

Policy Committee

18 September 2024



Reading
Borough Council
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Title	Cemetery Provision beyond 2030
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Partly open to the public and part exempt - see reasons below
Report author	Gavin Handford, Assistant Director for Policy, Performance & Customer Services
Lead Councillor	Cllr Emberson, Lead councillor for Corporate Services & Resources
Corporate priority	Our Foundations
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To note the options considered to maintain burial provision in Reading beyond 2030, as set out in the report.2. That the Committee resolve that the preferred option for further burial provision is to utilise the reserve cemetery land at Henley Road to continue providing the service in Reading until 2044.3. That the Assistant Director for Policy, Performance & Customer Services, in consultation with the Lead Member for Corporate Services & Resources, undertake formal consultation with key stakeholders on the preferred option to identify further impacts and mitigating actions.4. That the results of the stakeholder consultation come back to this Committee in January / February 2025 for consideration and final decision on using the allotment site for cemetery provision.5. That, subject to recommendation 2 being agreed, the Committee note the estimated total cost of the preferred option is £2.8m and that further budget provision will need to be approved through the Medium-Term Financial Plan subject to a final decision being made in January / February 2025.6. Authorise, subject to funding being approved through the capital programme, the Assistant Director for Property and Asset Management, in consultation with the Lead Member for Corporate Services & Resources, the Director of Finance, the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services, and the Executive Director of Resources to secure any option to procure further land for a new cemetery for future development to meet long term demand for burial provision beyond 2044 and report back options to Committee.

The Annex to this report contains exempt information within the meaning of the following paragraph of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 and by the Local Government (Access to information) (Variation) Order 2006:

3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

And in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information because:

Land values of potential other sites need to be confidential to ensure that the Council achieves best value.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. On current projections, the Council's Henley Road Cemetery will be full by 2030. The future demand for burial is based on usage over the last decade with an average of 165 new graves per year (169 last year). Although demand for burial has declined due to the growth of cremation this has tapered over the last 20 years and, due to the shortage of burial space in the surrounding area, this is likely to continue at the current level or increase.
- 1.2. A decision by the Committee on whether to discontinue burial, develop new provision by using reserve cemetery land to meet demand until 2044 and / or build a new cemetery is sought.
- 1.3. This matter was previously considered at the September 2021 Policy Committee when Members received information on the burial options within a 20-mile radius of the Borough and the potential to acquire land for a new cemetery. Members gave a steer at that meeting that they wished to continue to provide burial space but needed more clarity on costs and land availability. Officers were, therefore, instructed to complete further research into the options available and their findings and recommendations are set out in this report.
- 1.4. The availability of burial space around Reading is given in the September 2021 report which showed that Reading residents wanting burial in another municipal cemetery would pay a multiple of the local resident rate (2-3 times) in the same way that non-Reading residents pay a premium at Henley Road Cemetery. Alternatively, Reading's residents could use one of the private 'natural' burial grounds, although the restriction on memorials and the tending of graves would not be acceptable to all faiths.
- 1.5. Ending the provision of burial space (once Henley Road Cemetery becomes full) would disadvantage around 1 in 5 Reading residents who object to cremation or who, due to religious or cultural needs, require burial. It would also ultimately result in the loss of approximately £600k overall annual net income generated by the Council's existing burial services, after covering the costs of the service. However, ending the provision of burial space would remove the need to reclaim the cemetery reserve ground and avoid the need for capital investment.
- 1.6. A survey of land suitable for cemetery provision within the Borough and up to 5 miles from its boundary was completed by an external company specialising in cemetery development. We rejected areas not suitable for environmental reasons (ground water and flood risk, unsuitable bedrock geology, and high planning risk locations). Specific requirements helped produce an extensive list of suitable sites. Nineteen search criteria were used with priority being given to sites between 8-15 hectares, not within a ground source water protection zone and with existing road access.

