

Cemeteries Design Guide

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1. Introduction

This document has been produced to define the standard to which a Cheshire East Cemetery should meet and what it will deliver for residents of the borough. It will define how a Cheshire East Cemetery should look like which will inform the future site management plans for each site, or geographical grouping of sites.

The site management plans will be developed, in priority order, which will guide future development and investment at each cemetery. This would include the requirement for expansion of sites and as to when it would be appropriate for this need to be considered.

This is a live document managed in collaboration with the bereavement services operational leads and is subject to annual review towards continued service delivery improvement.



2. Constraints to Cemeteries Design

Before defining the desired standard of a Cheshire East Cemetery, the constraints to cemeteries design will be presented. The various constraints relate to health and safety legislation, planning and accessibility considerations.

Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order (1977)

Cheshire East Council must adhere to the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order (1977) which covers different aspects of site planning and development and also covers the management and registration of burial rights and disinterment.

Accessibility and Equality

In accordance with equalities legislation, the design of built infrastructure within the cemetery sites must provide an appropriately accessible environment inclusive of pathways, parking resources and access to chapel and office infrastructure. Where feasible, the design and implementation of built infrastructure should align with current accessibility guidelines from the Department of Transport's ['Inclusive Mobility A Guide to Best Practice on Access to Pedestrian and Transport Infrastructure'](#).

Health and Safety Guidelines

Acting as the Burial Authority, the council is responsible for the safety of site staff and visitors to the cemeteries and within their associated built infrastructure. All decision making around site development and operational activities undertaken onsite must comply with current UK health and safety legislation.

Notable legal frameworks relevant to activities undertaken within the cemeteries portfolio include the Health and Safety at work Act (1974) and the Management of Health and Safety at work Regulations (1999). Other notable regulatory frameworks to be implemented where necessary would include the Construction, Design & Management Regulations (2015).

The council is legally obligated to ensure all parties undertaking works within the cemeteries portfolio cooperate towards ensuring matters of health and safety are managed appropriately to protect service staff and visitors alike.

The safety of operational staff members and any contractual resource along with service users and members of the public is to be underpinned within operational decision making to limit the potential for accidents, injury and/or any reputational damage. Core areas of risk include memorial safety.

Planning and permitting processes

All development within the cemeteries is subject to local planning law with the requirement to ensure all proposals inclusive of building creation or refurbishment along with any proposal to extend the current footprint of a cemetery boundary to increase burial plot capacity are to be submitted for consideration by the council's planning authority.



3. Prioritised investment

Development within each cemetery into the desired standard will be prioritised according to the below hierarchy which ranks the design constraints into an order of importance.

