

A summary of responses to Cheshire East Council's

Cemeteries Strategy & Regulations Consultation 2022



Executive summary

Introduction

Cheshire East Council engaged on its [Cemeteries Strategy](#) and [Cemetery Regulations](#) between 24 October and 23 December 2022, with the intention of updating both documents based on the feedback received, before approving them for adoption.

The consultation was widely promoted and received 421 consultation responses in total – up from the 297 responses received in 2018.

Burial Vs Cremation

A majority of respondents, 54%, stated they would prefer cremation once they die, with 31% preferring burial.

Most of those preferring burial (79%) would prefer to be buried in a graveyard next to relatives or friends.

Location of future burial provision in Cheshire East

74% of respondents felt future burial provision should be made at all cemeteries across Cheshire East, by extending them where possible. Just 9% felt future burial provision should only be available at the two principal cemeteries at Crewe and Macclesfield.

Respondents preferred burial provision to be provided locally because they felt:

- People should have a right to be buried in the town they lived in
- Burial sites should be easily accessible to friends and family
- 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

Alternative preferences after death

There were significant levels of interest in alternative preferences after death:

- 58% felt that making woodland / natural burial sites was important
- 49% would be interested in alternative methods to cremation such as organics reduction or alkaline hydrolysis
- 46% would be interested in alternative sites for memorial plaques in Cheshire East

Environmental sustainability

High proportions of respondents felt environmental sustainability in Cheshire East cemeteries and crematoria is important:

- 79% felt it is important to make places for wildlife and nature with cemeteries
- 64% felt it is important to reduce the carbon output of crematoria

However, although a majority of respondents felt the council should make cemeteries wildlife-friendly and 'natural', many stressed that it is also important for them to be neat and attractive places for the bereaved to visit, and that making cemeteries places for wildlife should not mean the council stops maintaining cemeteries to a good standard.

Cemetery regulations

47% of respondents felt the content and tone of the current Cemetery Regulations is appropriate, 7% did not think they were appropriate, and 46% did not know either way.

Some suggested the regulations could be improved by:

- Making the tone of them less “haughty”, “cold”, and “aggressive”. Perhaps they could be written in a more customer friendly, lighter style of language
- Producing a version in a shorter, easy read version, written in plain English, perhaps using a larger font, with images and colour to help the visually impaired

45% of respondents felt the council must do more to ensure the Cemetery Regulations are upheld, 30% felt the council does not need to, and 24% did not know either way.

The regulations they felt needed to be upheld more included:

- Removing memorabilia and tributes like decorations, photos, toys, teddies, decomposing items, tacky items, balloons, trinkets etc, especially after a certain amount of time e.g. after 2 weeks
- Not allowing and / or removing very large memorabilia, tributes or headstones, as some are felt to be disrespectful to neighbouring graves
- Ensuring memorabilia are environmentally friendly e.g. not plastic
- Upholding dignity in cemeteries by preventing "parties" in the cemetery, fireworks, music and even bouncy castles
- Upholding the ban on dogs in cemeteries, and dogs that are off the lead
- Stopping anti-social behaviour including skateboarding and cycling

Gypsy / Traveller community feedback

As part of the consultation the council's Communities Team visited 17 different Gypsy / Traveller addresses across Cheshire East to talk about the Cemetery Strategy and Regulations, with 21 residents from these sites completing a short survey.

Of members of this community:

- 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
- 43% felt more should be done to make sure its cemeteries are looked after e.g. by removing memorabilia and tributes left around graves, 52% disagreed

Those that disagreed that memorabilia should be removed from graves felt it is nice to see gifts on graves, that they shouldn't be forced to change the way they grieve as that is their culture, and that Gypsy Travellers are victimised in how they choose to bury their dead.

Email feedback

The 10 emails received during the consultation came from a variety of stakeholders including Alsager, Poynton and Sandbach Town Councils.

These emails mostly emphasised the importance of burial provision being made available locally and requested provision is increased locally as population levels rise.

Conclusions

An improved consultation response

It is pleasing to see a 42% increase in the number of responses to this year's Cemeteries Strategy Consultation as compared to 2018 – this reflects the hard work and effort put in by the service to improve promotion of the consultation to a wider range of stakeholders this time round.

Cremation preferred to burial

It is noted that respondents would prefer cremation to burial at almost a rate of 2:1, with just 25% of all respondents indicating they wish to be buried locally once they die (31% x 79%).

This may reflect a long-term trend towards cremation away from burial, and may therefore have implications for future burial provision as the population of Cheshire East increases.

The council's preferred option of local burial is supported

The clear support for the council continuing to create burial provision at all cemeteries, rather than just at the 2 principal cemeteries at Crewe and Macclesfield, supports council proposals which is reassuring, and shows council policy here reflects resident preferences.

Alternative preferences after death to be explored

The level of interest in alternative preferences after death suggest these avenues could be explored by the council, particularly if they can help to reduce the amount of space needed for burial provision, and if they are more environmentally friendly than current practices.

Environmental sustainability

Similarly, the clear support for environmental sustainability within cemeteries and crematoria should be embraced, however, care should be taken that any proposals to make cemeteries more wildlife friendly ensure cemeteries remain neat and attractive and do not become overrun by wildlife.

Any future proposed changes to service provision should be progressed gradually and through effective engagement with residents.

Content and tone of the cemetery regulations

Although the regulations are well received generally, there does seem to be some scope to perhaps make them more “customer friendly”, and possibly to produce a shorter, easy read version to compliment the full version.

Upholding cemetery regulations

The enforcement of regulations is a more complex issue.

While there is general support for the regulations being upheld more stringently than they are now, particularly in regard to memorabilia and headstones on graves, a proportion of the gypsy / traveller community feel strongly against this, and feel this would victimise the way they choose to bury their dead – though it should be noted only a proportion of this community feel this way, and that this isn't reflective of the whole of this community.

Any steps taken to enforce regulations more stringently should be done extreme care, and only through compromise and through effective engagement with those most affected.

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Introduction

Consultation purpose

Cheshire East Council engaged on its [Cemeteries Strategy](#) and [Cemetery Regulations](#) between 24 October and 23 December 2022.

The council intended to update both documents, and so engaged with stakeholders to ensure that all views were sought before both documents were updated and presented to the Environment and Communities Committee for debate and adoption.

The main change being proposed within the update of the Cemeteries Strategy was to make future burial provision available at all existing council cemeteries, by extending them where possible to provide more local provision, rather than focusing provision only in 2 principal burial facilities in Crewe and Macclesfield, as the existing strategy set out.

Consultation methodology

The consultation was widely promoted to the following stakeholders:

The general public via:

- [The council's consultations webpage](#)
- [Media releases](#)
- Social Media, including Twitter and Facebook
- Posters and paper consultation packs distributed in all Cheshire East libraries.

The council's Digital Influence Panel – 989 members were contacted by email on 7 November 2022.

All Town and Parish Councils, and to Cheshire Association of Local Councils (ChALK) – Contacted by email on 24 October 2022.

Local funeral directors – 29 were contacted via email and post on 31 October 2022.

The Gypsy / Traveller community – 17 sites and addresses across Cheshire East were visited face to face by the council's Communities Team.

Local faith organisations including: The Archdeacon of Macclesfield (The Venerable Ian Bishop); various Church of England fellowship groups; Elim International Centre; The HOPE centre in North East Cheshire; Churches Together Nantwich; St Andrews Church; Lighthouse Centre; Crewe Mosque; and Hope Church Central.

Local community organisations including: The Friends of Sandbach Cemetery; Commonwealth War Graves Commission; Lingua GM; Age UK Cheshire East;

CHAWREC; Bulgarian communities contact; East Timor communities contact; Indian communities contact; Afro Caribbean communities contact; Kurdish communities contact; SHAPLA Bangladeshi women's communities contact; and Polish communities contact.

