixing of new memorials therefore a suitable policy on memorial safety should be included in the new regulations.

The issue around safety of memorials has been ongoing since the 1990's when it was discovered that in many cemeteries throughout the UK fixing methods were inconsistent and in some cases very poor which led to memorials becoming dangerous.



Unfortunately there are many reported cases of accidents due to unsafe memorials resulting in injuries but more concerning is that a number of deaths have occurred in cemeteries around the UK due to dangerous memorials falling on children and adults, most recently a death of an 8 year old boy occurred in a Glasgow cemetery in May 2015.

Watford need to ensure that they are managing their memorials safely and in line with current best practice. The ICCM policy document on the Management of Memorials should be adopted by the Authority and a regular memorial inspection scheme implemented to ensure every

memorial is inspected once every 5 years. To compliment this policy the ICCM do provide training to cemetery staff around memorial safety and how to undertake testing and recording under current best practice. This provides an ideal opportunity for relevant staff at Watford to make progress with their memorial safety programme and the workshop will ensure that all the staff involved will be suitably trained and competent in the work they are asked to carry out.

In addition to the above and should new regulations be introduced the Authority should consider a suitable registration scheme for memorial masons or adopt the national register provided by the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons (BRAMM) to ensure future compliance with industry best practice in the fixing of new memorials in the future.

#### Addressing Historic Non-Compliance of Regulations

Enforcing regulations in cemeteries is never an easy task due to the sensitivity and emotion attached to such matters. Watford Borough Council must therefore ensure that any new regulations are clear to understand by both the public and Elected Members, and it is elected members and senior officers of the Council who must also be asked to support them at their introduction and in the future if challenges from any areas of the community occur.

In order to be fair and reasonable it is recommended that Watford Borough Council agree a policy on how to deal with any unauthorised items such as memorials that are currently within the sites from this point forward and once the new regulations are implemented. There are 2 basic options that should be considered which are:

- Implement the new regulations once approved and apply them retrospectively. This could obviously cause some upset to bereaved families and visitors particularly if it involves the wholesale removal of unauthorised memorials from graves that may have been in place for a number of years. This would no doubt result in very bad publicity for the service and the Authority and could be seen as an insensitive approach.
- An alternative and more sensitive approach would be to '**draw a line in the sand**' and enforce the new regulations from the date of implementation only. There are of course potential issues with this approach with some users feeling they are being treated unfairly as they may not be permitted options that others using the service are already afforded. In order to counter this the new regulations should include a policy on how to deal with historical issues. An effective policy to consider is to leave any unauthorised items in situ and only deal with them when they become neglected after which time the Authority should photograph the grave, remove all unauthorised items and reinstate the grave back to the standard of the new regulations which would then be subject to those controls in the future. This action should be publicised before implementation to ensure that all cemetery users are aware of the Councils stance.

The second option above is both a practical and effective and can be seen as a reasonable stance for the Authority to take which effectively permits historical unauthorised items to remain but only whilst the grave owner is maintaining them to an acceptable standard.

Having reviewed the current regulations a draft updated version has been provided to officers which covers all of the key issues around cemeteries and their management and includes current best practice and the second option detailed above for implementation. These regulations should be used as a starting point for the service to consider implementing and updated and amended as required to fit the specifics of Watford's Cemetery Service.

### **Muslim and other Faith Burials (Weekend Burials)**

*Two issues that require considering. 1) the lack of burial space at NWC as described above and 2) the current lack of 24 hour burials at weekends and bank holidays. An assessment was made in 2013 for out of hours burials and associated issues in relation to cover, demand, costs and opportunities. As the demand was so low and costs prohibitive, this was not pursued. The local Muslim community have asked the Council to consider opportunities for 24 hour out of hours burials and how this could well be provided in Watford. The review should also identify the demand for weekend burials from other groups and consider the matter both as part of the need for burial service provision generally or alternatively as a stand alone exceptional requirement for specific faith groups.*

**Brief Response** – *to assess what opportunities there may be for providing such a service, cost and logistical issues, and local demand. The demand is currently very low and there are alternatives locally but this needs reviewing in line with the increased population growth of other sectors.*



It is essential to remember that the bereaved will have various religious and cultural differences and it is the duty of the Local Authority to take all reasonable steps to accommodate those needs in the provision of its service.

At present it is understood that a burial can usually be accommodated at North Watford cemetery within 24 hours Monday to Friday however only limited provision is offered for Saturday mornings providing the booking is made before noon the previous day and Veolia / WBC staff are available.

It is known that there are Muslim burial sections located in the nearby area at Woodcock Hill Cemetery in Rickmansworth (8 miles) which will cater for weekend and bank holiday funerals and also Carpenders Park Cemetery (6 miles) which provide burials on Saturdays providing a booking is made no later than 12:00 noon the previous day. Therefore there are local options that the Muslim community can consider should North Watford Cemetery not have availability.

There are a number of issues that have to be considered to provide an enhanced burial service outside of the current usual working hours to include weekends and bank holidays. Consultation will be essential in exploring this option, in addition to this cost vs demand must also be taken into account.