- 1.7. Approaches were made to the owners of the 17 sites that scored highest on the selection criteria, with priority being given to the top 5 sites. Of these, there were only two sites where the owners were interested in selling with prices of c£1.18M per hectare.
- 1.8. We extended the search to consider smaller sites, and this identified a site in South Oxfordshire (approximately a 25-minute drive from central Reading) with an estimated land purchase price of circa £2m. The site would provide circa 10,000 graves and meet projected demand for around 65 years. The total cemetery development costs would be in the region £12m.
- 1.9. None of these sites were considered ideal as all were out of Borough and had very high development costs ranging from £10m to £20m, with the former having a net return on the investment after approximately 36 years.
- 1.10. Whilst the above searches were being conducted, we also looked at the feasibility of using the reserve burial ground at Henley Road Cemetery (currently the Henley Road Allotment site which has 127 allotments leased to 115 individuals in 108 households). Although the land has been an allotment site for many decades, such use was granted on a 'temporary' basis and until such time that it was needed for burial.
- 1.11. The allotment site would provide circa 2,300 graves and meet demand for an estimated additional 14 years, extending existing capacity for burial space from 2030 to 2044. The site development costs would be circa £2.8m (a cost of £1,200 per grave with each grave generating income of more than £3,800) - mostly be generated at the time of the first burial. This is therefore a feasible option because of (a) the relative affordability, (b) the land is linked to the existing cemetery and (c) the site's availability – the land is designated reserve cemetery ground owned by RBC.
- 1.12. Preliminary ground water surveys (using results from five 6m deep boreholes) show that the 'allotment' site should be get a permit by the Environment Agency for burial use. This is unsurprising as the area provides a natural extension of the existing cemetery where the ground has proven suitable. Use of this site would be subject to the results of a third (and final) tier of ground water testing (three 35m deep boreholes monitored for up to 12 months). This work will be more disruptive to the site than the preliminary testing and cost circa £50k. Such tests are a pre-requisite to any planning application and would normally only be completed after a decision has been taken to use the site (subject to planning consent).
- 1.13. Allotments provide a valuable benefit to the tenants, often representing years of demanding work and therefore there is usually strong attachment to their plots. As a result, the moving or closure of allotments can cause distress and anger for those tenants. If this option is chosen by the Committee an open dialogue, regular engagement, long notice periods (as far ahead as can be given) and relocation assistance where possible will be proposed.
- 1.14. The option of reclaiming old, abandoned graves has also been considered. This practice has been adopted at several London cemeteries and involves using graves in which the last burial took place at least 75 years ago and where no living relatives can be traced. To obtain the legal powers required, this option would require public consultation in the first instance followed by a 'private' (Reading Borough Council) Parliamentary Bill at an estimated cost of £200,000. Changes in national legislation to allow grave reuse without the need for private bills is under consideration and may be part of the ongoing review of cemetery legislation by the Law Commission. However, the review's findings will take at least five years. Due to the long lead in period, this option would not provide sufficient burial space to meet demand within the next decade.
- 1.15. A local authority / private Bill to permit grave reuse takes around two years and a public consultation exercise is a requirement of any petition for a private Bill. The Council's two full cemeteries (Reading Old Cemetery and Hemdean Cemetery) contain over

20,000 graves that qualify for grave reuse as would the thousands of graves in Henley Road Cemetery and any new cemetery that the Council may decide to establish.

