



Solihull MBC

A Strategy for Solihull
Metropolitan Borough
Council

&

A Sustainable Service
Plan for the Bereaved

2019-2029

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3
Purpose of the review	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	3
Background	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	4
Current Position	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	4
Key Legislative Constraints	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	7
1.0 Predicted Future Demand Trends	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	9
1.1 Cremations	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	10
1.2 Burials.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	11
1.3 Memorials	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	11
2.0 Financial Constraints	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	11
2.1 Cremation, Burial and Memorials	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	11
3.0 Future Service Development	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	12
3.1 Cremations	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	12
3.2 Burials.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	13
4.0 Future Considerations	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	14
4.1 Cremations	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	14
4.2 Burials	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	14
4.3 Memorials	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	14

Executive Summary

The revised Bereavement Service Strategy sets out the Council's aims and intentions for delivery of Bereavement Services across the Borough. This includes the provision of a Burial, Cremation and Memorialisation service for all bereaved families across Solihull borough and also across the wider regional area. The Strategy covers the period 2019-2029.

Solihull's Bereavement Service provides a diverse and fully inclusive service to all of its customers and stakeholders

The Purpose of the review of the Strategy for Bereavement Services

In order to continue to meet the needs of the ever changing expectations of our communities including the evolving diversity and demographics of the area, it is essential that the service plans for the future continue to provide a high standard of burial, cremation and memorialisation facilities within the Borough of Solihull.

Local Authorities have been the main service provider for both Burial and Cremation services across the country over the past 120 years. This is in addition to the historical provision of burial services by the Church Authority through Local Parish churchyards. Over the last 50 years, we have seen the rapid decline in the Church Authority developing and providing land for burial provision. This has resulted in Local Authorities continuing to develop limited available land to meet the demand for burial. In addition, during the same period the demand for cremation has increased significantly and again Local Authorities have been the main service provider.

Crematorium facilities in Solihull were developed in 1958, when the local demand for cremation provision was evident. Prior to this, crematorium provision was available in Birmingham at Yardley (1952), Selly Oak (1937) or at Perry Barr (1903). In the first year of opening, Robin Hood crematorium undertook 611 cremations, increasing to currently around 1,950 cremations p.a. carried out at Robin Hood and around 850 p. a. at Woodlands. Since opening the service has conducted over 110,000 cremations at Robin Hood and over 12,000 cremations at Woodlands.

In conjunction with Solihull Observatory, the task of predicting future demand for burial and cremation services over the next 10 years has been undertaken. This enables the service to identify what future land and development of existing facilities will be required in order to provide the bereaved families with future sustainable service provision. This will need to include purchase of additional land along with the development of existing assets.

Background

Solihull MBC has provided a burial service for over 100 years and provided a cremation service for the last 60 years. During this time the service, and facilities have continued to expand and develop as demand for service provision has increased. This increased demand has led to the development of Woodlands Cemetery in 1983 and Woodlands Crematorium in 2000, Widney Manor Cemetery in 1992, and a major refurbishment of Robin Hood crematorium in 2017. The continuing development of these facilities has enabled the service to meet increasing demand and enabled us to offer the bereaved improved facilities and additional capacity for burial and cremation across the Borough.