Consultation response

In total 421 consultation responses were received.

This included 390 full survey responses from the following:

- 158 from Digital Influence Panel members, at a response rate of 16%
- 136 via Town and Parish Councils
- 71 via the consultation webpages
- 16 via libraries promotion
- 9 responses from other sources

In addition:

- 21 responses to a short version of the survey were received through engagement with the Gypsy / Traveller community – see appendix 1 for a summary of this feedback
- 10 email consultation responses were received – see Appendix 2 to read these.

Consultation response compared to previous years

The last time a similar Cemeteries Strategy Consultation was conducted by Cheshire East Council was in 2018, when 297 responses were received in total. Slightly more responses were received than this in 2022, with 421 responses received in total – this represents a 42% increase in consultation responses between 2018 and 2022.

[See the 2018 Cemeteries Strategy Consultation report on the council's webpages \(PDF, 356KB\).](#)

Survey respondent location

Of the 390 full survey respondents, 274 voluntarily supplied a valid email. The largest proportion of full survey responses came from Sandbach, with 26% of all valid postcodes supplied being from this town.

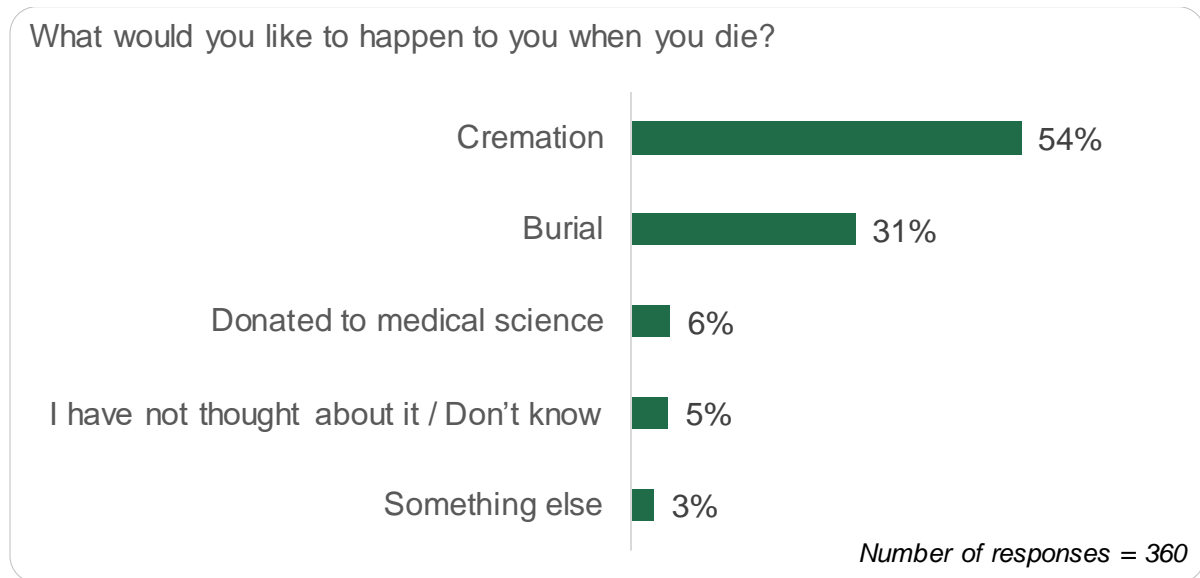
Geographic Town	Count of valid postcodes	Percent
Sandbach	103	26%
Macclesfield	29	11%
Crewe	22	8%
Alsager	16	6%
Congleton	12	4%

Poynton	8	3%
Wilmslow	8	3%
Knutsford	7	3%
Middlewich	6	2%
All other areas	63	23%
Total responses with a valid postcode	274	100%

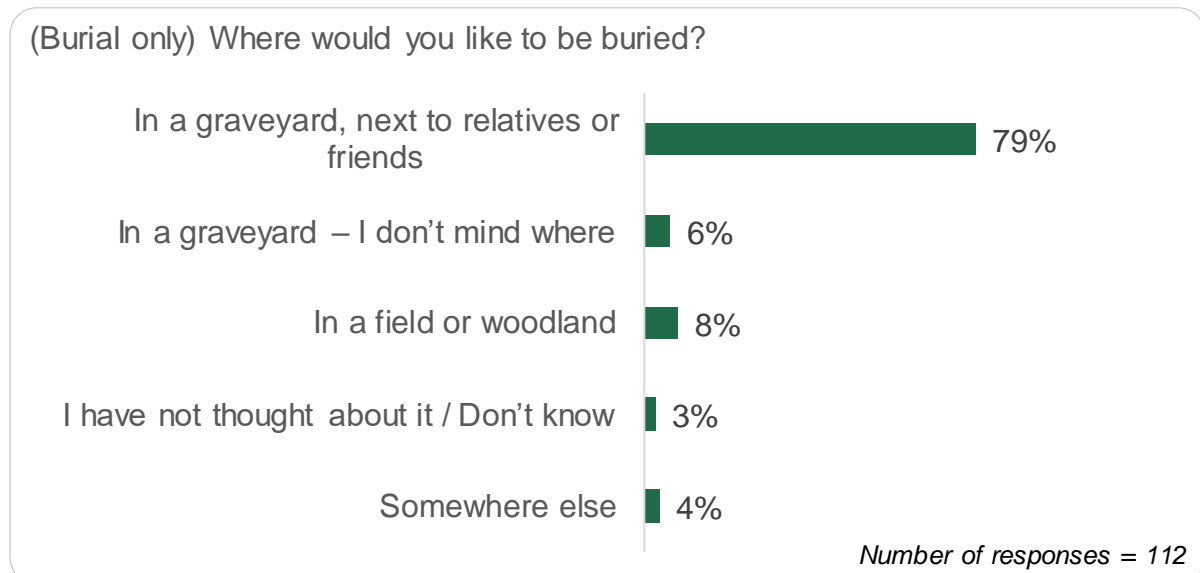
Future burial provision in Cheshire East

Burial Vs Cremation

A majority of respondents, 54%, stated they would prefer cremation once they die, with 31% preferring burial.



Of those that stated they would prefer burial, a large proportion, 79%, stated they would prefer to be buried in a graveyard next to relatives or friends. 6% stated they didn't mind where they were buried.