- 1.16. The Council's most prudent option would be to wait for national legislation rather than commission a Reading specific grave reuse Bill. Obtaining and then exercising the legal powers to reclaim and reuse graves can take a long time to achieve (circa 8-10 years).
- 1.17. If the Council does not wish to continue provision for burials, due to the cost of a new site and / or the impact on allotments, it could end provision once the remaining burial space runs out. However, whilst there is no legal obligation to provide new space, a Council decision not to use reserve cemetery space may be open to challenge by those expecting burial provision to continue for as long as designated land is available. If the decision is to discontinue burial provision, residents wanting burial would have to pay a premium to gain access to other public and private cemeteries in surrounding areas as previously reported to Committee.
- 1.18. In view of the prohibitive cost of providing a new cemetery at this time, which would have to be outside the Borough, and the Council's preference to continue provision, the recommended option is to bring the reserve cemetery land into use. The Henley Road allotment land, combined with the space still available, would meet demand for burial and maintain existing income streams until 2044. Hence it is an attractive and prudent option that is entirely within the Council's control to implement. The cost of developing the allotment site for such a purpose will be circa £2.8m and the total projected income from the extension will be in the region of £600,000 per annum and £8.4m in total. This option would, therefore, continue to deliver the current budgeted level of income.
- 1.19. Therefore, the use of the allotment site is recommended, and permission is sort to formally consult with key stakeholders on its use to identify further impacts and potential mitigations for allotment holders. The results of the consultation will be reported to Policy Committee in January / February 2025 for consideration and final decision.
- 1.20. If the decision is taken to use the allotment site, there will be time to give existing allotment holders ample notice and, potentially, to relocate at least some of them to other allotment sites over the next 2-3 years thereby helping to mitigate the opposition that is most likely to be experienced. Officers are also investigating options to provide replacement allotment plots by extending some existing sites.
- 1.21. For long-term burial provision (beyond 2044), additional land, albeit likely outside of the borough, should be acquired for future cemetery development, ideally with provision for a new crematorium.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. The option to be buried in Reading has always existed and demand was initially met by the five churchyards scattered around central Reading. Until the disturbance of graves for reuse became unlawful (in 1857), the churchyards had been able to meet demand for burial space. However, due to the population growth and high mortality rate, this became unsustainable with graves being re-used too quickly. As a result, the Government introduced national legislation prohibiting grave reuse and most churchyards were subsequently closed for burial.
- 2.2. Private and public cemeteries, including the Reading Cemetery in 1852 (later named Reading Old Cemetery), were established to meet demand. Reading was also served by Hemdean Cemetery which was opened by the Caversham Burial Board in 1884. Due to high demand, limited space, and the abolition of grave re-use, both cemeteries ran out of space over 75 years ago. The ownership and management of the Reading (Old) Cemetery was taken over by the Reading Borough Council in 1959 due to the Reading Cemetery Company being unable to generate income once the cemetery became full.
- 2.3. Since the closure of the two older cemeteries demand for new graves has been met at the Council's Henley Road Cemetery, which opened in 1927. Although a crematorium

was added in 1932 it was not until the 1970s that cremation surpassed burial as the preferred choice. This trend has continued, and cremation now accounts for around 80% of all deaths in England & Wales. The fastest rate of growth was between 1960-1990 but slowed and, since 2010, there has been an average annual increase of 1%. However, despite the rise in burial costs and greater accessibility to crematoria, demand for burial is still around 15-20%. It is worth noting that when Reading Crematorium opened in 1932 it was the UK's 23rd to be built and there are now 334 crematoria in the UK.

- 2.4. Keeping cemeteries within a reasonable travelling distance for funerals and the tending of family graves is difficult as older burial grounds become full and are closed. Any new cemetery would, due to the non-availability of land within Reading, probably be located outside of the Borough.
- 2.5. Cemeteries generally provide two grave types – ‘traditional’ where the whole graves can be covered with a memorial the full length and width of the grave, and ‘lawn’ where the grave is laid to grass and the memorial is limited to a headstone. In 1993, the concept of ‘woodland’ burial was established with the opening of a ‘natural burial ground at Carlisle Cemetery. Since then, provision has increased and there are now over 260 such sites, including several in Berkshire. Two sites can be reached within a 30 minutes’ drive of central reading.
- 2.6. Fees for woodland graves range from £2,000 to £3,600 for the purchase of a lease (ranging from 25 to 30-year lease period) and are inclusive of the first burial. In comparison, the lawn grave fees at Henley Road Cemetery start from £2,160 for RBC residents and £4,590 for non-RBC residents (who account for 20% of graves used). The traditional graves are more expensive at £2,545 for residents and £5,925 for non-residents. However, the Council’s resident fees are for a 50-year lease which, for a lawn grave, equates to £43 per year. Whereas, due to their short lease periods, the fee for a private woodland grave equate to £88 per year. It is also important to note that woodland burial, where grave mounds and memorials are not permitted, are generally unacceptable to certain faiths and those who seek to tend and mark the actual grave.
- 2.7. Cemeteries are highly emotive landscapes, and conflict invariably exists between those with relatives buried and those with a greater interest in the environmental benefits that they offer to the wider community. Indeed, conflict can also arise between those favouring ecological benefits compared against others more interested, for example, in conserving the heritage value of old monuments. Whilst all groups should work together in the best interest of the cemetery and all its users, cemeteries invariably generate strong and emotive feelings amongst people with an interest in the place and / or those buried there.
- 2.8. The Council owns and maintains three cemeteries and one crematorium, all being within Reading. The cemeteries contain some 45,000 graves, which have been used for 133,000 burials, and the crematorium has undertaken 141,000 cremations. RBC also maintains five churchyards which are now used as public open spaces (St Peter’s, St Laurence’s, St James’, St Giles, and St Mary’s).
- 2.9. The three cemeteries in Reading are:
- 2.10. Reading Old Cemetery, situated immediately to the east of Cemetery Junction. The cemetery was established under an Act of Parliament of 1842 by the Reading Cemetery Company and operated from 1843 until it became full in the 1950s, when responsibility for the site transferred to RBC. Covering 4.7 hectares, Reading Old Cemetery is one of England’s oldest garden cemeteries. It is kept as a wildlife landscape and has been listed by Historic England as a Grade II (Register of Parks & Gardens). The register entry reads ‘*site largely survives complete although with the loss of its two chapels and has suffered some neglect*’. Most of the graves in the cemetery have not been used for over 75 years and would qualify for potential grave reuse.

