

Cemeteries Strategy Review

November 2023

Prepared on behalf of Cheshire East Council by
The CDS Group



OFFICIAL

Contents

Reporting Details.....	3
Executive Summary	1
1 Introduction.....	2
2 Existing Burial Provision	5
2.1 Burial Data.....	6
2.1.1 Alderley Edge Cemetery.....	7
2.1.2 Congleton Cemetery	8
2.1.3 Coppenhall Cemetery.....	48
2.1.4 Crewe Cemetery.....	48
2.1.5 Macclesfield Cemetery.....	49
2.1.6 Crewe - Meadow Brook Cemetery.....	50
2.1.7 Nantwich Cemetery	48
2.1.8 Sandbach Cemetery	49
2.1.9 Weston Cemetery	50
2.1.10 Wilmslow Cemetery.....	51
2.2 Trends in Deaths in Cheshire East Borough	52
2.3 Trends in Burials Across Cheshire East Operated Cemeteries.....	52
2.4 Trends in Ash Interments.....	54
2.5 A Combined Analysis of Death, Burial and Ash Interment Data in the Cheshire East Borough	55
2.6 Cremations in the Cheshire East Borough	55
2.7 Parish Churches.....	56
2.8 Town Councils	58
3 Demographic Context	59
3.1 Ageing Population	59
3.2 Religious Beliefs	61
3.3 Future Population Estimates.....	62
4 Legal Context.....	63
4.1 The Provision and Maintenance of Cemeteries	63
4.2 Maintenance of Closed Churchyards	63
4.2.1 Consecration	64
4.3 Re-use of Graves	64
4.4 Burial Records	65
5 Public Consultation.....	66
5.1 Consultation outreach	66
5.2 Burial Versus Cremation	66
5.3 Location of Future Burial Provision in Cheshire East	66
5.4 Alternative Preferences After Death.....	66
5.5 Environmental Sustainability	67
5.6 Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Community Feedback.....	67
5.7 Cemetery Regulations.....	67
6 Vision, Policies and Objectives of CEC	69
7 Cemetery Strategy Short to Medium Term	70
8 Cemetery Strategy Long Term (2043 Onwards).....	72

Figures

Figure 1. Location of Cheshire East Borough Operated Cemeteries.....	4
Figure 2. Alderley Edge Cemetery & Possible Area for Extension	7
Figure 3. Congleton Cemetery	8
Figure 4. Congleton Cemetery Extension	8
Figure 5. Congleton Cemetery Indicative Burial Layout Plan	9
Figure 6. Coppenhall Cemetery.....	48
Figure 7. Crewe Cemetery	49
Figure 8. Macclesfield Cemetery.....	50
Figure 9. Crewe – Meadow Brook Cemetery.....	50
Figure 10. Nantwich Cemetery	48
Figure 11. Nantwich Cemetery Approved Turning Circle Alteration	49
Figure 12. Sandbach Cemetery	49
Figure 13. Weston Cemetery	50
Figure 14. Future Weston Cemetery Extension.....	51
Figure 15. Wilmslow Cemetery.....	51
Figure 16. Deaths in the Cheshire East Borough	52
Figure 17. Burials in the Cheshire East Borough (2016-2022).....	53
Figure 18. Ash Interments in the Cheshire East Borough (2016-2022).....	54
Figure 19. Burials and Ash Interments (2016-2021)	55

Tables

Table 1. Burial Data across CEC Cemeteries (2016 to 2022)	2
Table 2. Cheshire East Council Operated Cemeteries	3
Table 3. Burial Data across CEC Cemeteries (2016 to 2022)	6
Table 4. Percentage of Burials as a proportion of Total Deaths	53
Table 5. Percentage of Cremations Compared to Number of Deaths.....	55
Table 6. Cheshire East Survey – Parish Church Burial Data (2018)	57
Table 7. Age bands for Cheshire East residents and for England (2021)	60
Table 8. Population estimates, Total deaths and death rates for Cheshire East Borough (ONS)	61
Table 9. Population by Religious Group for Cheshire East Borough (ONS)	61
Table 10. 2018-based Subnational Population Projections (ONS)	62

Reporting Details

Strategy Author: Adam Muspratt Ba (Hons)

Verification: Eliot Winter BSc (Hons)

Reviewer:

Version Number: 2.2

Date of Version: 7th November 2023

Executive Summary

In Cheshire East, demand for burial provision is currently met by Cheshire East Council's ten cemeteries, together with town and parish council cemeteries and churchyards.

The percentage of burials (at Cheshire East borough operated cemeteries) as a proportion of total deaths in the borough has fallen over time, with burials accounting for 8.91% of deaths in 2017, whereas in 2021 burials accounted for 6.85% of deaths.

Between 2016 and 2021 the average number of deaths in the Cheshire East region was 4,117 per annum.

The average number of burials per annum across Cheshire East operated cemeteries was 325 per year.

A higher number of ash interments were completed at Cheshire East operated cemeteries between 2016 and 2022 than burials (on average 476 ash interments were completed per annum).

Additional documents to support this strategy will provide further analysis on the supply of graves in the Cheshire East borough across parish, town and borough operated cemeteries.

The results of the consultation are presented within the report. The results of the consultation exercise were used to inform the strategy update. The results of the consultation informed the key shift from the previous report which suggested that CEC should continue to operate two sites (the updated strategy suggests that the sites listed throughout this report should continue to be operated into the future).

The strategy identifies a series of short, medium and long term targets for Cheshire East council with regard to the operation and management of the council's cemeteries.

The strategy, supported by the feedback offered via recent public consultation, concludes that Cheshire East Council should continue to operate the 10 cemeteries referenced throughout this report in order to ensure that communities have access local cemeteries.

1 Introduction

- 1 Cheshire East Council commissioned the cemeteries strategy review to provide an update to the previous strategy developed in 2018. Several notable developments have had a direct impact on the ability to accommodate burials in cemeteries since the last review of the cemetery's strategy. These developments include:

- Covid-19 Pandemic: As a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic there was a higher mortality rate in the Cheshire East region in 2020, compared to the mortality rate between 2017 to 2019. The table below demonstrates the changes in population, number of deaths and mortality rate in the Cheshire East Unitary Authority Area between 2017 and 2021¹. The average mortality rate between 2017 and 2019 was 1.05% whereas the mortality rate in 2020 in the borough was 1.16%, in 2021 the mortality rate returned to pre Covid levels.

Table 1. Burial Data across CEC Cemeteries (2016 to 2022)

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Population	378,800	380,800	384,200	386,700	400,500
Deaths	3,930	4,084	4,017	4,478	4,231
Mortality Rate	1.04%	1.07%	1.05%	1.16%	1.06%

- Environmental Considerations: Environmental concerns have prompted discussions about sustainable burial practices, with some individuals exploring options like natural or green burials, which have specific requirements and considerations for cemetery design and management.
 - Changing Funeral Practices: To mitigate the spread of the virus, restrictions were implemented on gatherings and funeral services, leading to changes in traditional burial practices. Families often had to limit attendance at funerals or opt for alternative arrangements, such as cremation. Nationally the number of cremations as a percentage of total deaths marginally increased during the Covid-19 pandemic². This means that the number of ash interments at Cheshire East Cemeteries has increased since the last review.
 - Regulatory Changes: As of the 1st April 2022, the Environment Agency have introduced guidance which states that any new cemetery development or extension to an existing cemetery to be risk assessed to determine whether the development would require an Environmental Permit to operate.
- 2 These factors collectively contribute to the evolving management and pressures on cemeteries.
 - 3 This strategy update describes the quantity and location of current provision and reviews the options and mechanisms for ensuring appropriate provision for future burials. This required a detailed assessment of both past and future demand and capacity for burials within the Council's cemeteries.
 - 4 Cheshire East Council's 10 Cemeteries are listed below in the table below. As of 1st January 2020, Knutsford Cemetery has been operated by Knutsford Town Council, therefore this cemetery will

¹ ONS (2022) Available Via: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/deathsregisteredbyareaofusualresidenceenglandandwales>

² The Cremation Society of Great Britain (2023) Available Via: <https://www.cremation.org.uk/>