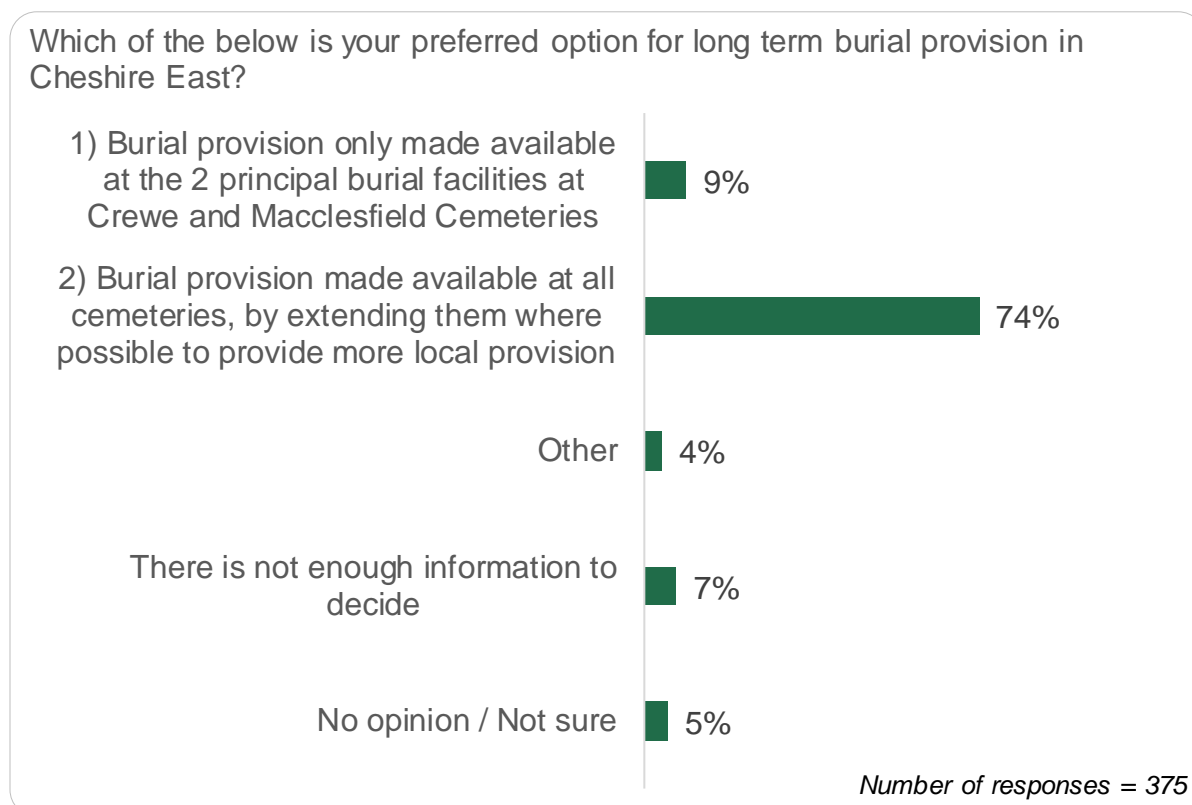


Therefore, 25% of all respondents (31% x 79%) would like to be buried in a graveyard near friends or family once they die.

Location of future burial provision in Cheshire East

Across all respondents, the preference for future burial provision in Cheshire East was for it to be provided at all cemeteries in the borough, by extending them where possible, rather than just at the 2 principal burial facilities at Crewe and Macclesfield Cemeteries.

74% of respondents felt burial provision should be made at all cemeteries, rather than just at Crewe and Macclesfield (9%).



Burial provision being made available at all cemeteries in Cheshire East was more likely to be the preferred option of those who prefer to be buried once they die – 91% of those that want to be buried want provision at all locations, compared to 71% of those that want to be cremated.

Comments on future burial provision in Cheshire East

Within the survey respondents were given the opportunity to comment on future burial provision in Cheshire East. In total, 109 respondents made at least one comment, making a total of 180 comments between them. These comments are categorised and summarised below.

Support for option 1 – Burial provision only made available at the 2 principles cemeteries of Crewe and Macclesfield (28 comments in total)

- Better to prioritise land and resources for the living, to turn existing land that is used frequently for dog walking, football etc into further burial sites feels wrong and a poor use of space (9 comments)
- Burial is outdated, unsustainable and should be discouraged for environmental and space reasons. Encourage cremation instead of burial, cremation should be the norm. It is not environmentally friendly to make people travel a long way (8 comment)
- Just make burial provision available at Crewe / Macclesfield for those that need it for religious reasons etc (3 comments)
- Some burial plots are abandoned, unkempt, neglected, where many of the headstones have fallen and the kerb stones are misplaced. Nobody tends these graves and the maintenance team do not remove the ivy or tree branches that gather amongst them (3 comments)
- Memorials are more important than burial sites, local burial is unnecessary to grieving and remembrance (2 comments)
- More information needed (2 comments)
- There has to be a balance between cost and burial provision (1 comment)

Support for option 2 – Burial provision made available at all cemeteries in Cheshire East (146 comments in total)

Respondents supported option 2 for the following general reasons:

- People should have a right to be buried in the town they have lived in, especially if they have paid Council Tax all their life. People want to be buried in the same cemetery as their loved ones (26 comments)
- 30 minute drive times are not realistic, 30 minutes is not local, and is too far to drive from some places. Crewe and Macclesfield are too far away for many. Making people drive further is not environmentally friendly. Petrol is too expensive to drive to tend a grave regularly (23 comments)
- Burial sites should be easily accessible by friends and family, people need to be close to their deceased loved ones. Cemeteries are a vital part of the community, they are a quiet space to visit and reflect on those loved ones we have lost, are beneficial for mental health, and visiting the graves of loved ones gives a great deal of comfort to those left behind. Local cemeteries are important and personal to families and relatives (18 comments)
- Public transport is not good enough to access just the 2 principal cemeteries, this policy would punish people who don't drive. A round trip of an hour by car can take 2 or 3 hours by public transport (17 comments)
- It is not acceptable for the elderly, disabled or those with ill-health to travel that far to visit cemeteries (8 comments)

- Crewe is not a nice place to be buried (2 comments)

Respondents also felt local cemeteries needs more space, that local councils should be empowered to provide cemetery space and decisions on local provision should be left to local people (12 comments).

Respondents also specifically felt extra provision was required in the following towns:

- Sandbach – Sandbach cemetery needs expanding, perhaps into the field next to it, and the land used that was assigned for that purpose. This issue has already been sorted – it has been decided by the council after a protracted battle with Friends of Sandbach Cemetery who won already (25 comments)
- Alsager – Alsager needs a new cemetery to reduce pressure on nearly full sites. Some communities, including Alsager, are growing in population quickly due to development (7 comments)
- Poynton – The existing St George's churchyard is full. Poynton's population is rising due to the 650 new houses added in the Local Plan, and this will inevitably lead to more demand for sites for burial, both of bodies and cremated remains. Now that Poynton churchyard is full, Cheshire East should establish a municipal cemetery in Poynton. This could also serve Disley, Adlington, Pott Shrigley and other villages in the north of the Borough (4 comments)
- Middlewich – All cemeteries should be under one control, unlike Middlewich which seems to be under the control of the local travellers groups (2 comments)
- Wilmslow (1 comment)
- Congleton (1 comment)

Other comments on future burial provision (6 comments in total)

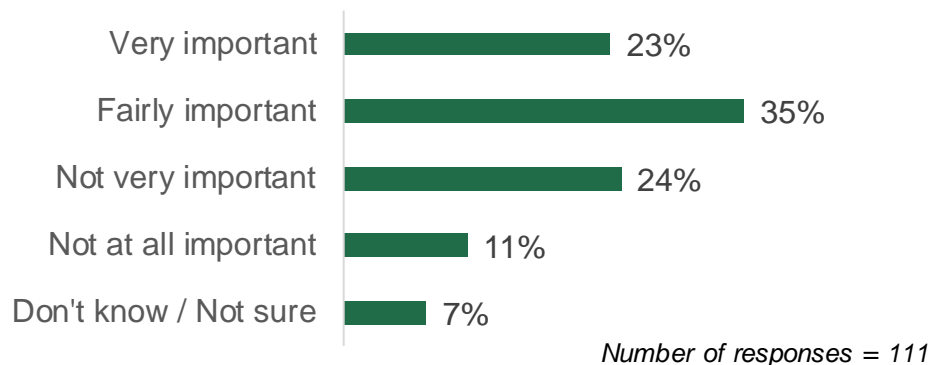
- Woodland burial sites and or natural burial sites will become more popular in future. Would like to see an area of woodland where a cremated or natural burial can happen and then trees planted around the area, more natural (2 comments)
- Environmental concerns are the most important thing with this new policy (1 comment)
- Provide more burial spots for cremated ashes (1 comment)
- The crematorium at Macclesfield needs to be bigger. It would be great to have a bigger chapel as an option (1 comment)
- More info about how this would be costed is needed (1 comment)

Alternative preferences after death

Woodland / natural burial

Of those that would prefer burial once they die, 58% felt the provision of burial facilities that could support woodland / natural burial was important, 35% felt it was not important.