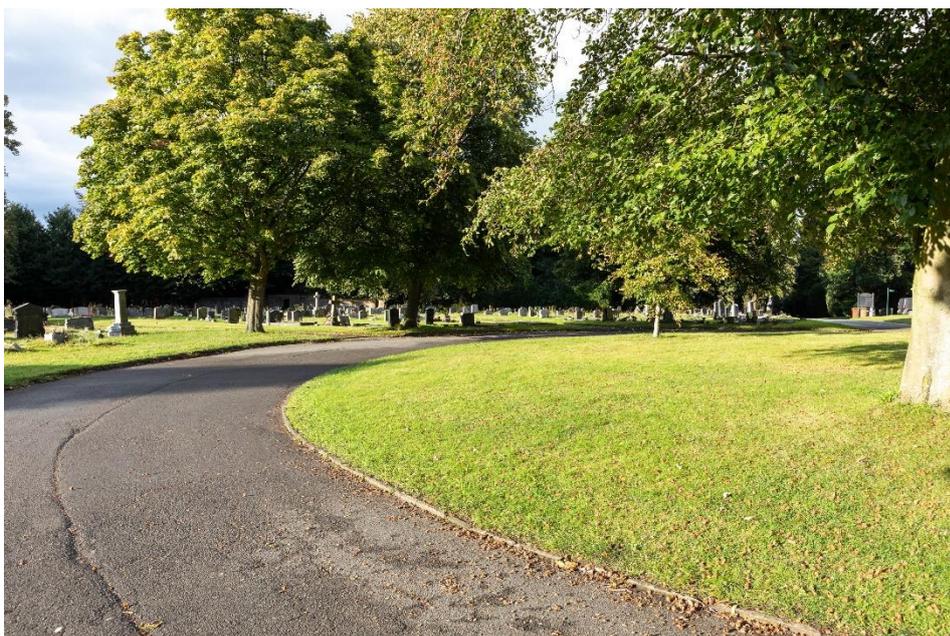
Ranking factors

- 1) Health and safety / Legislative compliance
 - a. Cemeteries > Risk assessed approach prioritizing severest outcomes
 - i. Memorials & headstone testing
 - ii. Tree risk management
 - iii. Grave excavation
 - iv. Traffic management
 - b. Crematoria > Risk assessed approach prioritizing severest outcomes
 - i. Cremator operation
 - ii. Mercury abatement
 - iii. Non carbon cremator options
 - c. Equalities legislation
 - i. Accessible infrastructure
 1. Chapels & buildings
 2. Car parks
 3. Cemetery & memorial pathways
- 2) Commercial and reputational impact
 - a. Site use and operational functionality
 - i. Site orientation / plot allocation

- b. Service continuity and ongoing plot capacity
 - i. Preserving plot capacity
 - ii. Potential for expansion
 - c. Customer service focus
 - i. Administrative office support
 - ii. Onsite facilities
 - d. Conservation of heritage features
 - i. Chapels & other listed buildings
 - ii. Antique headstones and memorials
 - iii. Topographical features
 - e. Conservation of green infrastructure
 - i. Veteran trees and ornamental beds
- 3) Sustainability
- a. Operational efficiencies
 - i. Crematoria equipment
 - ii. Fleet & operational vehicles
 - iii. Eco burial
 - b. Biodiversity
 - i. Landscaping
- 4) Public accessibility & amenity

4. Maintenance

All cemeteries' grounds maintenance is to be carried out according to the council's published Green Spaces Maintenance Standards Policy. The policy can be found here: [Maintaining our green spaces](#) and the level of maintenance is defined within the cemeteries section of the policy. This will include the maintenance of hard surfaces within the Cemeteries such as the footpaths.



5. Design Principles (Respect, Heritage, Sustainability, Ecology)

Integration with broader regional green space

Where feasible management practices should seek to balance the aesthetic and operational qualities of our cemeteries to offer facilities that are visually appealing, clean and safe.

Management practices should recognise the need to conserve and promote core heritage features that define the historic nature of the cemeteries alongside the interspersed elements of veteran tree planting and open green space that serve an amenity role.

The presence of green spaces in urban areas perform a vital function for nature conservation and biodiversity enhancement and have the potential to contribute towards Public Health and corporate climate mitigation objectives relating to improved air quality, flood mitigation and diminishment of urban heat island effect.

Promoting sustainable development –

Where feasible operational practices throughout the cemeteries should promote sustainable activity in line with the council's corporate objectives around climate mitigation.

Consideration should extend to the formulation of landscape maintenance schedules and other or operational procedures including the sourcing of materials utilised for the upkeep of site infrastructure and commercial memorialisation offers.

6. Cemetery Design

Pathways

Pathways in cemeteries ensure visitors and mourners can navigate the space safely and comfortably and are to be installed to ensure effective site coverage factoring current and future assume need.

Pathways should provide access to Chapels and offices / site operational & storage compounds / memorialisation & ashes plots / current grave plots / historic grave plots / car parking areas

The different pathway types and the criteria for when each type should be used are outlined below:

Tarmac: Tarmac pathways offer a durable option and are suitable for high-traffic areas allowing inclusive access for wheelchair users or those using walking aids or for individuals using push chairs or buggies. Tarmac is a stark contrast to the natural environment which needs to be considered.