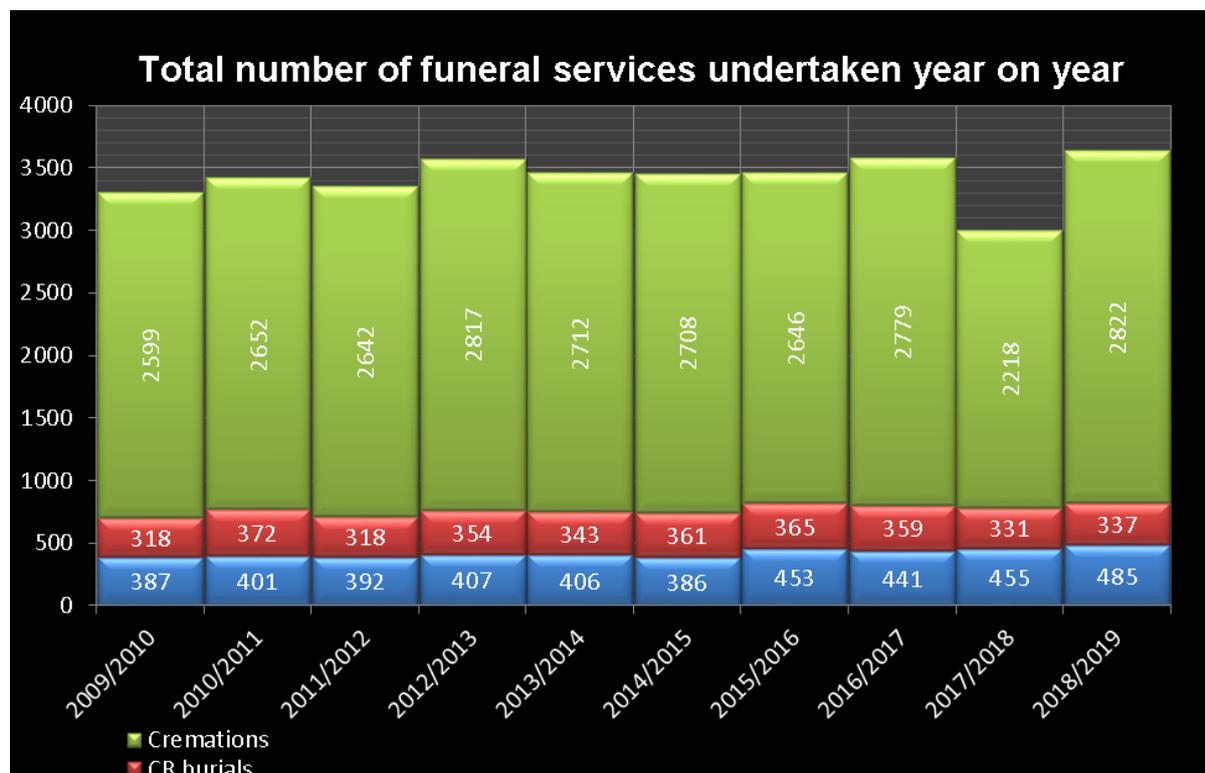
As a result of improved health care, improved nutrition, and general living conditions evidence has shown that people can expect to have an improved quality of life and an increased life expectancy. This has resulted in a decrease in the number of bereavements in recent years.

Although nationally the number of bereavements has fallen by around 60,000 per annum in the last 15 years, the number of burials and cremations undertaken by Solihull has remained fairly consistent. In some areas of the service, we have seen a year on year increase in the number of services undertaken, particularly in relation to the number of cremations undertaken at Woodlands Crematorium and this information is considered important in the planning of future service provision.

The Current Position

The following graph demonstrates that over the last 18 years the total number of funeral services undertaken by Solihull Bereavement services has seen a slight increasing trend despite the number of bereavements falling both locally and nationally during this period.

Figure 1: Total number of funeral services per annum



The data contained within the above graph, together with the data provided by the Solihull Observatory, has been utilised to inform the decision making process and in the development of the long-term service strategy for future service provision. This information has enabled officers to develop a plan for future service provision based on future predictions and this can be seen in section 3.1 and 3.2 of this strategy.

Service Challenges and Solutions

There are a number of challenges facing the future delivery of the Bereavement Service. These include:

- Future burial and cremation service provision
- Meet changes in future legislative and environmental requirements
- Develop where possible new and innovative service provision in order to meet the needs of the bereaved and the wider diverse community.

These issues are discussed together with options available in more detail within this Strategy document.

The Challenge for the Cremation Service Provision

In order to meet the challenges for on-going customer needs and expectations, Robin Hood Crematorium facility underwent a £1.5 Million investment and

refurbishment programme, together with the replacement of the 3 cremators and all associated equipment during 2017.