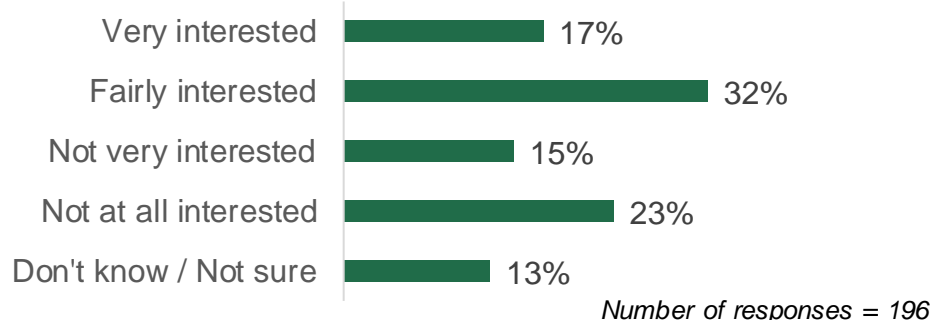
PREFER BURIAL ONLY How important is it to you for the provision of burial facilities that could support woodland / natural burial?



Alternative methods to cremation

Of those that would prefer cremation once they die, 49% would be interested in alternative methods to cremation such as organics reduction¹ or alkaline hydrolysis², 38% would not be interested.

PREFER CREMATION ONLY How interested would you be in alternative methods to cremation such as organic reduction also known as 'natural burial' or alkaline hydrolysis?



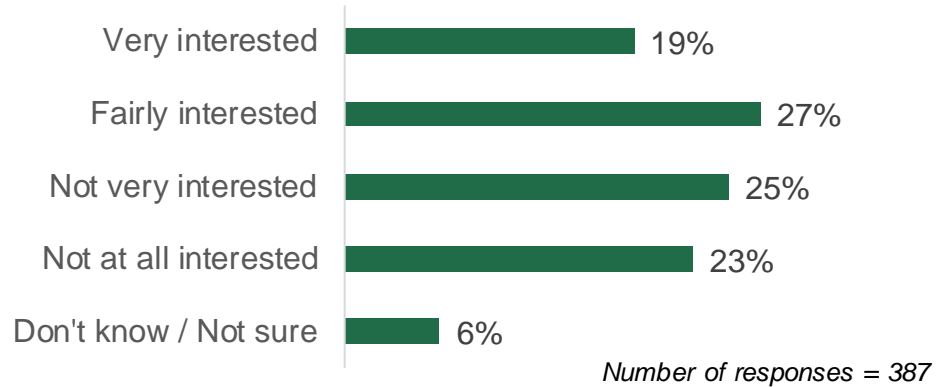
¹ Natural organic reduction is a process that transforms a body into nutrient-rich soil whereby a proportion can be returned to the family to scatter or plant with the remainder used for conservation purposes. Natural organic reduction is also sometimes referred to as terramation, soil transformation or body composting

² Alkaline hydrolysis is an alternative disposition method using heat, pressure, water and lye in a dedicated hydrolysis chamber whereby the process produces a liquid as well as bone remains. This process is sometimes referred to as water cremation, aquamation, biocremation or flameless cremation

Providing alternative sites for memorial plaques

46% of respondents would be interested in alternative sites for memorial plaques being made available in Cheshire East e.g. on benches or trees outside cemeteries. 48% would not be interested.

How interested would you be in alternative sites for memorial plaques being made available in Cheshire East e.g. on benches or trees outside cemeteries at authorised street or parks sites in the borough?

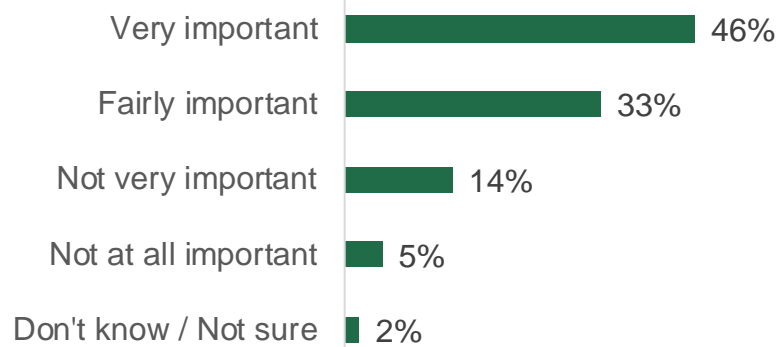


Environmental sustainability

Embracing wildlife in cemeteries

79% of respondents felt it is important that the council makes a place for wildlife and nature with its cemeteries.

How important is it to you that we make a place for wildlife and nature within our cemeteries, for example the inclusion of wildflower areas, trees and areas of longer grass?

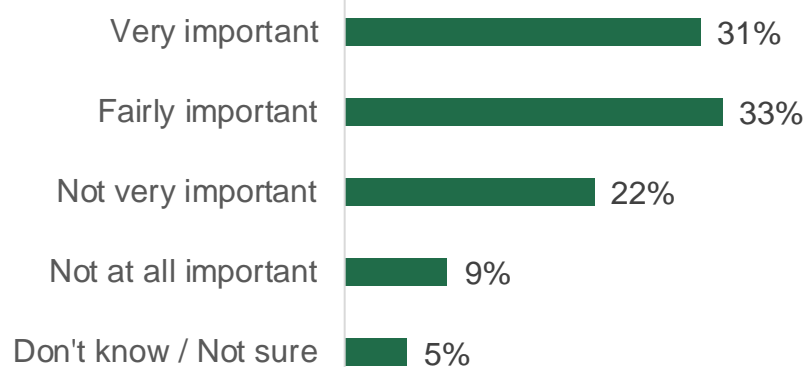


Number of responses = 368

Reducing the carbon output of the cremation process

64% of respondents felt it is important the council reduces the carbon output associated with the cremation process.

How important is it to you that the council reduces the carbon output associated with crematoria in the cremation process?



Number of responses = 368

Comments on environmental sustainability of cemeteries and crematoria

Within the survey respondents were given the opportunity to comment on the environmental sustainability of Cheshire East cemeteries and crematoria. In total, 54

respondents made at least one comment, making a total of 66 comments between them. These comments are categorised and summarised below.

Arguments in favour of, and against, making cemeteries places for wildlife and nature (33 comments in total)

On the one hand some respondents felt the council should make cemeteries wildlife, flora and fauna friendly – they are important wildlife havens, particularly in big towns and cities. Creating beautiful areas that also encourage nature is one area where crematoria can contribute to sustainability and biodiversity. Cemeteries should contain trees, decorative trees, bushes, wildflowers and not be too 'manicured'. Wildlife / nature helps provide the peace and mindfulness most people would like when visiting (16 comments)

On the other hand, others felt the idea of making the cemeteries wildlife-friendly and 'natural' is very nice, but we need to remember why cemeteries exist – it is also important for them to be neat and attractive places for the bereaved to visit. Cemeteries should be kept exactly as they are – they are for people, and if they are not properly maintained, cemeteries can just look unkempt.. Making cemeteries places for wildlife does not mean that the council can use that as an excuse to not maintain or upkeep the cemeteries to a reasonable standard. They are not areas for the fashionable rewilding. People still need to be able to access graves – there can't be long grass everywhere. There is a huge difference between a wildflower area and longer grass. Perhaps the actual burial sites should be trimmed and maintained, however, the surrounding area should be free for nature to exploit. Wild land attracts wildlife – if you have foxes and rabbits digging into graves or eating flower tributes you will have upset relatives. It was also felt that using space for rewilding reduces space available for burials, which contradicts the aim of creating more burial provision (17 comments).

