

OPEN

**Environment and Communities
Committee**

27 March 2025

Cemeteries Investment Programme

Report of: Philip Cresswell, Executive Director – Place

Report Reference No: EC/18/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All Cheshire East Wards

For Decision or Scrutiny: Decision

Purpose of Report

1. Is to update Members on the work undertaken following the adoption of the Cemeteries Strategy and Regulations at the February 2024 Committee.
2. It seeks Committee approval of the Cemeteries Design guide to progress cemetery development in accordance with the principles of the adopted Strategy.
3. It asks Members to note the approach taken to prioritising the investment into the Council's cemeteries estate and seeks approval to move forward with the first two years of that investment.

Executive Summary

4. The Cemeteries Strategy Report provides an update on the work undertaken following the adoption of the Cemeteries Strategy and regulations in February 2024. The report seeks approval for the Cemeteries Design Guide to progress cemetery development in line with the adopted Strategy's principles.
5. The Cemeteries Strategy covers ten sites managed by the Council's Bereavement Services team; the vision of the Strategy is to ensure that the burial needs of Cheshire East residents are met by working with

other providers to enable this provision to be located near the population. The Design Guide sets standards for the appearance and services of Cheshire East Cemeteries, guiding future site management plans, development, and investment priorities.

6. The report also includes an example management plan and outlines the process undertaken to develop a prioritised investment programme.

The Environment and Communities Committee is recommended to:

1. Approve the adoption of the Cemeteries Design Guide, as contained at Appendix A to this report.
2. Note the approach taken to prioritising future investment into the Council controlled cemetery sites and the need for this programme to be regularly reviewed to ensure that it remains relevant to the immediate and longer-term needs of the estate.
3. Approve the delivery of the Cemeteries Investment Programme for 2025/26 and 2026/27 and delegate authority to the Director Planning and Environment, to take all necessary steps to implement the programme, subject to funding and grant availability.

Background

7. The Council's Cemeteries Strategy (the "Strategy") and Regulations (the "Regulations") were adopted on the 1 February 2024 by the Committee.
8. The Strategy covers a total of ten sites which are managed by the Councils Bereavement Services team.

These sites are;

- Alderley Edge Cemetery, Chelford Road, Chorley SK9 7TQ
- Congleton Cemetery, Howey Lane, Congleton, CW12 4AE
- Coppenhall Cemetery (Closed), Reid Street, Coppenhall, CW1 3DZ
- Crewe Cemetery, Badger Avenue, Crewe, CW1 3JG
- Macclesfield Cemetery, Prestbury Road, Macclesfield, SK10 3BU
- Meadow Brook Cemetery, Minshull New Road, Crewe, CW1 3PP

- Nantwich Cemetery, Whitehouse Lane, Nantwich, CW5 6HP
- Sandbach Cemetery, off The Hill, Sandbach, CW11 1JJ
- Weston Cemetery, Cemetery Road, Weston, Crewe, CW2 5LQ
- Wilmslow Cemetery, Manchester Road, Wilmslow, SK9 2LE