The new equipment ensures that we are able to meet the challenges of the future and accommodate larger size coffins. We have also carried out work to make sure that we are fully compliant with the Disability Discrimination Act.

However, in order to meet these same needs and expectations in the north of the borough, it will be necessary to consider further investment and development of the facilities at Woodlands Crematorium. Woodlands opened in 2000 and the existing single cremator is now 18 years old. Although currently in fairly good condition it will be imperative that the service plans for its replacement and the possibility for the installation of an additional cremator as the number of cremations at this site continues to increase year on year.

The planning for any replacement/additional equipment and redevelopment of the facilities to meet future increased demand will be undertaken as part of the planned improvement programme and will be subject to a full business case. A full options report for improvement to Woodlands Cemetery and Crematorium will be brought to Cabinet Member for consideration.

The Challenge for the Burial Service Provision

Our current cemetery sites have limited capacity. At Robin Hood Cemetery we have approximately 20 graves available which have been found by filling in pathways and using any spare land available. Widney Manor cemetery was extended in 2013 providing an estimated additional grave provision for around 15-20 years depending on demand and grave capacity at other cemetery sites. Woodlands cemetery currently has approximately 4-5 years maximum capacity and again this is only possible by utilising pathways and any spare land.

Officers are working to utilise space in the best manner in all of our cemeteries and it may be possible to identify additional areas for use, however at Woodlands Cemetery there is a need to purchase additional land in order for us to continue to provide a full burial service in the North of the Borough. The decision to continue to provide burial service in the north of the borough was discussed and supported at Stronger Communities and Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Board meeting on 6th November 2018

Therefore, it is important that a forward planning approach for extending existing sites where possible and securing additional land be continued, if we are to meet future predicted demand requirements as detailed in section 3.2.

The Challenge for Memorial Service Provision

The challenge for memorial provision is to provide a selection of memorials which meet the requirements of a diverse cross section of the population, taking into account changing trends and ideas and also differing financial backgrounds.

Key Legislative Constraints

There are a number of legislative constraints on a Local Authority if and where they choose to provide a burial service or maintain existing burial facilities. These include:

Provision of Burial, Cremation or Memorial Facilities:-

There is no statutory requirement for a Local Authority to provide Burial, Cremation or Memorialisation facilities.

However, Stronger Communities and Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Board of 6th November 2018 agreed to continue to provide and develop its service provision for the bereaved. If for any reason the Council elects to discontinue to provide burial and cremation facilities for its bereaved residents, there would be a number of implications for the Council and its bereaved residents, including:

- **Access to alternative service providers facilities.**
There may be considerable difficulties for bereaved families within Solihull to access alternative service facilities due to their place of residence and the location of these facilities. There is also the issue of capacity for neighbouring service providers, and their ability to accommodate the additional number of burials and or cremations due to the impact that this may have for their existing service capacity.
- **Neighbouring service providers Fees and charges policies.**
There would be financial implications for the bereaved of Solihull particularly in relation to burials, due to neighbouring service providers who already apply enhanced fees and charges for the burial of their non-residents
- **Maintenance of existing burial sites.**
Solihull MBC would still have to accommodate burials within existing graves, where a second interment is taking place. The Council would also be required to maintain current burial sites to a good standard of maintenance.

- **Reserve Graves**

A number of families have purchased graves in reserve so that when the time comes they can rest in peace next to or in close proximity to their loved ones.

- **Statutory Public Health Requirements.**

The Local Authority has a statutory duty under the Public Health (control of disease) Act 1984, to bury or cremate those who pass away within the Borough where no funeral arrangements are being made. However, a Local Authority does not have to provide burial facilities in order to meet this legal obligation and this requirement could be discharged by arranging the funeral in another district or with an alternative service provider. There would be cost implications for the Authority from this.

