

COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

22 MARCH 2016

REPORT OF HEAD OF COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBOURHOODS

**NATURAL BURIAL GROUND PROVISION
UPDATE 2016**

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide members with an update in regards to potential partnership or joint working arrangements with a local landowner expressing interest in partnering with the council to establish a local 'Natural Burial Ground' (NBG).
- 1.2 To inform members of the existing natural burial ground provisions in near proximity to Melton Mowbray along with general information regarding those sites.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **Members consider the existing provision in the area and determine if this is sufficient to meet demand in the area and recommend that no further work to be undertaken at this time in regards to developing a Melton Mowbray NBG facility.**
- 2.2 **Subject to members decision on 2.1, should members consider officers should progress developing a site in Melton, members determine from the options highlighted in Appendix A (Options 1-4) and identify a preferred option as being a potential site for a NBG and request that further work be undertaken to develop a business case for presentation at a future meeting of this Committee.**

3.0 KEY ISSUES

3.1 Natural Burial Ground Provision

- 3.1.1 At a previous meeting of the Community and Social Affairs Committee, members agreed to seek expressions of interest from Landowners / Farmers in regards to seeking a partner with suitable land available locally that might potentially be willing to work in partnership with the council with the intension of developing a local Natural Burial site.
- 3.1.2 Accordingly advertisements seeking interest were placed in a number of relevant publications: the Melton Times, Grantham Journal, More to Death (a publication of the Natural Burials Association) a National Farmers Union publication and the Countryside Landowners Association magazine.
- 3.1.3 The response to these were good in regards to telephone enquiries and requests for further information and accordingly the process has identified four possible local sites detailed at Appendix A as Options 1,2,3 and 4.
- 3.1.4 This report also seeks to provide some understanding of Melton Mowbray's closest existing natural burial ground provision and give an indication of current demand, availability and uptake. Much of this information is commercially sensitive and confidential to the burial ground owners, however the research for this report would seem to indicate

that firstly there is a reasonable spread of existing facilities accessible to residents of this Borough albeit none are actually in Melton itself, and secondly, currently the existing sites do appear to be somewhat undersubscribed, receiving low numbers of customers per year, some as low as just 5 or 6 natural burials per year.

3.1.5 The closest established 'Natural Burial' grounds to Melton Mowbray are located at Loughborough, South Croxton, Scraptoft and Oakham (Appendix A is a map showing those site locations in relation to Melton Mowbray).

3.2 Appendix A outlines some details of the four privately owned pieces of land in and around Melton Mowbray identified by their owners in response to the adverts seeking expressions of interest in jointly developing a local Natural Burial Ground.

3.3 Established Natural Burial Grounds local to Melton Mowbray

3.3.1 PRESTWOLD NATURAL BURIAL GROUND – PRESTWOLD, LOUGHBOROUGH



This site is owned by one of the largest cemetery operators in the County. The Prestwold site was established over 20 years ago.

This 20 acre site has further land it can utilise when it needs to expand. It was the first Natural Burial Ground in the area and is the most established of the sites described here. It contains a number of different vistas and environments with woodland

and meadows and has a simple memorial system of name boards.

This site can accommodate almost every natural burial type from the almost complete self-service through to natural burials where a significant part of the service is little different from a traditional service. The annual usage numbers are rising; however, there is no concern in regards to meeting an increased demand as the current level of usage is fairly low.

3.3.2 THE WILLOWS NATURAL BURIAL GROUND - SOUTH CROXTON



This award winning 5.8 acre site is operated by local land owner who lives within close proximity of the site.

This site currently has further land it can utilise when it needs to expand. The land gently slopes down to a lake, a feature that is unique to this burial site when compared to others in the local area.

The site opened in 2011 and is the currently the site nearest to

Melton Mowbray; however, despite this it is located within the borough of Charnwood.

The cost of the land when first purchased was £115,000; furthermore, an additional £16,000 was spent on providing a moderately sized and adequately surfaced car parking

facility along with fencing and a noticeboard with leaflet holders to visitors with information. The site is managed with a strong sense of the countryside and conservation so that in time, the site will develop areas of wildflower meadows and natural woodland. The site is also only cut twice annually, this is to encourage biodiversity. The areas around the trees are left uncut to promote biodiversity and wild flowers.

This site can accommodate almost every natural burial type from the complete self-service through to natural burials where a significant part of the service is little different from a traditional service; furthermore, the site is able to accommodate scattering of ashes.

The site utilises a simple memorial system of memorial plaques, often planted with a tree native to the area, memorial benches are also permitted. Although the annual usage is increasing, there is no concern in regards to meeting an increased demand as the current level of usage is fairly low, for example, since opening only around 100 burials have been conducted at this site.

3.3.3 KETTON PARK GREEN BURIAL – KETTON, OAKHAM



Ketton Park is a five acre natural meadow situated outside of Leicestershire within the county of Rutland.