- 2.11. Caversham Cemetery, situated in Victoria Road, opened in 1885 as a Parish Burial Ground and came under the Council's ownership in 1911. This is a 'closed' burial ground that is designated as a local wildlife site and is home to numerous protected badger sets. The condition of the private memorials, as with Reading Old Cemetery, is the primary concern in terms of keeping the cemetery a safe place to visit. As with Reading Old, most of the graves would qualify for re-use.
- 2.12. Henley Road Cemetery, situated in Caversham, is a 22-hectare site which incorporates Reading Crematorium. The cemetery opened in 1927 and the crematorium was added in 1932. The cemetery is the only site within the borough currently able to provide new graves. At the current rate of demand (165 new graves per annum), the cemetery will run out of space within the next six. By using all available space left in the older sections of the cemetery, this could be extended a few years. This will entail using spaces that were not intend for graves (hedges, verges, and grassed paths) and thereby reduce the sense of spaciousness that currently exists within the landscape, possibly leading to complaints.
- 2.13. An extension using the adjacent Council owned allotment site (reserve cemetery land) could be completed within four years (including notice to allotment holders) and the process of selecting and preparing a new cemetery site could take 6-7 years to complete. Thus, the window of opportunity to provide new graves beyond 2030 is limited.
- 2.14. The first question to consider in determining future policy on burial provision is whether the Council wishes to continue providing new graves once Henley Road Cemetery is full. This is an option because there is no legal obligation on a local authority to provide new cemetery space once any existing cemeteries become full. In 2006, in an effort to establish the amount of burial space available, the Government completed a survey ([Burial grounds: the results of a survey of burial grounds in England and Wales - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)) and found that approximately 80 per cent of land available for burials was already occupied by graves and that the *'median predicted time for unused burial land to be filled by new interments was, for those burial grounds that were still open to new burials, 30 years for local authority sites and 25 years for Church of England / Church in Wales locations' meaning that most are projected to be full by 2036*.
- 2.15. In considering the above, the following factors warrant consideration:
- Around 1 in 5 residents, including those for whom burial is a religious or cultural requirement, want to be buried and this demand, despite the growth of cremation, is likely to continue for the foreseeable future. A decision to discontinue provision will create the risk of reputational damage and, potentially, a legal challenge if the Council is seen not to meet the needs of residents with protected characteristics.
 - The sale of graves provides the primary income stream for a cemetery and, once the remaining burial space has been used, the Council would immediately lose £400,000 per annum from the sale of new graves and, ultimately, an annual loss of £600,000 per annum (at current prices) as income from ancillary services declines and ends. Although this loss of income would be partially offset by savings in operational costs, the maintenance costs (£350,000 per annum) will continue (the Council has a statutory duty to continue maintaining existing cemeteries to a reasonable standard).
 - Henley Road Cemetery includes the Council's crematorium which is fitted with gas fuelled cremators. Although recently installed, these cremators will need to be replaced within the next 15 years and, should the Council then wish to opt for electric powered cremators, based on current technology, a new crematorium site and building will be required. If the Council decides to meet demand for burial through the provision of a new cemetery, future provision could, potentially, also be made for a new crematorium.
- 2.16. It is recognised that there are competing policy objectives that are difficult to reconcile. The Council has previously set out its objective to maintain a cemetery service for the benefit of residents, recognising burial is the preference for many, including particular

faiths. It has also set out its objective to maintain allotment provision in the Borough, recognising, the health and environmental benefits of this service.