- **Management of Memorials Located within Cemetery Grounds.**

Under Health and Safety Legislation, there is a requirement upon the Service provider to ensure that all memorials are erected in accordance with approved industry standards and that they do not at any time present a risk to staff, contractors or visitors to the cemetery grounds.

Provision of Facilities to Non-Residents of the Borough:-

Approximately 50% of all burials and cremations currently undertaken in SMBC cemeteries are for non-residents of the Solihull Borough.

Where the Local Authority chooses to provide burial or cremation facilities, it is obliged to offer the service to all individuals. However it is at the discretion of the Authority to decide additional charges for non-residents.

On-going Maintenance Obligations of other Burial Sites

Section 215 of the Local Government Act 1972, enables a Parochial Church Council to close a churchyard by an '*Order in Council*' and then serve notice on the Local Authority to maintain the Churchyard in decent order. As a result of this legislative position, Solihull MBC is responsible for the maintenance of the closed churchyard at St Mary's and St Margaret's located in Castle Bromwich.

It is not known at this time if there are likely to be any future applications by the church authority for the closure of a churchyard. However, there are an estimated 35 parish churchyards across the rural districts of Solihull. It is not known how many of these have burial provision for residents of the parish. It is possible that over the next 30 years a number of these could apply for closure and the responsibility for their future maintenance could ultimately be passed to Solihull Council or the local Parish Council.

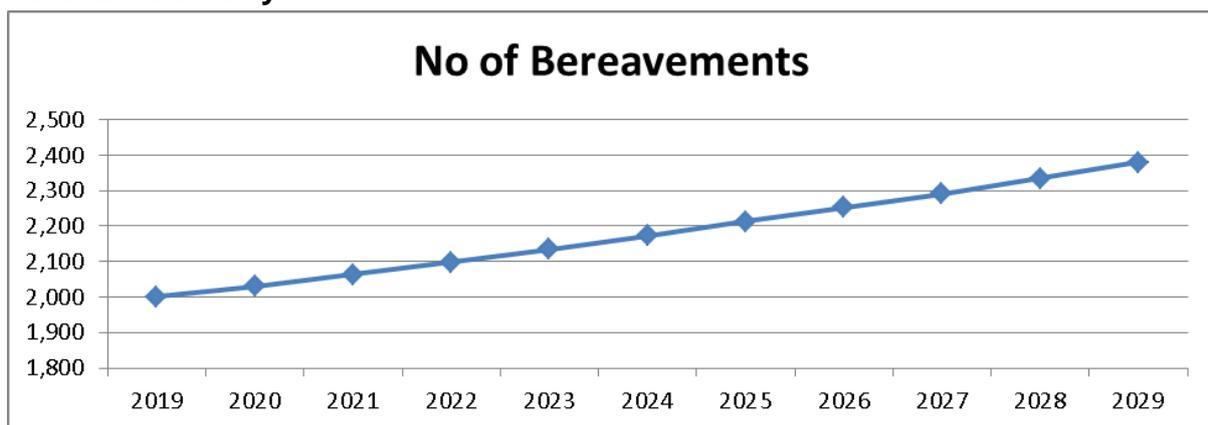
It is important to note that although the Council are responsible for the maintenance of the closed churchyard in Castle Bromwich, the Council receives no income from the Church Authority for any maintenance works undertaken. As a result there is a financial implication for the Council for the continual maintenance of this site of around £7,000 per annum. Clearly if further churchyards were to close and the maintenance responsibility passed to the Council, there would be an added financial burden for the Authority.

1. Predicted Future Demand Trends

Current national demographics and predicted population statistics over the next 40 years lead Government to anticipate that nationally the number of people passing away within the UK will increase from the current 560,000 per annum to an estimated 800,000 by 2050. There are a number of reasons for this predicted increase; most notable is the Government predicted increase in national population figures, the impact resulting from the baby boom of the 1950s and 1960s, and from an increased immigration and migration rate over an extended period, together with the consequence of an aging population. However it should be noted that the withdrawal from the European Union may have an impact on these figures.

