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Environment and Communities Committee

1 February 2024

Approval of Cemeteries Strategy

Report of: Peter Skates, Acting Executive Director - Place

Report Reference No: EC/27/22-23

Ward(s) Affected: All Cheshire East Wards

Purpose of Report

1. To update Members on the work undertaken to produce a new Cemeteries Strategy for Cheshire East, as guided by the relevant Member Advisory Panel.
2. To update the Committee, of the outcome of the public consultation process, undertaken during late 2022.
3. It seeks Committee approval to adopt the updated Strategy for implementation as the key policy to guide future management and investment into cemeteries within scope.
4. It seeks Committee approval to adopt the updated Cemetery Regulations which establish a set of clear parameters for the use of Cheshire East cemeteries.
5. It asks Members to note the next stages of development of specific management plans for each applicable cemetery site.

Executive Summary

6. Following an Environment and Communities Committee resolution in September 2021 it was decided to establish a Member Advisory Panel to guide a review and production of a new updated Cemeteries Strategy. The review also encapsulated the need to revisit and update the Cemetery Regulations.

7. A public consultation process was undertaken between 24th October and 23rd December 2022 the Council received a total of 421 responses, which have been used to inform the outcome of the strategy, the results of which are included later in this report.
8. Key feedback themes included:
 - Majority of 54% prefer cremation with 31% preferring burial
 - 74% of respondents felt future burial provision should be made at all cemeteries across Cheshire East, by extending them where possible.
 - Only 9% felt future burial provision should only be available at the two principal cemeteries at Crewe and Macclesfield
9. There were levels of interest in alternative preferences such as woodland / natural burial sites and residents importance of making places for wildlife and nature with cemeteries.
10. A majority of residents thought that the tone of the Cemetery Regulations document was appropriate with a similar majority (46%) of respondents stating that they felt the Council needs to do more to uphold regulations.
11. The next stage is to develop a consistent set of site management plans in priority order which would guide the future development and investment at each or a geographical grouping of sites. This would include the requirement for expansion of sites and as to when it would be appropriate for this need to be considered.
12. Once all of the site management plans have been developed these will be drawn together into a prioritised Cemeteries Investment Programme which will look holistically across all sites to understand where, when and how targeted investment is needed in order to continue to provide the same high service standards. These management plans will be developed in conjunction with the operator of the sites Orbitas to ensure that the plans align with future operational requirements.

The Environment and Communities Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress made to date in reviewing and updating the Cemeteries Strategy and Cemetery Regulations, including how the feedback on these documents from the recent public consultation exercise has been used to shape their content.
2. Approve the adoption of the updated Cemeteries Strategy, as contained at Appendix C to this report.
3. Note the intended next steps in relation to production of operational management plans for each site or group of sites in scope and to authorise the Head of Environmental Services to develop and approve these plans.
4. Note the intention to bring back at a future date for Committee's approval a Cemeteries Investment Programme.
5. Approve the adoption of the Cemetery Regulations, as contained at Appendix D, to be applied across all cemeteries within scope.

Background

13. The Council already has a Cemeteries Strategy adopted in 2018.
14. The strategy covers a total of 10 sites which are managed and operated on a day-to-day basis by Orbitas Bereavement Services Ltd ("Orbitas"). These sites are;
 - Alderley Edge Cemetery, Chelford Road, Chorley SK9 7TQ
 - Congleton Cemetery, Howey Lane, Congleton, CW12 4AE
 - Coppenhall Cemetery, Reid Street, Coppenhall, CW1 3DZ
 - Crewe Cemetery, Badger Avenue, Crewe, CW1 3JG
 - Macclesfield Cemetery, Prestbury Road, Macclesfield, SK10 3BU
 - Meadow Brook Cemetery, Minshull New Road, Crewe, CW1 3PP
 - Nantwich Cemetery, Whitehouse Lane, Nantwich, CW5 6HP