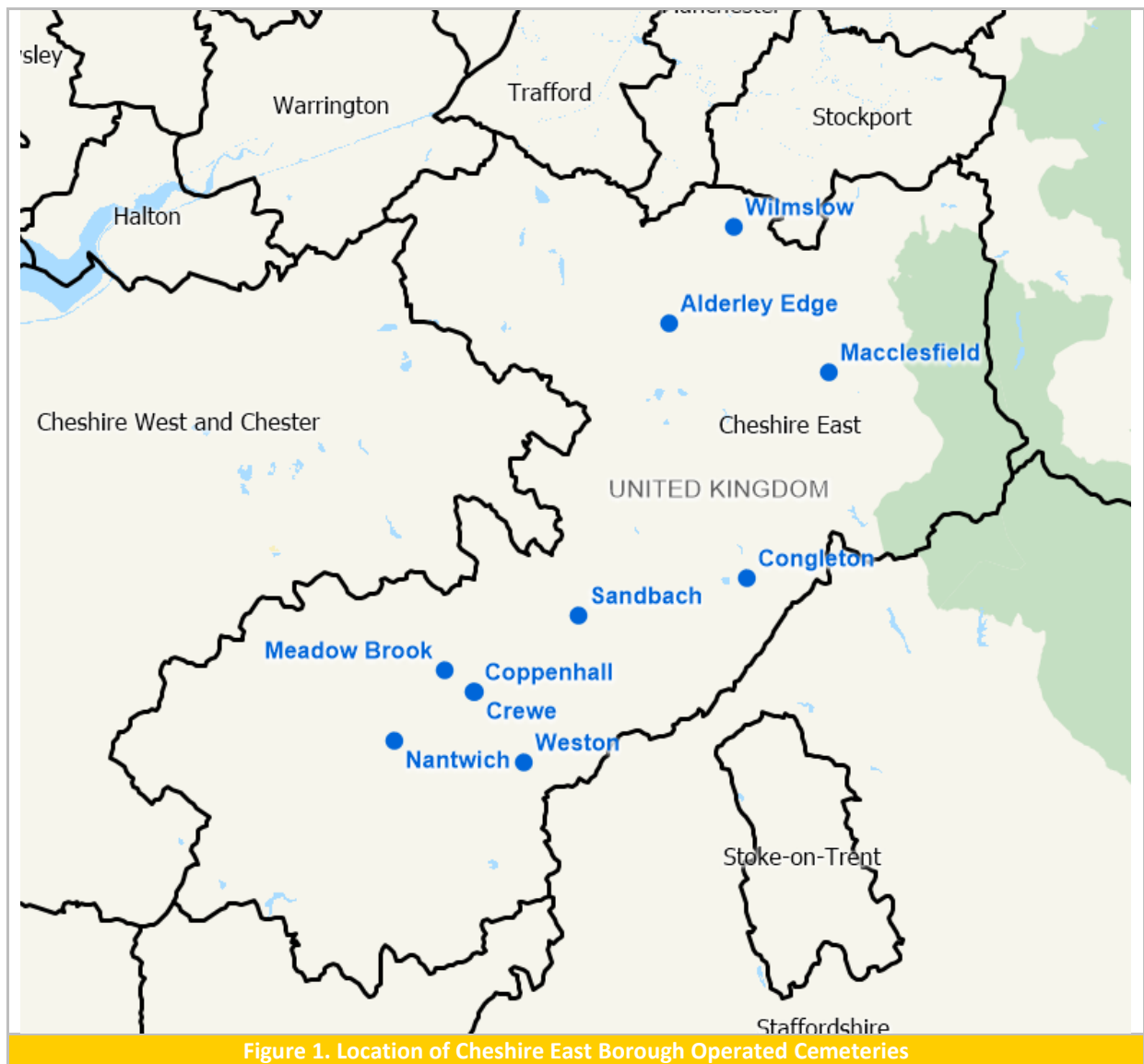
not be included as part of this strategy document³. Middlewich Town Council operate Middlewich Cemetery located on Chester Road, Middlewich CW10 9ET.

Table 2. Cheshire East Council Operated Cemeteries

Name of Cemetery	Address	Opened	Acres
Alderley Edge	Chelford Road, B5359, Chorley, SK9 7TQ	1906	3.96
Congleton	Howey Lane, Congleton CW12 4AE	2004	3.35
Crewe Coppenhall	Reid Street, Coppenhall CW1 3DZ	1863	4.47
Crewe Badger Avenue	Badger Avenue, Crewe CW1 3JG	1872	28.65
Crewe Meadow Brook	Minshull New Road, Crewe CW1 3PP	2017	13.25
Macclesfield	Prestbury Road, Macclesfield SK10 3BU	1866	35.65
Nantwich	Whitehouse Lane, Nantwich CW5 6HP	1875	5.59
Sandbach	The Hill, Sandbach CW11 1JJ	1935	5.59
Weston	Cemetery Road, Weston, Crewe CW2 5LQ	1902	0.65
Wilmslow	Manchester Road, Wilmslow SK9 2LE	1907	6.28

- 5 Figure 1 below indicates the boundary of the Cheshire East Borough and the location of the cemeteries listed above. The cemeteries are largely located close to or on the boundaries of the population centres in the borough. Therefore, the sparsely populated area to the south and north west of the borough, no borough operated cemeteries are in operation in this area.

³ Orbitas (2020) – Available Via: <http://www.orbitas.co.uk/pdf/Knutsford-Cemetery-transfer.pdf>



2 Existing Burial Provision

- 6 Burial space in the UK is becoming scarce at an ever-increasing rate. The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) has estimated that within the next 5 to 10 years, 30% of UK local authorities will have run out of burial space.
- 7 In a 2013 BBC survey of 358 local authorities surveyed, a quarter said they would have no further capacity in 10 years. Of these authorities represented on a league table of how much capacity remained in their cemeteries, the main council cemeteries are expected to have reached capacity within 6 to 8 years.
- 8 These calculations only consider current rates of burial and do not allow for the increasing number of total deaths arising from the nationally expanding population and an ageing population, nor shortages of burial space in neighbouring boroughs.
- 9 The data presented throughout the chapter below indicates the number of ash interments and burials completed across the Cheshire East Borough between 2016 and 2022.

2.1 Burial Data

Table 3. Burial Data across CEC Cemeteries (2016 to 2022)

Name of Cemetery	2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021		2022		Total	
	Burials	Ashes	Burials	Ashes	Burials	Ashes	Burials	Ashes	Burials	Ashes	Burials	Ashes	Burials	Ashes	Burials	Ashes
Alderley Edge	23	24	17	31	29	18	20	21	23	17	26	22	20	19	158	152
Congleton	17	25	11	28	17	31	27	31	22	23	16	27	25	28	135	193
Coppenhall	2	4	1	4	3	2	0	5	1	2	1	4	0	4	8	25
Crewe	61	143	54	146	56	166	56	125	48	145	46	143	44	166	365	1,034
Knutsford*	27	10	28	14	28	15	22	16	Reverted to Knutsford Town Council Operation 01/01/20*						105*	55*
Macclesfield	63	98	76	138	73	151	53	128	79	111	62	139	66	138	472	903
Meadow Brook	23	19	47	31	35	21	27	30	33	29	39	23	33	35	237	188
Nantwich	44	46	34	53	38	55	43	38	43	53	36	41	33	57	271	343
Sandbach	31	27	46	23	39	31	36	32	34	31	42	29	36	30	264	203
Weston	4	5	7	11	6	3	10	8	2	7	3	5	10	7	42	46
Wilmslow	36	19	29	30	33	35	29	25	37	26	19	26	37	30	220	191
Total	331	420	350	509	357	528	323	459	322	444	290	459	304	514	2,277	3,333

- 10 The Environment Agency state that there must be no more than 2,500 burials per hectare (or approximately 1,040 burials per acre) in a new cemetery or cemetery extension⁴.
- 11 However, with allowances for areas of hardstanding for footpaths, biodiversity enhancement and other facilities such as car parking that across one acre of land, 800 lawn burials could be accommodated, assuming no burial buffers are required under the Environment Agency's burial guidance. Approximately 3 above ground ash interments can be located per square meter (approximately 11,000 per acre).
- 12 In the near future this document will be accompanied by a site management plan of each cemetery which details the extent and location of remaining burial and ash interment capacity at each of the cemeteries listed below.

2.1.1 Alderley Edge Cemetery

- 13 The number of burials at Alderley edge is stable at, on average 22 to 23 burials per annum. There are several areas of the cemetery with burial capacity remaining (located to the north west of the existing cemetery).
- 14 Under planning application reference number 09/4038W on the Cheshire East Planning Search Portal, the area located to the east of the cemetery (highlighted in yellow in the figure below) has been approved for the change of use of the land to cemetery use.
- 15 Whilst the site plan submitted as part of this application does not detail the number of burials in this area, the site plan does indicate that the majority of the site is set to be allocated for burial plots, with areas allocated for tree planting, gravel paving and a memorial feature (described as a memorial wall).



Figure 2. Alderley Edge Cemetery & Possible Area for Extension

⁴ Environment Agency (2023) Available Via: [Low environmental risk cemeteries: exemption conditions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/low-environmental-risk-cemeteries-exemption-conditions)

2.1.2 Congleton Cemetery

- 16 The satellite image below indicates the area of Congleton cemetery that was extended after the original area scheduled for burials reached capacity.



