



## **Report to Cabinet**

**Subject: Burial Space Audit for the Borough of Gedling**

**Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2005**

**Author: Councillor Wendy Golland and Councillor Paul Feeney**

### **1. Purpose of the Report**

To adopt the Burial Space Audit for the Borough of Gedling.

### **2. Background**

The amount of available burial space in Gedling Borough Council is reducing to levels that give cause for concern. As a result Gedling Borough Council commissioned Peter Mitchell Associates to undertake an audit of burial space within Gedling and adjoining areas. The main purpose of the audit was to identify any action that may need to be taken to ensure the continued provision of burial space. In addition the report has made recommendations for improving the operational management of the Gedling cemeteries. Cllr Golland is responsible for the operational management of the Cemeteries and Cllr Feeney for the provision of burial land.

- i The audit report concludes that Gedling already has a high standard of management of its cemeteries but improvements could be achieved to the following areas: -
- Compared with other Local Authorities in Nottinghamshire, Gedling Borough's internment charges are low and could be raised above the inflation level in order to provide additional income for its cemetery service.
  - Gedling Borough Council could expand its services to the bereaved by offering greater choice for cremated remains. The Columbaria system, where cremated remains are placed in niches above the ground, could be adopted in our cemeteries.

- Adoption of the Institute of Cemetery and Cremation Management (ICCM) Charter for the Bereaved. The Charter sets standards of service for the industry. In order to become a member of the Charter for the Bereaved, a burial and/or cremation authority or company must show that they are able to satisfy 35 basic rights connected with funerals. The Charter also contains objectives and helps authorities to set priorities for future development and improvement. Members of the public can be assured that an authority that has adopted the Charter is committed to providing excellent service designed to meet their needs.
  - Regular assessment through the Charter Assessment process. This involves an annual questionnaire utilising Best Value principles assessed by the ICCM.
  - Further improvements to the website: Nottingham City Council's bereavement website is particularly impressive.
- ii The main issues identified by the audit relating to future provision are: -
- That at the projected rate of occupancy Redhill Cemetery will be full within 9 years and that further adjacent land should be purchased to extend the Cemetery's capacity. An extension of 2.19 hectares will provide a further 30 years burial space.
  - That an alternative to extending the Redhill Cemetery would be to exclusively use the Carlton Cemetery once the Redhill Cemetery is full, although it is accepted that this would reduce the number of years that Carlton Cemetery would be usable to 16 years.
  - Whether the Council should cease selling graves in advance of need. At the present time graves can be pre purchased. If graves could only be purchased when needed then this would potentially extend the period that the Redhill Cemetery could be used by 12 years. However the problem would only be delayed, as in 12 years the requirement for graves would reflect the current situation.
  - That although the burial space in the Parishes is acceptable there does remain the need for new provision in Linby, Papplewick and Stoke Bardolph. Lambley has only space available for the next five years. Lambley Parish has indicated that they wish to make new provision.
  - Gedling Borough Council will make provision for the burial of its residents but special provision for local cemeteries lies with the Parish Councils.
  - At the present time there is a period of 50 years for exclusive burial rights in graves within the Borough. Gedling Borough Council, in line with other Local Authorities, could: -
    - a. Reduce this period e.g. to 40 years.

- b. Introduce the flexibility of extending the period above 50 years in 5 or 10-year blocks at an additional charge.
- The Gedling area is less ethnically diverse than England and Wales as a whole, however burial provision should reflect the needs of all groups and therefore the proposed extension or new burial site should be laid out to meet these needs.

A landowner on the A60, approximately three miles out from Arnold, is proposing to develop a crematorium and provide woodland burials on land in his ownership. This proposal is subject to planning permission and is not detailed in the consultants report as it was put forward after its final draft.

Discussions with the landowner indicate that he would be willing to work in partnership with the Borough Council to provide additional burial space as an alternative to extending Redhill Cemetery.

Appendix 1 gives an executive summary of the Audit.

Services Scrutiny Committee have examined the Burial Audit document and its Action Plan as requested by the Leisure Portfolio Holder.

At it's meeting on 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2005 Scrutiny resolved:

“To endorse the Burial Strategy in so far as it goes and to establish a Working Group to review: -

Pricing and costing structures

Viability of a crematorium

Provision of roads, pathways and car parks

Health and Safety of monuments

Woodland burial spaces

And, to ask the Portfolio Holder to consider the results of the Working Group's Review before making final decisions.”

The Leisure Services Department will ensure the results of the Working Group's Review are considered prior to decisions being made.

### **3. Proposal**

To adopt the Audit and Action Plan, instructing the Leisure Services Department to ensure its delivery and promotion. A full copy of the report can be obtained from the Leisure Services Department.

### **4. Resource Implications**

Funding sources to be explored in order to fund the Action Plan.

## **5. Recommendation**

To adopt the Borough Burial Space Audit.

## **7. Wards Affected**

'All Wards'

The commissioning of this audit demonstrates that Gedling is customer-focused and is very much in keeping with current Government thinking.

Data obtained from the Census 2001 facilitates an analysis of the population of the area to assist in planning for future cemetery provision.

Gedling's age structure is very similar to that of the rest of England and Wales, although a higher proportion of Gedling's population is older. There are proportionately less 18 to 29 year olds in Gedling and proportionately more 45 to 84 year olds.

Gedling has relatively low numbers adhering to the non-Christian faith and a high proportion of people indicating that they have no religious belief or affiliation.

Gedling area is less ethnically diverse than England and Wales as a whole. Gedling most closely mirrors England and Wales as a whole in the Black Caribbean group, who prefer burial to cremation.

