

Environment and Regeneration Select Committee

The Future Development of Cemeteries



March 2007

Environment and Regeneration Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
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SELECT COMMITTEE – MEMBERSHIP

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Councillor R Cains (Vice-Chair)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Committee thank the following contributors to this review.

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Foreword

This Review was undertaken as a result of concerns that were being raised regarding the long-term strategy for the cemeteries within our Borough.

We commenced the review with a comprehensive tour of the Borough's cemeteries, which gave us a very good overview of the current provision and also gave us the opportunity to see some of the problems.

We were appreciative of the comprehensive background document on the Future Development of Cemeteries, which was prepared for us by Jayne Robins, the Registrations and Bereavement Manager and her staff. This became a well-used reference tool, which informed our discussions.

During the review the committee questioned representatives from the Funeral Directors, members and representatives of different faith groups and received the responses to similar questions from different Focus groups and The Elderly Citizens Forum.

The recommendations reflect the various areas the review covered and are designed to move the service forward. It was rewarding to work with staff who were very enthusiastic about the development of their service, but who were also mindful of the sensitivity of their service users.

Our sincere thanks go to all those who worked closely on this review, Jayne Robins, Alan Gibson, Sue Daniels and Judy Trainer and all others who gave their time to the process.

The Committee all agreed that it had been a very interesting and informative review and we had all learnt a considerable amount about the service.

Councillor Jennie Beaumont
Chair – Environment and Regeneration Select Committee



**Councillor Jennie
Beaumont
Chair –
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**Councillor Dick Cains
Vice-Chair –
Environment and
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Original Brief

What are the main issues?

Safety and Security:

- Vandalism
- Unsocial Behaviour
- Vehicular Access

Improvement Plan:

- Walls and Boundary Fencing
- Ground Stability and Drainage
- Road and Footpath Works
- Street Furniture
- Horticultural and Arboriculture Improvement
- Closed Churchyards
- Consecrated Land

Future Developments:

- Life expectancy of existing cemeteries/projected shortage of burial space
- Extension to Existing Cemeteries
- Additional Burial Land
- Stockton Crematorium
- Refurbishment/redevelopment/demolition of Chapels/Buildings
- Civil Funerals and Memorial Ceremonies (Dedicated benches and trees)

Extending Choice:

- Green Burials
- Woodland Burials
- Civil Funerals
- Coffins and alternatives
- Environmental Issues
- Choice of graves/depth

Policies:

- Re-use of Graves – Current Legal Position
- Grant of Exclusive Right of Burial
- Burial of Body Parts
- Cemetery Rules and Regulations

Operational Issues:

- Maintenance
- Grave Excavation
- Administration

The Thematic Select Committee's overall AIM in doing this work is:

The development of an improvement plan and long term strategy for the provision of cemeteries within the Borough.

The main OBJECTIVES are:

To ensure that there is adequate provision for future burial needs in the Borough
To identify improvements to existing cemeteries for inclusion in the 5 year improvement plan
To develop the range of burial options available
To introduce measures to reduce the incidence of unsocial behaviour at cemeteries

The possible OUTPUTS (changes in service delivery) and OUTCOMES (benefits to the community) are:

To improve the quality of existing cemeteries and extend the choice of burial options.

What specific value can scrutiny add to this topic?

Detailed consideration of issue and an understanding of views of local residents.

Who will the panel be trying to influence as part of their work?

Cabinet.

Who can provide us with further relevant evidence? (Cabinet Member/portfolio holder, officer, service user, general public, expert witness, etc.)

Funeral Directors, Residents/Service Users, Faith Groups, Care for Your Area, Finance, Conservation, Property Services, Finance, Cabinet Member

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 The provision of cemeteries is widely recognised as a vital service provided by Stockton Borough Council. To maintain and improve this service for the future will need the Council to take a number of strategic decisions, which may affect the direction in which the cemeteries are managed.

1.2 The responsibility for providing and maintaining cemetery land was much simplified in 1972, when the Local Government Act abolished all burial boards. New burial authorities were defined and, with the exception of a small number of company cemeteries, all cemeteries are now owned by local authorities or parish councils. Although there is no legal requirement for a council to provide burial or cremation facilities, this Authority has acted as a burial authority for almost 140 years. The Council has five cemeteries and has a legal responsibility for the maintenance of all or part of nine closed churchyards within the Borough.

Financial Issues

1.3 The Committee found that although direct fee comparisons were difficult, the Council's fees and charges appeared competitive compared with other Tees Valley Authorities based a comparison in respect of charges for lease of rights to a grave (lowest cost option), burial fee (single adult interment) and new memorial fee. The Committee felt that there was scope to review fees and charges whilst still ensuring that they remained competitive.

Recommended that a comprehensive fees and charges review for the service be undertaken as part of the service planning process for consideration before April 2008.

1.4 Due to a history of minimal maintenance and age of the assets within the Cemeteries, the Council on 1 March 2006, approved capital resources of £150,000 to fund improvements to cemeteries. The Council also approved, in principle, allocations of £150,000 for the following two years subject to capital resources being available. Although full condition surveys are essential in order to assess costs, officers are of the view that the costs allocated will still not be enough to bring all of the cemeteries up to an acceptable standard.

Recommended that the further capital investment to deliver the existing five year Improvement Plan for cemeteries and closed churchyards be considered through the Capital Asset Strategy Group to identify appropriate funding streams.

1.5 The Committee found that although the Bereavement Service generated income to the Authority, there was a predicted loss against budget owing to a reduced income. Previous years surpluses were in the main as a result of over achievement of income targets.

Recommended that the service review its medium term financial plan to re-assess the assumptions on which the budget has been set.

Funeral Times and Office Opening Hours

1.6 The Committee found that the Bereavement Services Officer and Horticultural Services Manager had been able, by special arrangement, to offer flexibility in funeral booking times. In addition, a basic booking service is offered to funeral directors via the Bereavement Services Officer's mobile telephone where Bank Holidays create a four day break in service.

1.7 Feedback from Viewpoint Panel Members revealed a desire for more flexibility in respect of funeral booking times, particularly at weekends. In addition, Funeral Directors and Faith Groups were in favour of extending funeral times on Friday evenings, particularly during the summer months and commented that any process to speed up the registration of a death would be welcomed.

1.8 The Committee felt that both funeral and office opening hours should be reviewed to offer an improved service to the customer.

Recommended that Care for Your Area be asked to review working arrangements in order to establish whether there is scope to provide an extended service on Fridays and Saturdays.

Recommended that Registration and Bereavement Services review office opening hours to provide, where possible, an improved service to the public.

Safety and Security

1.9 The Committee found that there had been vandalism to headstones, particularly in Durham Road Cemetery. The problems had worsened in Durham Road following the demolition of the cemetery lodge in 1995. As a result CCTV cameras had been installed in Durham Road Cemetery from the Cleaner, Safer and Greener Capital Funding and fencing repairs had been carried out. There have been no problems at Durham Road Cemetery since the CCTV cameras were installed.

1.10 The Committee found that cars were permitted within cemetery grounds but that there had been problems with congestion and people driving/ parking on grassed areas and even grave spaces. Most problems arise when drivers are unable or unwilling to manoeuvre without staying on the road. Plans are in place to create a one-way system at Thornaby Cemetery in the current financial year.

Recommended that in view of the experience at Durham Road Cemetery, the installation of CCTV be considered for inclusion within the five year Improvement Plan for other cemeteries.

Recommended that further efforts are made to establish friends groups for all of the Council's cemeteries.

Recommended that planting be undertaken at strategic locations to deter vandals and assist with traffic control within cemetery grounds.

Maintenance

1.11 The maintenance of the Borough's cemeteries was transferred to Care for Your Area in April 2003 and at the same time much of the Horticultural Service work

was brought back as in-house provision. Whilst the initial focus was very much upon improving the horticultural service provision, in recent years there has been a significant improvement in the maintenance of the Borough's cemeteries. In particular, improvements have been made to grass cutting, floral displays and bulb planting.

1.12 One of the major benefits from having an in house horticultural division that operates within the same umbrella as 'Care For You Area', is the ability to provide assistance from other front line services. However, such flexibility is often limited by the demands placed upon Horticultural Service teams and this flexibility is an added benefit, rather than being part of core service delivery and cannot always be relied upon. The Committee found that the maintenance of cemeteries within each of the Borough's cemeteries is of a very high standard.

1.13 Notwithstanding the high standards of maintenance within the Council's cemeteries, the Committee were made aware of localised flooding problems, particularly at Thornaby Cemetery by Viewpoint Panel Members and Faith Groups, and felt that improvements could be made to the back filling and reinstatement of graves to reduce "sinking" and improve presentation.

1.14 The Committee also supported the further development of a "green" approach to the maintenance of cemetery grounds. This could include a range of measures including:

- composting a greater amount of mown grass, leaves, flowers and other plant material removed from the grounds
- reduction in the use of herbicides/chemicals and peat
- the retention of cut timber in habitat piles, rather than burning
- increasing tree planting in order to offset carbon dioxide emissions
- sourcing alternatives to teak, mahogany and other hardwoods used in the construction on garden seats

Recommended that localised flooding problems be investigated and any capital implications identified for consideration by the Capital Asset Strategy Group.

Recommended that improvements are made to the way graves are back filled and reinstated.

Recommended that a "green" approach to the maintenance of cemetery grounds be developed.

Facilities

1.15 The Viewpoint Focus Groups, Funeral Directors and Faith Groups consultation all suggested cemetery maps to be on display in cemeteries. Although there are cemetery maps within cemeteries, the Committee felt that these should be reviewed in conjunction with section signage within the cemetery grounds.

1.16 The Committee found that the disused chapels in Durham Road and Oxbridge Lane Cemeteries were not subject to any conditions relating to listing.

1.17 As part of the Five-Year Cemeteries Development Plan it is suggested that the change of use of the remaining chapels and re-opening to the public be

investigated. As two of the four chapels were previously in use for funeral services according to the Rites of the Church of England, full consultation must take place between the Diocese and the Council before any proposals are implemented.

1.18 Preliminary enquiries to the ICCM ascertained that chapels within Carlisle Cemetery and the City of London Cemetery have been re-opened to the public recently. The chapel within the Carlisle Cemetery is currently used for funeral ceremonies and as a display area for biodegradable coffins. City of London Cemetery has opted for a multi-use approach, opening its chapels for funeral ceremonies and other assorted community activities.

1.19 The Council's Chapels are currently being used to provide storage and essential facilities to staff working within each cemetery. Should consideration be given to alternative usage for the chapels, then alternative facilities will need to be made available.

1.20 Consultation as part of the review revealed support for redevelopment of the chapels and a variety of uses were suggested including use as a Remembrance Room and for the holding of civil funerals.

1.21 The Committee were mindful that there would need to be further feasibility work on a range of options and funding streams explored before a decision could be made on the future use of the chapels but felt that redevelopment options should be explored further.

Recommended that improvements be made to the maps on display in the cemeteries in conjunction with section signage in the cemetery grounds.

Recommended that the redevelopment of the disused chapels of Oxbridge and Durham Road Cemeteries be further explored and a feasibility study be prepared on the various potential options.