Figure 3. Congleton Cemetery



Figure 4. Congleton Cemetery Extension

- 17 Between 2016 and 2022 the average number of burials per year at Congleton was 19. The number of ash interments at Congleton cemetery is higher than the number of burials completed at approximately 28 ash interments per annum.
- 18 According to the proposed layout plan that formed part of the planning application pack, approximately 1120 graves were scheduled for the site and an area has also been allocated on site for ash interment plots (although the number of ash interments was not stated as part of this design).
- 19 The south west of the site is particularly waterlogged and therefore is believed to be unsuitable for burials. This will reduce the burial capacity of the site; however further work is required to determine how this will affect the overall burial capacity of the site and as to whether a drainage solution can be implemented in this portion of the site.

2.1.3 Coppenhall Cemetery

- 20 Coppenhall Cemetery is one of the oldest and smallest cemeteries in the Cheshire East borough.
- 21 The number of burials and ash interments at Coppenhall Cemetery is relatively low, compared to other cemeteries, as the cemetery is close to reaching capacity. A small number of graves have been accommodated where trees have been removed.



Figure 6. Coppenhall Cemetery

2.1.4 Crewe Cemetery

- 22 Crewe Cemetery is the primary cemetery for burials and ash interments in Crewe. Within the grounds of Crewe Cemetery lies Crewe Crematorium, therefore ash interments are popular at the site with on average 148 ash interments completed per year between 2016 and 2022. It is likely that a large proportion of the ash interments at Crewe Cemetery are from Crewe Crematorium, therefore it can be estimated that approximately 12% of cremations at Crewe are then interred at Crewe Cemetery.
- 23 The number of burials at the site is gradually decreasing over time as the site begins to reach its burial capacity, the average number of burials between 2016 and 2022 is 52 burials per annum. Burials at Crewe Cemetery are all re-opened burials, all burials into new graves in Crewe are completed at Meadow Brook.



Figure 7. Crewe Cemetery

2.1.5 Macclesfield Cemetery

- 24 Burial numbers at Macclesfield are relatively consistent with a range of between 53 and 76 burials per annum between 2016 and 2022. The site averages 67 burial per annum and therefore has the highest number of burials in the region occur at Macclesfield Cemetery.
- 25 Similarly to Crewe, Macclesfield Crematorium is also located within the red line boundary Macclesfield Cemetery. As expected, and in similar fashion to Crewe Cemetery also accommodates a high number of ash interments per annum. It is likely the case that a large proportion of the ash interments at Macclesfield Cemetery are directly from the Crematorium. It is estimated that approximately 10% of all cremations at Macclesfield Crematorium are then subsequently interred at Macclesfield Cemetery.



Figure 8. Macclesfield Cemetery

2.1.6 Crewe - Meadow Brook Cemetery

26 Meadow Brook Cemetery, located on the north west periphery of Crewe is the most recently opened cemetery in the borough and was opened in 2017.



Figure 9. Crewe – Meadow Brook Cemetery

27 Approximately 34 burials and 27 ash interments are completed on average per annum at this cemetery.

28 The image below indicates the detailed planting plan and site outline for Crewe Meadow Brook burial ground.

OFFICIAL

2.1.7 Nantwich Cemetery

- 29 On average 39 burials are completed at Nantwich cemetery per annum, with a further 49 ash interments are completed annually.
- 30 Under reference number 21/3760N on the Cheshire East planning portal, a planning application was granted full permission to alter the turning circle on site. The satellite image shown in the figure below pre-dates the proposed changes to the site.
- 31 The approved site plan included as part of the application is included in figure 11 below.



Figure 10. Nantwich Cemetery

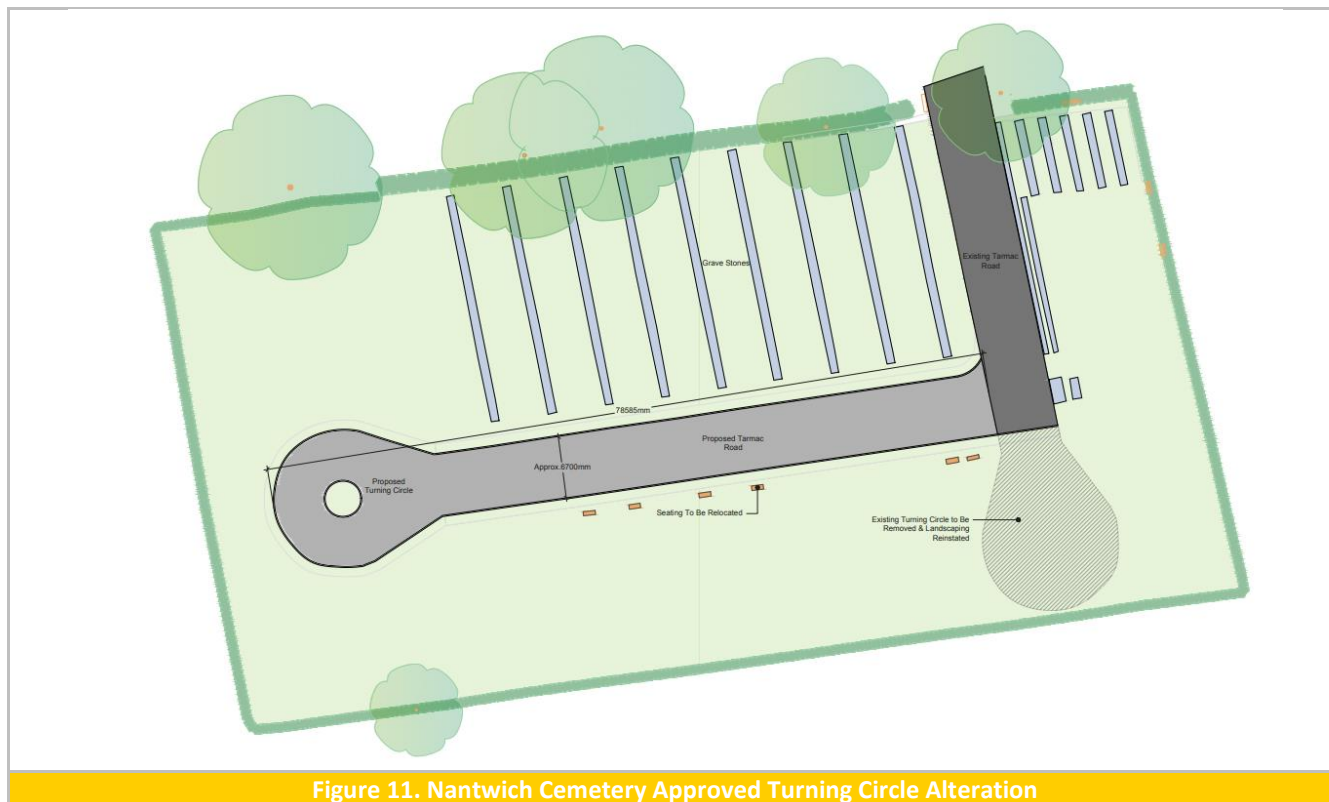


Figure 11. Nantwich Cemetery Approved Turning Circle Alteration

2.1.8 Sandbach Cemetery

32 Sandbach cemetery completes on average 38 burials per annum and 29 ash interments annually.



Figure 12. Sandbach Cemetery

33 Masterplans and additional documents detailing the extent of extensions to Sandbach cemetery are set to be released in due course following the publication of this strategy.

2.1.9 Weston Cemetery

- 34 Weston cemetery is nearing its burial capacity, as very few burial plots remain available it is estimated that the cemetery will reach full capacity by the end of the 23/24 financial year.
- 35 Based on burial data between 2016 and 2022, on average 6 burials are completed per annum at Weston Cemetery and 7 ash interments are completed annually.



Figure 13. Weston Cemetery

- 36 Under planning reference number 18/2400N full planning permission has been granted for a cemetery extension to the existing Weston Cemetery (directly opposite the existing cemetery) the access to this extension is planned to be from Cemetery Road.
- 37 According to the proposed site plan included within the planning application the site will accommodate a series of ash vaults and approximately 350 burial plots.



Figure 14. Future Weston Cemetery Extension

2.1.10 Wilmslow Cemetery

38 Based on burial data between 2016 and 2022, on average 31 burials are completed annually at Wilmslow Cemetery and 27 ash interments are completed per annum.



Figure 15. Wilmslow Cemetery

2.2 Trends in Deaths in Cheshire East Borough

- 39 The number of deaths in the Cheshire East borough has fluctuated between 2016 and 2021, reflecting various factors, including demographic changes and external events, such as the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 40 Deaths across the borough were at their lowest levels in 2017 when 3,930 people died.
- 41 The most significant change occurred in 2020, when there was a sharp increase in the number of deaths to 4,478. This considerable spike can be largely attributed to the global Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in a higher mortality rate worldwide. The impact of the pandemic on Cheshire East is evident in this data.
- 42 By 2021, while the number of deaths remained elevated at 4,231, it was slightly lower than the peak observed in 2020, possibly indicating the beginning of a recovery or a return to pre-pandemic levels. Overall, these numbers reflect the complex interplay of factors that influence mortality rates in a region, with the pandemic being a significant driver of change during this period.
- 43 Across the time period indicated in the figure below the average number of deaths was 4,117 per annum.