The site has a car parking facility and the site is a large open meadow and land gently slopes down the valley to the River Chater. This is the only site that has a flowing watercourse running through. Native trees of remembrance are planted within designated copses leaving the actual site of

burials to nature as a meadow. The copses together with the meadowland provide the natural habitat for insects, birds and other wildlife. The areas around the trees are left uncut to promote biodiversity and the meadowland will be cut only twice a year in the growing season to encourage wild flowers.

Each grave is marked with an engraved granite remembrance plaque set at ground level and recorded on a plan to allow for location in the future. Ketton Park can accommodate almost every natural burial type from the almost complete self-service through to natural burials where a significant part of the service is little different from a traditional service; furthermore, the site is able to accommodate scattering of ashes without any services from a funeral director.

3.3.4 SCRAPTOFT BURIAL GROUND – SCRAPTOFT



The Scraptoft site is located just five miles away from Leicester city centre and is located on a gentle slope in a quiet valley.

A brook runs along the northern boundary of the site and provides a wildlife refuge. There are patches of woodland with open wildflower glades and there are several hundred trees and shrubs as this allows native species to establish themselves

and mature. The site has a small car park and a noticeboard containing relevant information. This site can accommodate almost every natural burial type from the almost complete self-service through to natural burials where a significant part of the service is little different from a traditional service; furthermore, the site is able to accommodate scattering of ashes. The site utilises a simple memorial system of memorial plaques, often planted with a tree native to the area, memorial benches are also permitted. Although the annual usage is increasing, there is no concern in regards to meeting an increased demand as the current level of usage is fairly low.

4.0 POLICY AND CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no specific policies or corporate implications as a direct result of this report.

5.0 FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The introduction of an additional option for the council's cemetery services should result in an additional income stream not previously available. The initiative is at an early stage; however, it is already clear that a significant degree of investment is likely to be required to establish a local natural burial site and that if it were provided by the council the payback period may be considerable due to the current supply and availability greatly outstripping the demand situation..

5.2 If members approve the option to develop a natural Burial site in Melton, then officers will prepare a business case, which will outline the financial and operational details. Once established the outcomes of any agreed financial mechanism for a natural burial provision will aim to offer minimal on-going resource requirements of the council and an on-going income or share of any fiscal surplus generated by the facility.

5.3 Members will recall the concept was to work in partnership with a landowner, negating any expense to the council for acquiring land for the service, whilst offering an income to both the council and the landowner where one was not necessarily being generated previously. Thereby going forward primarily offering an additional provision for the council's cemetery service albeit with an initial substantial set up cost, to then be followed by a minimal maintenance requirement together with a small income.

6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS/POWERS

6.1 There are no legal implications or powers implications as a direct result of this report. However should members be minded to develop and further pursue the establishment of a local provision ,all authorisations, permissions and consents would be sought

7.0 COMMUNITY SAFETY

7.1 There are no direct implications as a direct result of this report.

8.0 EQUALITIES

8.1 Natural Burials can vary considerably in nature, procedure and cost. This can range from almost no difference from a traditional funeral, other than perhaps the materials used and the burial site setting, through to a provision that varies in almost every aspect from a funeral directed service using a traditional cemetery. However, in general many tend to offer lower cost funeral provisions than traditional burials.

Additionally natural burials are often seen as more appropriate to those seeking a ceremony with little or no particular religious or denominational affinity as well as offering something different with resting places such woodlands, flower meadows or other similar

natural environments conducive to tranquil and peaceful contemplation.

The differences natural burials can offer would increase the choices and options the council has to offer and address the needs and desires of those seeking a non-traditional, often non-religious service, addressing the equalities issues for such groups seeking such services.

9.0 RISKS

9.1

Probability	Very High A				Risk No.	Description
	High B					
Significant C	1					
Low D						
Very Low E						
Almost Impossible F						
	IV Negligible	III Marginal	II Critical	I Catastrophic		

Impact →

10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

10.1 Natural Burials invariably consider environmental factors with the use of local sustainable and non-synthetic materials where ever possible. As such Natural Burials should help mitigate climate change having a modest but positive environmental impact.

11.0 LEGAL & ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF NATURAL BURIAL

11.1 Burials are not permitted within 20 metres of a water course to prevent contamination of the water table.

11.2 Only single depth burials are permitted to control the release of methane and ensure efficient natural decomposition.

11.3 Biodegradable caskets must be used so that do not release toxins into the ground.

11.4 Each plot must be a least four feet apart from another to prevent upset between families.

11.5 Tress native to the local area must be used to ensure that the burial ground is in keeping with the surrounding area.

12.0 CONSULTATION

12.1 Consultation has included discussion with local undertakers and funeral directors as well as the local County Grave digger who has worked at most of the existing sites mentioned.

Information and data has also been provided and gathered during consultation about supply and demand and the main infrastructure requirements

13.0 **WARDS AFFECTED**

13.1 The provision is expected to be a facility local to Melton Mowbray and as such this report may affect any of the town wards.

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Date: 7 March 2016

Appendices : A- Potential site options-A-D

Background Papers: None

Reference : X : Committees\CSA\2015.16\220315\HR- Natural Burial Provision