Future Provision

1.22 The Committee found that burial space within the Borough was rapidly decreasing. The life expectancy of the existing cemeteries/ projected shortfall of burial space could be summarised as follows:

- Durham Road Cemetery – without extension into the adjoining open space (issue unresolved), 12.5 years. The closure of Oxbridge Lane would increase burials in Durham Road and decrease the life expectancy.
- Oxbridge Lane Cemetery – 5.5 years
- Thornaby Cemetery – without extending into undeveloped land, 25.5 years. With extension 137 years.
- Billingham Cemetery – without funding for drainage of 'C' Section (quotation July 2006 £40,000) 6.5 years, with drainage works – 31 years.
- Egglecliffe – full, no new graves available – re-open/previous solid purchase graves only.

1.23 The Committee felt that there was a need to make provision for the costs of the extension to Billingham Cemetery given the projected life expectancy of the cemetery. Whilst the projected life expectancy of Thornaby Cemetery was 25.5 years, the Committee were in support of the development of a woodland cemetery at Thornaby and were mindful that this should be undertaken in one single phase with

other works to minimise the risk of subsequent phases causing damage to previously completed works.

Recommended that a project brief be prepared for submission to the Capital Asset Strategy Group to identify appropriate funding streams to meet the costs of extension into Area C at Billingham Cemetery (approximately £40,000) and the extension and development of a woodland cemetery at Thornaby (approximately £300,000).

1.24 In addition, the Committee were conscious that the local burial needs were not being catered for in parts of the Borough and that there were several cases where cremated remains were being stored by families owing to Egglecliffe Cemetery now being full.

1.25 The Committee were aware that the Land and Property Section were conducting an exercise to identify suitable undeveloped land within the Borough for additional burial land. The Committee felt that that future burial provision needed to be considered as part of the planning development framework.

Recommended that the Land and Property Section identify additional land within the Borough for the siting of a cemetery in order to meet future burial needs.

Recommended that future burial provision be considered as part of the planning development framework.

1.26 The Committee also felt that the Council should investigate alternative, space efficient ways of interring cremated remains. It was hoped that this might overcome the problems of lack of space at Egglecliffe.

Recommended that officers investigate alternative, space efficient ways of interring cremated remains within cemeteries.

1.27 In addition to the extensions to existing cemeteries and the identification of additional burial land, the Committee felt that the Council should consider using remaining grave depths to offer residents more choice of burial locations and to extend the "life" of existing cemeteries. The Committee also concluded that it would be prudent to excavate graves, as a matter of course, to allow for 3 interments.

Recommended that the audit of space available in unpurchased graves within cemeteries be continued and upon completion grave space be offered in the following circumstances subject to appropriate consultation or awareness raising exercises:

- **Graves previously sold in perpetuity but containing no interments be identified for the purpose of cancelling Rights where the purchase took place over 75 years ago and re-offer the Rights of Interment and Rights to erect a memorial.**
- **That unused space within, previously 'reserved' graves be used for future interments. The Committee recommended that those 'reserved' graves where the previous interments took place 100 years or more ago be offered first.**

Recommended that all graves be excavated, as a matter of course, to allow for 3 interments.

Publicity/ Public Awareness

1.28 Comments from viewpoint panel members revealed that there was a general lack of awareness about burial options and alternatives. The Committee found that there was a wide range of coffins and many different approaches to funerals and burial.

1.29 In recent years, there has been a move away from formal religious services and an increase in the popularity of civil funerals. Recently, two members of the Registration/ Bereavement Service Team qualified to become Civil Funeral Celebrants.

1.30 The Committee concluded that there was a need to raise awareness of all of the options available so that people could make informed choices about their own and their loved ones funerals.

Recommended that articles be included in Stockton News to raise awareness on the full range of burial options and alternatives together with information on grave rights and transfer and the service offered by the Council in respect of civil funerals.

Recommended that information leaflets be prepared on the issues to be considered when planning a “green” funeral, on how to organise your own funeral and that leaflets on planning funerals be provided to solicitors to distribute to people when they are making wills.

Extending Choice

1.31 The Co-operative Group had planned to open a private crematorium on land in the Harrowgate Lane/Letch Lane area, currently leased as agricultural land. The costs associated with the creation of a junction on Harrowgate Lane were deemed by the Co-op to be preclusive to the continuation of the project. Some discussion took place in 2003 between the North Eastern Co-op and Stockton Borough Council to investigate partnership working to further this project. To-date no further progress has been achieved.

1.32 Feedback from Viewpoint Panel Members and Funeral Directors revealed support for a crematorium in Stockton. However, the Committee were mindful that that this would need to be subject to further investigation including funding streams and exploration of partnership arrangements. The estimated costs would be in the region of £2 million.

1.33 The Committee were aware of the growing interest in “green” funerals and “natural” burial grounds and supported the development of a woodland cemetery at Thornaby. The Committee concluded that the Council should aim to cater for a wide range of burial preferences.

Recommended that a detailed business case be prepared on the feasibility of providing a crematorium for Stockton including possible funding streams and partnership arrangements.

Recommended that the development of a woodland cemetery at Thornaby be considered by the Capital Asset Strategy Group to identify appropriate funding streams and that the extension and creation of a woodland cemetery be undertaken in one single phase to minimise the risk of subsequent phases causing damage to previously completed works.

Recommended that the identification of further woodland burial sites be supported.

Recommended that the Council's current regulations in respect of type and design of coffin be reviewed to allow greater freedom of choice within the constraints of availability and safe materials.

Recommended that bio-degradable coffins be supplied via Bereavement Services and that a reusable coffin shell (to be used in conjunction with a cardboard coffin) and a pall be available for use.

Dedicated Benches and Trees

1.34 Seating within the cemeteries was originally provided by the Council, however, the congregation of groups/gangs at benches, vandalism and subsequent costs for maintaining and replacing seating eventually lead to the Council removing damaged street furniture without its replacement. The dedicated benches scheme was borne from the removal of Council maintained seating.

1.35 Under the current scheme, a family may donate a bench to the cemetery, with or without an inscription to a loved one. The bench is donated on the understanding that it is the responsibility of the family to supply, install and maintain the bench that they have donated.

1.36 The dedicated bench scheme is not subject to any cemetery fee, however, the placement of this form of memorialisation reduces efficiency of maintenance programmes and therefore adds to the cost of maintaining cemeteries. The lack of regulation as to quality, construction and design of dedicated benches has led to disparity, many more suitable to a domestic environment, rather than for public use. In addition, little consideration is given to the environmental ethics of bench construction, leading to the use of non-renewable hardwoods and chemical preservatives that may be harmful to the environment.

1.37 A dedicated tree planting service is offered in conjunction with the Arboricultural Section within CFYA.

1.38 The popularity of the dedicated tree scheme means that it is not always possible to offer a donor the exact location requested, and the choice of location is further diminished with each subsequent planting season. The planting of dedicated trees can, however, reduce efficiency of maintenance programmes and may become a 'living shrine' with families planting flowerbeds at the base of the tree and placing other items around it. This can in turn lead to further hindrance of maintenance and may be detrimental to the health of the tree.

Recommended that clearer guidelines are developed in respect of the dedicated benches and trees schemes together with the introduction of appropriate fees and that the benches, trees and other appropriate memorial dedications be extended to locations other than cemeteries.

Timescales

Recommended that the timescales included in the action plan for implementation of the review recommendations reflect a desire to make significant progress by December 2007.

2.0 Introduction

2.1 The provision of cemeteries is widely recognised as a vital service provided by Stockton Borough Council. To maintain and improve this service for the future will need the Council to take a number of strategic decisions, which may affect the direction in which the cemeteries are managed.

3.0 Background

Historical Information

3.1 Historically, burial was the responsibility of the Church. Most of the churchyards in England and Wales are Anglican. The objection of some Nonconformist denominations to the consecration of burial land meant that dissenting congregations often used the space surrounding their chapels for burial, or bought small portions of land specifically for the purpose of interment.

3.2 As churchyards became full and there was an increase in demand for burial on land that was not controlled by the Church of England, the emergence of 'cemeteries' resulted. Many of the earliest cemeteries in Britain were founded by joint-stock companies that financed the laying out of grounds through the sale of shares.

3.3 National legislation was implemented – for London in 1852 and the provinces in 1853 – granting the Secretary of State the right to prohibit interment in any churchyard or graveyard. Communities were enabled to set up burial boards, which were based on the parish unit. The majority of cemeteries currently in use were founded in the period 1853-90, when burial boards were the principal agency of new cemetery establishment.

3.4 From the 1890s, the newly created local authorities were empowered to lay out cemeteries, and burial boards went into decline. The responsibility for providing and maintaining cemetery land was much simplified in 1972, when the Local Government Act abolished all burial boards. New burial authorities were defined, which included metropolitan and non-metropolitan authorities, London councils and, in rural areas, parish councils. These authorities took over the management of the burial board cemeteries. With the exception of a small number of company cemeteries, all cemeteries are now owned by local authorities or parish councils.

3.5 Perhaps the most radical change in burial provision has been the introduction of cremation. Statistics showing the number of cremations as a proportion of disposals demonstrates the rapid increase in the use of this form of disposal, especially since the 1940s. At present, the rate holds at 68-70%.

Legal Framework

3.6 It is the public law duty of the Church of England to provide for burials in open churchyards, however, there is at present no statutory requirement on any public authority to make available a place for burial. The opportunity for the public to bury those who have died in ground set aside for this purpose is dependent on the exercise of the discretionary powers of our Authority.

3.7 Provision of burial grounds is also dependent on normal application of planning legislation. No dispensation in relation to burial grounds is provided, nor are there any financial incentives or relaxation of financial burdens.

3.8 Although there is no legal requirement for a council to provide burial or cremation facilities, this Authority has acted as a burial authority for almost 140 years. The main legislation that governs cemeteries and crematoria is the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO). The Order sets out the general parameters under which municipal cemeteries operate. The Order allows considerable management discretion and regulates matters such as:

- Provision of chapels, mortuaries and biers
- Plans and record keeping, registration of burials and disinterments, and storage of records
- Grant of exclusive burial rights, rights to erect memorials and agreements for maintenance of graves and memorials
- Fees and other charges
- Maintenance, including removal of memorials
- Depth of burial and special provisions in relation to walled graves and vaults
- Offences and penalties

3.9 An important element of the legislation relating to burial consists of the regulation of the exhumation of buried human remains. It is an offence to exhume, or otherwise disturb buried human remains (including cremated remains) unless legal authority has been obtained. Where remains are to be exhumed from land consecrated according to the rites of the Church of England, permission takes the form of a Faculty from the Diocesan Consistory Court. If the remains are to be reburied in consecrated land a faculty will authorise this. In all other cases of exhumation, a licence must be obtained from the Home Office, unless otherwise permitted by other legislation e.g. Coroner's Warrant.

3.10 The authority to bury a body is subject to standard regulations i.e. requires a 'Form 9', Certificate for Burial or Cremation of bodies of deceased persons, issued by a Registrar of Births and Deaths or, where the death has been referred to the Coroner, the Coroner's Burial Order.