Other comments about the sustainability of cemeteries and crematoria (33 comments in total)

- The living emits more carbon emissions than the dead – this is not hugely important environmentally. In the grand scale of carbon output it is doubtful the amount of carbon produced here is significant. Cheshire East has many more environmentally harmful situations to address before they go for the dead e.g. why do they chop down roadside trees and not replace them, or why do they approve the removal of front lawns? (6 comments)
- A woodland or natural burial site would be preferred as an alternative to a cemetery – more people will want this option in future, this demand needs anticipating and catering for. CE cemeteries must have suitable sites where this could be offered. Wildflower spaces are good as areas for ashes to be scattered (6 comments)

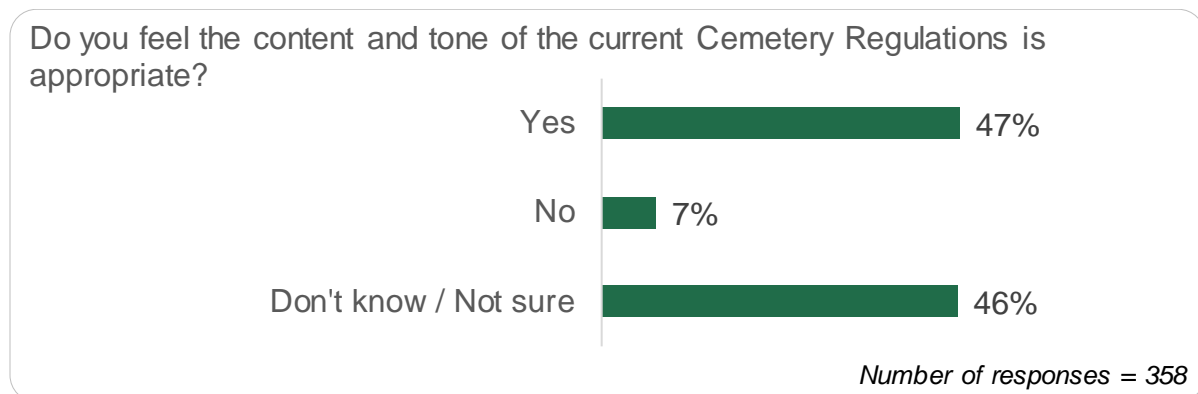
- Cremation and disposal of ashes is the future. Spreading ashes helps environmentally. Cemetery expansion should be resisted, with no new burials. We are losing too much land (4 comments)
- Making people travel further to visit a cemetery would increase carbon emissions, which is not environmentally friendly (3 comments)
- Ban plastic from cemeteries – Flow wrapping, plastic plants / flowers etc (2 comments)
- Environmental concerns should be the top priority, should be a priority over sentimentality (2 comments)
- Make the service more efficient (2 comments)
- Make environmentally friendly alternatives to cremation available, like aqua cremation (2 comments)
- Baby steps are needed. Education and communication will be important to manage change (2 comments)
- Stop making everything about the environment, stop this woke agenda (2 comments)
- "Caring for God's Acre" – Please can the council promote such charities as "Caring for God's Acre" to promote and enable eco and low-cost ways to manage churchyard (1 comment)
- Cemeteries could be better maintained – Without the goodwill of volunteers cemeteries would be in a much worse state (1 comment)

Cemetery regulations

Content and tone of the cemetery regulations

47% of respondents felt the content and tone of the current Cemetery Regulations is appropriate, 7% did not think they were appropriate, and 46% did not know either way.

Therefore, of those respondents who answered either yes or no, 87% felt the content and tone of the current Cemetery Regulations is appropriate, while 13% did not.



Improving the cemetery regulations

Within the survey respondents were given the opportunity to comment on how they felt the cemetery regulations could best be improved. In total, 49 respondents made at least one comment, making a total of 54 comments between them. These comments are summarised below.

The regulations are fine (7 comments in total)

Several respondents felt the regulations are fine, clear and concise.

Improve the tone and presentation of the regulations (13 comments in total)

Some felt the tone of the regulations feels a little haughty, cold, and aggressive. They could be written in a more customer friendly, lighter style of language, especially given those using them may be grieving.

For example, a softer opening could be included, something like "We recognise that you may be reading these regulations at a time of great loss and hope that our cemetery staff are able to help you through this difficult time. We hope this document provides clarity on the regulations associated with burial and cremation in Cheshire East".

Shorter, easy read versions may also be helpful, as 17 pages is a lot to scroll through. The content could perhaps be more informal dos and don'ts than being a formal script.

Larger print might also be helpful to everyone, as well as using images and colour for the visually impaired. They should also be written in plain English.

Enforce them better (10 comments in total)

Some felt the regulations could be improved by being enforced better, and making clear the regulations apply to everyone, as not everyone is respectful of them, and not respectful of the peace and quiet of the areas.

Memorials should be kept respectful, the regulations re. memorials are not adhered to, some memorials and decorations on graves and plots can be tatty or tacky. Also, the regulation re. keeping dogs on leads is not adhered to.

Non-compliance should be handled and dealt with, increase the number of staff to maintain tidy, neat and attractive sites.

Other ways the regulations could be improved (24 comments in total)

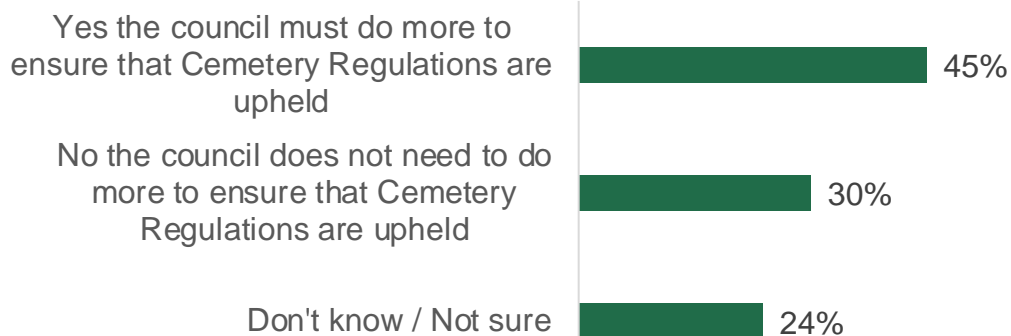
Others felt the regulations could be improved by:

- Keeping cemeteries clean and tidy (6 comments)
- Communicating with, listening to and consulting with the public more (3 comments)
- Looking after the environment better (3 comments)
- Listing alternative burial / cremation services that are available, including more environmentally friendly options (3 comments)
- Not locking cemetery gates, or keeping cemetery gates open until dusk (2 comments)
- Being more inclusive – They could be more inclusive of other cultural practices and beliefs, more respectful and with a greater understanding of those from different ethnic backgrounds (1 comment)
- Making more room for plaque potholders as in The Butterfly Garden at Sandbach (1 comment)
- Using traditional British measurements in them rather than metric (1 comment)
- Making more effort to contact relatives when working on plots and in particular memorial kerbs. A large quantity of these were removed in the eighties. Why? My father's kerb disappeared years ago, even though there were and still are relatives still alive (1 comment)
- Having bus parking spots (1 comment)
- Clarifying what the respective responsibilities of Orbitas and the council are, since cemeteries are operated by Orbitas. Where it states that the council determines whether something is suitable or not, who exactly makes this determination, and what are the rights of appeal / redress? (1 comment)
- Speeding up of time from death until funeral. Conduct cremations at unsocial hours if no one is to attend the service (1 comment)

Upholding the current cemetery regulations

45% of respondents felt the council must do more to ensure the Cemetery Regulations are upheld, 30% felt the council does not need to, and 24% did not know either way.

Do you think the council should do more to ensure that Cemetery Regulations are upheld e.g. by removing non-compliant memorial types and tributes?