3. The Proposal

3.1. To facilitate an informed decision the Committee instructed officers to investigate options available to the Council ranging from discontinuation of burial space provision to the establishment of a new cemetery.

3.2. The options and the results of the investigations are as follows:

(a) Identify land for a new cemetery within Reading.

An extensive search has not identified any suitable land within the Borough boundary.

(b) Identify Local Authority (LA) partner to commission land for both LAs to use.

Efforts to attract interest in a partnership arrangement for a new cemetery have been unsuccessful. Whilst an adjacent Borough Council has recently expressed tentative interest in discussing a potential joint search for cemetery land, as they face a similar shortage of burial space, this has not progressed and the urgency that Reading faces does not exist in neighbouring areas. Therefore, this is not considered a likely option at this time.

(c) Explore options relating to Caversham Park Land.

The site is an historically significant landscape that is registered as a Grade II Listed Park and Garden. The current developer's planning advisor advises that obtaining permission to use this land for cemetery use 'might prove hard if not impossible' to achieve. In any event, the owner of the site is not willing to discuss selling any part of the estate for an extension of the Henley Road Cemetery.

(d) Purchase agricultural or pastureland within 10 miles of Borough Boundary.

A new cemetery site appears to be achievable but would require a substantial capital investment to acquire land with land purchase costs being from £2m to £5m (although some potential sites have suggested even higher values up to £20m), with additional development costs being in the region of £6-£10m. Potential sites are explored later in this report. A new crematorium could be included within a new cemetery site (although the construction costs are not included here). The allotment site would give the Council 20 years to build a new cemetery. Due to the limited availability of land and rising costs, it would be prudent to secure a site at the earliest opportunity and defer development until new burial space is needed.

(e) In the absence of sufficient progress with the above options and the time scale and cost of building a new cemetery, officers explored the suitability of the Henley Road Allotment site (an important land holding for the Council that was originally purchased for a future extension of Henley Road Cemetery) for burial use.

The Henley Road Allotment section, which occupies 2.65 hectares of reserve cemetery ground, provides non-statutory temporary allotments. Of the 2.65ha, some 1.63ha is taken up by the 120 allotment plots, with the remaining 1.02 ha comprising paths/access and wooded areas which are not suitable for allotments. If found suitable for burial use (subject to ongoing ground water testing) and reclaimed for cemetery use, the allotment land would provide up to a further 2,300 graves (circa 14 years supply),

3.3. Due to options a-c not being viable and the high costs and risks associated with option d, in 2023 officers started to explore the suitability of the Henley Road allotment site for burial use. Although, definitive results of the site surveys and ground water testing will not be available until June 2025, initial findings indicate that the site will be suitable. The

cost of any works required to meet the requirements of any conditions of use will not be known until the Environment Agency has approved the application and specified works required to make the site usable. At this stage, we estimate that the cost of preparing the allotment site for cemetery use is likely to be in the region of £2.8m. The site would provide burial space for circa 14 years and generate income of more than £8.4m (at today's prices). The area would increase perpetual maintenance costs by £60,000 per annum, which would continue after the area became full.

- 3.4. Thus, we return to the fundamental choice of either ending the provision of burial space once Henley Road Cemetery becomes full or finding additional burial ground. Assuming the Council Policy is to continue burial provision, the available options are as follows:

Henley Road Allotments

- 3.5. Provide additional graves using the cemetery reserve land (currently used for allotments) to extend total grave provision from 2030 until 2044 at an estimated cost of £2.8m. There would be a requirement to compensate existing allotment holders and, potentially, to deal with any legal challenges from existing allotment holders.
- 3.6. Due to the amount of investment, strength of attachment and feelings tenants have towards their allotments, the moving or closure of allotments is difficult and can cause distress and anger for allotment holders. It is therefore further recommended that further consultation is carried-out.
- 3.7. The outcome of the proposed consultation and engagement would be reported back to Committee in January / February 2025 to inform the Council's final decision.
- 3.8. Establish a new cemetery outside of the borough (potentially securing land now for longer term future development).
- 3.9. Several potential sites have been identified where the owners have indicated a willingness to sell. Details of this are contained in the Confidential Annex.
- 3.10. If the Committee wishes to secure land for a future cemetery, authority to acquire a site to an agreed maximum budget would be needed to allow officers to enter into meaningful negotiations. Presently, it is only possible to give indicative figures of the likely land purchase costs as shown in the Confidential Annex. What the search has shown is that land is available within a reasonable travelling distance. It is worth noting that, like most urban cemeteries built in the 1800/1900s Reading (old) Cemetery was located outside the Borough's then main population areas when it was first established.
- 3.11. The primary issue is cost due to the substantial capital investment (land purchase, groundworks, buildings, professional fees etc) such a project would require (circa £10.5m). The initial investment required could be limited to the land acquisition for future development closer to when it would be required (within the next 15-20 years). Further details and a breakdown of the different elements are in the Confidential Annex.
- 3.12. In conclusion, there is sufficient demand for burial in Reading to warrant the continued provision of graves beyond 2030 when the Council's Henley Road cemetery is projected to run out of burial space for new graves. The options open to the Council to maintain burial space provision were narrowed down to extending the cemetery using the reserve burial land (currently providing the Henley Road allotments), opening a new cemetery outside of Reading and, in the longer term, reusing old, abandoned graves. For the reasons set out in this report, extending the Henley Road Cemetery is recommended together with the acquisition of additional land to be developed for use by 2044.
- 3.13. Whilst there is likely to be some opposition to the use of the allotments for cemetery purposes, there can be no doubt that the land has always been held in reserve for cemetery use and the area is needed to enable the Council time to maintain service provision and existing income streams. Importantly, the extension would facilitate the

long-term strategy needed to take account of potential developments in burial, cremation, and related funeral services over the next 5-10 years.