3.11 The provision of graves and the burial process is less regulated and allows discretion to the Authority, *some examples are:*

- *Depth of Grave* - Under LACO, Schedule 2, para. 2, a minimum depth of three feet is required above the top coffin to natural soil level, or two feet depending on soil conditions.
- *Plans and record keeping, registration of burials and disinterments, and storage of records* – LACO, Article 9, 11 and 12 makes detailed and comprehensive provision for burial records, the registration of burials and disinterments, but fees charged for copies of entries are determined locally (currently SBC charge £15.00).
- *General powers of management* – Under current legislation the Authority manage, regulate and controls maintenance levels, service standards, staff training and qualifications. We are also responsible for promotion of cultural, historical and environmental values and diversity of service provisions.

- *Layout, repair and access* – burial authorities may enclose, lay out and embellish a cemetery as they see fit, and must keep it in good order and repair, together with its buildings, walls and fences.
- *Consecration and setting apart for particular denominations* – there is discretionary provision to set aside part of a cemetery for consecration or use by particular denominations or religious bodies.
- *Provision of chapels* – there is a discretionary provision to provide a chapel, and such chapels may be provided for use by the Church of England or other denominations or religious bodies on application and where funded other than by the burial authority.
- *Provision of mortuaries and biers* – There is a discretionary provision to provide mortuaries and biers.
- *Sharing facilities* – Facilities may be shared with other burial authorities.
- *Maintenance, including removal of memorials* – Existing regulations relating to the maintenance of graves and memorials, levelling and the removal of tombstones and kerbstones in local authority cemeteries are comprehensive. This issue will be explored fully in Phase 2: The Management of Memorials.
- *Burial rights* – The Exclusive Right of Burial in and the Right of Erect a Memorial upon a grave or grave space are leased by the Authority to the Grantee for a fixed period, rather than the Grantee purchasing the land itself. Burial rights may be granted, either exclusively or otherwise, for a fixed term not exceeding 100 years.

Where the right to burial or to construct a walled grave or vault has not been exercised for 75 years, the right may be extinguished subject to compliance with due notice procedure.

Amendments to current practises for the granting and exercising of Rights should consider measures to alleviate disputes, particularly between different family members, and ensure any further changes reflect the recommended policy to prove applicants' entitlement to exercise Rights for burials and memorial works.

- *Fees and other charges* – Fees may be charged at the discretion of the burial authority for burials, memorials and inscriptions.
- *Rites of Church of England* – The local priest is under an obligation to perform funeral services for parishioners in the cemetery as he is in respect of any churchyard. A Bishop of the Church of England may object to inscriptions on memorials in a consecrated part of the cemetery.
- *Offences in cemeteries* – Offences include creating a disturbance, committing any nuisance, interfering with any burial, interfering with a grave, or playing any game or sport, or entering or remaining in a cemetery when it is closed to the public.
- *Penalties* – On summary conviction for all offences, a fine not exceeding £100 may be imposed, with £10 per day for any continuing offence after conviction.

- *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* – Burial authorities may grant the Commission the right to provide any structure, tree, plant or other feature. No action may be taken in respect to such structures or features without the consent of the Commission. Certain other dispensations and rights in relation to the Commission are also provided.

Grant of Exclusive Right of Burial

3.12 The Burial Authority responsible for a cemetery may grant two separate Rights for each grave, The Exclusive Right of Burial and the Right to Erect a Memorial. Where these Rights are not granted, but that particular grave is used for burial, the grave is classed as a 'public' or 'common' grave.

3.13 When a grave is purchased, it is the exclusive Right of Burial and the Right to Erect a Memorial that are leased for a fixed period, rather than the purchase of the land itself. This means that the person taking out the lease does not own the land, but has exclusive right, during the period of the lease, to say who can be buried in the grave and the style of and wording on the memorial upon that grave. It is assumed that the owner of the Rights is entitled to be buried in the grave that he or she owns, providing the grave is suitable for further burials. No assumption is made with regard to the Right to Erect a Memorial. The person who has leased the Rights to a grave is called the Grantee.

3.14 In the past it was possible to reserve grave space for a period of 14 years; upon expiry of the reservation, since no Rights have legally been granted, the Burial Authority may then use that grave in such a manner as it sees fit. It is no longer common practise for Burial Authorities to offer reservation of grave spaces.

3.15 The Burial Authority is entitled to grant these Rights for any duration not exceeding 100 years; in Stockton-on-Tees, terms of 50 years or 100 years are offered for lawn and traditional graves, or 25 years for cremated remains gardens and babies' burial gardens. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council grants both the Exclusive Right of Burial and Right to Erect a Memorial as a single transaction to either single or multiple 'purchasers'.

3.16 The current cost of leasing the Rights to a grave space are:

Type of Grave	Duration of Lease	Cemetery Fee	Yearly equivalent
Traditional/Lawn Grave	100 years	£369.00	£3.69
Traditional/Lawn Grave	50 years	£314.00	£6.28
Cremated Remains Garden	25 years	£74.00	£2.96
Babies Burial Garden	25 years	£50.00	£0.50
Transfer Fee*		£60.00	-

3.17 Following the death of the Grantee, it is important that ownership of the Rights is transferred to an entitled person, as the legally registered Grantee must give his or her written consent before any further interments (other than of the Grantee) or memorial works may take place.

3.18 When the Grantee dies, it must be established who is legally entitled to assume ownership of the lease of the Exclusive Right of Burial and Right to Erect a Memorial. This is generally any person named in a Will as recipient of the residuary estate or the lawful next of kin.

3.19 The process of legally transferring the Rights to a grave varies, depending upon the estate of the deceased and any legal documents relating to it.

Closed Churchyards

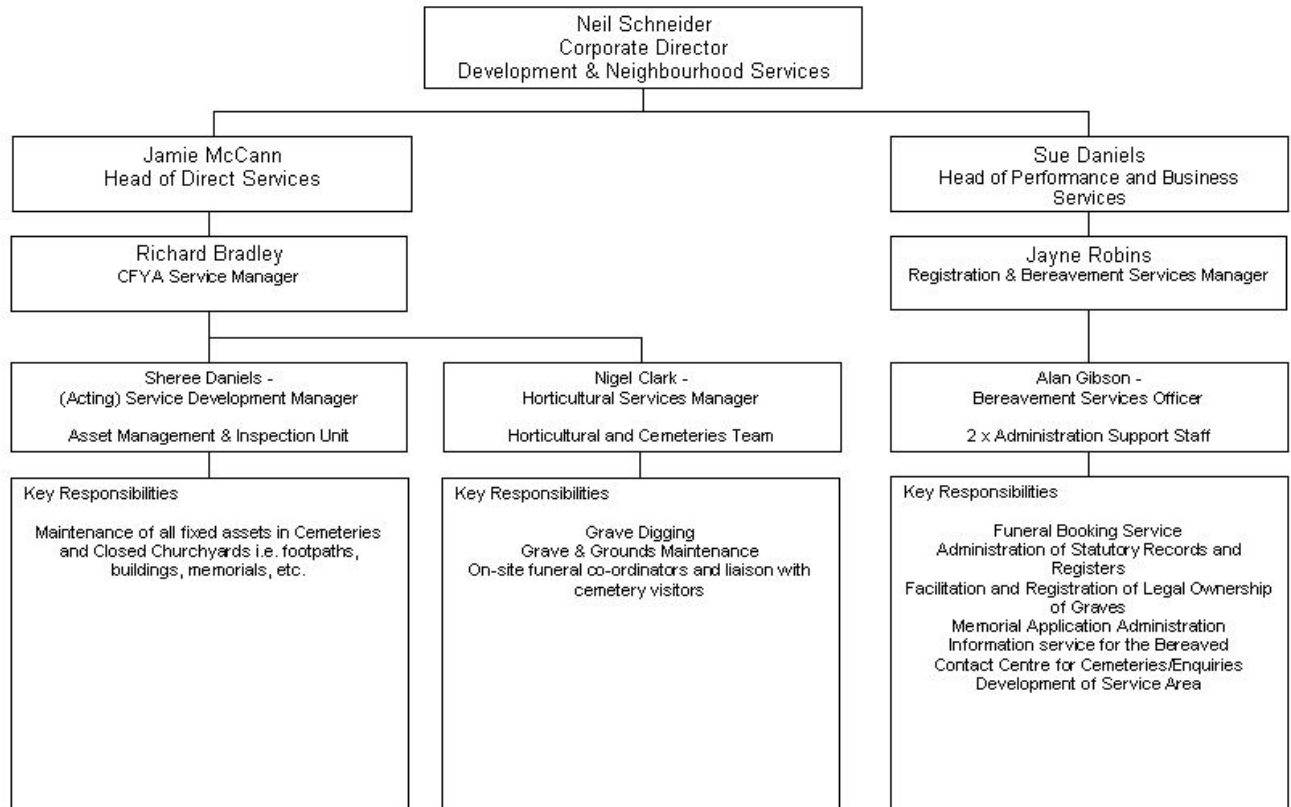
3.20 When there are no further grave spaces remaining for new burials within the churchyard, the Diocese request that a Closure Order is granted by Her Majesty in Council. The closure order provides that no further burials may take place within the churchyard, or the portion of the churchyard to which the closure order relates. The Parochial Church Council (PCC) may then relinquish its responsibility for the maintenance of the churchyard; usually, the local authority of that district or borough assumes these responsibilities.

3.21 Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council has responsibility for grounds maintenance, the safety and upkeep of boundary walls and fences and for ensuring that footpaths are well maintained in all or part of nine closed churchyards within the Borough. The Local Authority also assumes a duty of care for public safety, implying a responsibility for inspecting memorials within the churchyards and to ensure that any street furniture present at the time of the closure does not pose a risk to visitors. There are four churchyards in the Borough still open for burial.

4.0 Evidence/Findings

Management Structure of Cemeteries

The Management of Cemeteries in Stockton-on-Tees



Budgetary Information

4.1 As can be seen from the above chart, the Cemeteries and Memorial Service is made up of two distinct budget areas. The Cemeteries section has the responsibility for the maintenance of all fixed assets in cemeteries and closed churchyards, grave digging and grounds maintenance. Bereavement Services are responsible for the funeral booking service, facilitation and registration of legal ownership of graves and information service for the bereaved. Budget details for the previous financial years are summarised below:

	2004/5	2004/5	2004/5	2005/6	2005/6	2005/6	2006/7	2006/7	2006/7
	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Actual	Variance	Budget	Estimate	Variance
Cemeteries	310020	289509	(20511)	314421	312018	(2402)	312699	312099	(600)
Bereavement	(97306)	(126710)	(29404)	(80214)	(136349)	(56136)	(84767)	(40619)	44148

4.2 The key areas to note with regards to the Cemeteries budgets are that approximately 71% of the budget relates to staff costs and the remaining is a mixture of vehicle and equipment expenditure. Over the last three years, there have been no major variances recorded between the budget and final outturn. In 2004/05 savings of £20,000 (7%) were generated due to a reduced requirement to hire grass cutting and other equipment. There are no significant variances predicted for 2006/07, which is similar to the results during the 2005/06 financial year.

4.3 The key areas to note with regards to the Bereavement budgets are that the service actually generates income to the Authority. In 2004/05, the service generated net surpluses of £127,000 and in 2005/06 this rose to £136,000. For 2006/07, the service is only anticipating generating net surpluses of £41,000. The reduced income has resulted in a predicted loss against budget of £44,000 for 2006/07. This is compared to a surplus of £29,000 in 2004/05 and £56,000 in 2005/06. Both years surpluses in the main were as a result of over achievement of income targets.