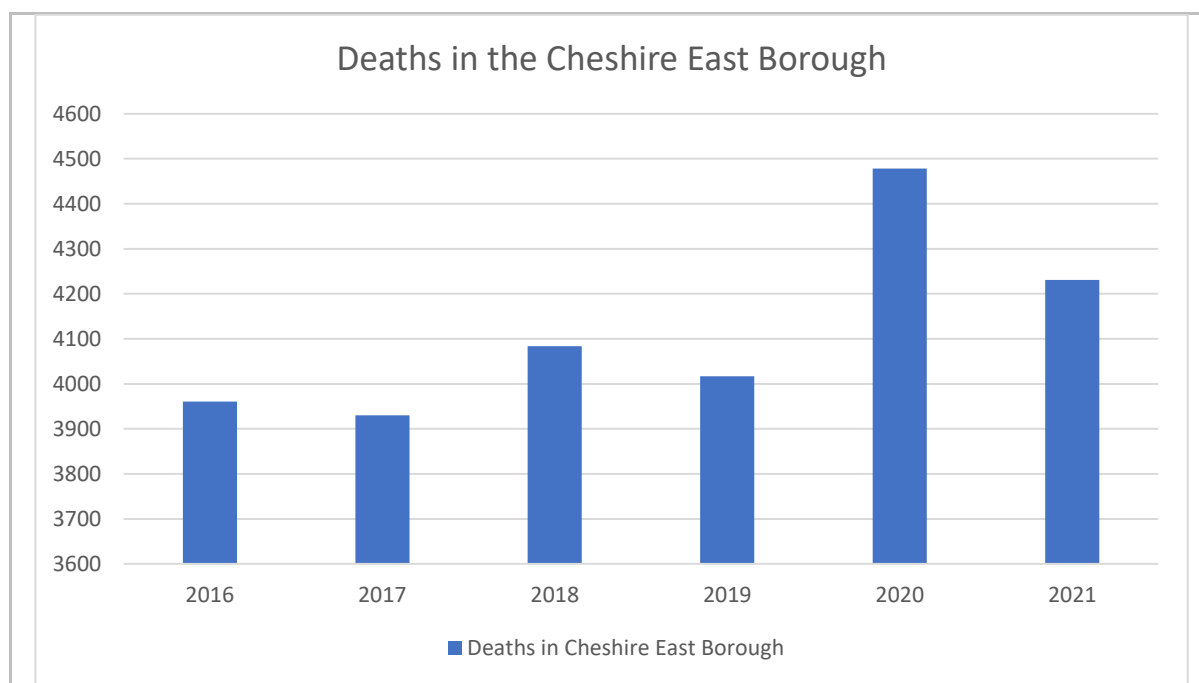


Figure 16. Deaths in the Cheshire East Borough

- 44 The data in figure 16, table 4 and figure 19 does not include information relating to 2022 as the data from the ONS has not been published at the time of publication of this document.

2.3 Trends in Burials Across Cheshire East Operated Cemeteries

- 45 The data highlighted in the figure below indicates that the number of burials over time is decreasing in the Cheshire East borough.
- 46 Given the information presented in chapter 2.2 of this strategy, this trend is somewhat unexpected, as in years where mortality rates were greatly affected by the Covid-19 Pandemic (2020 and 2021) the number of burials across the borough was lower than the number of burials in 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

- 47 As figure 16 identifies, the number of deaths during the Covid-19 Pandemic was higher than average therefore the decrease in number of burials can largely be attributed to changing in burial patterns and an increase in cremations during Covid.
- 48 The average number of burials per annum is 325 burials.

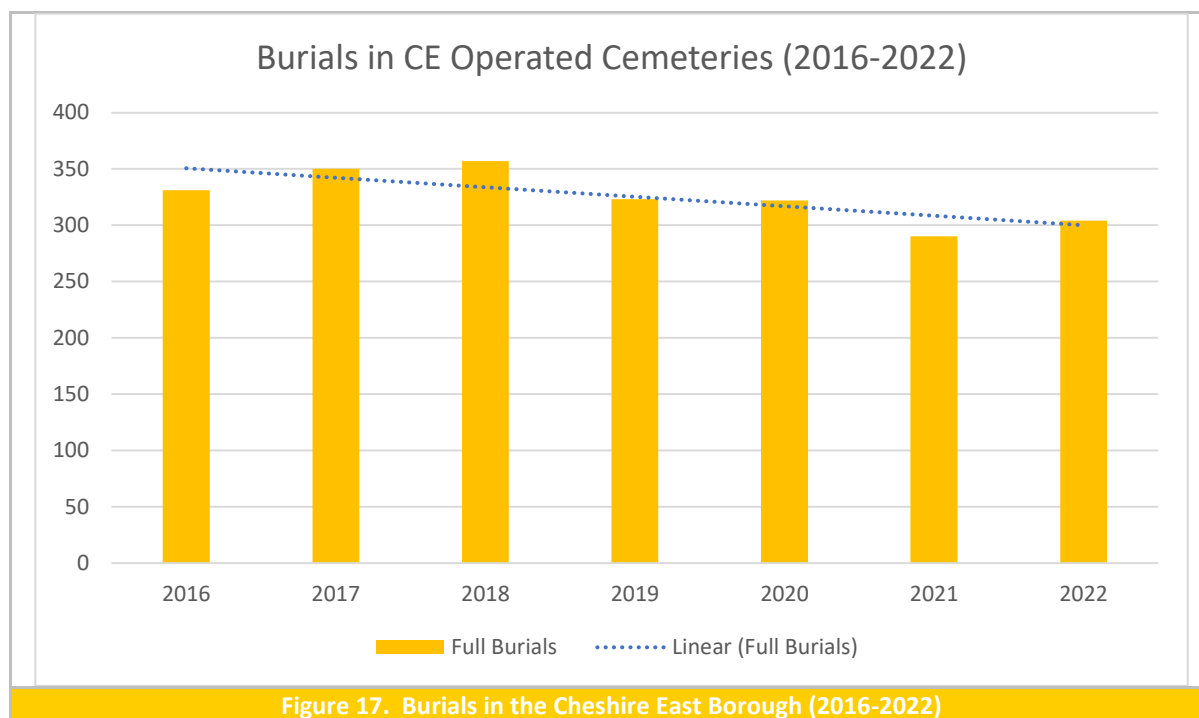
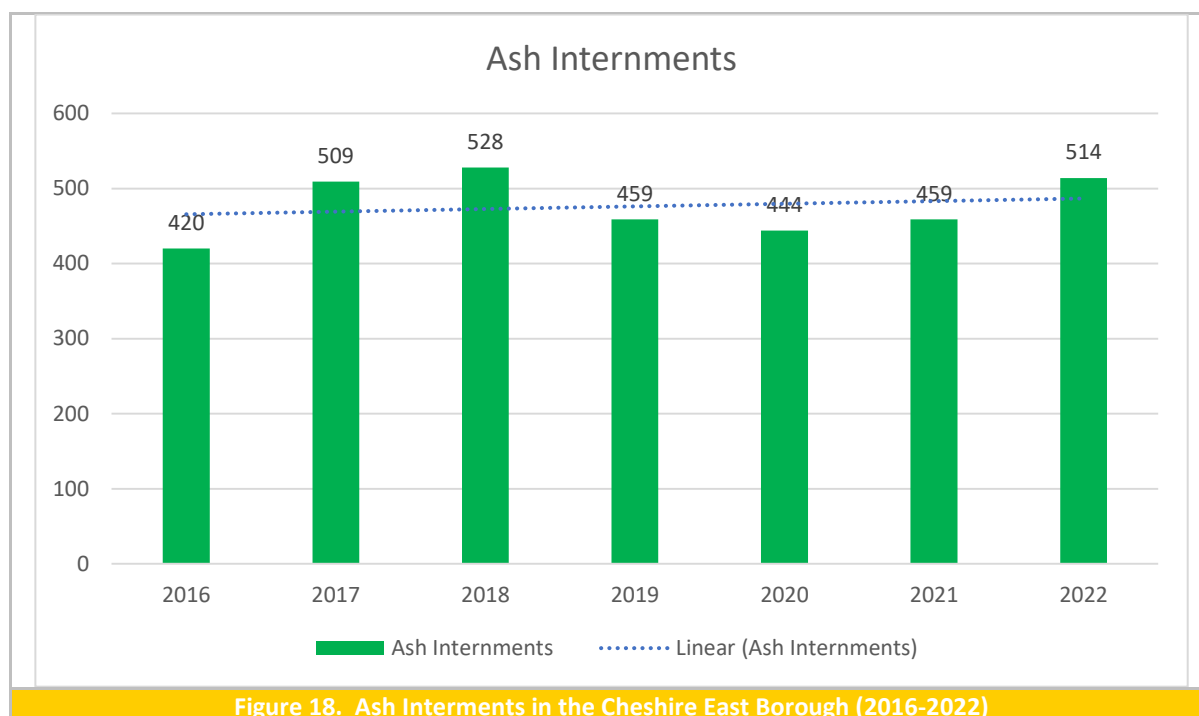