#### Standard Requirements for an Enhanced Out of Hours Burial Service

In order for a burial to take place the death must first be registered with the Registrars of Births Deaths and Marriages in the District where the death occurred. This is a legal requirement under Section 15 of the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953.

As this process must be completed before burial the Registration Service must be available at weekends and Bank Holidays to carry out the statutory registration process. In addition to this it is usual at Watford for 2 gravediggers and the Cemetery Manager to attend all funerals.

In order to provide an out of hours service Watford Borough Council will need to implement a standby system every weekend and for bank holidays. It is arguable however whether religious holidays such as Christmas Day, Good Friday and Easter Sunday should be included in any agreement.

Standby costs alone would be **significant**, and in addition to this overtime costs would be incurred when staff are called out.

The current staffing levels are also prohibitive in providing this level of service at Watford at present. With only one cemetery manager and 2 grave diggers currently in post this would require all 3 of them to be on call every weekend, in terms of a work/life balance this may be prohibitive and it is unclear if the staff concerned would agree to such a change in their terms. There are also issues of cover for periods of sickness and leave to consider, again with limited numbers of suitably qualified staff on hand to deliver the service managing this may be difficult. Veolia were consulted on operational issues that would be impacted on in delivering an out of hours service and this is attached as an Appendix This highlights 3 areas of operational challenges that are of concern:-

- Operational Challenges – Labour
- Operational Challenges – Mechanical Resource contingency
- Operational Challenges – Management and Administration

Veolia are willing to assist WBC in ensuring that the satisfaction levels within the community relating to the cemetery

service remain high and that wherever possible they help to achieve and surpass local stakeholder's expectations.

The challenge of trying to introduce a weekend and bank holiday burial service within the cemetery would be less challenging for a larger borough with a larger workforce as there would be more capacity for weekend working via overtime. With such a small pool of employees to draw from the challenge for WBC and Veolia collectively would be to find a balance of available human resource that does not incur enormous cost.

The Registration service must also be included in future consultation to ensure they are available to provide the required paperwork outside of normal office hours.

Cemetery users should also be consulted on the provision of extended burial times covering weekends. It should be remembered that for many Sundays are a traditional day to visit loved ones graves and other cemetery users may raise concerns about any changes to the current permitted burial times.

### Service Demand

Burial Figures for North Watford Cemetery are detailed below which shows around a fifth of all burials taking place at the site are for the Muslim community. It is known that there are a number of Muslim sects who use the facility, however for the purposes of this report total Muslim numbers have been used including the burial of children to ensure a complete picture is shown.

<b>Year</b>	<b>No. of Full Burials</b>	<b>No. of Muslim Burials</b>	<b>% of Muslim Burials</b>
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2010	175	38	21%
2011	144	28	19%
2012	152	26	17%
2013	169	39	23%
2014	166	41	24%

5 Year Average	160 per year	34 per year (22 Adults 12 Children)	20%
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The above table shows demand for the service to be around 20% of all burials carried out at North Watford Cemetery to be for the Muslim Community, however of those only 9 have been arranged for a Saturday over the last 5 years. The trend however is increasing and in 2014 almost a quarter of all funerals were for the Muslim community.

Whilst there is a clear demand to provide a service for the Muslim Community the number of burials undertaken at weekends as a percentage of total Muslim burials is only 5% of all deaths. It is not clear from the data available whether any requests for weekend burials over the last 5 years have been declined due to operational reasons or regulations.

The average number of Muslim burials is currently 34 per year, it is clearly impossible to state exactly how many funerals will be required at weekends throughout the course of a whole year. The formula to offer a best estimate would be  $34 \text{ deaths} \div 12 \text{ months} = 3 \text{ funerals per month}$ . It would therefore be a safe estimate to assume at least one of those 3 would require a weekend funeral.

Research should also be undertaken to establish if there is sufficient demand from the wider local population for burials at weekends from other faiths or groups. The results of this may provide a larger issue to be considered by the Authority.

## Cost vs Demand

Excluding the issues around staffing resources highlighted by Veolia, in terms of cost vs demand in terms of providing an enhanced service at weekends and Bank Holidays it would be fair to place that cost of the provision against the groups using the service which is likely to make it unaffordable.

Standby payments are set at approximately £27.50 per session. A full out of hours service for Watford would result in 4 staff being required to be on standby namely:

- Funeral Attendant/Cemetery Manager
- Grave Diggers x 2
- Registrar of Births and Deaths (employed by HCC)

The requirement of the 4 staff above are in order to provide an effective service at weekends and bank holidays and it should be made clear that these posts cover 4 different individuals.

The Funeral Attendant/Cemetery manager is required to co-ordinate the booking and ensure staff are available to work. This role will also include preparation of digging instructions, completion of statutory registers and paperwork and overseeing the burial service and dealing with any issues before and during the burial. Given that the service is operating out of normal hours it is essential that an experienced and suitably qualified member of staff is available to undertake these essential duties.

The grave digging staff are obviously required to prepare the grave space on the day of the burial, this may include the excavation of a new grave or dealing with a pre-dug stock grave which may still require work to deal with water ingress or collapsed

walls. It is essential to have 2 gravedigging staff due to the nature of the work and to comply with best practice and health and safety requirements.