Longer-term projections of the UK population suggest that the population will peak around 2040 at nearly 64 million and then gradually start to fall. <sup>1</sup>

It is necessary to state the obvious: in the longer term, population growth will lead to increased demand for burial space.

Existing capacity is as follows:

	<b>Unused Plots</b>	<b>New Graves Used Per Year</b>	<b>Graves Reserved Per Year</b>	<b>Graves Sold Per year</b>	<b>Years left</b>
<b>Gedling Borough Council</b>	<b>2,500</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>11</b>
Gedling Cemetery	200	6	2	8	25
Carlton Cemetery	1,300	82	31	113	12
Redhill Cemetery	1,000	68	42	110	9

The new extension at Carlton Cemetery covers 2.16 hectares, sufficient for 3,240 graves even allowing for a generous 30% of the extension to be used for roads. At a demand of 113 graves per year, this suggests that Carlton Cemetery extension has a capacity for an additional 28 years:

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<sup>1</sup> Office for National Statistics

	<b>Unused Plots</b>	<b>New Graves Used Per Year</b>	<b>Graves Reserved Per Year</b>	<b>Graves Sold Per year</b>	<b>Years left</b>
<b>Gedling Borough Council</b>	<b>5,740</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>25</b>
Gedling Cemetery	200	6	2	8	25
Carlton Cemetery	4,540	82	31	113	40
Redhill Cemetery	1,000	68	42	110	9

At current rates of use, in 9 years time Redhill Cemetery's supply of new graves will be exhausted. The demand on new grave space at Carlton Cemetery will increase dramatically, affecting the longevity of the cemetery:

	<b>Unused Plots</b>	<b>New Graves Used Per Year</b>	<b>Graves Reserved Per Year</b>	<b>Graves Sold Per year</b>	<b>Years left</b>
<b>Gedling Borough Council</b>	<b>3,651</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>231</b>	<b>16</b>
Gedling Cemetery	128	6	2	8	16
Carlton Cemetery	3,523	150	73	223	16
Redhill Cemetery	0	0	0	0	0

However, these estimates are based upon the current volume and pattern of demand for new graves. The demand for new graves may start to increase due to the projected increase in the numbers of deaths and it will continue to increase for a number of years. In 25 years time, just when the demand for new graves is likely to be very significantly increased compared to current rates, Gedling will have no new grave space. It would therefore be prudent to take a long term view now and identify means of prolonging the availability of grave space in Gedling.

I recommend:

The Council cease selling graves in advance of need  
The extension of Redhill Cemetery

Overall 32% of new grave sales are in advance of need. It could be argued that this current high level of sales of reserved graves is unsustainable in that it reduces the projected lifespans of the cemeteries:

	<b>Unused Plots</b>	<b>New Graves Used Per Year</b>	<b>Graves Reserved Per Year</b>	<b>Graves Sold Per year</b>	<b>Years left</b>
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<b>Gedling Borough Council</b>	<b>5,740</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>156</b>	<b>37</b>
Gedling Cemetery	200	6	0	6	33
Carlton Cemetery	4,540	82	0	82	55
Redhill Cemetery	1,000	68	0	68	15

This restriction would add 12 years to the availability of new graves in Gedling. The counter argument is that the restriction upon people's choice to pre-purchase graves only postpones by 12 years the need to face the inevitable need to create cemetery extensions or even new cemeteries.

When Redhill Cemetery runs out of space for new graves, there will be a reduction in choice for the bereaved at that time.

Ideally, land adjacent to Redhill Cemetery should be allocated to cemetery use now. It could be used as grazing or allotments etc. for the next 5 years, but should then be laid out as an extension to Redhill Cemetery. This would enable the provision of local burial space to continue and would reduce the rate at which the Carlton Cemetery extension would be exhausted of space.

Most churchyards in the area are full. Whilst most local communities are well served by Parish or District Council cemeteries, there are no council cemeteries in Linby or Papplewick, where both churchyards are nearly full. The situation is similar in Stoke Bardolph.

In general, local District and Unitary authorities have sufficient burial space for a considerable number of years, although the provision may not be even throughout each area.

Ashfield has sufficient space for a further 60 years. The building of new houses in Hucknall will increase demand on that cemetery in due course.

Mansfield District Council has recently extended several of its cemeteries, which will meet demand for an estimated 60 years.

Nottingham City Council is currently developing the first 12 hectares of a 40 hectares site that will provide burial space at current rates for 150 years.

Both Amber Valley and Broxtowe Councils have space remaining and potential extension space.

The overall picture for burial space provision is good, but there remains the need for new or additional provision in Linby, Papplewick, Stoke Bardolph and Lambley.

There would appear to be scope for Gedling to raise its charge for the exclusive rights by more than the rate of inflation to generate additional income for the provision of its cemetery service, for example by the development of cemetery extensions.

The next step is to reduce the periods of exclusive rights and offer options to 'top-up' the period in 5 or 10 year lengths.

There would appear to be scope for Gedling to raise its interment fees by a higher rate than the rate of inflation to increase income for its cemetery service.

Gedling could expand its services to the bereaved by offering greater choice for cremated remains. Columbaria, where cremated remains are placed in niches above ground, can be sited within existing cemeteries fairly readily. They provide choice for the bereaved and a renewable source of income for the burial authority.

Gedling already has a high standard in the management of its cemeteries.

Improvements could be achieved in the following areas:

- Adoption of the ICCM Charter for the Bereaved
- Regular assessment through the Charter Assessment process
- Further improvement to the website: Nottingham City Council's bereavement website is particularly impressive.