Table 4. Percentage of Burials as a proportion of Total Deaths

Year	Percentage of Burials (When compared to total deaths)
2016	8.36%
2017	8.91%
2018	8.74%
2019	8.04%
2020	7.19%
2021	6.85%

- 49 The percentage of burials (at Cheshire East borough operated cemeteries) as a proportion of total deaths has fallen over time, with burials accounting for 8.91% of deaths in 2017 whereas in 2021 burials accounted for 6.85% of deaths.
- 50 It is essential to acknowledge that the data presented in the table above does not account for deaths that have been registered in the Cheshire East Borough and then the burial has been located outside of the borough.
- 51 Whilst this analysis does not consider that post 2020 Knutsford cemetery is no longer being operated by Cheshire East Council, as Knutsford Cemetery was completing on average 26 burials between 2016 and 2019 the removal of this data set does not account for the sizeable drop in burial numbers as a percentage of deaths.

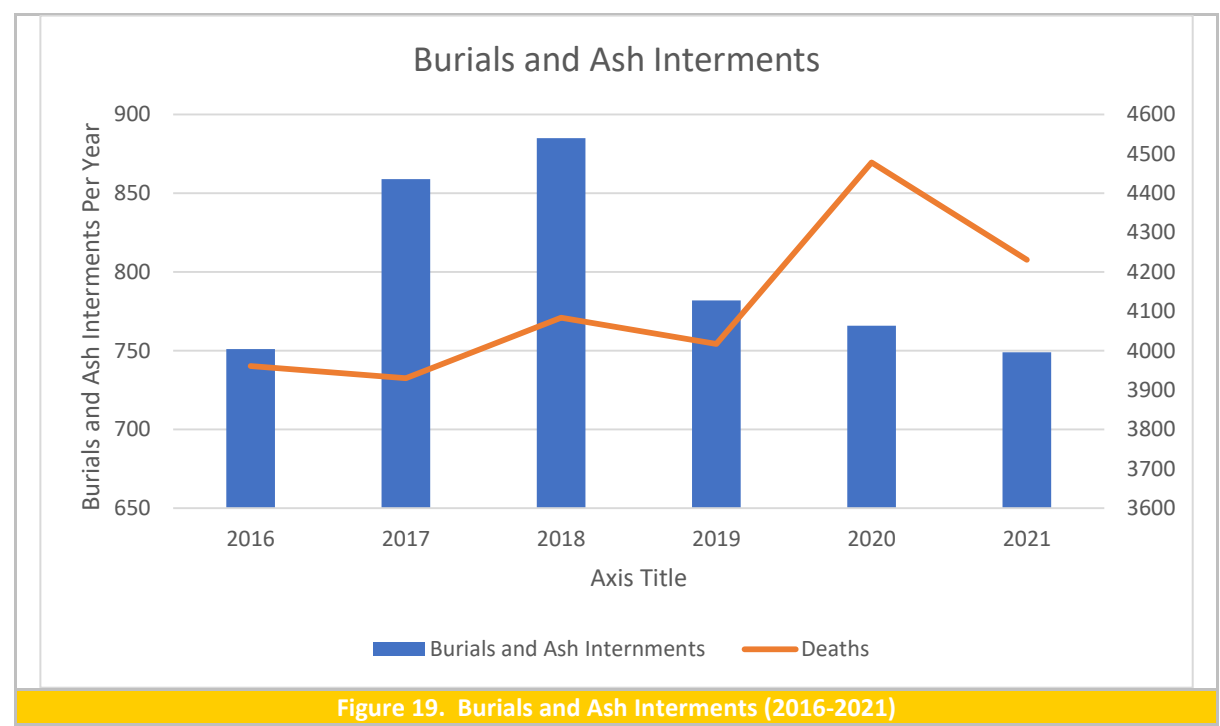
2.4 Trends in Ash Interments



- 52 The number of cremations completed across the UK is rising. The trend line on the graph above, indicates that over time the number of ash interments has increased in the Cheshire East Borough and the number of ash interments is larger than the number of full burials.
- 53 In the future this trend is expected to continue, as the price of burial plots continues to increase, as the value of land increases⁵. 3 above ground ash interments use approximately 1 square meter of area; therefore, they are far less costly than full burials. The cost for a cremation at Crewe Crematorium in January 2022 was £840 and the cost for interment is £266 (total cost of £1,106), whereas the cost for a full burial for a resident in the borough was £1,389 (Non-resident fee is £2,778).
- 54 A single full adult lawn burial measures approximately 2 square meters, therefore for a full burial the revenue per square meter is approximately £695. Whilst the possible revenue generated from a square meter of ash interments (3 cremations and ash interments) is £3,318. The revenue from ash interments is 477.4% than that of burials. As a result of this and with consideration to the fact that the number of ash interments is increasing, Cheshire East Borough Council should ensure there is suitable provision for ash interments in the future.

⁵ Statista (2023). Available Via: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1302115/development-land-value-change-uk/#?text=According%20to%20the%20forecast%2C%20land,by%20three%20percent%20in%202023>.

2.5 A Combined Analysis of Death, Burial and Ash Interment Data in the Cheshire East Borough



- 55 The information presented as part of sections 2.2 to 2.4 is summarised in the figure above.
- 56 Burials and Ash Interments peaked at Cheshire East operated cemeteries in 2018.

2.6 Cremations in the Cheshire East Borough

- 57 A key factor affecting burial demand, is the relationship between cremation and burials. Over time the number of cremations completed across the UK has increased significantly, therefore the number of burials per annum has subsequently reduced⁶. The key factor as to why the popularity of cremation has increased over time is due to the cost and availability of cremation and crematoria. Due to the highly competitive nature of the cremation sector, this has forced prices for cremation to stay relatively low (compared to the cost of a burial).
- 58 The Cremation Society of Great Britain log the number of cremations completed per annum in the Directory of Crematoria each year, the table below illustrates the increase in popularity of cremation across England, Wales, the Isle of Man and the Channel Islands across the last 30 years.

Table 5. Percentage of Cremations Compared to Number of Deaths				
Year	Number of Deaths	Number of Cremations	Percentage	Percentage Change (Decadal Variance)
1989	580,108	401,420	69.20%	N/A
1999	559,423	404,050	72.22%	3.02%
2009	495,036	377,326	76.22%	4%
2019	530,481	428,046	80.64%	4.42%

⁶ The Cremation Society of Great Britain (2023) Available Via: <https://www.cremation.org.uk/>

- 59 The data in the table above demonstrates that over time, the number of cremations compared to the number of deaths has increased significantly in the last 30 years. Over the course of each decade, the percentage increase in the number of cremations compared to all deaths is approximately 4%. If this trend is to continue in the future, Cheshire East Council can expect the burial demand across the borough to fall over time and the demand for cremations to increase at Crewe and Macclesfield Crematorium.
- 60 The data analysed under section 2.1.2 of the strategy does not analyse burial numbers over a long period of time and therefore demonstrate the decline in burial numbers over time.
- 61 In addition, the number of cremations at Crewe and Macclesfield Crematoria (owned by Cheshire East Council and operated by Orbitas Bereavement Services Ltd) has increased over time across the two facilities:
- 1999 – 2,776 cremations.
 - 2009 – 2,884 cremations, 3.89% increase in cremations from 1999.
 - 2019 – 2,875 cremations, 0.31% decrease in cremations from 2009.
- 62 There is a slight contraction in the number of cremations completed in 2019 compared to 2009, which is likely a result of other crematoria opening in the region, which in turn reduces the number of cremations as the ‘catchment area’ reduces in size.
- 63 Macclesfield Crematorium operates close to the crematorium’s practical capacity which is a key factor as to why the number of cremations on site has plateaued over time.
- 64 The data used in this section of the strategy has not considered the cremation data from 2020 or 2021, due to the increased rate of cremation, as a result of the Covid 19 Pandemic.