- 3.14. There is a limited window of opportunity to ensure that the Council can provide burial space in the long-term and, except for the cemetery extension, the available options have long lead in periods. There is time to give existing allotments holders notice of the closure of the allotments and, potentially, to offer some of them allotments at an alternative allotment site.
- 3.15. The longer-term need, beyond 2044 for both a cemetery and a replacement crematorium beyond the life of the existing crematorium persists. It is recommended that the Council continues the search for suitable options for long-term land in line with the conclusions within this report, which would allow outline plans and arrangements to begin to be put in place to allow for the time when the extended Henley Road Cemetery is full, and the existing crematorium needs to be replaced. The Assistant Director for Property and Asset Management, in consultation with the Lead Member for Corporate Services & Resources, the Director of Finance and the Assistant Director of Legal and Democratic Services will, in line with this requirement, seek to secure options to procure further land for a new cemetery for future development to meet long term demand for burial provision beyond 2044 and report back those options to the Committee.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. Cemeteries and crematoria are essential community assets that are needed for the dignified care of the dead and the bereaved. The Council is the borough's primary burial and cremation authority providing local and affordable access to burial and cremation services. The Council's plans for its Bereavement Services includes making improvements to the Henley Road Crematorium, which was fitted with two new cremators last year. There is capital provision in 2024/25 to improve the parts of the building that are ancillary to the two chapels. However, plans to extend and refurbish the two chapels and public waiting area / toilets have been put on hold pending strategic decisions.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. Securing new land for burials, particularly if natural burials are an option, would contribute be an investment in green infrastructure – particularly as cemeteries provide urban 'green lungs and green open space.
- 5.2. The environmental implications of the available options are complex. Research in 2022 by the Centre for Sustainable Planning and Environment suggests that cemeteries provide many of the same benefits as green spaces [Frontiers | Planning Cemeteries: Their Potential Contribution to Green Infrastructure and Ecosystem Services \(frontiersin.org\)](https://frontiersin.org) and, with the right maintenance and management, can provide valuable ecosystems in urban areas. The Council's existing older cemeteries (Reading Old and Hemdean) fall into this category and are sites suited for sustainable grave re-use that could negate the need for a new cemetery which, certainly in the short-term, would have the biggest environmental impact. This adverse impact would be due to the construction work required to create a new cemetery. However, in the longer term, the 'new' cemetery could become another important green space in an area that, over the life of the cemetery, will be urbanised. In the same way that Reading 'Old' Cemetery has become a part of the Borough's system of green lungs, a new cemetery would do the same for future generations as they populate what are now urban areas.
- 5.3. Discontinuing burial will require people to travel further for cemetery space and have a negative environmental impact. Where it is religiously and / or culturally tolerable, some may opt for cremation which, whilst saving land, has an environmental toll through the use of fossil fuels and CO2 emissions.
- 5.4. If the decision to develop a new cemetery is taken the full environmental and climate impact implications would need to be considered.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. Officers have sought to engage with the allotment holders in an open and constructive way during the site testing at Henley Road allotments. It is recognised that the uncertainty has caused distress for many allotment holders. It is therefore recommended that formal consultation and engagement with key stakeholders takes place.
- 6.2. The consultation will also ensure timely communication with allotment holders, enabling them to make an informed decision on whether to continue to plant and use their allotment until such time as a final decision is made.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, section 149, a public body must in the exercise of its functions have due regard to the need:
 - Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and other conduct that is prohibited by this Act;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2 An EIA has identified that not securing further burial land will adversely impact Religious and cultural groups requiring burial services.
- 7.3 Although there is faith burial land within twenty miles of reading, this will incur additional costs to those family burying out of area / in non-RBC owned cemeteries. The proposed consultation and engagement will help to further enhance the EIA and identify any additional mitigating actions that may be required.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1 The management of cemeteries is governed by the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO). Local authorities are defined as burial authorities and given power to provide cemeteries by virtue of Local Government Act 1972 and Under section 214 of the Local Government Act 1972, the Council may provide and maintain cemeteries whether inside or outside the borough's boundary. Powers and provisions for managing, regulating, and controlling cemeteries are contained in the LACO.
- 8.2 Whilst the Council must maintain existing cemeteries under its ownership, there is no legal obligation to provide a new cemetery.
- 8.3 If the option to re-use graves is pursued by the Council this would entail seeking legislative change either unilaterally, in partnership with other local authorities or by lobbying central government to initiate national legislation.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1. Bereavement Services generate annual income of £2.3m and an annual surplus of £1m. If the provision of new graves is discontinued, the Council will lose annual income of £600k. Cemetery costs would be reduced through a reduction in grave digging expenditure (initially through a reduction of one post and, ultimately, two with a total annual saving in the region of £70,000 although this would not fully materialise for many years (until all existing graves are full).
- 9.2. The reserve cemetery land, which the Council owns, has the potential to provide an estimated 2,300 graves which would enable the cemetery related income to continue to be generated for an additional 14 years, generating a total income more than £8.4m.

- 9.3. The estimated cost of getting the reserve land into operational cemetery use is £2.8m and annual maintenance costs will increase by an estimated £60k per annum (the latter liability will be perpetual). The Capital Programme includes £1.636m for burial land acquisition in 2025/26 which would need to be supplemented by an additional £1.164m Capital Bid to provide the full £2.8m cost of developing the reserve ground, although the expenditure would be deferred until 2027/28 to allow the relocation of allotment holders. The project budget would also cover the package of care compensation described in the report (although this is to be finalised) and a project officer to support the consultation, engagement and planning.
- 9.4. If the Committee agrees to the option to purchase additional land for future development an additional Capital Bid would be required to be considered and approved as part of the 2025/26 Budget process and officers authorised to enter into negotiations to buy land (with any purchase completion being subject to budget approval and planning consent for cemetery use).
- 9.5. The Henley Road allotment site currently provides annual income of £3,100, which would end if the site is reclaimed for cemetery use. However, Officers are working to develop options to provide some alternative plots, which would provide income.

10. Timetable for Implementation

2024	Actions
September	Decision taken to consult on allotment site and delegated authority given for officers to negotiate acquisition of additional reserve cemetery land
2025	
January / February	Policy Committee decision taken to proceed with use of allotment site (subject to outcome of consultation).
February - December	Pre-planning application, survey work completed, site development plans finalised and full planning application.
February	Tier 3 ground water testing begins
2026	
January - December	Phase 1 relocation of allotment holders
2027	
January - December	Phase 2 relocation of allotment holders and procurement for cemetery development works completed
2028	
January - December	Site developed for cemetery use
2029	
January- November	Site works for cemetery use
December	Project complete

11. Background Papers

There are none.