Tarmac should only be used when a need exists for smooth transitional access to heavily trafficked areas including car parks, chapels and crematorium facilities and other communal remembrance spaces.

Fig 1: Tarmac pathway connecting heavily trafficked route between Crewe Crematorium and car parking area



Grit/ Limestone: Pathways comprised of a consolidated layer of finely graded natural stones offer a traditional and clearly defined aesthetic. Regular footfall helps consolidate the material to seal the path surface and suppress noxious weed growth.

While a more costly option than mown grass pathways, this material offers a more durable surface allowing inclusive access for wheelchair users or those using walking aids. This may also be suitable as an intermediary pathway type for designated access for site operatives to undertake operational duties.

Grit/Limestone pathways should be deployed in more heavily trafficked areas at core facilities. Sites with sufficient remnant burial capacity to ensure sufficient levels of usage to assist with consolidation and suppression of weed growth.

Typical functionality to include routes to parking areas / ornamental features of memorial planting beds and remembrance gardens. May also include operational routes where the frequent passage of heavy wheeled equipment would diminish the surface quality of grass trackways

Paved- Pathways constructed using brick or concrete pavers offer a stable and even surface allowing inclusive access for wheelchair users or those using walking aids. Paved pathways are good for heavily trafficked areas at core facilities along with sites with sufficient remaining burial capacity to ensure sufficient levels of usage to justify elevated installation costs.

Can be used when there is a need for ornamental features linked to memorial planting beds, walled gardens of remembrance and other communal remembrance spaces.

Typical applications would include routes to parking areas, ornamental feature of memorial planting beds and remembrance garden kerb set features.

Fig 2: Paved memorialisation area at Crewe main cemetery



Mown Pathways- Grass pathways offer a naturalised appearance and are a cost-effective option to provide access for less frequently utilised areas of site. These path types require regular mowing and have the potential to become muddy and slippery in wet conditions.

While being a more costly variant, the addition of mesh panels should be considered where there is a need to enhance accessibility to the infirm or for wheelchair users for well utilised areas of site that are prone to excessive waterlogging or that are become muddy and impassable during wetter periods to enhance the utility of grass pathways.

Mown pathways should be used in lower tier cemeteries with lower burial capacity and lesser expected visitor attendance.

Linkage with Car Parks: Pathways directly connected to car parking areas should offer smooth transitions and a suitably robust surface type to accommodate users with mobility constraints or individuals with push chairs and prams.

Where necessary ramps should be provided to counter any significant elevation changes and accessible parking bays should be included on site.

Waste & Cleanliness

Establish a regular schedule for waste collection to prevent overflow and maintain cleanliness. Increase the frequency during peak visitation times, such as holidays and special events.

Ensure bins are kept clean and in good condition. Replace damaged bins promptly to maintain a tidy appearance and prevent any health hazards.

Bins to be placed strategically at convenient locations throughout the cemetery, such as near entrances, parking areas, and along main pathways. Ensure they are easily accessible for visitors and maintenance staff. Sympathetic placement with the appropriate materials.



Memorials

Memorialisation offers aim to ensure that placement is undertaken in a coordinated manner in an effort to limit undue burden for site upkeep and maintenance whilst being in accordance with the [Cheshire East Cemeteries Regulations](#).

There are different types of memorialisation example which can be applied to a Cheshire East Cemetery.

Seating

Wooden Memorial Seats: A wooden memorial bench with an inscribed plaque, or timber routed inscription. Individual benches will be utilised to place multiple memorialisation inscriptions. Seats located in the Garden of Remembrance can have cremated remains placed nearby. These wooden memorial benches are to be placed in pre-determined locations and can be leased for a set 5 or 10 year period.

Existing wooden benches, when they reach end of life, will be removed and where possible commemorative plaques returned, with the owner given the opportunity to further commemorate in the cemetery.

Existing Stone Memorial Seats: Due to long term stability and maintenance the authority is discontinuing the sale of stone benches for placement within our cemeteries. Existing stone benches will remain until end of life and then they will be removed.