2.7 Parish Churches

- 65 Section 2.1.2 of this strategy explores the trends in burials across the Cheshire East operated cemeteries and estimates that the number of burials completed per annum has decreased across the cemeteries listed over time.
- 66 The previous strategy developed in March 2019, reviewed and examined the burial data from Parish Churches across the Diocese of Chester. The Diocese of Chester supported the review with information on burials per annum and burial capacity. In order to update the review, the Diocese of Chester was once again contacted in June 2023, however they stated that they were unable to respond to the information request on this occasion.
- 67 Therefore, this section of the strategy uses previous data to make statistical assumptions regarding to the number of burials at parish churches and importantly the remaining burial capacity of the cemetery.
- 68 In 2018 75% of the 61 churches within Cheshire East recorded as having churchyards that were in use for burials. The survey identified 35 Church of England churchyards where burials still take place, although some only offer space for the burial of ashes.
- 69 Churchyards often serve small local communities and may be hundreds of years old. These factors combine to make it difficult to establish precise figures for average demand for new graves and the number of grave spaces remaining.
- 70 The results of the 2018 survey are indicated below:

Table 6. Cheshire East Survey – Parish Church Burial Data (2018)

Deanery	Parish	Church	Coffin burials per Year	Capacity in years	Ashes burials per year	Capacity in years
Bowdon	Ashley	St Elizabeth's			4	20
Congleton	Alsager	Christ Church	30	1		
Congleton	Astbury	St Mary's	15	10		
Congleton	Brereton	St Oswald's	2	20		
Congleton	Church Hulme	St Luke's	5	30		
Congleton	Eaton	Christ Church	1	50		
Congleton	Goostrey	St Luke's	5	5		10
Congleton	Hulme Walfield	St Michael	1	50		
Congleton	Mossley	Holy Trinity		0	2	5
Congleton	Smallwood	St John the Baptist	2	4		
Congleton	St John	St John	2	5	2	15
Congleton	St Peter	St Peter		0	8	4
Congleton	Warmingham	St Leonards	3	50	2	50
Knutsford	Chelford	St John the Evangelist	3	10		
Knutsford	Lower Peover	St Oswald	5	50		
Knutsford	Marthall	All Saints		50		
Knutsford	Over Peover	St Lawrence	5	50		
Knutsford	Over Tabley	St Paul's		100	1	50
Macclesfield	Bosley	St Mary the Virgin	1	20	1	10
Macclesfield	Gawsworth	St James the Great	2	30	7	
Macclesfield	Henbury	St Thomas	1	10		
Macclesfield	Marton	St James & St Paul	1	50		
Macclesfield	Pott Shrigley	St Christopher's	1	40	2	35
Macclesfield	Sutton St James	St James	3	10		
Macclesfield	Wildboarclough	St Saviour	1	30		
Macclesfield	Windle	St Michael	2	8		
Malpas	Marbury	St Michael and All Angels	2	15	2	20
Nantwich	Acton	St Mary	6	75	6	400
Nantwich	Baddiley	St Michael	1	50		
Nantwich	Burleydam	St Mary & St Michael	1	50		
Nantwich	Crewe Green	St Michael & All Angels		100		
Nantwich	Haslington	St Matthew's Haslington		100		

Nantwich	Leighton-cum-Minshull Vernon	St Peters	6	100	3	
Nantwich	Wistaston	St Mary the Virgin	12	20	15	20
Nantwich	Wrenbury	St Chad	9		5	

2.8 Town Councils

71 There are 11 Town Councils within Cheshire East. A series of cemeteries across the Cheshire East region are operated by town councils, these cemeteries include:

- Middlewich Cemetery.
- Audlem Cemetery.
- Nether Alderley Cemetery.
- Swettenham Cemetery.
- Knutsford Cemetery.

72 In common with larger local authorities, town and parish councils generally charge higher cemetery fees to non-residents. They may also have a policy of not accepting non-resident burials, unless specific links with the community can be evidenced, as a means to prolong the capacity of their cemeteries to meet local need.

73 Swettenham Parish Council's cemetery regulations specify that rights of burial will be granted subject to one of the following conditions being met⁷:

- Resident within the parish of Swettenham at date of death. Former residents who have left the parish due to retirement, marriage, residential care, but have a strong family link with the parish community.
- Former residents who were listed in the Register of Electors for the parish within the period of 5 years prior to death. Residents from adjoining parishes who have maintained a strong connection with the parish by way of community involvement.

74 Nether Alderley Parish Council manages its cemetery through a Burial Board with Regulations that include persons entitled to be buried in the Burial Ground⁸:

- "Parishioners": Persons who are resident within the civil parish of Nether Alderley or who are on the current electoral roll of St. Mary's Church, Alderley.
- "Non-Parishioners": Anyone who lives outside the civil parish of Nether Alderley but within the ecclesiastical parish of St. Mary, Alderley. "Non-Parishioners": Anyone who lives outside the civil parish of Nether Alderley but who has lived within the civil parish of Nether Alderley for a period of no less than 10 years at any stage. "Non-Parishioners": Anyone who has been on the electoral roll of St. Mary's Church, Alderley, for a period of no less than 10 years at any stage. "Non-Parishioners": Anyone who has lived within the ecclesiastical parish area of Great Warford for a period of no less than 10 years at any stage.

75 Therefore, burial space might be available in parish council cemeteries, but only to local residents.

⁷ Swettenham Council (2023). Available Via:

http://www.swettenhamparishcouncil.org.uk/_UserFiles/Files/Cemetery/Cemetery%20Rules%202023.pdf

⁸ Nether Alderley Council (2019). Available Via: <https://www.netheralderleyparish.com/wp-content/uploads/Burial-Board-Regulations-2019-Booklet-1.pdf>

3 Demographic Context

76 In order to further understand and analyse the demand for burial space, it is important to consider the demographic context of the Cheshire East Borough. In particular the following factors are key to understanding the demand for burial space:

- Ageing Population.
- Birth Rates and Expanding Population.
- Mortality Rates.
- Religious Beliefs.
- Socioeconomic Factors.

77 This chapter will explore the relationship and trends between the factors listed above and the burial data presented throughout chapter 2.

78 The data presented in this section of the strategy is largely taken from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Census Data which was collected in 2021. Some of the data presented is based upon population estimates to formulate population projections at local authority level.

3.1 Ageing Population

79 The table below shows the number of Cheshire East residents split into age bands relative to England as a whole. The data shows the predominant age band is Age 55-59 in Cheshire East, representing 7.65% of the population and the predominant age band is Age 30-34 for England, representing 7% of the population. The 55-59 age group is likely reflective of the 'Baby Boomer' generation⁹.

80 There will be an increase in need for burial services associated with the Baby Boomers which is estimated between the years of 2026 and 2044. The estimation is based on the increase in births in the generation between 1946 and 1970, then the average life expectancy of 80 years old.

81 In the Cheshire East Borough, the number of people aged over 65 in 2021 was 89,200, accounting for 18.41% of the total population. In the future this figure is projected to increase, and an expanding ageing population is intrinsically linked to increasing death rates due to a larger proportion of deaths occurring. Therefore, regional and national death rates are expected to rise in the future, along with the need for burials. Similarly, the population aged over 65 in England in 2021 was also 18.41%.

82 Upon comparison of data previously collected as part of the 2011 Census the proportion of the population aged over 65 has decreased from 19.3%, this can largely be attributed to the migration of young people to the borough and as a result of Covid-19 whereby death rates particularly increased amongst the elderly age groups. By contrast, the proportion of the population aged over 65 in England has increased by 2.01% from 16.4%.

83 Given that a high percentage of the population in the borough are aged between 50 and 65 (21.67%) in the next 15 to 30 years, it is highly likely that the ageing population will significantly increase the death rate and thus more burials and ash interment will occur per annum in the coming years.

⁹ ONS (2023) Available From:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/articles/populationprofilesforlocalauthoritiesinengland/2020-12-14>

Table 7. Age bands for Cheshire East residents and for England (2021)

Age Band	Cheshire East	% Of Population	England	% Of Population
0-4	19,900	4.99%	3,077,000	5.45%
5-9	22,100	5.54%	3,348,600	5.93%
10-14	22,900	5.74%	3,413,100	6.04%
15-19	19,700	4.94%	3,218,900	5.70%
20-24	17,600	4.41%	3,414,400	6.04%
25-29	21,700	5.44%	3,715,400	6.58%
30-34	24,300	6.09%	3,952,600	7.00%
35-39	24,500	6.14%	3,795,400	6.72%
40-44	23,900	5.99%	3,580,400	6.34%
45-49	26,400	6.62%	3,602,600	6.38%
50-54	30,300	7.60%	3,907,700	6.92%
55-59	30,500	7.65%	3,806,300	6.74%
60-64	25,600	6.42%	3,256,100	5.76%
65-69	22,300	5.59%	2,767,500	4.90%
70-74	24,400	6.12%	2,796,600	4.95%
75-79	18,000	4.51%	2,038,800	3.61%
80-84	12,500	3.13%	1,427,900	2.53%
85-89	7,600	1.91%	872,200	1.54%
90+	4,400	1.10%	498,200	0.88%
Total	398,800	100%	56,489,800	100%

- 84 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) provide population estimates each year and the number of deaths recorded each year, this data is shown in the table below for the period between 2016-2021.
- 85 The data demonstrates that in the Cheshire East area, the population is estimated to have increased each year between 2016-2021. It is likely that the increase in population between 2020 and 2021 is due to the population estimates for each year until 2021 being lower than the actual number, as the 2021 figure uses data collected from the Census.
- 86 Upon review of the death rate for the borough it is clear that the death rates have stayed fairly constant between 2016 and 2021 (when not considering 2020), this is expected as due to the high population of the area it would require a significant unusual event (such as a natural disaster) to increase deaths by a significant number.
- 87 The population density across the borough is highest in the urban areas of Crewe and Macclesfield. Also, the population centres of Congleton, Knutsford, Sandbach and Wilmslow have notable populations.
- 88 According to data collected as part of the 2021 census the population density of the borough is 341.9 (the number of usual residents per square kilometre). This is lower than the population density of the northwest region which is 525.8 residents per square kilometre and lower than the population density for England and Wales which is 394.6 residents per square kilometre.
- 89 Given that population density is relatively low in the Cheshire East region, it implies that residents of the Cheshire East Borough are required to travel further distances in order to reach community facilities such as cemeteries.