Solihull Observatory has provided data information, which has been used to help inform the service on future demands requirements. This information has been used in the future planning process for the service.

Figure 2: Forecast for the number of estimated bereavements within Solihull over the next 10 years:



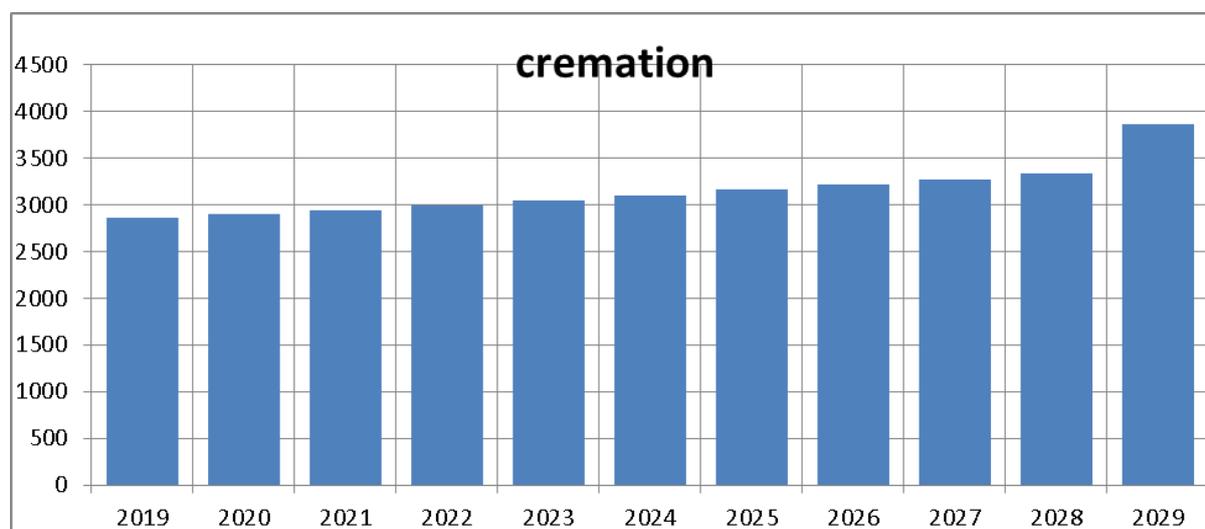
The population of Solihull is around 214,000, and is estimated to increase to approximately 226,800 by 2029. During this period it is also accepted that the age of the population will continue to increase as a result of the baby boom of the 1950's and 1960's.

1.1 Cremation (Future)

In order to provide the bereaved with a sustainable Cremation service, it has been necessary to establish the current and future demand for this service.

The following table indicates what this impact is likely to be for Solihull Council, based on the anticipated number of bereavements within Solihull Borough over the next 10 years. For the purpose of the Strategy, it has been necessary to assume that the current percentage of cremations undertaken for residents and non-residents of the Borough will continue at the current level.