The individual site management plans will determine the locations for benches.



Habitat Boxes

Habitat boxes can be leased for 3, 6 or 10 years and are to be allocated based on a pre determined location throughout woodland planting. Boxes will be placed considering best practice factoring directional placement of the box opening, height of placement and proximity to other boxes to ensure an optimal nesting environment for the target species that choose to nest in them.

The individual site management plans will determine the locations of habitat boxes.

The offering could include Bat boxes, Bird boxes, Bug boxes/hotels & Butterfly havens.

Wall of Remembrance

The authority will seek to establish or maintain walls of remembrance within each of our cemeteries. Where possible, existing structures will be utilised. These may be in conjunction with areas of ash burial, sustainable interment beds and, or woodland/wildflower commemorative areas.



Additional memorialisation offers

New initiatives in line with other bereavement service providers that aim to form a uniform approach to memorialisation focused on centralised locations which where possible shared features. These would be designed within the site layout management plan to determine where additional memorialisation can be located.

- Cremation kerbs
- Cremation garden
- Rose Garden
- Private Gardens
- Willow & Bitch Trees: Memorials would be offered on a communal focal point, board or wall with linkage to a tree placed withing a pre-determined planting area factoring
- Boulder memorials
- Shrub Garden Scatterings
- Wildflower Meadow Scatterings
- Memorials trees and Steel Sculptures: Tree of life features

Zoning (burial plots, memorial areas, green / ecological spaces)

Individual sites are to be zoned to reflect core features that would include:

- a. Remaining plot capacity for traditional burials
- b. Areas assigned for ash interment
- c. Areas of communal memorialisation inclusive of
- d. Topographical constraints including drainage aspects and the presence of underground and/or overhead services & utilities
- e. Scope for commercial diversification to include areas to be assigned for eco and woodland burial
- f. Wilderness zones . Consideration will be given to improving biodiversity.

Zoning Considerations

Burial Plots: Plot utilisation will require appropriate forms of pedestrian access along with service routes to fulfil operational needs.

Cultural and religious practices of the community should be factored into this process to include adequate provision of any bespoke sections as necessary.

Memorial Areas: Dedicated spaces for memorials and monuments offer the ability to localise maintenance efforts and are a more easily managed site resource.

Ecological Spaces: Integrated green spaces including lawns, gardens, meadows, hedges, shrub beds and veteran woodland planting enhance the aesthetic appeal of our cemeteries and contribute to localised biodiversity enhancement within the cemetery through their function as habitat for local wildlife.

Future site development that necessitates the loss of such features should factor the need for replacement ensuring areas of mitigatory planting compliment the existing landscape composition in terms of species and habitat type.

Eco-Burial Areas and Wilderness Zones

Eco-Burial Areas require allocation of designated plot areas where biodegradable materials and minimal environmental impact are prioritized. These areas can be integrated into natural landscapes such as woodlands or meadows to promote sustainability.

Wilderness Zones within the cemetery would offer localised biodiversity enhancement and contributing to a broader wildlife presence throughout the remainder of the site in support of the council's ecological sustainability aims. These areas should be managed with minimal human intervention, allowing natural processes to occur and providing habitats for a variety of birds, small mammals and insect species.

Use of native plants and sustainable landscaping practices

Incorporate greater percentages of perennials to offer longer term planting stock with selective and limited addition of annual planting to offer a varied aesthetic from season to season and reduction in labour to replant entire beds and borders.



Water supply and irrigation systems

All water sources within the cemetery are accessible for all visitors who wish to water graveside flower arrangements and for the purpose of light cleansing of memorials or headstones.

Water taps should be situated at convenient and accessible locations for all cemetery users.

Water points should be clearly sign posted to guide visitors along with any relevant safety information.

Maintenance facilities and storage

Appropriate areas will be screened for maintenance and storage areas. Some cemeteries will have dedicated operational areas. Excess soil from grave excavations will be dealt with in accordance with the site managements plans for each site.