

SUBJECT:	Reopen Monmouth Cemetery for New Burials
MEETING:	Cabinet
DATE:	5th July 2023
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	Osbaston

1. PURPOSE:

To seek Cabinet approval to reopen Monmouth Cemetery for 'on-demand' coffin burials.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

To approve the proposed policy change to reopen Monmouth Cemetery for the offer of 'on-demand' coffin burials.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 'On-demand' coffin burials means graves are prepared, at depths to accommodate one or two coffins, only following a death and the booking of the burial with MCC.
- 3.2 A Ground Investigation report was produced in 2013 by Capita Symonds following concerns over the depth of the water table in the area where new grave plots were being prepared for burials. Following 5 months of monitoring (between October 2012 and February 2013) their recommendations were:
- *It is not recommended that the site is utilised for future burials as the groundwater level is at and above that required for the base of the interment.*
 - *The cost of the installation of the drainage system and outfall is likely to be uneconomic when considering the number of burial plots that will be available between drainage trenches.*
- 3.3 Following the Capita Symonds report Cabinet resolved to close Monmouth Cemetery for coffin burials in new grave plots. Reopening old graves for a second/third coffin and reserved spaces have been honoured and the offer for new cremated remains plots has remained.
- 3.4 Having been approached by Monmouth Town Council, who have been very keen to reopen Monmouth cemetery for coffin burials in new graves and subsequently working with them, a plan to commence the offer of new graves for coffin burials has been formulated.
- 3.5 The plan necessitates the widening of an existing tarmac path and the improvement and enlargement of the current turning area for the hearse and family vehicles. The Town Council has agreed to meet these costs. This infrastructure allows access to an area of

land within the cemetery, previously inaccessible to the machinery required to prepare a grave and given over to rough ground (Appendix 3, Area 1). The widening of the path will also provide the extra hard standing required for the machinery to safely dig graves at the bottom of a steep bank (Appendix 3, Area 2), again, previously not allocated for grave spaces due to the lack of infrastructure.

- 3.6 There are also several graves that could be offered at single depth (1.4m) in the existing, incomplete rows, which are situated at a higher ground level to the bore holes that were dug and monitored by Capita Symonds (Appendix 3, Area 3).
- 3.7 In February 2023 (the water table is generally at its highest during the winter months) test holes were dug in Area 1 and Area 3 (to double depth - 2m). In Area 1 there were no concerns regarding ground water levels. In Area 3 there was some seepage at double depth so an offer of only single depth would be advisable here.
- 3.8 It is estimated that in total, across all three areas, approximately 110 new grave spaces will be created. In line with the proposal to cease the offer to reserve plots in all MCC cemeteries, it is recommended that there will be no offer to reserve any of these newly created plots for future use. This will ensure equity to residents in accessing burial plots.
- 3.9 Based on the average use of new grave plots per year in the other cemeteries, (Llanfoist Avg. 30 new grave plots used per year and Chepstow Avg. 15 new grave plots used per year) it is envisaged that the new grave plots will provide in the region of 3.5 - 7 years of on-demand graves. Because the cemetery has been closed for new graves, it is difficult to assess what the demand might be.
- 3.10 There is potential to create further new grave plots in the rough ground above Area 1. It is currently given over to self-seeded bushes/saplings and brambles etc. There are a few tree root balls in this area from felled Ash trees which recently succumbed to Ash Dieback. The number of potential graves in this area is dependent on the extent of the root systems and how much can be removed.
- 3.11 The loss of biodiversity is likely to be minimal, however, some grassland at the bottom of the bank will be lost to graves. To mitigate the impact to biodiversity, plug plants ie native wildflowers will be planted across the cemetery. There is a 'Friends of Monmouth Cemetery' group who are keen to lead this project and who will be guided by MCC Biodiversity and Ecology.
- 3.12 Monmouth Town Council have agreed to pay the additional costs incurred to maintain the grave for the first 12 months following a burial. This charge covers the costs involved with topping up the grave every 4 weeks for the first 6 months to aid settlement, and before a memorial can be fixed and to finally 'make good' the grave with topsoil and turf/grass seed, depending on the time of year. This process occurs after each burial, including when graves are re-opened for a second interment. In financial year 2023-24 this charge per burial is £66. This charge will be reviewed each year in-line with the burial charges.

4. REASONS:

- 4.1 An overview of all Council managed cemeteries is taking place, with a view to increasing the amount of time we can offer 'on-demand' grave plots with the existing space we have remaining. As such it is recommended that the ability to reserve a grave space across all MCC managed cemeteries (not including cremated remains plots) is ceased.
- 4.2 Monmouth Town Council will fund the necessary infrastructure works required to utilise the existing, suitable, and recently cleared land within Monmouth cemetery. In line with our recent planning to extend the existence of an offer of 'on-demand' coffin burials across Monmouthshire, re-opening Monmouth Cemetery helps to assist in this aim.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 The MCC Cemeteries Officer will administer the burials with no extra resource required.
- 5.2 The MCC Grounds Department will prepare the graves and maintain the plots for the first 12 months following a burial.
- 5.2.1 The cost of digging the grave and backfilling is included in the cost of the grave.
- 5.2.2 The cost to maintain the grave for 12 months following a burial will be paid by Monmouth Town Council. In Financial year 2023-24 this will be £66 and will be subject to an annual review, in-line with the burial charges.

6. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING)

- 6.1 Having the ability to bury a loved one in the area in which they resided and close to family and friends can provide much comfort at a difficult time. To create new burial plots in Monmouth Cemetery will give the residents of Monmouth the choice to bury their loved one within their hometown.
- 6.2 Not offering the ability to reserve grave plots creates equity, as the graves will be used on-demand only. The cost to reserve a grave space can be prohibitive and can deny access to grave spaces when they are required.
- 6.3 Integrated Impact Assessment document – appendix a

7. CONSULTEES:

Nicola Howells - Asset Manager
Nick Keyse – Acting Head of Landlord Services
Peter Davies – Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Officer Resources
Cllr Rachel Garrick – Cabinet Member for Resources
Nigel Leaworthy - Commercial and Operations Manager
Kate Stinchcombe - Biodiversity and Ecology Lead
Cllr Jane Lucas- County Councillor Osbaston Ward
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8. **BACKGROUND PAPERS:** None
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Appendices

- Appendix a – Integrated Impact Assessment document
- Appendix b - areas being considered for new grave plots
- Appendix c – proposed area of work
- Appendix d – proposed works