Table 3: Predicted Future Cremation Demand



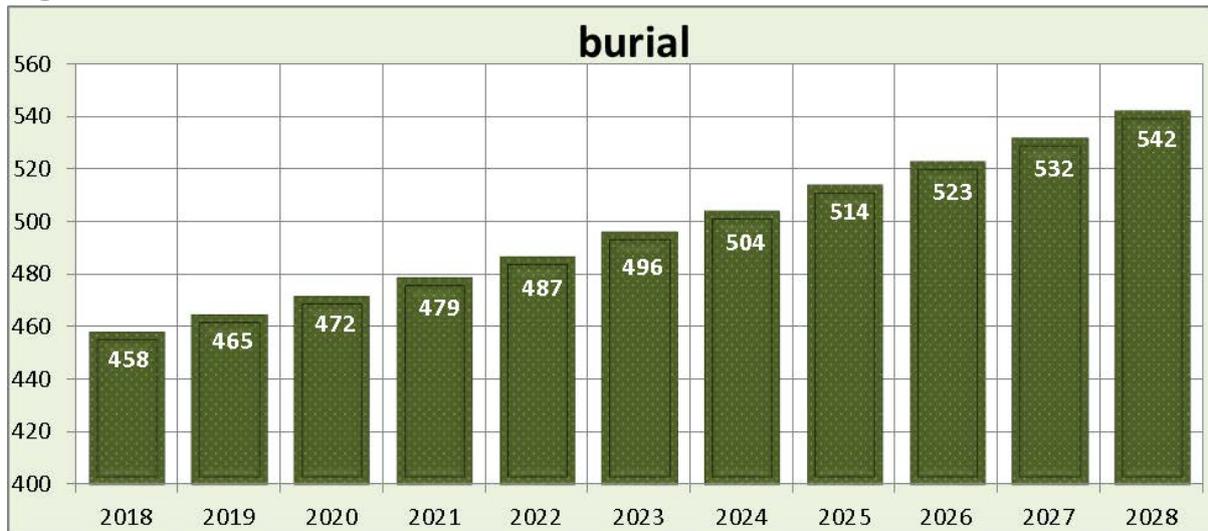
Work has already commenced in order for us to meet this increased demand with the refurbishment of Robin Hood Crematorium in 2017, however further work will need to be carried out to ensure that we continue to meet this increasing demand.

1.2 Burial (Future)

Using the data provided by Solihull Observatory, it is possible to forecast that there will be a significant public dependence on Solihull Council to provide a full and comprehensive burial service.

The following table indicates what this impact is likely to be for Solihull Council, based on the anticipated number of bereavements within Solihull Borough over the next 10 years. For the purpose of this Strategy, it has been necessary to assume that the current percentage of burials undertaken for residents and non-residents of the Borough will continue at the current level.

Figure 4: Predicted Future Burial Demand



As indicated previously, current burial facilities and capacity if not extended, could be exhausted within the next few years in the North of the Borough.

1.3 Memorials

- As previously discussed there is an on going need for memorialisation, particularly following a cremation, in order for families to visit to pay their respects. Memorials are continually monitored and reviewed across our cemeteries and improvements made where appropriate.

2.0 Financial Constraints

2.1 Burial, Cremation and Memorialisation

The gross total income generated in 2018/2019 from all burials undertaken was £1.02 million and £2.08 million from all cremations and £0.177 million from memorial sales. This represents a significant level of income generation for the Authority and enables the service to provide high quality service provision and a high standard of maintenance to its grounds and facilities for the bereaved.

The level of income received supports the significant financial investment required by the Authority through an annual contribution of £80,000 into the Bereavement Service Reserve Fund. This fund sustains the current service provision and helps finance future service enhancements and service development including the development of further cemetery sites and crematorium facilities.

There were 485 full burials undertaken in 2018/19 (with approximately 48% relating to burials of non-residents). The income received from undertaking non-resident burials is an important source of financing for burial service provision and assists the Authority in funding the maintenance of existing cemetery sites.

3.0 Future Service Development

3.1 Cremation

3.1.1 Robin Hood Crematorium

The 3 Cremators at Robin Hood Crematorium were installed in 2017 and should be capable of undertaking around 2700 cremations in total per annum (current volumes are around 2000 per annum). Manufacturers estimate that cremators are likely to remain serviceable and operational for at least 15-20 years before the need for replacement, dependant on usage and maintenance.

Our ability to accommodate the increased demand for cremation services is not solely reliant on cremator capacity. At Robin Hood the single chapel facility accommodates all funeral services for cremation. If the number of requests for cremation does increase further options would need to be considered.

3.1.2 Woodlands Crematorium

The annual number of cremations undertaken at Woodlands continues to increase year on year, with 896 cremations being carried out during 2018/19. It is anticipated, that this annual number will continue to increase as the population and the numbers of bereavements increases.

The existing cremator at Woodlands is now 18 years old and is nearing the end of its serviceable life. However, the cremator remains in good condition due to regular maintenance. Despite this, consideration and planning will need to be given to its replacement within the next 2 years.