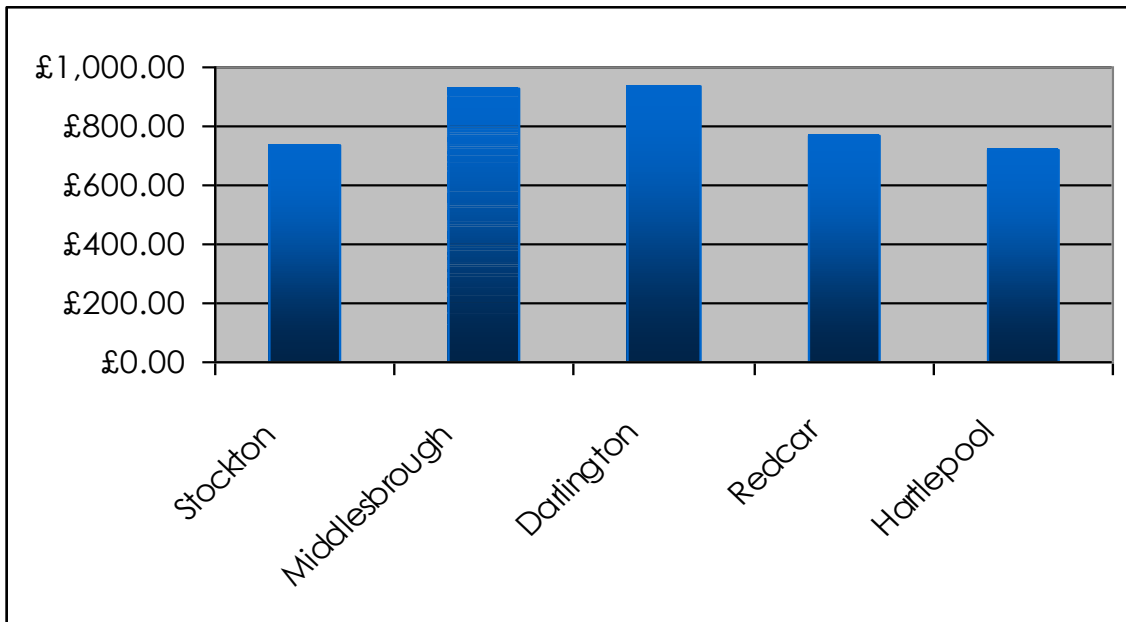
4.4 Total income received by the service is as follows:

2004/05 - £252,000
2005/06 - £264,000
2006/07 – £200,000

4.5 At Council on 1 March 2006, capital resources of £150,000 were approved to fund improvements to cemeteries. Also at this meeting, the Council approved, in principle allocations of £150,000 for the following two years, subject to capital resources being available. However, the resources allocated will not be enough to bring all of the cemeteries and closed churchyards up to an acceptable standard.

Fees /Charges & Cost Comparisons

4.6 Full details of the current fees and charges levied by the Council were presented to the Committee. A detailed fees comparison with other Tees Valley Local Authorities is attached at Appendix 2. Although overall comparisons are difficult, Stockton’s fees and charges appear competitive based on a comparison in respect of lease of rights to grave (lowest cost option), burial fee (single adult interment) and new memorial fee.



Current Funeral Times/Office Opening Hours

Funeral Booking Times

4.7 The following funeral booking times are currently offered within the Borough's Cemeteries. By special arrangement with the Bereavement Services Officer and Horticultural Services Manager, flexibility in funeral booking times may be offered.

Monday to Thursday (Excluding Bank Holidays)

<u>Morning</u>	<u>Afternoon</u>
9.30 a.m.	1.00 p.m.
10.10 a.m.	1.40 p.m.
10.50 a.m.	2.20 p.m.
11.30 a.m.	3.00 p.m.*

Friday (Excluding Bank Holidays)

<u>Morning</u>	<u>Afternoon</u>
9.30 a.m.	1.00 p.m.
10.10 a.m.	1.40 p.m.
10.50 a.m.	2.20 p.m.
11.30 a.m.	

Saturday

Cremated Remains & Babies Burial Gardens

Morning Only

As Monday to Friday, but commencing at 8.50 a.m.

9.30 a.m.
10.10 a.m.
10.50 a.m.
11.30 a.m.

* 3.00 p.m. booking available April to September only for adult interments.

The same booking time may only be offered in two cemeteries per day, unless by prior agreement with the Bereavement Services Officer and Horticultural Services Manager.

Office Opening Hours

4.8 The Registration/Bereavement Services Offices are open between the following hours:

Monday to Wednesday

8.30 a.m. to 5.00 p.m.

Thursday

8.30 a.m. to 6.00 p.m.

Friday

8.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.
only

Saturday Morning

For Marriages and Civil Partnerships only

Out of Hours Arrangements

4.9 There are currently no arrangements in place for funerals to be booked outside of office opening hours, except where Bank Holidays create a four day break in service (Easter Weekend and where Christmas and Boxing Day coincide with a weekend).

4.10 For such occasions, a basic booking service is offered to funeral directors via the Bereavement Services Officer's mobile telephone.

4.11 In 2006, many Burial Authorities have been approached regarding possible discrimination against followers of the Hebrew and Islamic faiths, through the omission of an out of hours burial service.

4.12 In Stockton, there have, to date, been no requests for an out of hours service. The Muslim and Jewish sections of Oxbridge Lane Cemetery have minimal space remaining for future burials, with infrequent requests for burial falling within the published funeral booking times.

4.13 The Muslim section of Thornaby Cemetery now caters wholly for the demand for burials according to the provisions of the Islamic faith within the Borough. The local Muslim Community currently interprets burial custom as requiring the burial of the deceased as soon as is possible following the death, without reference to any particular timescale. This was confirmed in November 2006 by Mr Haji Jaber, Imam at Middlesbrough Mosque. He stated that it is not a requirement of the Islamic faith that burials take place within 24 hours of death. Specific reference was made to those Muslims who are repatriated (particularly to Pakistan and Bangladesh), a process that cannot be carried out within 24 hours.

4.14 There is, however, a wealth of differing traditions and cultures within the Islamic faith, dependent upon the country or area of origin.

4.15 The following table presents the numbers of Muslim burial between 1996 and 2006:

Year	Number of Muslim Burials
1996	2
1997	5
1998	6
1999	7
2000	4
2001	5
2002	7

2003	6
2004	4
2005	5
2006	1*

* As at 31 October 2006

All Cemeteries - Saturday Morning Burials

Year	All Faiths	Muslim
1996	10	0
1997	19	0
1998	18	0
1999	14	0
2000	10	0
2001	9	0
2002	12	0
2003	11	0
2004	2	0
2005	9	1
2006	8*	0

* As at 31 October 2006

Safety and Security

Vandalism

Damage to memorials/street furniture:

4.16 Vandalism to headstones, particularly in Durham Road Cemetery, has resulted in extremely bad publicity for the Authority and, more importantly, additional distress to bereaved families.

4.17 The problem of vandalism had become more apparent in Durham Road Cemetery since the demolition of the cemetery lodge in 1995. Traditionally the cemetery lodges were tenanted by cemetery staff and part of the tied tenancy agreement meant that the tenant was responsible for the opening/closing of cemetery gates and the general policing of the cemetery grounds outside of normal working hours. (Following an extensive review of park and cemetery lodges; the remaining cemetery lodges have now been transferred over to Tristar and are tenanted by private residents)

4.18 Bereavement Services, CFYA, Security & Surveillance and Stockton Police work in partnership in an attempt to address this abhorrent problem, however, in

March and April 2006 we encountered further vandalism, resulting in the installation of CCTV cameras from the Cleaner, Safer, Greener Capital Funding. The cameras send high-quality images through wireless connection to the Council's Security Centre, where they are digitally recorded and can be forwarded to the Police HQ Control Room. The Council's Enforcement Team undertake security patrols and have responsibility for the opening up and closing of cemetery gates. Fencing repairs have also recently been carried out.

4.19 Costs were obtained in March 2006 for the installation of CCTV in other Council cemeteries as follows:-

Thornaby	£17,777.88
Oxbridge Lane	£14,438.88

4.20 Generally speaking, the other cemeteries across the Borough do not suffer the same degree of vandalism as the Durham Road cemetery does.

Antisocial Behaviour

4.21 Notwithstanding the problems surrounding vandalism as described above, the impact of antisocial behaviour within cemeteries can be wide ranging from dog walkers allowing their pets to foul within the cemetery grounds, graffiti, groups/gangs of young people congregating to the abandonment of stolen vehicles, abuse of drugs/alcohol and theft of items from graves.

Vehicular Access

4.22 Traditionally, cemeteries have not been designed with motor vehicles in mind. With the current high levels of vehicle ownership, this is now creating traffic management issues within cemeteries. The current Borough Cemeteries have narrow driveways and no parking facilities, which can lead to congestion and people driving/parking on grassed areas and even grave spaces. Most problems arise when driver are unable/ unwilling to manoeuvre without staying on the road. Attempts are made to encourage drivers to remain on the road by placing oak flower tubs at various locations. Plans are in place to create a one-way system at Thornaby Cemetery in the current financial year.

Maintenance

4.23 The maintenance of the Borough's cemeteries was transferred to Care for Your Area in April 2003 and at the same time much of the Horticultural Service work was brought back as in-house provision. Whilst the initial focus was very much upon improving the horticultural service provision, in recent years there has been a significant improvement in the maintenance of the Borough's cemeteries. In particular, improvements have been made to grass cutting, floral displays and bulb planting.

4.24 Seven full time operatives and two apprentices are employed to work in the Borough's cemeteries and closed churchyards. This is supplemented by two seasonally employed staff. In addition to the burial and associated duties of staff, there are many horticultural activities that need to be undertaken, such as grass cutting, bedding works and litter picking and as such wherever possible, staff from Horticultural Services will assist. One of the major benefits from having an in house horticultural division that operates within the same umbrella as 'Care For You Area',

is the ability to provide such joined up work and assistance from other front line services. However, such flexibility is often limited by the demands placed upon Horticultural Service teams and this flexibility is an added benefit, rather than being part of core service delivery and cannot always be relied upon. The Committee found that the maintenance of cemeteries within each of the Borough's cemeteries is of a very high standard.

4.25 Environmental Improvement Schemes have been carried out at Oxbridge Cemetery including decorative lighting of the chapel and entrance road as well as improvements to the cremated remains garden. All cemeteries receive an 8/10 day grass cutting service – the same service levels of grass cutting in parks, verges etc. The War Graves section within Thornaby receives a particularly enhanced maintenance specification including weekly cuts and collect of all grass cuttings and a weekly edge. This is provided free of charge to the War Graves Commission (who normally undertake all of their own war grave maintenance). The integration of the cemetery staff with horticultural staff has been a key success factor in the maintenance improvements within the Borough's cemeteries. In 2006, Thornaby Cemetery was awarded the Cemetery of the Year following the runner up award achieved in 2005.

4.26 An annual inspection of all roads, footpaths, furniture and signage is carried out as well as related repairs. Repairs have recently been carried out to the Remembrance Room at Billingham. Notice Boards and water troughs have recently been repaired and restored and plans are in place to carry out essential maintenance to the Chapels at Durham Road and Oxbridge.

