

Part A

**Report to:** Cabinet

**Date of meeting:** 1 June 2020

**Report author:** Head of Parks, Heritage & Culture

**Title:** North Watford Cemetery Expansion

**1.0 Summary**

1.1 After a review was carried out of the cemetery service in 2015, a 10 year cemetery strategy was adopted in 2016, which looked at a range of issues, covering all aspects of the service. One critical issue was the capacity of North Watford Cemetery, with 7-9 years remaining at that time, based on burial rates and population growth.

1.2 This report summarises a proposal to expand the existing North Watford Cemetery site within the boundaries of the existing cemetery, based on unused land, currently ornamental landscape as well as options to pursue further provision outside of the Borough with neighbouring authorities. In the current Covid-19 pandemic, burial rates have increased, and whilst cemetery space is sufficient at present, the 7-9 years capacity will decrease.

**2.0 Risks**

2.1

<b>Nature of risk</b>	<b>Consequence</b>	<b>Suggested Control Measures</b>	<b>Response</b> (treat, tolerate, terminate or transfer)	<b>Risk Rating</b> (combination of severity and likelihood)
Run out of space at NWC	Lack of space, customer dissatisfaction	Expand existing areas in cemetery and look at alternatives outside the Borough. Possible partnership working with neighbouring authorities.	Treat	6
Timeline in resolving finding alternative	Space runs out with no alternative in place especially	Expand existing areas in cemetery that will give us	Treat	6

cemetery space	with increased burial rates	time to find an alternative site		
Environmental concerns and groundwater table	EA objections and work delayed	Recent Government guidance issued that no permit is required during Covid-19 pandemic. North Watford Cemetery in Groundwater SPZ Zone 2 and therefore only low risk to Groundwater issues and therefore currently exempt	Treat	4
Financial – budget sufficient based on agreed works	Delays in delivering project and cost over run	The project is relatively straightforward and design team includes a cost consultant and Quantity Surveyor.	Treat	6

### 3.0 Recommendations

- 3.1 To accept the proposals outlined and the design submitted by Southern Green Landscape Architects
- 3.2 To agree to progress to detailed design, procurement and appointment of a contractor.
- 3.3 To agree to negotiate and work with neighbouring authorities in Hertfordshire about provision of burial space to meet future demands.

**Further information:**

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**Report approved by: Alan Gough, Group Head, Community and Environmental Services**

## 4.0 Detailed proposal

- 4.1 Following on from the review of the cemetery service in Watford by the Institute of Cemeteries and Crematoria Management, a 10 year strategy was developed for our cemetery service. Since this was adopted in 2016, a number of improvements have been carried out including additional staff, award of Green Flag, ICCM Gold Standard achieved, and the extension of the cemetery office facility. IT has been improved and records management, but one of the underlying issues is the cemetery at North Watford Cemetery is running out of space with 7-9 years remaining. The Council has been proactive in looking at new cemetery space for the last 12 months, which continues to prove challenging. The main issues are groundwater levels and potential contamination, which rules out many of our open spaces, as well as a number of these have current defined uses (playing fields, recreational space) and a small number are also ex-landfill sites.
- 4.2 With the current Covid-19 pandemic, burial rates as well as cremation rates have doubled and there is a concern that the 7-9 years will decrease, hence a more pressing need to find alternative space. Officers have re-visited the North Watford Cemetery site to look at space here and have identified that current areas which consist of ornamental lawn, bedding, a small ornamental pond could be used to create extra burial space as well as ashes interment. At the same time, we need to look beyond the finite lifespan of North Watford Cemetery and options outside the Borough and look at how we can potentially work with neighbouring authorities in Hertfordshire.
- 4.3 With the above in mind, Southern Green Landscape Architects were successful in winning a tender to look at these spaces and options available based on maximising burial space, potential income generation, a combination of traditional burials, ashes interment, columbaria introductions as well as retaining that sensitive feel for the space, including horticultural enhancements. A budget of £700,000 has been allocated to deliver this aspect of the expansion. In summary the proposals include the following:-
- 273 extra burial plots in the area to the south of the car park and on the green space between the cemetery lodge and depot.
  - 200 ashes interment opportunities in columbaria
  - Ornamental Memorial trees with engraved leaves
  - 3 pet columbaria
  - Improvements to the main entrance of the cemetery with a garden introduced
  - Car Park resurfaced and lined
  - Extra areas that have been identified in the lower part of the cemetery.

This gives us the potential of an extra 3-4 years life-span on top of the 7-9 years, possibly longer and maximises space at North Watford Cemetery. There are

currently no opportunities for columbaria ashes interment at North Watford Cemetery. The detailed drawings for these are attached as Appendices.

The current Muslim section has also been expanded with further clearance behind their existing section, relieving the pressure within this area, giving up to another 100 spaces.

## 5.0 **Implications**

### 5.1 **Financial**

5.1.1 The Shared Director of Finance comments that there is a budget provision of £700,000 in 2020/21 to accommodate this expansion.

### 5.2 **Legal Issues** (Monitoring Officer)

5.2.1 The Group Head of Democracy and Governance comments that the council is a burial authority under s214 of the Local Government Act 1972 and may make provision for cemeteries either inside or outside its area .

### 5.3 **Equalities, Human Rights and Data Protection**

5.3.1 Having had regard to the council's obligations under s149, it is considered that all aspects of equal rights are fulfilled as part of these proposals.

Having had regard to the council's obligations under the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2018, it is considered that officers are not required to undertake a Data Processing Impact Assessment (DPIA) for this report.

### 5.4 **Staffing**

5.4.1 Not applicable

### 5.5 **Accommodation**

5.5.1 Not applicable

### 5.6 **Community Safety/Crime and Disorder**

5.6.1 Not applicable

### 5.7 **Sustainability**

5.7.1 This report emphasises the need to develop burial space as a priority to ensure the longer term sustainability of North Watford Cemetery.

**Appendices**

Appendix 1A-1F – Drawings from Southern Green Ltd.

**Background papers**

No papers were used in the preparation of this report.