Number of responses = 352

Which cemetery regulations should be upheld more

Within the survey respondents were given the opportunity to comment on which cemetery regulations the council should uphold more. In total, 73 respondents made at least one comment, making a total of 96 comments between them. These comments are summarised below.

Uphold regulations on memorabilia / tributes better (48 comments in total)

With regard memorabilia / tributes left on or around graves, respondents felt the council must:

- Remove memorabilia and tributes, especially after a certain amount of time, perhaps after 2 weeks. This includes decorations, photos, toys, teddies, decomposing items, tacky items, balloons, trinkets etc (30 comments)
- Not allow / remove very large memorabilia, tributes or headstones. Some felt very large items are unfair and disrespectful to neighbouring graves, some were ridiculous, and felt the council must ensure they comply with design, size requirements, and that tributes must be kept within grave plot boundaries. As an example, one respondent stated "The Mario brothers one at Sandbach Cemetery is a disgrace" (10 comments).
- Uphold the regulation "The council reserves the right to remove any memorial, which either does not conform to its description on approved the Memorial Application form or which is erected without the permission of the Council." (3 comments)

- Ensure memorabilia and tributes are environmentally friendly e.g. remove plastic tributes (5 comments)

Other regulations that should be upheld better (48 comments in total)

- Uphold all the regulations. Are these regulations or guidance? If the former they are to be followed, and if the latter they are to be at the discretion of the reader. If regulations are not going to be upheld, withdraw them (5 comments)
- Maintenance – Tending of individual plots should be improved, especially where loved ones are unable to visit and maintain them. Maintain older sections of cemeteries better, level graves, maintain trees, remove fallen or broken headstones, and remove curb sets that are over 100 years old or damaged (18 comments)
- Uphold dignity in cemeteries. Ensure everyone is treated with respect in life and after death. Prevent "parties" in the cemetery, fireworks, music and the odd bouncy castle!! Fireworks are regularly set off during the day at Sandbach Cemetery. This is a totally inappropriate (7 comments)
- Uphold the ban on dogs in cemeteries, or dogs that are off the lead at least. Macclesfield cemetery is used by people to exercise dogs. Dog walking companies arrive in vans and use the cemetery to exercise dogs. This is a business involving payment and should be prevented (3 comments)
- Prevent anti-social behaviour in cemeteries, including skateboarding, cycling and "kids running riot" (3 comments)
- Stop pollution of groundwater (and therefore rivers) through continued use of sites highly in highly permeable grounds (1 comment)
- Keep the area natural (1 comment)

Finally respondents felt regulations should be upheld better in:

- Sandbach Cemetery (7 comments)
- Crewe Cemetery (2 comments)
- Middlewich Cemetery (1 comment)

Conclusions

An improved consultation response

It is pleasing to see a 42% increase in the number of responses to this year's Cemeteries Strategy Consultation as compared to 2018 – this reflects the hard work and effort put in by the service to improve promotion of the consultation to a wider range of stakeholders this time round.

Cremation preferred to burial

It is noted that respondents would prefer cremation to burial at almost a rate of 2:1, with just 25% of all respondents indicating they wish to be buried locally once they die (31% x 79%).

This may reflect a long-term trend towards cremation away from burial, and may therefore have implications for future burial provision as the population of Cheshire East increases.

The council's preferred option of local burial is supported

The clear support for the council continuing to create burial provision at all cemeteries, rather than just at the 2 principal cemeteries at Crewe and Macclesfield, supports council proposals which is reassuring, and shows council policy here reflects resident preferences.

Alternative preferences after death to be explored

The level of interest in alternative preferences after death suggest these avenues could be explored by the council, particularly if they can help to reduce the amount of space needed for burial provision, and if they are more environmentally friendly than current practices.

Environmental sustainability

Similarly, the clear support for environmental sustainability within cemeteries and crematoria should be embraced, however, care should be taken that any proposals to make cemeteries more wildlife friendly ensure cemeteries remain neat and attractive and do not become overrun by wildlife.

Any future proposed changes to service provision should be progressed gradually and through effective engagement with residents.

Content and tone of the cemetery regulations

Although the regulations are well received generally, there does seem to be some scope to perhaps make them more “customer friendly”, and possibly to produce a shorter, easy read version to compliment the full version.

Upholding cemetery regulations

The enforcement of regulations is a more complex issue.

While there is general support for the regulations being upheld more stringently than they are now, particularly in regard to memorabilia and headstones on graves, a proportion of the gypsy / traveller community feel strongly against this, and feel this would victimise the way they choose to bury their dead – though it should be noted only a proportion of this community feel this way, and that this isn’t reflective of the whole of this community.

Any steps taken to enforce regulations more stringently should be done extreme care, and only through compromise and though effective engagement with those most affected.

Appendix 1 – Gypsy / Traveller community feedback

Engagement with the community

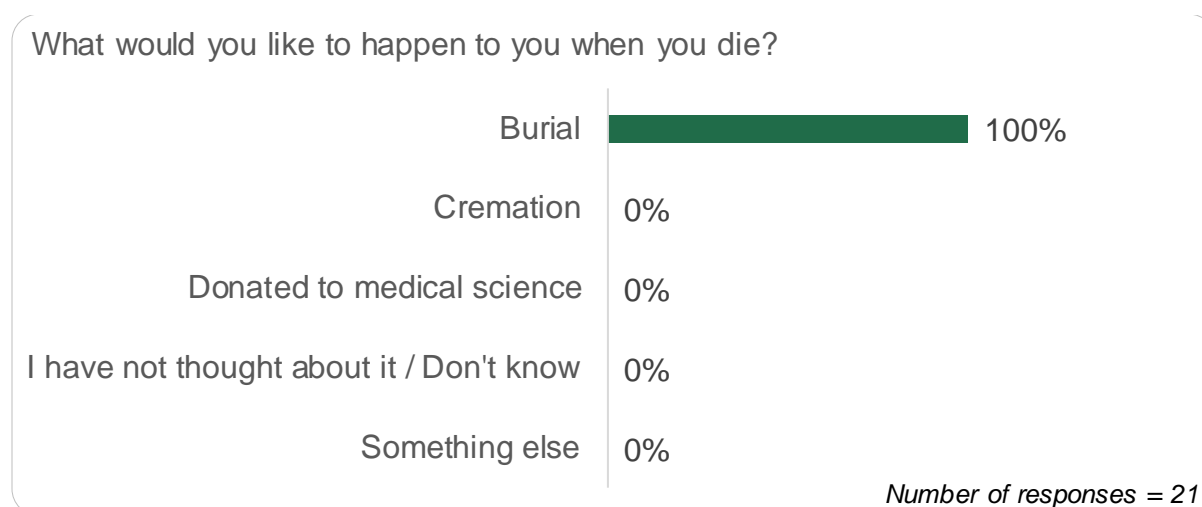
Between 2 and 5 December 2022, members of the council’s Communities Team visited 17 different Gypsy / Traveller sites or addresses to talk about the Cemetery Strategy and Regulations, and to hand out short easy read surveys to capture feedback.

At 5 of the sites no residents were met, while at 12 of the sites 21 residents completed a short survey. Responses of these short surveys are summarised below.