9. These are located as shown in Figure 1 below

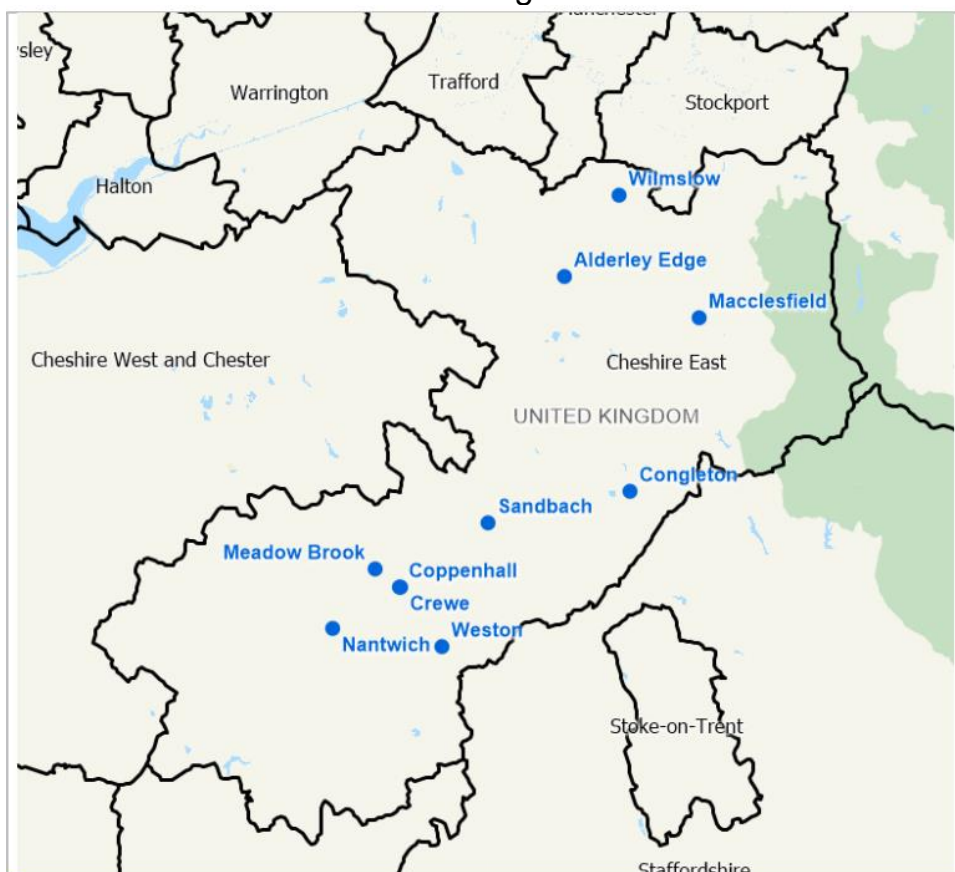


Figure 1 Cemetery Locations

10. Middlewich Cemetery, Audlem Cemetery, Nether Alderley Cemetery, Swettenham Cemetery and Knutsford Cemeteries are out of scope of this report as they are not operated by Cheshire East Council.
11. The vision of the Strategy 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.
12. Following the adoption of the strategy a Design Guide to inform future management and extensions of our cemeteries has been developed and is contained within Appendix A of this report.

13. The development of the Design Guide has been informed by research into other similar documents published by other local authorities who are responsible for cemetery sites.
14. The Cheshire East Council Cemeteries Design Guide sets the standards for the appearance and services of Cheshire East Cemeteries. It guides future site management plans, development, and investment priorities, including site expansions.
15. The guide addresses constraints in cemetery design, such as health and safety legislation, planning, and accessibility. It emphasises compliance with the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order (1977) and equalities legislation to ensure accessible infrastructure.
16. Health and Safety is paramount, with the council responsible for the safety of all individuals (staff and members of the public) working within and attending these sites. All site development and operational activities must comply with relevant health and safety legislation, including, but not limited to the Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974.
17. The document prioritises investment in cemetery development based on a hierarchy of constraints, focusing on creating a safe and accessible environment, and achieving legislative compliance. It also highlights the importance of maintaining green spaces, promoting sustainable development, and conserving heritage features.
18. The Design Guide will be used in the development of management plans for each cemetery site. Site management plans will inform and promote consistent approaches to site maintenance, safeguarding and unlocking capacity and future prioritised investment at each location.
19. An example management plan (Congleton Cemetery) is enclosed with in Appendix B of this report.
20. In order to inform an initial investment programme desk top reviews and site surveys of each cemetery have been undertaken to establish a baseline of asset condition and need. This process has focussed on two aspects, firstly maintenance and upkeep of existing infrastructure and secondly requirements for future expansion of capacity.
21. In order that all requirements identified across the ten sites can be considered equitably a prioritisation matrix has been developed, which assigns scores against pre-determined criteria as follows;
22. Site works within the investment programme have been categorised using the following criteria:

- Health & Safety Management
- Accessibility
- Cremator Maintenance
- Capacity
- Inclusivity
- Grant Support
- Operational need
- Business development
- Biodiversity enhancement
- Aesthetic enhancement

23. In order to break down the investment into manageable and deliverable programmes of work and in the context of the Council's current financial position, these have then been split into delivery time bands. Where needed this has considered for instance the known timings for need for specific cemetery extensions for instance.
24. The investment periods have been split into several phases that focus on an initial one to two year period to factor business capacity and safety critical works, along with a two to four and a five to ten year period that will align with developmental need in the longer term for sites where capacity issues are not of immediate concern.
25. Clearly the prioritised investment programme is relevant at the point in time that it is produced however it will be necessary to undertake regular reviews to ensure that continues to be so, when considering the likes of asset condition, market forces and so forth.
26. The focus therefore will be to consider investment programme in two yearly cycles, with committee approval sought to move forward with the first two years of investment with a further report brought back in due course setting out future years priorities.
27. In 2025/26 and 2026/27 a total of £939k is proposed to be spent. Notable proposed priorities include:
 - Initial site extension works at Alderley Edge, Sandbach, and Weston Cemetery.
 - Memorial Safety works at Alderley Edge, Crewe, Macclesfield, Nantwich, Sandbach, and Wilmslow Cemetery
 - Drainage works at Meadow Brook Cemetery with an initial drainage survey at Congleton Cemetery.
 - Road repair/ resurfacing works at Crewe and Wilmslow Cemetery.

