

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: CEMETERY PROVISION
Meeting: FALKIRK COUNCIL
Date: 26 June 2013
Author: DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Council currently operates 9 active cemeteries and carries out approximately 820 burials per year, as opposed to 1950 Cremations.
- 1.2 At present 6 active cemeteries are under significant demand pressure and nearing the end of their available capacity (within 10 years). It should be noted that suitable land for new or extended cemeteries has become more and more difficult to find, acquire and develop for burials and the lead in time for new sites has been known to be up to 10 years in some Council areas. New or extension cemetery site selection criteria are considerably more challenging than they were for the historic sites needing replacement; for example sites need to be located in accordance with more stringent Environmental (SEPA's) guidelines, to prevent pollution of groundwater and surface watercourses, and planning permission is usually needed.

2. EXISTING CEMETERY CAPACITY ISSUES

- 2.1 One of the Council's main cemeteries (New Grandsable Cemetery) has recently presented considerable operational difficulties when preparing lairs for burials. Soil conditions in newly dug lairs is mainly loose gravel & boulders and suggests that the remaining part of the site's soil conditions are such that graves cannot be safely or practicably dug to depths which would take any more than 2 person's remains (as opposed to the planned 3). It is possible that some lairs may only present the opportunity to contain a single person's remains, or may only prove suitable for the sale of "short" lairs for the internment of ashes only. In addition there are significant problematic ground water and/or artesian water drainage difficulties being encountered. This is likely to mean that some sections of New Grandsable Cemetery may not be able to be developed to the same higher capacity as planned. The result will be a reduced remaining capacity for this site of only 190 lairs of 2 burials deep (380 people's remains), as opposed to the planned 380 lairs of 3 burials (1140 people's remains). This situation has triggered the identification of the fact that the Council's remaining overall cemetery capacity is now considerably less than had been identified prior to this discovery (1 year instead of expected 5.5 remaining years). Work is underway to try to identify an engineering solution, however officers are not confident that a cost effective method of winning back lairs for burial will be likely.

- 2.2 Polmont Cemetery has part of the Antonine wall running through it. Historic Scotland has notified the Council that the zone of protection for the Antonine Wall has been extended to 25 metres, as opposed to the former 16 metres. This means that a further zone within this site which had been available for burials is now no longer available for burials and the remaining capacity has had to be recalculated (significantly downwards) as a result. Capacity has been reduced by 85 lairs, meaning the remaining life of this site has been reduced at short notice to only 1 year, after which the site will need to close to burials requiring a new lair (unless using one of the lairs already prepurchased). Discussions were held with Historic Scotland on 21 June 2013, to try to better this position for the Council. Historic Scotland have however, reconfirmed the boundary of the zone of protection for the Antonine Wall at the distance previously recorded in Falkirk Council planning policies. The loss of lairs anticipated for burials has been confirmed.
- 2.3 Some small pieces of land adjacent to Polmont cemetery are being investigated for potential additional lairs. This land is expected to require planning permission and additional testing for suitability.
- 2.4 In addition there are local “hot spot” cemeteries throughout the Council area which through the routine combination of advanced lair purchases and immediate burials, now have less than 10 years remaining capacity. This may result in some of those cemeteries having their capacities exhausted sooner than alternative localised new cemetery provision can be secured and developed. Indeed there is no guarantee of the ability to replace localised cemeteries with alternative provision in specific local community areas, as new suitable sites are becoming increasingly difficult to find. The location and timescale will be dependant upon site availability and suitability.
- 2.5 The remaining capacity of each currently active cemetery is detailed in the table in paragraph 3.1, assuming no change to the current policy of selling lairs in advance to families and individuals. Assuming a lead in time of up to 10 years to find and develop suitable sites and using the current level of demand for advance lair purchases, the capacity of 6 of our current 9 cemeteries would be exhausted within this 10 year period. This means that 1 site (Polmont) would be exhausted within approximately 1 year, 3 sites are likely to have no capacity for new lair burials within 2 years and 3 cemeteries will have life expectancies beyond 10 years irrespective of the policy of advance lair purchase.

3. POTENTIAL SOLUTION TO CEMETERY CLOSURES IN THE SHORT TERM

- 3.1 Alternatively, if the current advance lair purchase policy is amended such that only advance lair purchases can be made for sites which have in excess of their anticipated lead in time for replacement remaining (10 years), then the remaining lifespan of active cemeteries could be extended considerably in accordance with the table at paragraph 3.1. This would allow additional needed time for the Council to locate and develop suitable new/expanded cemeteries, but still short of 10 years, meaning the Council would prioritise site replacements according to remaining lifespan with recognition that site availability will also dictate the order of delivering new sites.