Key to the whole process is ensuring that a Registrar of Births and Deaths is available to undertake the statutory requirement of registering a death. Without this element of the process in place the relevant paperwork cannot be issued and a burial cannot go ahead. The registration of a death can only be completed by a duly appointed Registrar or Deputy Registrar. It should also be noted that in some cases where a death may have to be referred to the Coroner it is unlikely permission would be granted for a short notice burial particularly over a weekend.

Therefore to operate an enhanced scheme a minimum of 4 staff would be required to be on standby each weekend and the calculations below are based on this level of service.

Each individual above would be required to be on standby for 2 periods each weekend which is a total cost of £55 per person x 4 = £220 per week x 52 weeks = £11,440 for standby payments plus any additional enhancements for Sunday and Bank Holiday working

Overtime payments are calculated as an average of £18.46 per hour (Time + Half at scp 27) per person and attributed as follows:

- Funeral Attendant/Cemetery Manager - 4 hours
- Grave Diggers x 2 - 8 hours (4 hours each)
- Registrar of Births and Deaths – 1 hour

This would total £18.46 x 13 hours = £239.98 (approx.) based on an average of 1 weekend per month this would be an annual overtime cost of around £3000.

Costs are therefore **estimated** as follows:

Annual Standby Costs	£10,000
<u>Annual Overtime Costs</u>	<u>£ 3,000</u>
Total Annual Cost	£13,000

If it is agreed that the average number of out of hours funerals would be one per month this means that the actual cost of providing an enhanced out of hours service would be in the region of £1,100 per out of hours burial to include the associated overtime and standby costs.

The only additional income to offset these costs is the weekend surcharge currently set at £300. Based on the figures above this would generate £3,600 per year (£300 x 12) a shortfall of £9,400 per year of the actual cost. **This does not take into account the actual need to appoint and train extra staff to deliver such a service and is based on the current provision available and therefore does not give a true reflection of the costs which in reality are likely to be much higher.**

There are **significant costs** issues associated with providing an enhanced out of hours service and of course operational and staff resources to also consider as described in an analysis by Veolia. Engagement with a number of neighbouring Authorities has taken place; the results show a varying range of service levels being provided and a range of costs. However it should be noted that it does not appear that there is a 'perfect solution' already in place that could be easily adopted by Watford Borough Council and the Council must review the results of this exercise together with the projected costs, resource implications and demand for the service before reaching a final decision.

A more thorough consultation exercise needs to be undertaken in order to obtain a clear direction for the Authority to take at this time.

Further consultation should include as an absolute minimum:

- Cemetery Staff and Management;
- Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages;
- Elected Members;
- Finance Department;
- Human Resources;
- Veolia;
- All Muslim Community Leaders; and
- Funeral Directors.

The consultation must clearly identify the following at an early stage in order that **further options** can then be explored:

- Minimum expectations/needs of the local Muslim Community (currently a 7 day service, 365 days a year);
- Staff Views; and
- Whether the service be subsidised or operate as a cost recovery service.

The Muslim community groups should be consulted so it is clear as to what the minimum acceptable standard of service they feel should be provided by the Authority is. This will enable the Authority to **accurately cost** what that provision would be. Consultation should also seek to gain a financial view from senior management, Elected Members and finance as to whether the enhanced service should operate on a cost recovery basis or be subsidised. It also is essential to gain



the views of staff as without them to carry out their individual roles the enhanced level of service would not be viable.

Other options to consider may be to look at a partnership approach with the sites at Rickmansworth and Carpenders Park to see if a more joined up approach could be considered that would benefit the Authority and the local Muslim communities.

Alternatively, and possibly the most viable solution, the Authority may wish to consider identifying a piece of land to sell, lease or give to the Muslim community in order that they are able to manage their own burials entirely, this would however have a negative impact on the current income stream for the cemetery service. It is important to note that this option would require the community to ensure that they comply fully with all relevant burial legislation and it must be remembered that this would be a significant undertaking as it is not clear if the community possess the relative skills and knowledge to operate its own site at present.

There is a general pressure on suitable burial space for all denominations and groups throughout the Watford area so whilst this is a significant issue for the Council it forms the basis for an overall strategy to identify burial land in general but does not preclude the fact that some existing areas of land are running out faster than others and so sourcing a viable alternative for the Muslim community remains paramount and is a priority.

It would seem sensible given the information above for the Authority to look to formalise a Muslim Burial Board made up of a small number of key community leaders who are able to meet on a regular basis with the Cemetery manager to discuss any issues and form a stronger partnership working relationship. This will in the future allow all parties to better understand the issues that each group has and

provide a suitable platform for issues and ideas to be discussed and developed in the future.