28. The site management plans once fully developed will be published to the relevant sections of the Council's bereavement services webpage so that all residents and users have a clear understanding of the current and future proposals for their local site.
29. The investment programme will also be published to the same area of the Council's website and annual updates will be offered as to the progress against its delivery. These updates will be shared informally with the Committee.

Consultation and Engagement

30. The consultation on the Strategy and Regulations was undertaken between 24th October and 23rd December 2022 with feedback taken from anyone who wished to respond. [Cemeteries Strategy & Regulations Consultation 2022 - Full report](#)
31. The Design Guide has been influenced by the consultation's comments surrounding continuing to create burial provision at all cemeteries, ensuring accessibility and supporting environmental sustainability.
32. All of the feedback has been used in further developing the Strategy and Regulations adopted at the Feb 2024 committee.

Reasons for Recommendations

33. The proposal supports the Effective an Enabling Council Commitment which states that we are addressing our challenges with a focus on delivering value for money, continuous improvement and better outcomes for Cheshire East's residents. We recognise that acting with integrity builds trust, enabling collaboration to deliver our shared ambitions.

Other Options Considered

34. The Committee could resolve not to adopt the proposed Cemeteries Design Guide or move forward with a prioritised investment programme in which case the practical aspects of managing, maintaining and developing our cemeteries estate would continue without clear and consistent guiding principles.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

35. The management of Cemeteries is a statutory function under the Local Government Act 1972, and the Local Authority Cemeteries Order 1977 which gives the Council broad powers when it comes to day-to-day management, layout, maintenance and erection of memorials.
36. Regulations made for the management of Cemeteries should be proportionate to achieve their aim, and should not disadvantage particular groups, or one particular group in their application.
37. The Regulations as drawn are proportionate and do not on the face of it disadvantage any one group, but in their application the Council will need to be alive to cultural sensitivities around memorials and what is, or is not appropriate in a particular setting. Cemeteries are however public places where a broad cross section of society will want or need access, and it may be necessary to impinge upon cultural sensitives at a particular setting. If required, this should be supportable by reference to a legitimate aim.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

38. The prioritised investment plan has been based on cost estimates, profiled over a number of years from 2025/26 onwards. Based on the majority of schemes requiring capital borrowing upfront, an affordable programme has been designed to utilise the yearly receipts from the environmental charge to fund the cost of borrowing.
39. The initial four year period of investment is estimated at £0.939m, the cost of borrowing is £56k p.a. (assumed 4.71% interest over 25 year payback). The annual receipts from the environmental charge are estimated at £0.2m which will be used to fund the annual cost of borrowing.
40. It is assumed that £124k of the investment proposals will be funded outright by the annual receipts of the environmental charge in 2025/26. Annual fee increases will take into account the additional costs of investment to ensure that the investment programme continues to be affordable.
41. Future year capital investment will seek section 106 and grant contributions where available and the total investment will need to align with the available receipts from the environmental charge to ensure the borrowing costs of the programme are fully funded.

42. As the scheme would be forward funded by borrowing this would need to be presented to the Capital Board for review and recommendation taken forward for approval in line with the Constitution.

Policy

43. The proposal primarily supports the commitments of the Cheshire East Plan 2025-29 as shown in Table 1:

Commitment 1: Unlocking Prosperity for all	Commitment 2: Improving Health and Wellbeing	Commitment 3: An Effective and Enabling Council
We want to build on our strengths and maximise the opportunities of our location and connectivity; our industry, commerce, agriculture and heritage.	Cheshire East is a great place for children, young people and adults. We want it to be an even better one, enabling people to live a healthier, longer life; with good mental, physical and financial wellbeing; living independently; feeling safe and enjoying the place where they live.	We are addressing our challenges with a focus on delivering value for money, continuous improvement and better outcomes for Cheshire East's residents. We recognise that acting with integrity builds trust, enabling collaboration to deliver our shared ambitions.

Table 1: Cheshire East Plan commitments

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

44. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken associated with the Strategy and regulation updated and included with in the background papers of this report.

Human Resources

45. The delivery of the investment programme will be undertaken via existing staff resources supplemented where appropriate with additional project management and specialist technical resource.

Risk Management

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

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

Table 2: summary of key risks and proposed mitigations

Rural Communities

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

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

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

Public Health

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

Climate Change

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

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	<p>Appendix A – Cemeteries Design Guide (for approval)</p> <p>Appendix B – Example Site Management Plan (Congleton Cemetery)</p> <p>Appendix C – Investment Programme Years 1-4 (as prioritised)</p>
Background Papers:	<p>Cemeteries Strategy : 12-march-1-cec-cemetery-strategy-approved-2024.pdf</p> <p>Cemeteries Regulations: Cemetery Regulations Approved 2024</p> <p>Public consultation report: Cemeteries Strategy & Regulations Consultation 2022 - Full report</p> <p>Equality Impact Assessment: Found alongside the Appendices of the Report</p>