

SUBJECT: RESERVATION OF GRAVE PLOTS

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 5th July 2023

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: Countywide

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To seek Cabinet approval to cease the offer to reserve grave spaces (not including cremated remains plots)

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 To approve the proposed policy change in Council managed cemeteries.
- 2.2 To commence a review of remaining burial space in Monmouthshire, to inform a strategic assessment of future cemetery provision, inclusive of additional or alternative sites.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 Available and suitable land for burials is increasingly becoming scarce and reserved graves reduce the availability of 'on demand' plots.
- 3.2 There are two reasons that plots are reserved:
- To make arrangements for one's own funeral (part of a funeral plan) to lessen the burden on family.
 - To ensure that one can be buried next to a family member.

As such, plot reservations can remain empty for many decades and the Exclusive Right of Burial (issued for 75 years) is not purchased until the first interment is carried out.

- 3.3 Many local authorities now do not offer the ability to reserve grave plots, including some of the Council's neighbouring authorities, many of which reversed the offer to preserve the number of graves for 'on demand' burials.
- 3.4 It is likely that ceasing this provision could cause concern for families who already have relatives buried in the cemetery. However, there is likely to be equal/greater concern if space for new burials is exhausted prior to the Council securing any extension or alternative burial sites, which will be more likely if the time available to achieve this is reduced.

3.5 An alternative to a new grave is to use existing graves as 'family' plots. Existing graves that have no further capacity for a coffin burial can still accommodate 6-8 ashes caskets. For as long as the Exclusive Right of Burial is valid (and there is provision to purchase additional years and transfer it to beneficiaries) the grave can be re-opened to inter cremated remains. Thus, providing the ability to create a family plot for years to come.

3.6 Using Llanfoist as a case study:

3.6.1 Llanfoist Cemetery has approximately 300 new grave plots remaining in the final area allocated for coffin burials. Using the average number of new grave plots used from the last 7 years, this area would provide 10 years new burial offer, however, once the 6 year average for reservations is included (minus those reserved plots that are used as new plots each year – approx. 1-2 per year) this area will provide space for approx. the next 7.5 years ie. a reduction of 2.5 years.

Avg no of new grave plots used per year (not incl cremated remains plots) – 30

Avg no of grave plots reserved per year (not incl cremated remains plots) - 11

3.6.2 There is an income generated from plot reservations at Llanfoist cemetery. For the last 3 financial years (including 4x Out of County reservations) the income combined was £12,584. That's an average of £4,195. This is approximately the same income that is generated from two new double depth graves - £4430 (the most common new grave type).

3.7 Reservations (excluding income generated by the reservation of cremated remains plots) across all cemeteries managed by the Council for 2022-23 brought in £3,552. This equates to just under 2% of total income.

3.8 Alongside the proposed policy change, work will commence to assess the remaining burial space within the County and locations that may require additional cemetery provision. The proposed review will include assessment of alternative burial spaces on MCC land and third party provision.

REASONS:

4.1 There is a need to maximise the number of years remaining where MCC can offer new burials as and when the need arises.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 Discontinuing the offer to reserve grave spaces would result in a loss of income. The income generated from the reservation of cremated remains plots would continue. Across the cemeteries, the income in Financial Year 2022-23 generated from plot reservations was £3,552. This equates to approx. 2% of total income for that year.

5.2 This potential income shortfall and budget pressure will be managed within the overall Resource directorate budget amidst the wider pressure and savings needing to be achieved by the directorate as part of in-year budget recovery and the budget process for 2023-24.

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

6.1 As the number of available grave spaces becomes limited it is likely that the number of reservations will increase as families seek to secure a grave for the future. Ceasing this provision creates equity within the community to access graves, as the cost to reserve a grave space could be prohibitive to many.

6.1 The inability to reserve a grave space will impact on those that would take comfort in the knowledge that they would be interred near to family or to know where their final resting place will be, however the offset is that grave spaces will be exhausted sooner which will equally impact on the residents of Monmouthshire.

6.2 The ability to create a family grave in existing plots remains an option and as cremation becomes ever more popular this will allow families to be buried together.

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

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

None

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