## **Part 2 – Perception**

### **Consultation and Engagement – identifying service demands**

*Watford Borough Council has an excellent track record of local community engagement and consultation, yet there has been no recent consultation with cemetery users, clients, funeral directors or the bereaved in recent years. Informal feedback has been received over the years that the service is a good service but issues arise over lack of availability, opening hours, Muslim burials availability etc. In 2010/11 Policy Development Scrutiny Committee set up a Task Group to review the services for the deceased. The Task Group met and produced a final report in November 2010, which was then considered by Cabinet at its meeting in December 2010. An action plan was produced and Policy*

*Development Scrutiny Committee reviewed the action plan and asked for a further update in a year. Since then, no further engagement has occurred especially with users, direct and indirect.*

#### ***Brief response – THIS ELEMENT WAS CARRIED OUT BY WBC***

Whilst it is noted that WBC will be addressing this element in more detail it should be stated that no formal stakeholder groups appear to exist at present connected to the Cemeteries service.

Whilst there are informal groups and clear good working relationships are in place between management and funeral directors and memorial masons these relationships should be formalised and regular (perhaps twice yearly) meetings should be arranged to both gauge views and opinions of stakeholders and discuss future plans, changes and new ideas for the service.

This form of customer engagement can be extremely useful and beneficial to the service and pave the way for much improved relationships with regular service users.

Customer feedback from the bereaved is also important and should be sought through questionnaires soon after the funeral has taken place. This will help identify any perceived shortfalls in the service and allow them to be addressed quickly and allow regular improvements to the service.

## **Benchmarking**

*Watford has traditionally managed cemeteries as a standalone service without any formal benchmarking although more informal benchmarking is carried out locally in relation to pricing structures.*

**Brief response** – *To look at local, regional and national benchmarking in relation to pricing, quality and overall provision of service, grounds maintenance and make recommendations.*

At present it is not possible to benchmark the service against anything other than the Charter for the Bereaved of which Watford Borough Council is a member.

Watford offers a Bronze level service based on the national scoring of the Charter for the Bereaved which is completed annually by Charter Members. There are 3 levels based on the score achieved, these being bronze, silver and gold.

The Charter is a good benchmarking tool and does allow for continuous improvement to the service by introducing new ideas and services and simply turning a No into a Yes on the annual questionnaire. The service has increased its score of

previous years by making regular changes, this should continue and the service should challenge itself to achieve a silver level within the next 2 years.

No other benchmarking is regularly undertaken with the exception of checking fees and charges with neighbouring Authorities. With the exception of the Charter for the Bereaved the only other national benchmarking tool which could help the service is the APSE benchmarking service for cemeteries and crematoria. Although the annual return is quite detailed to complete the information returned can be extremely valuable and also puts the service into a benchmarking group which would allow for the sharing of good practice and ideas. In addition to this staff should be encouraged to attend regular ICCM Branch Meetings and events such as the ICCM Learning Convention to network and learn about new trends and ideas.

The formation of a Local Benchmarking group should be considered initially involving the Bereavement Service/Cemetery Managers of the Authorities who form the management committee of West Herts Crematorium namely:

- Dacorum Borough Council;
- Hertsmere Borough Council;
- St Albans City & District Council;
- Three Rivers District Council;
- Watford Borough Council; and
- West Herts Crematorium.

An agreed benchmarking template could be completed annually to compare service standards, costs and income and the group work together to look at ways to collectively improve. Quarterly meetings should be sufficient for the group to be

effective and it may be surprising how useful the regular sharing of knowledge and experiences can be.

There are many benefits of establishing a local group in addition to sharing useful local data the benchmarking group can work effectively together to explore improved and efficient ways of working and look to identify collective opportunities that benefit all customers and service users. This may include items such as standardisation of application forms, memorial regulations, memorial safety policies and registration schemes.

## **Marketing of Cemeteries**

*Although signage at both cemeteries is now excellent, no publicity or marketing material exists for the cemeteries covering what is on offer, service provided, who actually provides it, costs, contact details. This is in stark contrast with the nearby West Herts Crematorium.*

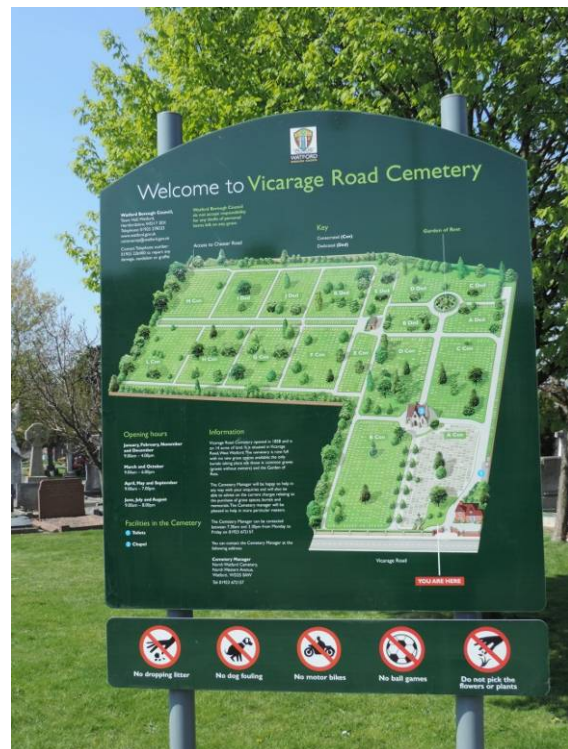
**Brief Response** – *Assess opportunities for the marketing of the cemetery service in relation to the development of a brochure, social media, internet, advertising and other potential opportunities.*

As detailed above in the section covering income opportunities marketing of the service and the services offered is key to raising its profile and generating additional income.