- Sandbach Cemetery, off The Hill, Sandbach, CW11 1JJ
 - Weston Cemetery, Cemetery Road,, Weston, Crewe, CW2 5LQ
 - Wilmslow Cemetery, Manchester Road, Wilmslow, SK9 2LE
15. Knutsford Cemetery is out of scope of this report as since 1 January 2020 it has been operated by Knutsford Town Council.
16. Following a Environment and Communities Committee resolution in September 2021 it was decided to establish a Member Advisory Panel to guide a review and production of a new updated Cemeteries Strategy. This should have a specific focus on future development of various cemeteries which are in scope.
17. The high level objectives of the review of the Strategy are as follows;
- To seek views to continue provision where possible at all of the Councils existing cemeteries areas rather than the previous strategy's focus for long term provision solely on the cemetery facilities at Crewe and Macclesfield;
 - To bring back into consideration moving into the extension areas on adjoining land at Sandbach, Alderley Edge and Weston cemeteries;
 - The objectives also sought a mandate for the introduction of sustainable practices throughout the bereavement service;
 - A refresh of data within last strategy to ensure robust, in particular around remaining burial capacities at each site;
 - Changes to Cemetery Regulations to better aid management of these sites, to be included as part of consultation and;
 - Introduction of concept of having bespoke management plans to look at short, medium and long term needs on a site specific basis
18. The review also encapsulated the need to revisit and update the Cemetery Regulations to enable a more easily understandable set of rules for both the operator and users of these sites. In particular in terms of appropriate use and the visual appearance of these sites, whilst not unduly impacting one specific user group.
19. A public consultation process has been undertaken to inform the outcome of the Strategy the results of which are included later in this report.

20. A specialist consultant was subsequently appointed to assist with the development of the Strategy and Cemetery Regulations, now included at Appendix C and D respectively.
21. The next stage is to develop a consistent set of site management plans in priority order which would guide the future development and investment at each or a geographical grouping of sites. This would include the requirement for expansion of sites and as to when it would be appropriate for this need to be considered.
22. It is proposed to develop the site management plans over a circa 12 month period in the following prioritised order with the authority for implementation considered under a delegation as per the recommendations to this report;
 - Sandbach Cemetery
 - Alderley Edge Cemetery
 - Congleton Cemetery
 - Coppenhall, Crewe and Meadow Brook Cemeteries – combined under a single management plan due to their geographical proximity.
 - Macclesfield Cemetery
 - Nantwich Cemetery
 - Weston Cemetery
 - Wilmslow Cemetery
23. Once all of the site management plans have been developed these will be drawn together into a prioritised Cemeteries Investment Programme which will look holistically across all sites to understand where, when and how targeted investment is needed in order to continue to provide the same high service standards. These management plans will be developed in conjunction with the operator of the sites Orbitas to ensure that the plans align with future operational requirements.
24. The Cemeteries Investment Programme will be brought back to Committee at a future date.
25. It is envisaged that the Member Advisory Panel will continue to be updated in line with the site management plans development, to provide ad-hoc updates to Committee on progress.
26. The following should be considered as the high level timeline for the next stages of implementation of the service review;
 - Report to E&C Committee to seek approval – 1st February 2024
 - Procurement and appointment of consultant to develop cemetery site management plans – April 2024

- Develop site management plans and Cemeteries Investment Programme – circa 12 months
- Report to Committee to present Cemeteries Investment Programme for approval – Spring 2025.

Consultation and Engagement

27. A public consultation exercise was undertaken between 24th October and 23rd December 2022 with feedback taken from anyone who wished to respond.
28. The prior Cemeteries Strategy consultation was undertaken in 2018 with a total of 297 responses. The latest consultation surpassed this figure with 421 responses received representing a 42% increase between the consultations undertaken in 2018 and 2022.
29. A full report is contained at Appendix A.
30. The key feedback themes that can be seen are as follows;
 - Majority of 54% prefer cremation with 31% preferring burial
 - 74% of respondents felt future burial provision should be made at all cemeteries across Cheshire East, by extending them where possible.
 - Only 9% felt future burial provision should only be available at the two principal cemeteries at Crewe and Macclesfield for the following reasons;
 - Burial sites should be easily accessible to friends and family and in the town they lived in
 - 30-minute drive times are not local and are too far to travel to from some places, especially for the elderly, disabled or those with ill health
 - Public transport is not good enough to access just the 2 principal cemeteries
31. There were levels of interest in alternative preferences after death noting in particular 58% felt that making woodland / natural burial sites was important.
32. Respondents supported environmental sustainability in Cheshire East's cemeteries and crematoria with 79% of respondents supporting the importance of making places for wildlife and nature within cemeteries.

33. A majority of residents thought that the tone of the Cemetery Regulations document was appropriate with a similar majority (46%) of respondents stating that they felt the Council needs to do more to uphold regulations, with 30% of responses stating that this wasn't needed.
34. The consultation included as part of its scope an outreach from the council's Communities team who visited seventeen different Gypsy, Roma & Traveller addresses across Cheshire East to seek views from this community. The 21 residents from these sites who completing a short survey stated:
 - 100% would like to be buried once they die
 - 76% felt burial provision should be made at all cemeteries, rather than just at Crewe and Macclesfield
35. All of the feedback has been used in further developing the Strategy and Regulations now included here for approval.