Table 8. Population estimates, Total deaths and death rates for Cheshire East Borough (ONS)

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
	Cheshire East					
Population	376,700	378,800	380,800	384,200	386,700	400,500
Total deaths	3,961	3,930	4,084	4,017	4,478	4,231
Death rate	1.05%	1.04%	1.07%	1.09%	1.16%	1.06%

- 90 Over the 6 years shown in the table above the population in the borough has increased by 6.32%. If the population of the Cheshire East borough continues to increase at 6.32%, in 30 years the population could reach 544,098 people in 2051. This increase in population and an ageing population would cause increased pressure on bereavement services in the borough (both burial provision and number of cremations).
- 91 As discussed throughout this section of the strategy, Cheshire East Council should plan and prepare for an increased population (and increased death rate) by ensuring the council's existing cemeteries and any new cemeteries have appropriate provision for both burials and ash interments to meet the needs of Cheshire East communities.

3.2 Religious Beliefs

- 92 Religious beliefs and practices play a significant role in an individual's choice between burial and cremation, with certain religions traditions prohibiting cremation.
- 93 As a local authority one of the core values of the Cheshire East Borough organisation is to '*provide services that customers need*', therefore suitable burial provision needs to be in place to meet the needs of all religious communities.
- 94 The table below indicates the population of the Cheshire East Borough (2021) by religious group. Given this information was collected during a census, 5.5% of responses were registered as 'Not Answered', in practice every person has a religious belief even if they have no religious belief.

Table 9. Population by Religious Group for Cheshire East Borough (ONS)

Religious Group	Percentage of Population
Christian	54.3% (216,629)
No Religion	37.7% (150,257)
Not Answered	5.5% (21,815)
Muslim	1.0% (4,140)
Hindu	0.5% (2,046)
Other Religion	0.4% (1,558)
Buddhist	0.3% (1,314)
Jewish	0.2% (640)
Sikh	0.1% (371)

- 95 Across several cemeteries operated by Cheshire East there are records detailing historic provision for Islamic burials.
- 96 A review of provision in accordance with religious requirements will be completed in future supplementary documents.

3.3 Future Population Estimates

97 The ONS release a series of population estimates to project the likely population for local authorities across the UK¹⁰.

Table 10. 2018-based Subnational Population Projections (ONS)

Year	Projected Population Cheshire East Region
2018	380,790
2028	399,336
2038	413,025

98 The table above demonstrates that between 2018 and 2038, the ONS estimate that the population of the region is expected to increase by 8.465% to 413,025 people.

99 An increase in population will increase pressure on Cheshire East operated cemeteries.

¹⁰ ONS (2020). Available From:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/localauthoritiesinengland/table2>

4 Legal Context

4.1 The Provision and Maintenance of Cemeteries

100 Cheshire East Council is a burial authority by virtue of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended. The Council provides and manages its cemeteries within the framework of the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO), as amended.

101 The provision of cemeteries is not a statutory duty. However, LACO places various statutory duties upon local authorities in relation to cemeteries that they already provide, include the duty to “keep the cemetery in good order and repair, together with all buildings, walls and fences thereon and other buildings provided for use therewith” under the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 article 4 (1).

4.2 Maintenance of Closed Churchyards

102 The Local Government Act 1972 also places duties upon local authorities, in certain circumstances, in relation to Church of England churchyards. Where a churchyard has been formally closed under the Burial Act 1853 by Her Majesty by Order in Privy Council, the duty to maintain the churchyard automatically falls upon the Parochial Church Council.

103 However, the Parochial Church Council may serve a written request upon a relevant local authority, normally the Parish Council, to take over the maintenance of the churchyard. Within 3 months of the service of the original request, the parish council may in turn pass the responsibility to maintain the churchyard to the next relevant level of local government, including borough councils and unitary authorities.

104 The level of maintenance required in a closed churchyard is specified in the Local Government Act 1972 s.215(1):

105 3 Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 article 4(1)

- “... the parochial church council shall maintain it by keeping it in decent order and its walls and fences in good repair.”

106 Where, under s.215(2), the PCC serve a request on the relevant local authority to take over the maintenance of the churchyard there is a duty imposed:

- “... the maintenance of the churchyard shall be taken over by the authority on whom the request is served ...”

107 The local authority becomes responsible in lieu of the parochial church council for the maintenance of the closed churchyard and thus the local authority is under a statutory duty to maintain the closed churchyard to the same standard as that required by s.215(1) of the PCC, i.e.

- “in decent order and its walls and fences in good repair”.

108 The Ministry of Justice confirm this in its document ‘Churchyard Closures: Frequently Asked Questions’:

4.2.1 Consecration

109 With a consecrated burial ground, the responsibility to maintain the cemetery lies with the local authority however all the decisions associated with the management of the cemetery are required to be determined by the Church of England. On occasion this can lead to operational difficulties.

4.3 Re-use of Graves

110 Across the UK, there is a growing awareness of the unsustainable way in which cemeteries are managed. As cemeteries fill up, the solution is to create new cemeteries, leaving the old ones to decline through lack of income.

111 This is an inevitable consequence of the system created by the Victorians to meet a burial space crisis, caused by a rapid increase and urbanisation of the population and epidemics of cholera, which led to demand overwhelming supply in urban parish churchyards.

112 In seeking to rectify the situation at that time, the Victorians invented a solution that has created huge negative implications in the present. The Victorians not only enabled the formal closure of churchyards and the creation of new cemeteries, but also introduced the concept of granting burial rights in perpetuity and introduced legislation that prohibits the disturbance of human remains.

113 Whilst parish churchyards have met local burial needs for centuries by the re-use of graves, this is not an option in cemeteries where exclusive rights of burial and prohibitions on disturbance exist. Land becomes locked up and unavailable for further burials.

114 Legislation applies to London local authorities, which goes a little way towards enabling the re-use of graves. New legislation in Scotland is addressing this matter there. However, there appear to be no signs of new legislation forthcoming that would enable local authorities in England to extinguish exclusive rights and re-use old graves.

115 The term 're-use' refers to the disturbance of old burials in order to make space for new burials. It requires specific legal permission, without which it is illegal.

116 It is possible to obtain faculty permission from the Chancellor of the diocese to enable the re-use of old public graves in consecrated areas. This has already been successfully implemented at the City of London Cemetery and by the London Borough of Enfield at Edmonton Cemetery. The issue of a faculty cannot be guaranteed, but the likelihood is increased by adequate preparation for the faculty application process.

117 This option is not practicable for individual or small groups of graves and requires a reasonable number of public graves located within a defined area and which have not received a burial for 75 years or more.

118 In practice, the grave is reopened to sufficient depth for two new burials. It remains of the uppermost original burial are uncovered during excavation they are removed and reburied in a communal grave nearby. The remaining original burials are left undisturbed.

119 Since the faculties were issued to the two London local authorities mentioned above, s.25 of the Burial Act 1857 has been amended and a faculty could now authorise the exhumation of old burials and their replacement at a lower depth within the same grave.

120 It is important to note that the faculty jurisdiction of the Church of England does not override statute law and separate statutory powers are required to enable exclusive rights of burial to be extinguished. Such powers do not currently exist for local authorities outside of London.

121 Currently, re-use of old graves in Cheshire East could only occur under faculty relating solely to old public graves on consecrated land.