West Herts Crematorium is an excellent example of how to produce good marketing material with glossy brochures, neatly drawn maps, information and application forms and lots of good quality information all with a specific corporate brand and logo

which is easily recognisable. Quality information like this promote a quality service and is clearly the way Watford need to go in marketing its cemetery services.

The maps at the cemetery entrances are of an excellent standard, well drawn with good detail and all areas clearly marked. This is in stark contrast to the maps handed out from the cemetery office. Watford Borough Council should request the artwork used for the main entrance signage to be produced in a printable format which could be handed out to visitors at the cemetery.



A brochure (including a detailed and professionally drawn map) promoting the services offered must be considered and include contact and ownership details about the sites as well as information around the types of services and facilities available, this would be essential should the Authority decide to expand its current provision of services and consider provision of new memorial options, green burials or columbaria.

The internet should also be used and dependent on local IT policy consideration should be given to a dedicated web site for the service. This could provide extensive information about the service, memorial options, price lists, forms and maps and be regularly updated to inform service users of any changes or upcoming events.

As detailed earlier once all of the historical records are backed onto the computer system links through the cemetery website could be used to access records and generate income.

The service should also consider marketing and promoting itself through holding regular events such as an annual Christmas Memorial service or an open air memorial service during the summer. These could be sponsored by a Local Funeral Director or Memorial Mason and a collection made to be given to a local charity. Involving the Mayor at such events will help raise the profile of the service significantly.

Consideration should also be given to working more with the local community and the service should look to assist with the formation of a Friends group, this is likely to be particularly beneficial to Vicarage Road Cemetery given its age and amount of local history it contains. A properly constituted friends group can seek charitable donations and grant funding to carry out repairs and improvements to sites and preserve local history. In the current period of austerity within local government seeking additional income sources to assist with improvements and preservation is sensible as is generating local public interest in the sites.



## **Part 3 – Infrastructure and Environment**

### **Quality of the grounds and Cemetery as a Green space**

*The grounds of both cemeteries are maintained by Veolia having outsourced the service in July 2013. This covers all works related to grounds maintenance including grass cutting, shrub maintenance, weed control, tree management, litter management and clearance as well as grave digging / backfilling. The quality of the open space at NWC and VRC is generally very good with recent improvements to the entrances, external works of both chapels, car parking and signage. However, there are no long term development plans for improving the grounds – they are simply maintained to an agreed standard. NWC has the potential for further improvements and could well satisfy Green Flag Award standards for entry to the award. NWC may also have the potential for a future HLF Parks for People bid as it has considerable local historical interest.*

**Brief Response** – *to review the quality of the spaces and grounds maintenance specification against current standards and as part of any potential masterplan development, highlight opportunities for improvements. To also review and challenge the current practices related to grave digging and backfilling and ensuring full compliance with agreed good practice.*

The grounds maintenance at both sites is extremely good and of a very high standard. Grass is well maintained throughout both sites and there was no evidence of overgrown areas, poorly managed shrubberies or litter problems.



The maintenance specification provided to Veolia (Document P&OS16 – Cemeteries) has been reviewed. The document is concise and covers general requirements for grave digging, backfilling and exhumation all of which are well covered and clearly set out in the specification.

The document is focused on responsibilities of the contractor rather than it being an actual specification of works, for example it does not detail the number of grass cuts to be undertaken in each cemetery per year or the requirements of annual bedding displays. The specification includes a line at 68.4.5 stating that the partner shall ‘Maintain the grass, trees, shrubs, flowerbeds and hedges’. The detail relating to the specification of standards of grounds maintenance forms part of the overall maintenance specification for the Borough. The management of the grounds maintenance does not appear to be an issue given the high standards witnessed at the site.

### Green Flag Awards

Watford Borough Council already has a good track record in managing its parks and open spaces with Green Flag awards at 6 of its parks awarded in 2015. The cemeteries should be viewed as just as an important open space as the towns parks and achieving a green flag not only recognises the hard work and efforts of the staff working at the site but also raises the profile of the site and provides a mechanism to introduce a continuous method of improvement for the site.

All Green Flag sites are judged on 8 key criteria and a number of factors contribute to each of these headings as detailed below:

## **A Welcoming Place**

When approaching or entering the park/green space, the overall impression for any member of the community - regardless of the purpose of their visit - should be positive and inviting. There should be:

- Good and safe access
- Good signage to and in the park/green space
- Equal access for all members of the community

## **Healthy, Safe and Secure**

The park/green space must be a healthy, safe and secure place for all members of the community to use. Any issues that have come to light must be addressed in the management plan and implemented on the ground. New issues that arise must be addressed promptly and appropriately.

- Equipment and facilities must be safe to use
- It must be a secure place for all members of the community to use or traverse
- Dog fouling must be adequately addressed
- Health and safety policies should be in place, in practice and regularly reviewed
- Toilets, drinking water, first aid, public telephones and emergency equipment where relevant (e.g. life belts by water) should be available in or near the park/green space, and be clearly signposted.