With the projected increase in cremations, as shown in table 7 it may be considered the most cost effective juncture to undertake a refurbishment and replacement programme including consideration for a second cremator.

3.1.3 Environmental Issues (Cremation);

Mercury Abatement

Current Legislation requires that Crematoria across the country reduce mercury emissions by 50% with effect from 1st January 2013 ways. Solihull currently meets it's requirements by purchasing from the national trading organisation 'Crematoria Abatement of Mercury Emissions Organisation' (CAMEO).

Social and Environmental Responsibility (Carbon Emission Management)

One of the other ways Local Authorities can deliver high quality service provision, whilst operating in a socially responsible way, is to reduce the impact on the environment by achieving a reduction in the carbon footprint and where possible to reduce carbon emissions into the atmosphere. This will ensure that its cremation service operates in the most efficient way by appropriate management of staff and equipment. The service is regularly monitored by officers from Enforcement, Monitoring and Compliance to ensure that we comply with the Environment Agency's regulation regarding emissions.

3.2 Burial

It is estimated that in order to meet the predicted increasing demand for burials, it will be necessary to identify and develop land for long-term burial provision. Therefore, work has commenced with the Council's Strategic Land Service to investigate and identify possible land which could be developed for future cemetery provision

3.2.1 Widney Manor Cemetery

Widney Manor Cemetery was extended by 9 Acres onto adjacent Council owned land in 2012, at a cost of around £500,000. The development of this land required a programme of ground water monitoring and detailed assessment both prior and after its development as a cemetery. The result of the monitoring works undertaken identified that around 30% of the site has been identified as unsuitable for burials. This has a significant impact on the remaining capacity of the site. Furthermore, in order to bring this land into a suitable condition for burials considerable mitigating works may be required. Officers are currently working to look at available options for this land.

3.2.2 Woodlands Cemetery

In order to provide a sustainable burial service in the north of the Borough there is an urgent requirement to identify additional land for longer-term provision. Remaining capacity for burials at Woodlands is a maximum of 4-5 years, it is essential that further land is secured and developed in time to meet future demand and to ensure a continual burial provision in north Solihull.

A number of areas of land adjacent to Woodlands cemetery have been identified as a possible site for future burial provision. As a result a detailed investigation has been undertaken to establish if any of these areas would be suitable for burials.

Purchase of any land will only take place once a detailed investigation to comply with the Environment Agency's requirements and planning permission is granted. If any

of these sites investigated were to be acquired and developed, the site could provide burial capacity in north Solihull.

The likely financial implications and optimum sources of funding for the above will be brought before Cabinet for approval.

However, it is important to note that if any of the land cannot be secured or if the land is identified as unsuitable for burial, it will be essential to identify and consider alternative land if we are to provide a sustainable burial service in the north of the Borough.

4. Future Considerations

4.1 Cremation

No proven operational alternative to cremation is in existence within the UK. However, officers are aware that there are a number of alternatives under development in other parts of the world. Officers will continually monitor these developments and any that are commercially proven will be considered further and any possible benefits to the bereaved or the Council will be reported to Cabinet Member.

4.2 Future Burial Options for Consideration

It must also be recognised that the service undertakes around 400 interments of Cremated Remains across all cemetery and crematoria sites. This will also have an impact on the use of available land and consideration of future requirements has been included for within future land needs.

If the option to provide future burial provision is not taken, the Council would have to recognise that there would be a substantial impact in terms of both loss of income to the Council and a significant impact on the bereaved residents of Solihull.

4.3 Memorials

Following the development of the Tranquillity Garden, and Lavender walk schemes at Robin Hood, consideration will be given to the development of a new memorial scheme for Woodlands Crematorium with the intention to offer a wider product choice and improved memorial facilities for the bereaved across the whole Borough. A new scheme at Woodlands would significantly further increase the memorial options available for the bereaved at Woodlands Cemetery.