Grave Excavation

4.27 Grave Excavation is a complex operation that requires skilled and experienced staff to undertake the duties. Depths of excavation vary from the number of plots from each grave, for example, a three-person plot requires a depth of 7 foot and a two-person plot required a depth of 6 foot. Graves that are being re-opened are excavated to a depth of 5.6 feet for the first opening and/or 4.6 feet for the second re-opening. After each re-opening, a marker is placed in the soil to warn operatives not to go below that depth level. For new excavations, a JCB excavator is used whereas for a re-opening a manual hand dig is carried out. The length of a grave is generally 7.6 feet. To prevent the excavation from collapsing, shoring is used, particularly aluminium, telescopic shoring that is fitted around the grave sides. Due to the different soil structures around the Borough, excavations can take place a day before a burial – such as in Oxbridge. In comparison, the excavations in Thornaby are often not undertaken until the day of the burial due to the risk of collapse from water logged ground

Improvement Plan:

4.28 In 2002 a review of maintenance arrangements within the Parks and Cemeteries was carried out following the Grounds Maintenance Service being brought back in-house.

4.29 It was felt that maintenance responsibilities would best lie with the operational areas who already had resources and experience with regard to repairs and maintenance.

4.30 Following identification of land an initial assessment of assets areas was carried out to determine condition /required works and associated budget pressures. On assessment a total of £30,000 was identified to carryout immediate repairs that constituted a risk to Health and Safety of users.

4.31 These repairs were scheduled and completed by 31 March 2005 and 6 monthly inspections carried out to identify and make safe any actionable defects on footways/carriageways and street furniture.

4.32 Due to a history of minimal maintenance measures and the age of the assets within the cemeteries more permanent repairs and some reinstatement/improvement works are essential to bring them up to a decent standard and improve future conditions.

4.33 Boundary walls were one of the main concerns, with many requiring major works to rebuild and point, or replace inadequate fencing - full condition surveys of all of the walls and assets within the cemeteries and closed churchyards was required to assess priorities/costs and allow for forward financial planning as well as opportunities to apply for grant funding for major improvement works.

4.34 A successful capital bid to carry out works to walls and other assets within the cemeteries will ensure that the future of the cemeteries is safeguarded, although full condition surveys are essential in order to assess costs and it is presumed that the costs allocated will not be enough to bring all of the cemeteries and closed churchyards up to an acceptable standard. For these works, a 5-year improvement plan will be implemented according to priority and risk. Distinct areas of work/development are identified as follows: -

Walls & boundary Fencing
Ground stability & Drainage works
Memorials & inspection
Road & Footpath Works
Chapels & buildings
Street Furniture
Expansion & development
Horticultural Aesthetics work & trees

Burial Statistics

4.35 Statistic for burials in Stockton-on-Tees 1999 to 2005 are set out below:

Year	Durham Road	Oxbridge Lane	Thornaby	Billingham	Egglescliffe	Total Burials
1999	192	76	130	81	21	500
2000	171	48	125	109	14	467
2001	205	73	138	92	10	518
2002	204	64	113	102	12	495
2003	206	64	124	97	5	496
2004	188	68	135	92	4	487
2005	209	72	125	109	4	519
Average*	196	66	127	97	10	497

Durham Road Cemetery

Year	New Graves	Re-open Graves	Cremated Remains	Babies Burial Garden	Total
1999	77	81	23	11	192
2000	77	69	15	10	171
2001	85	74	34	12	205
2002	79	71	48	6	204
2003	76	64	54	12	206
2004	78	60	44	6	188
2005	87	79	35	8	209
Average*	79	71	36	9	196

Oxbridge Lane Cemetery

Year	New Graves	Re-open Graves	Cremated Remains	Babies Burial Garden	Total
1999	17	37	18	4	76
2000	20	24	4	0	48
2001	19	35	16	3	73
2002	19	32	11	2	64
2003	15	29	16	4	64
2004	14	33	20	1	68
2005	19	22	26	5	72
Average*	19	30	16	3	68

Thornaby Cemetery

Year	New Graves	Re-open Graves	Cremated Remains	Babies Burial Garden	Total
1999	57	37	28	8	130
2000	54	42	24	5	125
2001	50	51	35	2	138
2002	45	47	16	5	113
2003	39	47	32	5	124
2004	57	39	32	7	135
2005	48	48	20	9	125
Average*	50	44	26	5	127

Billingham Cemetery

Year	New Graves	Re-open Graves	Cremated Remains	Babies Burial Garden	Total
1999	47	27	5	2	81
2000	48	21	33	7	109
2001	40	28	23	1	92
2002	38	31	25	5	102
2003	42	24	27	4	97
2004	40	21	28	3	92
2005	38	26	27	3	109
Average*	41	25	24	3	97

Egglecliffe Cemetery

Year	New Graves	Re-open Graves	Cremated Remains	Babies Burial Garden	Total
1999	18	2	1	-	21
2000	11	3	0	-	14
2001	5	5	0	-	10
2002	5	6	1	-	12
2003	2	3	0	-	5
2004	0	4	0	-	4
2005	1	2	1	-	4
Average*	6	3	(0.4)	-	10

* Rounded down to nearest whole number

Deaths and Burials in Stockton-on-Tees 2000 to 2005

Year	Deaths*	Burials	Burials as percentage of registered deaths
2000	1638	500	30.53%
2001	1809	469	25.93%
2002	1690	518	30.65%
2003	1765	518	29.35%
2004	1768	495	28.00%
2005	1746	495	28.35%
Averages	1736	499	28.80%

* Data supplied by Office for National Statistics

Deaths, Burials and Cremations in the Tees Valley

	Stockton		Middlesbrough	No further data supplied	Darlington			Redcar & Cleveland		Hartlepool		
	Deaths	Burials	Deaths		Deaths	Burials	Crem	Deaths	Burials	Deaths	Burials	Crem
2000	1638	500	1442		1190	273	1874	1569	589	943	453	931
2001	1809	469	1437		1209	238	1845	1507	571	1014	448	923
2002	1690	518	1463		1128	228	1883	1586	542	1065	458	933
2003	1765	518	1434		1131	216	1883	1556	569	1017	437	907
2004	1768	495	1494		1161	234	1927	1465	510	1028	436	915
2005	1746	495	1405		1077	241	1863	1481	515	1052	428	921

Disposals as percentage of Deaths in Borough (based upon Averages 2000 to 2005)

Borough	Burial	Cremation	Total Disposals
Stockton-on-Tees	28.8%	-	28.8%
Middlesbrough			
Darlington	20.7%	163.7%	184.4%
Redcar & Cleveland	36%	-	36%
Hartlepool	43.6%	90.6%	134.2%

Life Expectancy of Cemeteries

Burials in New Graves

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	Average ⁺
Durham Road	77	77	85	79	76	78	87	80
Oxbridge Lane	17	20	19	19	15	14	19	18
Thornaby	57	54	50	45	39	57	48	50
Billingham	47	48	40	38	42	40	38	42
Egglescliffe	18	11	5	5	2	0	0	6 [†]

* Rounded up to nearest whole number

† No New Graves Available

Durham Road Cemetery

8.553 hectares, opened 1894

Average burials per year in new graves:

80

Graves Available:

1,012*

Life Expectancy:

12 years 8 months

Oxbridge Lane Cemetery

10.73 hectares, opened 1871

Average burials per year in new graves:

18

Graves Available:

93

Life Expectancy:

5 years 2 months

(Additional 4 graves for Muslim burial – shelving may not be possible)

Thornaby Cemetery

21.66 hectares, opened 1869

Average burials per year in new graves:

50

Graves Available:

Life Expectancy:

137 Years[‡]

Billingham Cemetery

2.264 hectares, opened 1969

Average burials per year in new graves:

42

Graves Available:

Life Expectancy:

31 Years[‡]

Egglescliffe Cemetery

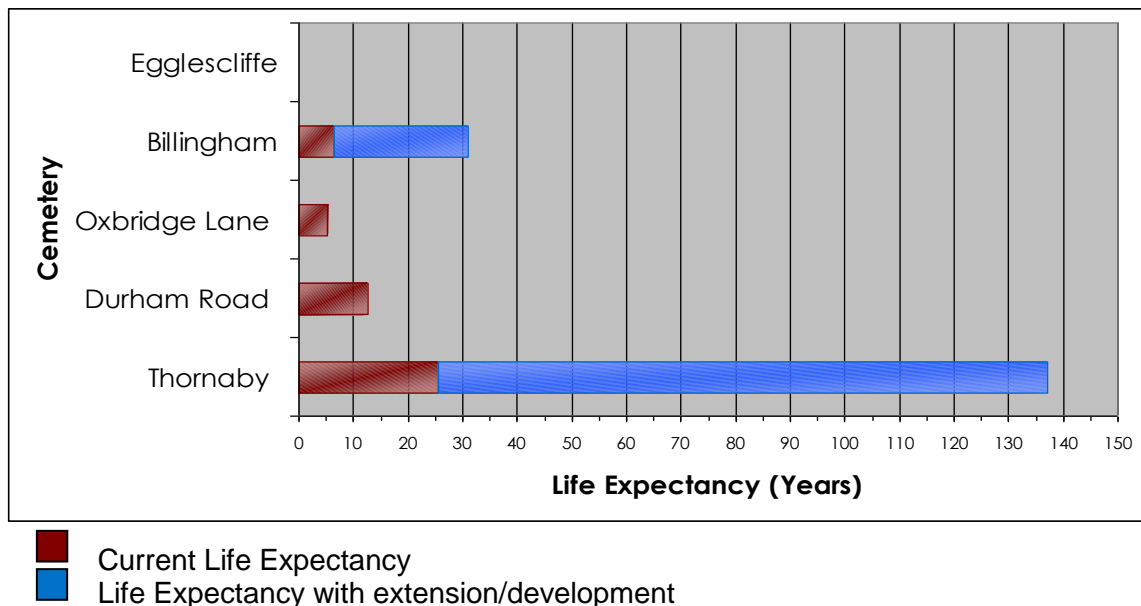
0.1812 hectares, opened 1980

Cemetery closed for burials in new graves

* Awaiting on-site confirmation of suitability for burial

‡ Sections remain undeveloped, estimate based on Home Office Burial Grounds Survey (2005)

The above information can be illustrated in the following graph:



4.36 To summarise, life expectancy of existing cemeteries/projected shortage of burial space is as follows:

- Durham Road Cemetery – without extension into the adjoining open space, 12.5 years. The closure of Oxbridge Lane would increase burials in Durham Road and decrease the life expectancy.
- Oxbridge Lane Cemetery – 5.5 years
- Thornaby Cemetery – without extending into undeveloped land, 25.5 years. With extension 137 years.
- Billingham Cemetery – without funding for drainage of 'C' Section (quotation July 2006 £40,000) 6.5 years, with drainage works – 31 years.
- Egglecliffe – full, no new graves available – re-open/previous solid purchase graves only.

Extension to Existing Cemeteries:

Thornaby Cemetery – an area of approximately 23 acres is available for the future extension of the cemetery, however, extensive works to survey and develop the site are expected. Design and Landscape, DANS, are currently investigating preliminary costs to survey the site and produce a full scheme of works. A rough estimate for completion of the proposed extension has been suggested of around £300,000.