## **Clean and Well Maintained**

For aesthetic as well as health and safety reasons, issues of cleanliness and maintenance must be adequately addressed, in particular:

- Litter and other waste management
- The maintenance of grounds, buildings, equipment and other features
- A policy on litter, vandalism and maintenance should be in place, in practice and regularly reviewed.

## **Sustainability**

Methods used in maintaining the park/green space and its facilities should be environmentally sound, relying on best practices available according to current knowledge. Management should be aware of the range of techniques available to them, and demonstrate that informed choices have been made and are regularly reviewed. Parks/green spaces should:

- Have an environmental policy or charter and management strategy in place, which is in practice and regularly reviewed
- Minimise and justify pesticide use
- Eliminate horticultural peat use
- Recycle waste plant material
- Demonstrate high horticultural and arboricultural standards
- Have energy conservation, pollution reduction, waste recycling, and resource conservation measures

## **Conservation and Heritage**

Particular attention should be paid to the conservation and appropriate management of:

- Natural features, wildlife and fauna
- Landscapes
- Buildings and structural features
- These should serve their function well without placing undue pressure on the surrounding environment

## **Community Involvement**

The park/green space management should actively pursue the involvement of members of the community who represent as many park/green space user groups as possible. The following should be demonstrated:

- Knowledge of user community and levels and patterns of use
- Evidence of community involvement in management and/or developments and results achieved
- Appropriate levels of provision of recreational facilities for all sectors of the community

## **Marketing**

- A marketing strategy should be in place, which is in practice and regularly reviewed
- There should be good provision of information to users, e.g. about management strategies, activities, features, ways to get involved
- The park/green space should be promoted as a community resource

## **Management**

- A management plan or strategy should be in place
- This should clearly and adequately address all of the above criteria and any other relevant aspects of the park/green space's management
- The plan must be actively implemented and regularly reviewed
- A financially sound management of the park/green space must also be demonstrated

Cemeteries are still a fairly recent addition to the Green Flag process and the number of sites appears to grow on an annual basis. There are a number of benefits to achieving this nationally recognised award most notably the fact that it recognises the hard work and dedication of staff at the site and also serves to raise the profile of the service.

In looking at the key criteria above it should be noted that Watford cemeteries are clearly already some way towards satisfying the criteria to achieve a further two Green Flags for its cemeteries in the future. Some work is required of course such as the preparation of a management plan or strategy, improved marketing and community involvement, however given that the Authority has already achieved 6 awards there is clearly an in-house resource that should be utilised to assist the cemetery service achieve Green Flag status in the future.

This review document has already identified some of the missing criteria that would be required and should form the basis of an improvement strategy for the cemetery service to not only seek Green Flag recognition but also to drive continuous improvement through the service over a longer period.

## **Building Infrastructure**

*Both cemeteries have a number of buildings including occupied lodges, chapels, ancillary buildings and maintenance yards. Some have been improved whereas others require investment or possible alternative uses sought. The recent Property Review needs to be taken into consideration as part of the assessment of buildings at both cemeteries.*

**Brief Response** – *To assess all buildings in both cemeteries in relation to condition, usage and accessibility and take into account the wider recommendations of the Property Review and to make further recommendations based on the needs and operation of the cemetery service*

### Buildings at North Watford Cemetery

There are a total of 4 buildings at North Watford Cemetery all of which are in generally good condition externally. However consideration should be given to improvements or alternative uses to some of these buildings.

### Office & Living Accommodation (Main Entrance)

The living accommodation was not inspected as part of this review, however it should be noted that it is not uncommon for cemetery lodges to continue to be occupied by operational staff and can be seen as a benefit to the service in terms of security whilst still generating an income through receiving an annual rent.

Information around the office has been covered in section 1 under the visitor experience and it is recommended that improvements are undertaken to make this more welcoming and consideration given to important areas such as records storage and security of staff working alone.

There is scope to extend the office to accommodate an improved store and would allow a complete remodelling of the main reception area. In addition to this consideration should be given to provide an external waiting area for mourners to gather under in advance of a funeral arriving.

#### Toilets & Mess Room (Main Entrance)

Opposite the main office at North Watford Cemetery is a building incorporating public toilets and a mess room utilised by staff of Veolia.

The toilets when inspected were deemed to be adequate but consideration should be given to refurbishment in the near future and a review as to whether they satisfy current DDA requirements. The room between the toilets is currently utilised as a mess room and is used by Veolia staff however these staff are not connected to the cemetery service.

As stated previously in the report a better use of the building to be considered would be to offer a lease to an individual or a company to operate a cemetery related business from this building such as a florist or perhaps a memorial mason. Not only would this bring in a new income stream for the service from the lease but would further enhance the visitor experience at the site. Florists have successfully been opened at a number of sites around the UK generally by individuals looking to establish a new business. Not much space is required and the required infrastructure of water and electricity is already in place making this an excellent opportunity.



## Mess Room & Operational Yard

There is a small operational yard at North Watford Cemetery which is utilised by the staff contracted to Veolia. It provides adequate storage for plant and equipment and reasonable mess and toilet facilities for the staff.