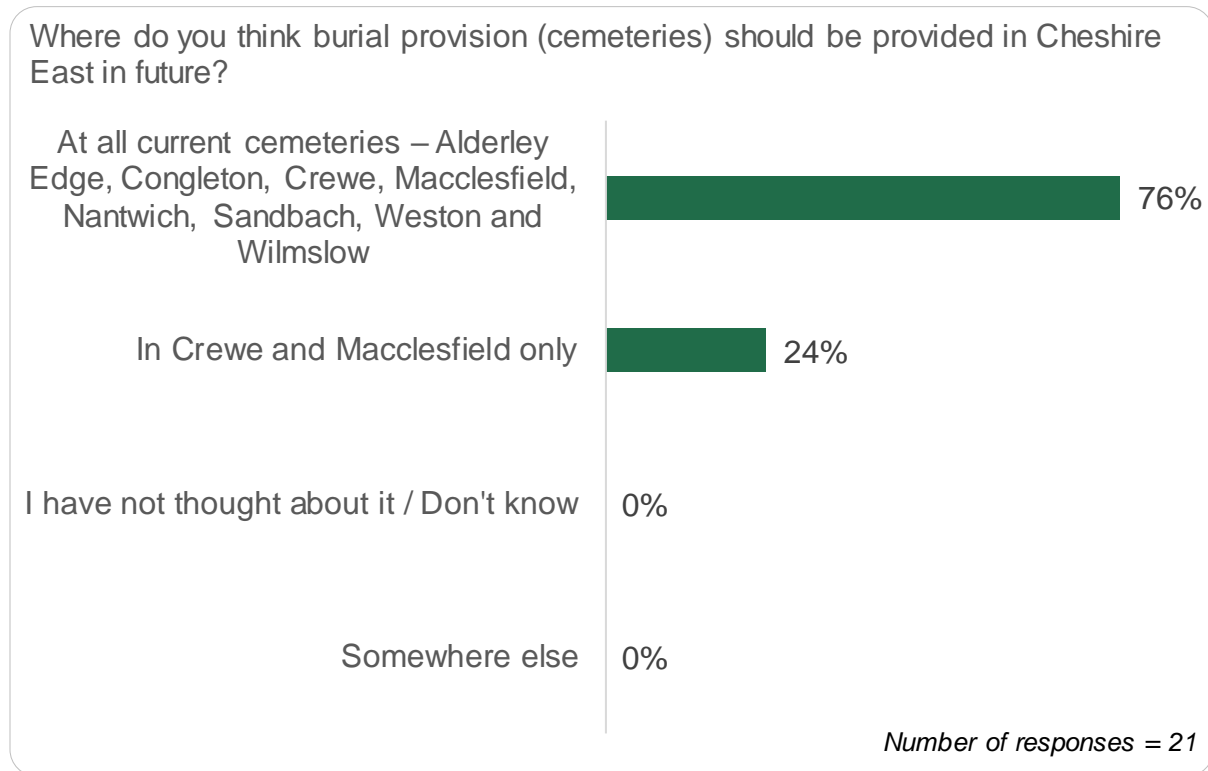
Of those completing a short survey, 15 defined their ethnic origin as “Gypsy or Irish Traveller”, 3 defined their ethnic origin as “Roma”, and 3 defined their ethnic origin as “White British / English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / Irish”.

Future burial provision in Cheshire East

100% of respondents expressed they would like to be buried once they die.

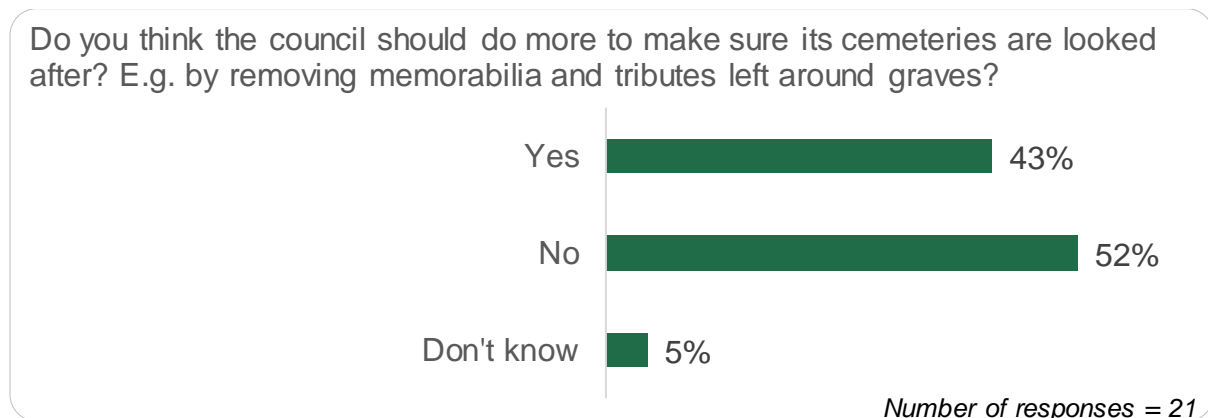


76% of respondents felt burial provision should be made at all cemeteries, rather than just at Crewe and Macclesfield (24%).



Cemetery regulations and memorials

43% of respondents felt more should be done to make sure its cemeteries are looked after e.g. by removing memorabilia and tributes left around graves, 52% disagreed.



Gypsy / Traveller community comments on the Cemetery Regulations

Respondents made a total of 30 comments in reply to the question “How can the council look after its cemeteries better than it does now” – These comments have been summarised into the below categories:

Against proposals to look after cemeteries better

Respondents felt that all family items and flowers should remain where family have put them, and that after listening to the proposed changes they are not happy with these policies. They felt it is nice to see gifts on graves, that they shouldn't be forced to change the way they grieve as that is their culture, and that Gypsy Travellers are being victimised in how they choose to bury their dead (10 comments)

In support of proposals to look after cemeteries better

On the other hand, some were in favour of the council making sure cemeteries are looked after better. It was suggested that other councils only allow memorabilia for 2 months before it is removed or families remove it themselves (5 comments).

Better facilities wanted

Respondents felt cemeteries need to improve the facilities including the toilets, disabled access, car parking, water facilities, electric plug ins and CCTV (7 comments).

Maintain cemeteries better

Respondents felt the council should cut the grass more, ensure stand pipes are working, cut trees back (specifically on Badger Avenue cemetery), fix headstone damage, and have better walkways (5 comments).

Have longer visiting hours (2 comments).

Allow Travellers to tend plots themselves (1 comments).

Appendix 2 – Email consultation responses

The following appendix publishes all 10 consultation email responses received that the council has permission to publish. Emails are listed in chronological order of when they were received.

Email 1 – Alsager Town Council

Email received 17 November 2022:

“PEC22/100 Cheshire East Council Draft Cemeteries Strategy

The Committee considered the CEC Cemeteries Strategy and Regulations consultation. Concerns were raised on the lack of cemetery space at Alsager and that there are limitations to access either Crewe or Macclesfield by public transport.

Resolved: That the Town Clerk respond to the survey expressing disappointment that concentration of the provision will be Macclesfield and Crewe, that there is significant demand in Alsager for burial and that the reliance on private vehicles to access Crewe or Macclesfield is contrary to the aspirations of CEC and Alsager Town Council to combat Climate Change.”.

Email 2 – From an individual

Email received 18 November 2022:

“I would like Sandbach Cemetery to be extended into the field alongside which was the original plan , I was born in Sandbach and wish to stay in Sandbach after my death and not taken to somewhere I have never been, and my family living and dead are all...”

Email 3 – From an individual

Email received 18 November 2022:

“The Cemetery has to stay open at all costs, please remember that not everyone has transportation of their own to go to other cemetery’s.

People who live in the Sandbach area should be allowed to be buried in Sandbach if that is their wish.

I sincerely hope that no changes are made to the status quo.”

Email 4 – From an individual

Email received 18 November 2022:

“I think we should keep Sandbach Cemetery open, what happens when the people who are left can't get to Crewe or Macclesfield. I think it's wrong to close it as people from Sandbach and the area round Sandbach have lost they loved one and cannot get to cemetery to take flowers and just to see the grave were they husband or wife are buried.”

Email 5 – From an individual

Email received 19 November 2022:

“Hi please keep Sandbach Cemetery. When I pass I don't want to be in a dump like crewe. I want to be in my home town where my parents are buried.”

Email 6 – From an individual

Email received 24 November 2022:

“I have submitted the online consultation form, however, it would not accept my comments in the appropriate section merely saying "incorrect format" so, for that part, I am sending an email.