Durham Road – Initially, it was believed that the area of land adjacent to Durham Road Cemetery and currently used as a recreation ground had been acquired by the Council for the purpose of future extension to the cemetery. The original Deed for the acquisition cannot be located in the Council's Land Ownership Records and so the re-designation of land under the Local Plan was requested. This request was to be considered following the completion of the Authority's urban open spaces audit, however, Sport England recognise this land as 'Multi Use Games Area' and have registered intention to object. To-date, the outcome remains unknown.

Oxbridge Lane Cemetery – Remaining, undeveloped land within Oxbridge Cemetery occupies an area once used for the disposal of refuse. Test digs have revealed that this land would be unsuitable for full adult interments. The newly created cremated remains garden occupies a portion of this area. The adjoining former allotment site on Oxbridge Lane had been considered for possible extension of the cemetery, however, graves must not be closer than 30m to a spring or natural watercourse (*Water Resources Act 1991*) and of the remaining site, approximately two thirds suffers from regular flooding, leaving a relatively small area that could have any potential for burial.

Also, consent from the Secretary of State is required to change the use of allotment sites – in this case consent was given on the proviso that the land is developed for 'Community use' (which generally infers a recreational/amenity benefit).

Billingham Cemetery – Remaining sections currently set aside for interments can be used to extend the life expectancy of the existing cemetery but only following drainage works. Estimates suggest a cost of around £40,000 to install drains in the next section of the cemetery earmarked for development as burial land.

Egglescliffe Cemetery – Cemetery is now full for new graves and there is no provision for an extension. The major concern is that the Authority provides no other cemetery to serve this area.

Additional Burial Land

4.37 The Land & Property Section of the Council has been requested to assist in the identification of suitable undeveloped land within the Borough. To-date no Council or privately owned land has been identified by them. Cemeteries are classed as development in planning terms although they might be easier to get permission for a cemetery than for other types of development. Development land is diminishing and land that is readily available does not tend to be in an ideal location for a cemetery. Bereavement Services are particularly concerned that the burial requirements of residents in the Yarm and Ingleby Barwick areas are not being catered for. This is reflected in the concerns of funeral directors serving these areas.

Using Remaining Grave Depths – Current Legal Position

4.38 Most graves are 'bought', thereby reserving them for the burial of specific persons. The reference to buying a grave is not strictly correct. The "Right of Burial" is purchased, giving the owner control over the burials in the grave, and the right to place a memorial. The ground itself remains in the ownership of the Authority. The Right cannot be purchased for a period in excess of 100 years. Currently Stockton Council offer grave Rights for 50 and 100 years for full adult grave spaces and also grant the option of purchasing the Rights in advance, for families wishing to secure a grave in a certain area or for them to save costs when they die.

4.39 The majority of graves in our Stockton cemeteries allow for two burials, one above the other.

4.40 In the past, unpurchased graves, usually called public, common or pauper graves, were used for many burials. These graves are still available and, as no Right of Burial is given, are relatively inexpensive. They are used for the burial of unrelated people, and no Right to place a memorial is given.

4.41 The use of remaining grave depths is under consideration throughout the country. This is a response to the absence of new ground for graves in some areas. In addition, it would also address the high annual cost of maintaining many acres of old graves.

4.42 Although there is a proposal to change the law to permit the selective 'reuse of graves' referring to the disturbance of human remains and re-interment at a greater depth within the same grave, the current legal position in relation to using remaining grave depths is as follows:

- Graves sold in perpetuity – Rights may be cancelled after 75 years, but may only be used where no previous interments have taken place (LACO).
- Reserved graves – revert to public grave after 14 years from date of reservation and may therefore be used for further interments.
- Graves where Rights have expired – memorial may be removed and remaining space used where family have not renewed Grant of Rights.
- London Local Authorities have greater powers to cancel Rights and re-use grave spaces (exhumation and increasing depth) – London Local Authorities Bill 2004.
- London Borough of Newham has been carrying out interments in unused grave space for the last 10 years without adverse publicity – even large Muslim community accept burial in this type of grave.

Sample study of space available in unpurchased graves as at 12 February 2007

Durham Road Cemetery

Section A¹

	Space remaining for:*		
	1 Burial	2 Burials	3 Burials
Rights Renounced			
Solid grave – no reservation/purchase			3
Expired Reservation/unpurchased	103	99	
Purchased Pre 1906 – Rights expired	1	1	

Oxbridge Lane Cemetery

Section A Extension

	Space remaining for:*		
	1 Burial	2 Burials	3 Burials
Rights Renounced	2		
Solid grave – no reservation/purchase			
Expired Reservation/unpurchased	61	40	
Purchased Pre 1906 – Rights expired			

Thornaby Cemetery

Section F

	Space remaining for:*		
	1 Burial	2 Burials	3 Burials
Rights Renounced			
Solid grave – no reservation/purchase			1
Expired Reservation/unpurchased	216	150	
Purchased Pre 1906 – Rights expired			

* Confirmation of remaining space subject to testing of grave

Stockton Crematorium

4.43 The Co-operative Group had planned to open a private crematorium on land in the Harrowgate Lane/Letch Lane area, currently leased as agricultural land. Outline planning consent was granted on 4 February 1997 for 'Erection of a single storey crematorium & associated external works including car parking & community forest' (96/1993/P) on condition (among others) that public access to the crematorium be via Harrowgate Lane instead of Letch Lane as per the original proposal. The costs associated with the creation of a junction on Harrowgate Lane were deemed by the Co-op to be preclusive to the continuation of the project.

4.44 Some discussion took place in 2003 between the North Eastern Co-op and Stockton Borough Council to investigate partnership working to further this project. To-date no further progress has been achieved.

4.45 Crematoria are already present in the neighbouring Boroughs of Middlesbrough, Darlington & Hartlepool, however, the Government has introduced the requirement that mercury emissions be reduced to zero by 2020 (removal of dental mercury compounds from cremator emissions).

4.46 By 2012 at least 50% of mercury emissions must be abated, allowing for crematoria to 'trade' emissions – i.e. where one crematorium is fitted with abatement equipment, a neighbouring crematorium may pay a premium per cremation to the other and thus reduce combined emissions by half.

Refurbishment of Chapels

4.47 It was commonly believed by previous Cemeteries Superintendents that the chapels within Durham Road and Oxbridge Lane Cemeteries were Grade II Listed buildings, however, it has now been established that the chapels are not subject to any conditions relating to listing.

4.48 Further research revealed that in a Committee Meeting of the Council of the County Borough of Teesside on 16 June 1971, item 666 'Cemetery Chapels' offered the following information:

"Pursuant to the decision of the Committee at the last Meeting (minute No. 4144), reports prepared by the Borough Architect's Department on the Durham Road, Linthorpe, Oxbridge Lane, Redcar and Thornaby Cemetery Chapels were submitted. The total estimated cost of repairs and decoration works at these Chapels was £6,094. The Director submitted the following statement showing the frequency of use made of the Chapels during the calendar year 1970.

Cemetery	Opened	Number of Interments (1970)	Number of Chapel Services
Durham Road	1895	311	43
Linthorpe	1869	213	35
Oxbridge Lane	1871	134	16
Redcar	1874	125	35
Thornaby	1869	157	13

The Deans of the three Rural Deaneries which operate within the County Borough had discussed possible withdrawal from use of these Chapels with their respective clergy, and the Director had now been informed in writing that no objection would be raised by these ecclesiastical units should the closure of the Chapels be deemed necessary.

Recommended that approval be given to the closure and eventual demolition of the Chapels in the Durham Road, Linthorpe, Oxbridge Lane, Redcar and Thornaby Cemeteries, and that the Town Clerk be authorised to make application to the appropriate Consistory Courts for the necessary faculties.”

4.49 As part of the Five-Year Cemeteries Development Plan it is suggested that the change of use of the remaining chapels and re-opening of the same to the public be investigated. As two of the four chapels were previously in use for funeral services according to the Rites of the Church of England, there were some concerns that limitations on the use of the two chapels may be imposed by the Diocese of Durham. There have been no indications of specific limitation of use, however, full consultation must take place between the Diocese and the Council before any proposals are implemented.

4.50 Preliminary enquiries to the ICCM ascertained that chapels within Carlisle Cemetery and the City of London Cemetery have been re-opened to the public recently. The chapel within the Carlisle Cemetery is currently used for funeral ceremonies and as a display area for biodegradable coffins. City of London Cemetery has opted for a multi-use approach, opening its chapels for funeral ceremonies and other assorted community activities such as residents' meetings, live music events and as rehearsal space.

4.51 Information gained from the Council's Trading Standards and Licensing Unit ascertained that activities deemed as 'Community use' may be licensable under new legislation as 'regulated entertainment'.

4.52 The Chapels are currently being used to provide storage and essential facilities to staff working within each cemetery. Should consideration be given to alternative usage for the chapels, then alternative facilities will need to be made available within each cemetery (which could, in turn, have an effect on the provision of burial space) or maintenance schedules revised to allow for additional travelling times (which could have an effect on burial times).

Civil Funeral and Memorial Ceremonies

4.53 In recent years, a movement away from formal religious services has developed. This has seen the introduction of popular music, on entry and/or exit from the chapel, and the greater use of poetry, readings or dance.

4.54 The service consists of two parts, the 'full' service and the 'committal'. These two parts are often unified into a single service, particularly with cremation. With burial, the committal part is completed at the graveside.

4.55 Bereavement Services continues to respect individual beliefs and actively support both religious and secular funeral ceremonies. Wherever possible, Bereavement Services will do its utmost to promote choice and offer services to meet the needs, wishes and beliefs of the bereaved family.

4.56 Recently, two members of the Registration/Bereavement Service Team qualified to become Civil Funeral Celebrants. A Civil Funeral Ceremony is unique in that a balance of religious and non-religious content may be included, and so is especially suitable for those who might not worship regularly, but wish to acknowledge the religious beliefs of their family and friends.

4.57 A Civil Funeral Ceremony can also be prepared in advance for those wishing to arrange their own funeral.

4.58 According to the National Association of Funeral Directors, one in 20 families now opt for a “celebration of life” service rather than a church service and the Church of England report a decline in the number of church funerals taking place.

4.59 When making funeral arrangements, some families can feel that they would like the funeral to be as private as possible, but realise that there are many others who also wish to commemorate the life of their friend or colleague. In such cases, a Memorial Ceremony may be appropriate and Registration/Bereavement Services can now offer Memorial Ceremonies as part of their Civil Funerals programme.

4.60 Memorial Ceremonies are usually held between three and five weeks after the funeral. It is a chance for all who knew the deceased to gather, socialise and share their memories of the life they knew. It is also a chance for the family to show their acknowledgment and appreciation for the role that each friend or colleague played in the life of a loved one.

4.61 As with Civil Funerals, a Memorial Ceremony can be held almost anywhere, except for religious buildings; if a large number of guests are expected, then a function room at a hotel or village hall is especially suitable for this type of ceremony.

4.62 To-date, Bereavement Services have delivered 3 Civil Funerals, two at Teesside Crematorium, Middlesbrough and the third at Darlington Crematorium.