It was noted that ground areas of the yard are not solid and consideration should be given to concreting the area to provide a hard standing which would be particularly useful during the winter period and allow the staff to operate in cleaner conditions.

Security throughout the whole site is good given there is only a single entrance and the manager lives on site however the excavator whilst stored in the locked compound is not secured in a shed or container and a review of this should be considered if space allows.

## Cemetery Chapel

There is a burial chapel located in the centre of the site that is utilised for burial services. Externally it is attractive and well maintained and common of small burial chapels found in many cemeteries around the UK.



Internally the building does need some work to bring it up to a more acceptable standard. There is a problem with the roof which appears to have water ingress and dated and ineffective electric heaters. There is a basic music

system used to provide music at services however this is only a domestic CD player and consideration should be given to

installing something more commercial. A loop system to assist the hard of hearing is also in place.

## Buildings at Vicarage Road Cemetery

### Living Accommodation

At the main entrance to the site there is a large well maintained property. This is utilised as a domestic property in the same way as that at North Watford Cemetery but does not have an enquiries office attached. The occupant is employed by Veolia and undertakes duties associated with the security of the site.

### Toilets

There are toilets located close to the main entrance of the site however on the day of the visit both were locked and inaccessible.

### Cemetery Chapel

The chapel located at Vicarage Road is similar in size and design to that at North Watford Cemetery. It is also well maintained and attractive and it appears that some restorative work has been undertaken in the past.

Internally it is basic with hard wooden seats in place and there does not appear to be music system. It is however clean and well lit from the large ornate Victorian windows.

The only heating is the electric heaters placed at a high level (similar to those at North Watford Cemetery). It was not clear if they are currently working however if they are they would be expensive to operate and it is doubtful they would be

particularly effective in a large stone building.

Should areas of Vicarage Road cemetery be reused in the future then this chapel may become more frequently used, however at present it may be better suited to an alternative but cemetery related use.

### **Growth and Expansion Opportunities – The Need for Space and Green Burials**

*No new grave spaces are available at Vicarage Road Cemetery and there is now limited space left at North Watford Cemetery. Burial space is especially limited in relation to the Muslim section which has circa 2 years space remaining. The Local Plan has identified 2 potential sites at Lower Paddock Road on the site of the former parks depot (under council ownership) as well as a green field site at the end of Hempstead Road, adjacent to Russell Lane (not under council ownership and since objected to by the EA) and the potential for expansion at North Watford Cemetery. There are also no current opportunities for Green Burials in Watford.*

**Brief Response** – *To assess the local need for Green Burials, assess the success elsewhere through localised benchmarking and review the proposed alternative sites and scope for cemetery extensions, green burials and possible capacity. There is also a need to review how many years left there are at NWC based on current demand.*

Burial Space is a major issue facing Burial Authorities throughout the UK and Watford is no different. The brief identifies that the service recognises it is running out of space and needs to identify options for its sites in the future. As of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2011 records state that North Watford Cemetery had 4 hectares of land available for burials. 4 hectares = approximately 9.8

acres. However examining the site shows that only approximately 1 acre would appear to be currently available for immediate use. It is strongly advised that a thorough site survey be undertaken to establish an exact current position in relation to available land and mapped on the GIS system to assess exact availability.

From the data supplied and based on there being 1 acre of land available it has been calculated that there is currently around 12 years' worth of burials remaining at North Watford Cemetery based on current death rates and land usage. Calculations state that the figure could be 12 years however it is known that certain areas are unsuitable for burial and cannot be utilised, therefore the area available will be closer to **7- 9 years space**. At present the service is undertaking an average of 160 full burials per year this is made up of around 75 new graves and 85 re-opened graves.

The common formula to identify available burial space is:

- number of acres available (1) ÷ average number of annual burials (75) x number of graves per acre (900) = number of years available (12)

If new grave spaces are set out as 9' x 4' (36 square foot) most cemeteries can accommodate around 900 graves in an acre of land to include paths and minor landscaping. Based on this assumption North Watford Cemetery currently has 12 years of burial space left in total, however some of the land area is known to be unsuitable for burial reducing that capacity to an estimated 7-9 years and consideration has also to be given for provision of land for different faiths such as the Muslim community. If a more accurate measure is required the same formula above can be used but based on a specific denominational use of a set area.

Whilst 7-9 years may seem a considerable life span for the cemetery it is essential to be aware that establishing a new burial

ground can take a considerable amount of time (3-4 years) due to the needs associated to satisfying the Environment Agency and gaining planning consent. Therefore work should commence now in looking to identify new ground and ensure it is reserved for future use or alternatively/additionally to examine ways to increase the capacity of the land to lengthen the period of availability such as grave re-use or policy restrictions on who can be accepted for burial e.g. Watford residents only.

### Grave Re-Use

The ICCM have previously undertaken a study of Vicarage Road Cemetery and recommended that grave re-use could be considered at this site either through legislation under the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 to reclaim graves where the rights have expired and have never been exercised. An alternative option being undertaken by other Authorities at present is to apply for consent to the local church diocese to exhume remains from consecrated areas of burial. These remains can then be re-buried at the end of the row of the same section freeing up new space for burials. Whilst this can be sensitive consideration should be given to this option at Vicarage Road cemetery and the ICCM will be able to provide additional advice on this option if required. A copy of this original ICCM report has been provided to officers.