My initial reaction when I first read, last year I think, that Cheshire East planned to concentrate its cemetery provision to Crewe & Macclesfield was disbelief. I have lived in and around Sandbach for approx 70 years and have generations of family buried in its cemetery. It was my firm understanding that the field, previously used for football, was acquired specifically to provide overspill to the main cemetery when the time came. It has not been used as a football pitch for many years, possibly since the new facility on Hind Heath Road, opened.

My main objections are:

- Your graphs show that Cheshire East has a growing older population, higher than the average for England. Families who have lived in Sandbach for possibly their whole life, assumed that they could join family and friends in their local cemetery. Their surviving family and friends would have easy access to visit them to provide comfort (in my case) and also to show respect.
- I visit Macclesfield cemetery on a regular basis to visit my goddaughter's grave. This is only possible as I can drive. I would suggest it would be totally impossible if you had to use public transport. It is also quite a journey to get there from Sandbach, not an easy route.

I would also suggest that public transport would not be possible to visit Crewe, although much nearer to Sandbach. It is out of town and, if it was possible, would necessitate several changes of buses. Causing yet more difficulty to the less abled.

Why has the land which was specifically acquired for an overspill, now been removed from the equation. From information in the local press and social media, it seems as if you denied this was the purpose until legal documents were obtained, I believe from County Records, to show that this was, in fact, the original intention.

I appreciate that the upkeep of these sites is rising, but what price do you put on residents who may not be able to visit their loved ones if this misguided strategy goes ahead. You are in receipt of legal documents, are you willing to overrule them to the detriment of your residents?

I could go on, but found from experience, that the briefer, more succinct, the better.

Thank you.”

Email 7 – Poynton Town Council

Email received 29 November 2022:

“Please accept the following as Poynton Town Council’s response to the consultation on Cemeteries Strategy and regulations.

Poynton’s population has grown larger in recent years and has the highest concentration of older people in Cheshire East. There will be an inevitable future demand for facilities for those Residents that wish to be buried/scattered in their town of residence.

Poynton Cemetery at St Georges Church is now closed and the nearest Council Cemetery is in Macclesfield.

The Poynton Neighbourhood Plan made note for a requirement of a new cemetery or garden of remembrance.

Therefore, Poynton Town Council feel there should be a new Cemetery or Garden of Remembrance in Poynton.”

Email 8 – From an individual

Email received 7 December 2022:

“Please SERIOUSLY consider banning plastic flowers and plants on graves and CREMATION pots. Plastic is not sustainable and gets blown into farmers fields, or left to fade a horrible colour.

Insist people plant crocuses, bluebells, snowdrops, daffodils and other small flowering bulbs for environmentally friendly, bee loving, scenic areas.”

Email 9 – Sandbach Town Council

Email received 8 December 2022:

“CEC Cemeteries Strategy 2022

(A) Two key points

1) From the CEC website “ the main change we are proposing in the update of the Cemeteries Strategy is to make future burial provision available at all existing council cemeteries, by extending them where possible to provide more local provision, rather than focusing provision only in 2 principal burial facilities in Crewe and Macclesfield, as the existing strategy sets out.”

2) This isn't a consultation on a revised or draft cemetery strategy, it is an exercise to obtain views prior to generating a draft strategy.

(B) Further points

1) The current strategy has data up to 2017, this needs updating to show what capacity remains at each of the CEC cemeteries. I would hope that the figures for Sandbach Cemetery reflect the availability of adjacent council-owned land that has previously been designated for cemetery expansion.

2) The online consultation is confusing in presenting the existing strategy as having combined burial and cremation facilities at both Crewe and Macclesfield - in reality, burials in Crewe take place at Meadow Brook (next to the former council refuse tip) and cremations take place at the refurbished Badger Avenue crematorium, quite a distance apart.

3) Support for the retention of local cemetery provision within Cheshire East.

(C) I think it is worth reiterating comments made about the 2018 strategy

1) Drive time to cemeteries should not be the prime consideration in selecting burial destination - the suitability of the location should also be a factor, the new cemetery based in Crewe at Meadow Brook is located close to the former Crewe Council tip and depot, a very insensitive neighbouring land use.

2) Consideration should be taken of accessibility for relatives wishing to visit both at the time of a funeral and subsequent memorial visits, need to be aware of limited public transport within most of Cheshire East to the cemeteries in the two principal towns.

3) Demographics - need to assess the impact of the population increase in Sandbach resulting from the 30% plus increase in houses during the 2030 Local Plan. 2021 census data should also be considered.

4) Vision - Should CEC consider the availability of extending existing cemeteries other than Weston and Alderley Edge? E.g. Sandbach has adjacent land allocated for use as a cemetery extension, why is this not included in the analysis and report?

“8.3 The key policy is for Cheshire East Council to focus its long-term burial provision in two principal cemeteries in Crewe and Macclesfield, whilst continuing to operate and maintain the other cemeteries. The future management of the seven cemeteries outside of these two main conurbations, and the development of additional provision, could better meet local needs by being the responsibility of town and parish councils.”

It is not clear how all the vision, policies and objectives are derived and supported by the earlier sections of the report. Whilst I feel many of the statements can be supported I have major concerns with 8.3. There are concerns with both sentences within 8.3, as they contradict each other.

- a. The proposal to concentrate burial provision at two principal cemeteries seems to be based purely on travel time to funerals, it does not take into account the physical suitability of the Crewe site, located next to a former rubbish dump, poor level of accessibility for post funeral family visits.
- b. The first sentence states that Cheshire East would continue to operate and maintain the other cemeteries, whilst the second sentence proposes that they would be better devolved to town and parish councils. [So do they propose devolution or not?]

I disagree with Vision 8.3, in restricting CEC responsibility to two principal cemeteries, it is not appropriate, CEC should also continue to operate and extend the Sandbach cemetery using the designated adjoining council-owned land.

November 2022

Appendix

The response from Sandbach Town Council in 2018.

Sandbach Town Council has reviewed the Draft Cheshire East Cemeteries Strategy.

Whilst it is able to support Section 9 - Cemetery Strategy Short Term, making more efficient use of the existing cemeteries, there are issues with the proposals in sections 10 and 11.

Sandbach Town Council requests that the useful life of the award-winning Sandbach Cemetery is extended by incorporating the adjoining council-owned land to the south of the existing cemetery currently used as a football pitch. Local residents have understood that the playing field had been allocated to cemetery expansion. This would provide an additional principal Cheshire East cemetery close to the geographic centre of the borough, it would improve provision in a town that expects a 40%

increase in population during the period of the Local Plan, and could optimise travel times for both funerals and family visits when compared to the two principal cemetery proposal.

Sandbach Town Council proposes the inclusion of a fourth point under 10 Cemetery Strategy Medium Term “Progress the development of the extension of Sandbach Cemetery.”

Point 10.3 is not derived from the main body of the report, if it is to be included as a recommendation then much greater detail should be included in the strategy report.

However, Sandbach Town Council has a major concern with the long-term strategy of CEC maintaining only two open cemeteries in the borough, i.e. Crewe and Macclesfield.

It is important to keep the Sandbach Cemetery open

- Central location within Cheshire East, with good road access.
- CEC already own adjoining land that is designated for cemetery expansion
- The Sandbach Cemetery operates to a high, award winning standard.
- Sandbach expects its population to increase by 40% by 2030.

September 2018.”

Email 10 – Poynton Town Council

Email received 25 January 2023:

Dear Rand C

I am aware that the above consultation is now closed. However, I have been asked to write to you by the Town Council to ask whether Cheshire East own any suitable land in Poynton which could be used as a burial ground or memorial garden. Would you be able to forward this email on to the relevant department please.

Kind regards,