Dedicated Benches and Trees

Dedicated Benches

4.63 Seating within the cemeteries was originally provided by the Council, however, the congregation of groups/gangs at benches, vandalism and subsequent costs for maintaining and replacing seating eventually lead to the Council removing damaged street furniture without its replacement. The dedicated benches scheme was borne from the removal of Council maintained seating.

4.64 Under the current scheme, a family may donate a bench to the cemetery, with or without an inscription to a loved one. The scheme provides that proposed inscriptions must be approved by the Bereavement Services Officer, but other than the location of the bench itself, no other restrictions are imposed.

4.65 The bench is donated on the understanding that it is the responsibility of the family to supply, install and maintain the bench that they have donated and that the Council accepts no responsibility for any matter arising from the placement of the bench, save where damage is sustained as a direct result of its actions or negligence. Under Health and Safety legislation, however, the Council has a duty of care to ensure that the risk of injury to staff and visitors is minimised, and may be

deemed liable for any such injury sustained as a result of the placement of a dedicated bench.

4.66 The dedicated bench scheme is not subject to any cemetery fee, however, the placement of this form of memorialisation reduces efficiency of maintenance programmes and therefore adds to the cost of maintaining cemeteries.

4.67 Since the donor does not enter into any form of lease agreement for the placement of a dedicated bench, the Council may at its discretion, remove any bench that becomes unsightly or unsafe, however, any such action may lead to adverse publicity or animosity on the part of the donor.

4.68 The lack of regulation as to quality, construction and design of dedicated benches has led to disparity, many more suitable to a domestic environment, rather than for public use. In addition, little consideration is given to the environmental ethics of bench construction, leading to the use of non-renewable hardwoods and chemical preservatives that may be harmful to the environment.

4.69 Dedicated benches are a popular choice with many bereaved families; unfortunately, this tends to be localised to newer sections of the cemeteries and demand far outstrips available locations. In many cases, although there is no other bench present at the requested location, it is necessary to reject a request for the time being, to allow access to that particular section of the cemetery for excavation equipment and grave maintenance. Increasingly, families request locations that cannot be offered, for example, in an area where they perceive no graves to be present, which can often lead to disappointment and dispute.

Dedicated Trees

4.70 A dedicated tree planting service is offered in conjunction with the Arboricultural Section within CFYA.

4.71 The Bereavement Services Section deal with initial enquiries and serve to approve proposed inscriptions, however, the Arboricultural Officers liaise directly with the family to ascertain preferred species and location within the cemetery. A donation is requested toward the cost of each tree planted (currently £50).

4.72 It is usual for a stainless steel or aluminium plaque to be placed next to the tree itself, responsibility for the supply of which rests with the donor.

4.73 This scheme offers many benefits; the deceased is commemorated with a living memorial and the appearance of the cemetery is enhanced, as well as adding to the diversity of wildlife habitats.

4.74 The popularity of the dedicated tree scheme means that it is not always possible to offer a donor the exact location requested, and the choice of location is further diminished with each subsequent planting season.

4.75 The planting of dedicated trees can, however, reduce efficiency of maintenance programmes and may become a 'living shrine' with families planting flowerbeds at the base of the tree and placing other items around it. This can in turn lead to further hindrance of maintenance and may be detrimental to the health of the tree.

Green Burials

4.76 'Green' burials have different meaning for different people. Below are some of the frequently requested services:

- that the coffin is made from environmentally friendly materials such as cardboard or wicker
- that the funeral is a simple one e.g. no flowers or large cars
- that a memorial is not required
- that the burial takes place in a natural surrounding, which has a conservation policy
- that the body is not embalmed
- that the funeral is carried out by the family and close friends without a funeral director
- that the burial is in an unpurchased grave

4.77 The National Association of Funeral Directors estimate that there are 2,000 "green" funerals every year and that there are now 214 "natural" burial grounds across Britain compared with 52 in 1997.

Woodland Burials

4.78 The proposed woodland graves are to be located on the perimeter of Thornaby Cemetery, using an area of the field reserved for future burial needs. Sufficient ground exists to extend the area for many decades and the woodland will be part of a wider scheme to preserve a number of unique wildlife habitats adjacent to the cemetery. The scheme will protect the neighbouring relic salt marsh, reed beds and meadowland, whilst creating a managed native woodland to enhance the already rich wildlife habitat.

4.79 The burial area will be planned to re-create the traditional native North East woodland scene. This is considered one of the finest habitats for wildlife and will include some of the region's native tree species such as oak, ash, hazel, wild cherry, bird cherry, etc. The burial area will remain forever, in the midst of a developing woodland habitat.

4.80 Woodland burial will not be for those who require a neat and tidy grave with a traditional headstone. It will be chosen by those who love wildlife and the environment and who wish to create woodland, providing environmental benefits for future generations.

4.81 Graves will not be reserved for specific religions and the dead of varying faiths will be buried in the same area. It will be the families' decision as to whether they arrange a religious service, a secular service or to have no service at all. Traditional funeral patterns will not have to be rigidly followed and the funeral can be carried out without using the guidance of a funeral director.

4.82 Woodland burial offers those who do not wish to burden remaining family with tending to a traditional grave and memorial the option to allow nature to care for the grave, and the neglect of an unvisited memorial will not arise.

4.83 Each grave will be marked discretely for identification purposes and plans produced to ensure that an accurate record of each burial is maintained; for visitors to the cemetery, however, graves will be indistinguishable from natural environment.

4.84 Each woodland grave will accept a single burial; for those who wish to be buried near a loved one, a separate woodland area will be created, allowing two graves to be buried in side by side.

4.85 A woodland cemetery is intended to protect and create the natural habitat, and it is proposed that management of the area shall take this into account. The major purpose in visiting graves is to see the memorial or to place flowers; people walking to individual graves would create pathways and trample vegetation and wild flowers, destroying the living memorial we propose to create and so memorialisation of woodland graves would not be permitted.

4.86 For those families who would like a memorial or a place to remember loved ones, a sculpted memorial area will be created, providing a focal point for families and the opportunity to place a small metallic memorial leaf upon the memorial sculpture; the dedicated tree planting scheme would also be extended to an area of the woodland cemetery

4.87 In keeping with the ecological aims of the woodland burial ground and the surrounding habitats, it is preferred that burial should take place in a biodegradable coffin, shroud or other acceptable container. Standard chipboard coffins used by funeral directors may be permitted, but the use of materials containing plastics, glues and artificial preservatives is discouraged. The use of natural wooden coffins would be encouraged, providing that the wood is unpreserved and has been obtained from sustainable sources managed to ensure environmental impact is minimised.

4.88 Embalming fluid is mixture of the preservative formaldehyde, methanol, ethanol and other solvents. There is conflicting evidence regarding the impact of embalming fluid on the environment, but since embalming is not a necessary part of funeral arrangements, and it is increasingly believed that it may cause harm to the environment, the use of embalming fluid will not be permitted for woodland burial.

4.89 The realisation of the woodland cemetery is dependent upon the completion of access routes included in the proposed extension of Thornaby Cemetery. It is recommended that the proposed extension of Thornaby Cemetery and the creation of the woodland cemetery be undertaken in a single phase to minimise the risk of subsequent phases causing damage previously completed works.

Coffins and alternatives

4.90 The dead have been buried in a variety of ways over the centuries. In pre-Christian times the body may have been naked and laid in a stone 'cist'. Progressively, a desire to cover the body and prevent it coming into contact with the soil developed. The wealthy moved towards wood and even metal coffins, leaving the poor to shrouds. For a long period, the Government decreed that wool be used in order to help the wool trade. The poor could have their bodies placed in the parish coffin, which was carried to the graveside, where the body was removed and lowered into the grave. The same coffin was re-used in this way for decades.

4.91 The Victorian period saw the general use of individual and privately purchased coffins made in oak and elm and often heavily ornamented. As hardwoods became expensive cheaper materials have superseded them.

4.92 The 'standard' coffin currently used by funeral directors is made of chipboard with a good quality veneer, which looks like real wood. The nameplate, handles and inner linings are all made of artificial material, mainly plastic. These coffins are used for both burial and cremation. It is evident that many people perceive these coffins as composed of real wood, and the plastic handles as metal.



4.93 Many comments are made about coffins, which demonstrates that the public are uninformed about these issues. Consequently, it is suggested that crematoria are cremating, and thereby wasting vast quantities of wood. As explained above, the wood is almost always chipboard.

4.94 Some authorities are already successfully offering the 're-usable' coffin for cremation and burial. This is a return to the Parish coffin concept, but now offers important environmental and cost benefits.



4.95 The coffin is probably the most symbolic and central item of the funeral. It can be the final and most telling statement after a person has died. Unless a choice of coffin or alternative is easily available, the deceased and bereaved are unable to express their needs or philosophy. The choice should allow for a range of containers from the ostentatious through to the simple.

4.96 The ostentatious is available as a commercial product, from some funeral directors, in the form of American style caskets. These tend to be ornate and lavish, being composed of hardwoods and rich materials. In contrast, the simple cardboard or bamboo coffin can be used as a symbol of the deceased's concern for the environment, or because they are opposed to the high costs associated with funerals.



4.97 The coffin, of any type, can be personalised by an artist to reflect personal interests. The artistic options are individual, may require skills and time, all elements that are generally missing with the current funeral arrangements.

4.98 In 1994, three manufactures of biodegradable (cardboard) coffins arose and subsequently some funeral directors and crematoria/cemeteries are offering these products. This move was generally in response to the environmental burial schemes opening around the country.

4.99 Some people rapidly labelled the cardboard coffin 'cheap' and lacking in 'dignity'. This, of course, is a matter of opinion, and where a person requires ostentation, the cardboard coffin is not an option. The word dignity is defined as 'true worth' and where a person has a belief in protecting the environment, or in having a humble or modest funeral, then the cardboard coffin has true worth to that person,

and they should be given the choice. An added advantage is that cardboard coffins can be decorated attractively with paint, or personalised, by an artist or by the family themselves.



4.100 Also, where the box shape, or cardboard finish is felt to be upsetting visually, it is a simple matter to cover the coffin with a pall. Alternatively, home made palls, patchwork quilts or similar can be used.



4.101 Another 'green' option is the burial shroud. This consists of a board, upon which the body is laid, the whole being wrapped in a large piece of woven wool, linen or cotton cloth. The shroud is sold with cotton ropes, which are attached and used by four or six bearers. The shroud is suitable for all forms of burial, but not for cremation.

4.102 Consideration could be given by the Authority to the following:

- Review current constraints/regulations to enable freedom of choice for type and design of coffin, within the constraints of availability and safe materials.
- Supply coffins (bio-degradable type) via Bereavement Services.

- Promote greater choice, offer advice and source of supply over all available coffins, containers and shrouds
- Have a pall available for use by funeral director or the bereaved.
- Provide a diagram illustrating the construction of a simple, homemade coffin.

Environmental Issues

4.103 As an Authority we should be exploring ways of promoting and facilitating the provision of burial with due regard to environmental impact and encourage service options that eliminate or significantly reduce the risk of harm to our environment. The Council could consider the following steps to reduce the risk of harm to the environment.

General

- Promote and recommend products used in embalming that have insignificant impact on the environment in terms of pollution of ground water.

(Embalming is defined as the preservation of a body from decay, originally with spices and more recently through arterial injection of embalming fluid.)