### New Cemetery Options

There is often a perception among residents that “there is never enough green space”, but when Watford assessed the amount of green space over a range of open space typologies (Parks & Gardens; Amenity Green Space; Natural Green Space; Outdoor Sports Facilities; Children and Young People; Cemeteries), as a town, Watford is very well endowed, and many of the wards have excellent provision of green space over a range of typologies. Some deficiencies do occur, especially with regards to natural green space, but overall, Watford is well provided for. However, accessibility is an issue for many and the Watford Green Spaces Strategy advocates adopting green infrastructure principles and developing a strategic green space network for the town. By setting standards of provision Watford can concentrate on those sites that are most important which need to be protected at all costs as well as continually enhanced.

But there are a number of sites that are not performing well and may be deemed low quality and/or low value. Several sites fall into this category at present. There is a clear policy on how these sites should be treated either enhancing the quality of these green spaces as long as it is possible to improve and enhance the value of them or if this is not possible, consider the space surplus to requirements in terms of its current use and consider alternative uses (which could include potential provision as cemetery space). However, this must be considered in the light of wider planning policies such as the need to determine **other typology deficiencies** in the area within distance thresholds, whether enhancement is realistic and determine community value by local consultation.

## Woodland and Natural Burial

Woodland and Natural Burial grounds have been operational in the UK since 1993 when the first area was opened in Carlisle as part of its existing cemetery. Since then the concept of woodland



burial and associated services such as natural burial and meadowland burial has grown steadily in the UK resulting in both the private and public sector venturing into this market.

The basic concept is that the deceased is laid to rest in an existing woodland area, or a woodland is created around new burials and the site managed as a natural woodland area. It must be stressed that this concept is not to everyone's taste and maintenance standards can and do vary so it is essential to identify exactly what Watford would want to offer and achieve. It is suggested that the management of the service look to visit providers in the area to gain their views and also look at the service provided by private sector organisations.

With the exception of Woodcock Hill Cemetery and Carpenders Park there appears to be no other provider in the area of woodland or natural burials.



There is definite scope to provide Natural Burial at North Watford Cemetery in an

area to the east of the site which is currently wooded but does have some natural openings into the area and is currently used as a surplus soil storage area. The area

could not be utilised for traditional burials as clearance of the site would be expensive and tree roots would provide a continual problem in regular excavation of new deep graves.

I would recommend utilising this area as a natural burial ground as a suitable basic infrastructure is already in place and there is little capital outlay required to prepare the site as only minor works would be required to clear and level an area and prepare the ground and undertake planting of natural wildflowers and or native tree species in and around the area.

It would of course be necessary to undertake some test digs in the area to ascertain the current composition of the ground and eliminate any possible problems before opening the area to natural burials.

If the area is deemed suitable regulations need to be introduced for the future management and control of the area, however as stated above it is essential that the Authority establish early what type of woodland burial area it intends to provide.

The ICCM in conjunction with Stratford Business School are shortly to introduce a new education diploma based around Natural Burial and it is highly recommended that the Cemetery Manager be encouraged to complete this course.



## Paddock Road Site

The old depot site at Paddock Road was examined as part of this review and consideration given as to whether it could accommodate woodland burials in the future.

Access to the site along the roads in the area would be difficult for a funeral cortege with many of the streets on the approach both narrow and regularly double parked by residents. It should be considered that a funeral hearse and limousine are wider than standard vehicles and therefore could have problems on the approach to the site.

The only access from the road appears to be through the single tracked road between the local allotments in the area. It has to be considered if this would be acceptable to both the bereaved as part of the 'final journey' of a loved one and also to the allotment holders who would witness funeral corteges passing through on a regular basis. The single track road could also be problematic as only limited passing places exist and a funeral cortege could be made up of a number of vehicles.



The entrance to the site is better protected from the allotments and has adequate parking outside and a field utilised for grazing opposite.

On entering the site there are a large number of buildings which include offices, workshops and storage garages. They vary in size and most if not all would need to be demolished if the site was to be used as they are not in



keeping with a woodland/natural burial ground setting but one or two could possibly be converted to provide storage of equipment or a ceremony hall.

The ground appears to be a mix of concrete, tarmac and soil in different areas throughout the site, again to permit burial all of the hard materials would need to be



removed and this would also include removal of foundations under the existing buildings. Costs may be significant but substantially less than purchasing land elsewhere not in Council ownership

The surrounding fields provide a pleasant and peaceful area and would lend itself to a natural burial ground environment however it is unclear if the Authority owns this land or not and if any restrictions exist as to its future use.

On first impressions it is difficult to see the actual depot site at Paddock Road functioning well as a burial ground primarily due to the difficult vehicular access. In terms of preparation of the site this could be extremely expensive given the substantial amount of ground works that would be required to remove the buildings and tarmac areas. The surrounding fields however would



provide extremely good natural and woodland burial facilities however the difficult access issues remain. If an alternative route into the area could be found or created this may well be worth further consideration.