4.4 Burial Records

- 122 Since the 16th century, it has been a requirement for vicars to maintain a register of baptisms and marriages, and also burials in parish churchyards. The Parochial Registers Act 1812 required the Burial Register to be kept separately and prescribed its basic form and required all burials to be consecutively numbered. The Act also required a copy to be made of the entries in the Register to be sent annually to the Registrar of the Diocese.
- 123 When cemeteries first developed in the 19th Century, they followed this established pattern of keeping records of all burials. The Burial Act 1853 required the Register to be in the same format as a church Burial Register and, again, a copy of the entries to be sent annually to the Registrar of the Diocese. The Burial Act 1857 emphasized the importance of the Burial Register by making it a felony to wilfully damage, destroy or make a false entry in it.
- 124 The Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO), as amended by the Local Authorities' Cemeteries (Amendment) Order 1986, is the legislation currently applicable to the registration of burials and the recording of the sale of exclusive rights.
- 125 LACO was the first legislation to prescribe in some detail the content of the records. The 1986 amendment enables the keeping of the statutory cemetery records on computer.

5 **Public Consultation**

5.1 **Consultation outreach**

126 The prior Cemeteries Strategy Consultation conducted by Cheshire East Council was in 2018 with a total of 297 responses.

127 The latest consultation has surpassed this figure with 421 responses received representing a 42% increase between 2018 and 2022.

128 The results of the consultation are presented within this section of the report. The results of the consultation exercise were used to inform the strategy update. The results of the consultation informed the key shift from the previous report which suggested that CEC should continue to operate two sites (the updated strategy suggests that the sites listed throughout this report should continue to be operated into the future.

5.2 **Burial Versus Cremation**

129 Majority (54%) prefer cremation with 31% preferring burial. Most preferring burial (79%) would prefer to be buried in a graveyard next to relatives or friends.

5.3 **Location of Future Burial Provision in Cheshire East**

130 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.
- Detractors suggested:
- 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

5.4 **Alternative Preferences After Death**

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

- 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

5.5 Environmental Sustainability

132 Respondents supported environmental sustainability in Cheshire Easts cemeteries and crematoria:

- 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.

133 While 16/33 comments suggested the council should make cemeteries wildlife-friendly and 'natural', there were detractors who stated:

- *It is also important for cemeteries to be neat and attractive places for the bereaved to visit, and making cemeteries places for wildlife should not mean the council exploit this solely as a cost saving exercise at the expense of maintaining cemeteries to a reasonable standard.*

5.6 Gypsy, Roma & Traveller Community Feedback

134 The consultation included outreach from the council's Communities team who visited 17 different Gypsy, Roma & Traveller addresses across Cheshire East, 21 residents from these sites completing a short survey who 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 (24%).
- 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.

135 Detractors disagreed that memorabilia should be removed from graves suggesting that gifts on graves and the way these communities grieve is cultural with some responses suggesting a sense of victimisation in how these communities choose to bury and/or celebrate their dead.

136 *It is noted that the wording in the current draft is to be amended to the proper Gypsy, Roma & Traveller designation.*

5.7 Cemetery Regulations

137 47% of respondents felt content and tone of current Cemetery Regulations is appropriate, 7% did not think they were appropriate, and 46% did not know either way. Suggested improvements to the regulations included:

- Making the tone less "haughty", "cold", and "aggressive".
- Being written in a more customer friendly with lighter style of language in plain English
- Producing a shorter, easily readable version, perhaps using a larger font, with images and colour to assist the visually impaired

138 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 (e.g decorations, photos, toys, teddies, decomposing items, tacky items, balloons, trinkets etc), especially after a certain amount of time with some suggesting a 2 week period
- 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

6 Vision, Policies and Objectives of CEC

- 139 The vision is to ensure that the quantitative and qualitative needs of the people of Cheshire East for burial are met, by working with other providers, both existing and potential, to enable this provision to be located in proximity to the population, which is often widely dispersed across Cheshire East's 1,166 square kilometres.
- 140 Since the previous strategy document was produced the local authorities, burial strategy has switched from focussing on providing the majority of burial provision across two sites in Crewe and Macclesfield respectively to a local focus with a series of local cemetery hubs to meet the burial needs of local communities.
- 141 The vision requires an awareness of levels of demand and capacity and their distribution, to seek to meet those needs through developing appropriate provision in terms of location and type of burial facilities.
- 142 A policy of optimising burial space in existing cemeteries, sensitive to aesthetic, heritage, and access considerations, would maximise the period during which each cemetery will be able to offer new graves.
- 143 A policy on an appropriate fee structure for exclusive rights of burial agreed with reference to supply and demand that could cover a range of exclusive rights that befits both the bereaved and the Council, would provide greater flexibility and sustainability.
- 144 Exclusive rights of burial could be offered with a range of periods, such as 25, 50 and 75 years, a range of renewal options, such as five or ten years, and priced accordingly. The shortest period would be offered at the lowest price and would benefit those unable to afford the longer periods. It would enable them to subsequently renew the exclusive rights at affordable rates if they so wished. This would be a more appropriate way to provide equality of opportunity than a single price.
- 145 Further policies are set to be developed following completion of the masterplans of each of the Cheshire East operated cemeteries.

7 Cemetery Strategy Short to Medium Term

146 The previous Cheshire East Cemeteries Strategy, published in March 2019 identifies a series of short, medium and long term actions and targets for the council to pursue.

147 The below section of the strategy outlines the progress to date against these targets and updates the actions if required.

148 The council's is currently delivering a capital project to replace the current data bases and mapping software. The project is currently in progress with the council's IT team and specialist IT partners.

149 Target 1 - the strategic management of the cemeteries requires ready access to reliable data, which will be provided by:

- Consolidation of the three separate BACAS databases.
- Inclusion of mapping of graves in BACAS for all cemeteries.
- Confirm ability of BACAS to produce management statistics suited to the specific needs of Cheshire East Council.
- Provision of resources, including training in the use of the mapping program, to identify graves in each section of each cemetery that are empty, available, and deliverable.
- Audit of data held within BACAS to ensure accuracy.

150 Target 1 Update – currently the council is delivering a capital project to replace the current data bases and mapping software. The project is currently in progress with the council's IT team and specialist IT partners.

151 Target 2 - review periods of exclusive rights, extension periods and pricing structure.

152 Target 2 Update - the Council has taken advice on Exclusive rights of burial to ensure compliance with legislation. Annual reviews of pricing structures occur as part of the local authorities' fees and charges scheme. The council consider this target as actioned and complete as the council has received advice on exclusive rights of burial.

153 Target 3 - research potential solutions to overcoming difficult ground conditions at Wilmslow Cemetery.

154 Target 3 Update - this action is set to be undertaken as part of the site management plan to be developed for all cemetery sites following completion of the cemetery's strategy. A number of options have been reached to adapt to ground conditions.

155 Target 4 - progress the development of the extension of Weston Cemetery.

156 Target 4 Update – a planning application for the cemetery extension has been completed and granted with full permission. Construction is yet to formally commence on this project as of July 2023.

157 Target 5 - to consider, where appropriate, the transfer of existing facilities or working to set up a trust for future cemetery provision where there is a desire to provide more local provision over and above Cheshire East's principal provision.

158 Target 5 Update - the council is open to consider all applications for Town or Parish Councils for the transfer of facilities or management and is aware since the last strategy the completion of transfer of the operation of Knutsford cemetery to Knutsford Town Council.

159 Target 6 - the Council will also consider how to provide for natural and modern methods of burial such as green, woodland or natural burial grounds, or "park like" spaces where people can scatter or bury ashes/ash containers.

160 Target 6 Update - this target will be considered as part of the management plan for key sites with proposals where appetite at certain Council sites to provide for this type of commemoration. The council is also aware of the development within the bough of private sector provision to fulfil this need.

161 It is proposed to develop the site operational management plans over a circa 12-month period in the following prioritised order;

- 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

162 As these documents are operational in nature it is intended that they will be developed, approved and implemented for use under a delegation to officers.

163 Developed management plans will be drawn together into a prioritised Cemeteries Investment Programme (CIP) 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. Once developed the CIP will be brought back to Committee at a future date for approval, prior to implementation, excluding those projects which are already committed investments.

8 Cemetery Strategy Long Term (2043 Onwards)

164 Given that 5 years have passed since the previous strategy the councils long term targets remain the same as the previous strategy update.

165 Cheshire East Council to manage the cemeteries referenced throughout the strategy, providing burial facilities that are sustainable, through a combination of the measures already taken in the short and medium term.

166 Continue to consider the transfer of existing facilities and or the creation of trusts for future cemetery provision, where appropriate, (as above).

167 The short-term actions relating to BACAS will provide ready access to accurate and reliable data and associated mapping will enable the Council in the long-term to:

- Optimise the use of land already available within existing cemeteries.
- Continue liaison, co-operation and appropriate degrees of joint-working, with town and parish council and churches to ensure continued burial space provision to meet local need.

168 The council is looking to implement the developed cemetery management plans and extensions in accordance with the CIP and giving due consideration to the financial ability of the council to deliver this.