Reasons for Recommendations

36. The proposal supports Open and enabling objective of the Corporate Plan, delivering the priority set out to:
 - a. Support a sustainable financial future for the council, through service development, improvement and transformation.

Other Options Considered

37. The Committee could resolve not to adopt the proposed Cemeteries Strategy in which event that strategy adopted in 2018 would still apply.
38. The Committee could resolve not to adopt the proposed Cemetery Regulations which would remove the framework within which operationally these sites can be better managed to the benefit of all.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

39. Management of Cemeteries is a statutory function under the Local Government Act 1972, and the Local Authority's Cemeteries Order 1977 gives the Council broad powers to deal with the day-to-day management, layout, maintenance and erection of memorials.

40. Regulations made for the management of Cemeteries should be proportionate to achieve their aim, and should not disadvantage particular groups, or one particular group in their application.
41. The Regulations as drawn are proportionate and do not on the face of it disadvantage any one group, but in their application the Council will need to be alive to cultural sensitivities around memorials and what is or is not appropriate in a particular setting. Cemeteries are however public places where a broad cross section of society will want or need access, and it may be necessary to impinge upon cultural sensitives at a particular setting. If required, this should be supportable by reference to a legitimate aim.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

42. To date the work associated with update of the Strategy and Regulations have been funded from the Environmental Services revenue budget. The subsequent development of site management will be funded from the same source.
43. There are already known financial implications associated with future investment required in cemeteries for the likes of extensions to existing footprints and larger scale maintenance activities. These works will include the likes of new and extended highway and footway provisions, drainage infrastructure and landscaping works.
44. This investment is currently not consistently quantified across the wider estate but will be identified and costed at a high level as part of the site management plans.
45. The approach being taken within the strategy will bring these plans together into a costed and prioritised Cemeteries Investment Programme, which will where appropriate consider the suite of investment projects in cemeteries, such as the second chapel at Macclesfield, which are already ongoing. This programme will be reported back to Committee in the timescales referenced earlier in this report alongside any potential route to funding of these interventions.

Policy

46. The proposal primarily supports the following priorities from the Corporate Plan 2021-25 as show in Table 1.

<p>An open and enabling organisation</p> <p><i>Priority: Promote and develop the services of the council through regular communication and engagement with all residents</i></p> <p>Residents and staff to be aware of the council and the services we provide</p>	<p>A council which empowers and cares about people</p> <p><i>Priority: Work together with our residents and our partners to support people and communities to be strong and resilient.</i></p> <p>All services to be developed together with our residents and communities, so they are based on what works for people in Cheshire East.</p>	<p>A thriving and sustainable place</p> <p><i>Priority: A great place for people to live, work and visit</i></p> <p>A high-quality accessible bereavement service, that remains relevant to the changing needs of Cheshire East residents and delivers value for money</p>
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Table 1: Corporate Plan priorities

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

47. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken and updated with the feedback from the public consultation. This is contained at Appendix B to this report.

Human Resources

48. There are no human resource implications of this report.
49. Any further work to develop site management plans will be undertaken by outsourced specialist consultant resource to ensure that these documents can be given due priority and delivered in a timely manner.

Risk Management

50. Table 2 sets out the key risks to the implementation of the service review and ongoing mitigating actions taken;

Risk	Mitigating Actions
Lack of internal resource to develop site management plans and Investment Programme leading to delays	Proposal to outsource onward development post Strategy adoption to a suitably qualified consultant.
Adverse public reaction to adoption and subsequent implementation of updated Cemetery Regulations, in particular by specific communities	Proactive and clear communications campaign covering all communities in advance of any formal implementation. Grace period offered for any changes
Lack of funding for all investments needed across cemetery sites in scope	Development of a long term and prioritised Cemeteries Investment Programme, informed by individual site management plans, to establish where this investment will be required and how it could be funded

Table 2: summary of key risks and proposed mitigations

Rural Communities

51. The revised strategy proposes a move away from the previous position of having two core cemeteries at Crewe and Macclesfield to ensuring that more local provision is maintained for longer. The proposed Strategy for adoption is considered of greater benefit for rural communities, as it maintains current travel distances and times to their nearest cemetery.

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

52. There are no specific impacts on children and young people as a result of this report.

Public Health

53. There are no specific impacts on public health as a result of this report.

Climate Change

54. This proposal will not have a material impact on the council's carbon agenda.

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Ralph Kemp Head of Environmental Services ralph.kemp@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix A – Cemeteries Consultation Report Cemeteries Strategy & Regulations Consultation 2022 - Full report (cheshireeast.gov.uk) Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment (updated post consultation) Appendix C – Cemeteries Strategy Appendix D – Cemetery Regulations
Background Papers:	NA