Estimated Life Expectancy

Cemetery	Remaining lairs	Purchased lairs for immediate burial annual average**	Pre purchased lairs (for later burial) Annual average years	Average life expectancy (allowing advance lair purchase) years	Average life expectancy (removing advance lair purchase) years
Polmont*	17	7	8	1	2.4
Muiravonside*	20	10	0	2	2
New Grandsable*	190	55	30	2	3.4
Hills of Dunipace*	300	45	45	3	6
Airth*	60	5	2	8	12
Larbert*	400	25	25	8	16
Camelon	1300	65	40	12	20
New Carriden	400	25	5	13	16
Slamannan	250	5	5	25	50

Cemetery statistics April 2013; Average life expectancy using figures estimated using current levels of demand and anticipated supply.

* Cemeteries which have less than 10 years lifespan remaining and require replacement sooner than maximum new capacity can be provided

** Number of burials which require a new lair to be purchased at time of burial need.

- 3.2 By adopting a “no advance lair sales policy” immediately (where sites reach 10 or less years remaining capacity following advance lair sales), the remaining lifespan of Falkirk Council’s active cemeteries can be projected to be extended in accordance with the table below. This policy would stop any lair being sold unless for the purposes of imminent burial. In summary this policy would lead to only 4 sites having their capacity exhausted within 10 years. Of these, 4 would be exhausted within 6 years, 3 within 4 years, 2 within 3 years and only 1 (Muiravonside) within 2 years, (followed by Polmont in approx 2.4 years). This policy would however allow the Council to continue to sell lairs in advance within 3 cemeteries and each would be kept under review until the trigger for ceasing advance lair purchases is reached per site (10 years capacity), after which it is proposed to automatically cease advance lair purchases at the site to which this applies.
- 3.3 Members attention is drawn to the fact that it could be expected that the above calculations could prove overly optimistic should any delay occur in ceasing advance lair purchases as described, as a rush (sudden increased demand) on the advance purchase of lairs could occur, should members of the public exercise their current right to buy lairs in advance of any restrictions to follow. This increased demand is unquantifiable and if excessive, could effectively close some cemeteries to those requiring burial without having the benefit of having purchased a lair in advance, without much warning, and considerably sooner than alternative provision can be ready in a locality, and sooner than estimates given in the table above.

- 3.4 Estimates given per site in the table above assume the current demand per site and Members should be aware that this could vary by demographic demand, death rate and the trend preference for cremations over burials being at its current level. Should any of the 9 sites be unable to take new lair purchases as a result of insufficient capacity, then the site's demand would switch to increase the pressure on one or more of the remaining sites, reducing the anticipated life remaining for each site. It is not possible to predict accurately the effect of the rebalancing of demand which would occur and so life expectancy in the table above could alter with a disproportionate affect on one or more sites.

4. DEVELOPMENT OF NEW & EXTENDED CEMETERIES

- 4.1 Officers in Estates are currently working with Development Services to identify potential land for development as cemeteries and the possibility of extensions to sites coming towards the end of their expected capacity. For example Slamannan Cemetery's lifespan was considerably extended from 1.8 remaining years to 25, by the creation of an extension using neighbouring council owned land. It is thought that this may not be an opportunity for most of the remaining sites. At this time the focus is in assessing the viability of land owned by the council, however this search will require to be extended to land requiring the council to purchase it for the purpose of new cemeteries, should inadequate suitable council land be available. The acquisition of private land may prove to be a long process, and in some cases may need to consider involving compulsory purchases.
- 4.2 At this stage capital has been allocated to support this project as follows; £55,000 in 13/14 (mainly for new site investigations & Slamannan extension), £0.5M in 14/5, £475,000 in 15/16. It is expected that this capital allocation will allow the development of additional cemetery capacity. Until exact land acquisition costs and site specific development costs are known however, it is expected that bids for additional capital may be required in later years to continuously maintain a bank of cemetery capacity time, within which additional replacement sites can be acquired and made operational (10 years per locality).

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to consider:

- 5.1 The temporary cessation of advance lair purchases, at all sites where demand causes the cemetery to have less than 10 years remaining capacity (at the prevailing rate of advance lair purchases).**
- 5.2 The limited remaining capacity of currently active cemeteries and the intent to search for, secure and develop suitable sites. This may take up to 10 years depending upon location and circumstances.**

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DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Nil