Historically, the process is identified with the Egyptians, and the mummification of bodies. In fact, this complicated and extreme method was abandoned, although in recent centuries, ways of preserving bodies has received considerable attention. Varying levels of success were achieved but probably due to expense, they were utilised by very few people.

In the past thirty years, the commercial promotion of embalming has greatly increased. There has also been an increase in the use of unqualified embalmers over this period. Embalming is particularly evident amongst larger commercial funeral directors in urban locations. Conversely, the process is less common in rural areas, where small funeral directing businesses predominate. Also, some funeral directors appear to oppose the process.

The current use of the word 'embalming' is misleading. The process is generally referred to as cosmetic embalming. It is used to improve the visual appearance of the body, and to prevent deterioration in the period leading up to the funeral. It has no long-term preservative value and cannot be compared with the Egyptian concept of preserving bodies.

The embalming process involves removing the body fluids and replacing them with a solution of formaldehyde, often containing a pink dye. The body fluids are treated and disposed of via the public sewer. The embalming fluid normally consists of a 2% solution of formaldehyde, which has acidic properties in solution. Approximately one pint of embalming fluid per stone weight of the body, plus one pint, is used. Consequently, one to two gallons of embalming fluid can be used and the effect of this on soil, soil organisms and air quality following burial or cremation needs further independent research. Our ignorance of the consequences of using this chemical is a cause for concern. In particular, the chemical is used by funeral directors and embalmers, who carry no responsibility for its impact on the cemetery or community.)

- Encourage the use of material other than chipboard, fibreboard and plastic in the construction of coffins and cremated remains caskets.

- Promote the reduction of the use of plastic in floral tribute construction.
- Provide the bereaved with information on funeral options that have a lesser impact on the environment.

Burial

- The formulation of comprehensive cemetery management plans designed to protect the environment, character, biodiversity, landscape and heritage value of cemeteries.
- Support and encourage families wishing to arrange Independent burials by producing guidance leaflets and advice.

(The majority of people use a funeral director to organise a funeral 'package' on their behalf. Although convenient, this increases costs and can reduce the amount of personal input the bereaved have in the funeral.)

- The use of environmentally friendly chemicals to clean memorial stones, as an alternative to corrosive acids.

Maintenance of Cemetery Grounds

- Composting a greater amount of mown grass, leaves, flowers and other plant material removed from the grounds.
- Reduction in the use of herbicides/chemicals and peat.
- The retention of cut timber in habitat piles, rather than burning, which release carbon content.
- Increasing tree planting in order to offset carbon dioxide emissions.
- Sourcing alternatives to teak, mahogany and other hardwoods, used in the construction of garden seats.

Choice of graves/depth

4.104 In the past, cemeteries offered a wide choice of grave types, with an associated variety of memorials. Due to various reasons, such cemeteries fell into disrepair. Consequently, grave choice became limited and gradually, a perception developed that memorials were a nuisance and that they should be rigidly controlled as to size and design. Added to this was a concentration of grounds' maintenance costs. The culmination of these two aspects was the introduction of the lawn type graves.

4.105 The lawn grave is generally the only option available at most cemeteries. This design is perceived as offering the cheapest maintenance regime, allowing easy and unimpeded mowing along the lawns between parallel rows of identical headstones. The loss of individuality, artistic skill and any element of choice is evident, and this type of grave can be seen as regimented and boring. However, the

lawn type grave reduces the many disadvantages of the traditional grave including the need for a more expensive memorial, the removal/replacement of the memorial for a burial, and higher maintenance costs.

4.106 The absence of full grave memorials and/or kerb surrounds enables people to walk unimpeded over the lawn grave. This upsets some and is disliked by certain religious groups. In reality, the grass on lawn graves is intensively mown, which is relatively expensive and wastes fossil fuel, thereby harming the environment.

4.107 A standard lawn grave, for two adult interments, occupies an area of 9'0" x 4'0" and is excavated to a depth of 6'0" for the first interment. The grave is re-opened to a depth of 4'6" for the second interment. Requests have been granted for a lawn grave to be excavated to 7'0" for the interment of a child prior to the interment of the parents.

Lawn Graves



4.108 Stockton still offers the 'traditional' grave option, however, there are limited numbers of these grave types available. Families are permitted to plant shrubs, plants or flowers over the grave space, but all other current regulations for cemeteries apply to traditional graves.

4.109 A traditional grave, for three adult interments, occupies an area of 9'0" x 4'0" and is excavated to a depth of 7'0" for the first interment. The grave is re-opened to a depth of 5'6" for the second interment and for the third interment the grave is re-opened a depth of 4'6".

Traditional Graves



4.110 Over recent years it became apparent to Bereavement Services, following conversations with recently bereaved who had chosen to cremate their loved one, that they had no grave to tend and nowhere to relate to the deceased. This appeared to be having a negative impact on their grieving process. In July 1999, Stockton opened their first Cremated Remains Garden, which allows families to choose the cremation option, but also give them a grave to tend in quiet contemplation.

4.111 Each cremated remains grave holds two caskets of cremated remains. The grave area occupies an area of 4'0" x 2'0" and the first set of cremated remains is interred at a depth of 2'0" at the head of the grave, the second set of remains are again placed at a depth of 2'0" and are interred at the foot of the grave.



4.112 Traditionally, babies, stillborn babies and non-viable foetuses were interred in 'public' or communal graves. In 1994, Bereavement Services worked with Bereavement Counsellors from, the then, North Tees General Hospital and the Co-Operative Funeral Services to open our first Babies Burial Gardens, The Garden of St Nicholas at Oxbridge Lane Cemetery.

4.113 These graves are individual babies graves and occupy an area of 4'0" x 2.6". The grave is excavated to a depth of 3'8". All graves within the Garden are for babies and no other interments take place in this area.

4.114 This restriction of burial choice has occurred in parallel with the increasing adoption of cremation. Figures from 1994 show that over 70% of deaths involved a cremation-based funeral; this figure has remained fairly consistent. This increase has not occurred without adverse criticism. This has focused on the effect of cremation on the environment, and the accusations that a 'factory line' system has developed.

4.115 The extensive focus on the provision of cremation facilities is evident, even though there is now an increasing emphasis on burial provision. This is concentrating on offering a wider choice of graves, including a 'green' or natural form of burial, and generally to widen memorial choice.

4.116 The green burial option is already available as woodland burial in some parts of the country. This involves burial followed by the planting of a tree. Subsequently, the 'return to nature' concept allows the graves to form a woodland nature reserve, without routine maintenance or the use of chemicals. Restrictions on the use of

embalming and a requirement to use biodegradable coffins usually apply and the majority deny the placement of any memorial on the grave.

Consultation

4.117 As part of the evidence gathering for the review, the Committee consulted with Funeral Directors and Faith Groups and sought views from Viewpoint Focus Groups and the Elderly Citizens Forum. A detailed summary of the views obtained are set out in Appendix 3.

Key points are set out below:

Viewpoint Focus Groups and Elderly Citizens Forum

- Cemeteries were well kept and in a good state of repair – Thornaby and Billingham in particular
- Suggested more trees and seat and pathways to avoid getting muddy
- Drainage problems highlighted at Thornaby in particular
- All cemeteries were felt to be accessible although more parking would be welcomed
- It was generally felt that cars should be permitted within cemetery grounds to allow access for elderly and disabled people
- Dogs should be on leads on all times
- There were a range of suggestions for additional facilities including water, compost bins, toilets, shelter, cemetery maps
- Future uses for the disused chapels included Remembrance Room, information point, toilets, café, use for civil funerals
- Location was felt to be a key factor in attracting anti social behaviour. Solutions included more supervision and lighting, locking the cemeteries, strategic planting, CCTV and establishing Friends Groups
- Most panel members were interested in the alternative burial options shown and felt that more information needed to be made available on the various options
- Panel members felt that civil funerals might become more popular in the future and should be down to personal choice
- There should be more flexibility in respect of funeral times at weekends and there was a suggestion to have one late night
- Generally felt that there should be local burial provision
- Supported a crematorium in Stockton
- Although Panel Members had reservation, it was felt that the Council should consider using remaining grave depths for new burials in graves over 100 years old

Funeral Directors

- It was felt that there should be more flexibility in respect of funeral times, in particular on Fridays and later times in the summer
- Would welcome contact with the office from 8am
- Cemeteries were considered accessible. It was felt that cars should continue to be permitted to allow access for elderly and disabled people
- It was felt that Durham Road cemetery needed some attention and there was a need to keep pathways clean
- Suggestions for facilities included cemetery maps, water, waste bins and toilets
- Ideally there should be local burial provision

- It was not considered viable for funeral directors to jointly purchase private burial land
- It was felt that using remaining grave depths would not be popular and should only be considered for older graves
- A crematorium for Stockton would be welcomed but it was felt that take up might be slow at first
- Suggestions for the redevelopment of the disused chapels included Remembrance Room, waiting area before funerals, venue for civil funerals (a big increase in the last 12 months)
- Customers tended to prefer traditional funerals and some alternatives could be expensive
- A woodland burial site would be welcomed

Faith Groups

- Cultural tradition for Muslim burials to take place as soon as possible
- Later funeral times on a Friday during the summer would be welcomed
- Weekend and Bank Holiday burials would be welcomed
- Any process to speed up the registration of a death would be welcomed
- Drainage problems identified in the Muslim burial area in Thornaby
- Muslim community would like to see improved provision for the washing of hands
- Improvement to mapping and signage in cemeteries
- Would like somewhere to dispose of old Qurans
- Less of the Muslim community are now wanting to be buried in their country of origin and this is likely to put additional demand on burial space
- Sikh and Hindu communities do cremate; Muslims do not
- Cremation needs are being met by Middlesbrough Crematorium – no foreseeable increase in demand
- If a crematorium was being developed for Stockton, would need to bear in mind that Sikh funerals can attract a great many people and therefore timings would need to be considered to avoid peak times
- Sikh and Hindu Community would like a designated area for scattering ashes near running water leading to a stream
- Muslim community would support the development of a woodland burial site provided it fulfilled religious requirements

5.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 The Committee concluded that there was a projected shortage of burial space across the Borough and recommended that this situation needed to be addressed through extension to existing cemeteries, where possible, and additional burial land, if this could be identified. In view of the pressure on burial land, the Committee also concluded that the Council should also consider using remaining grave depths and explore more space efficient ways of interring cremated remains.

5.2 The Committee found that there was a lack of awareness of burial options amongst the public and felt that more information should be provided together with an extended choice of funeral and burial options.

5.3 The Committee also felt that funeral times and office opening hours should be reviewed to provide, where possible, an improved service to the customer.

5.4 The Committee found that the Council's cemeteries were maintained to a high standard but felt that some localised drainage problems needed to be addressed and made suggestions for improved facilities within cemetery grounds.

5.5 The redevelopment of the disused chapels in Durham Road and Oxbridge Lane were considered by the Committee as was the possibility of a crematorium for Stockton. However, the Committee were mindful that such developments would need to be subject to more detailed feasibility work and investigation of funding streams.

Recommendations

That:-

Financial Issues

- 1. A comprehensive fees and charges review for the service be undertaken as part of the service planning process for consideration before April 2008.**
- 2. The further capital investment to deliver the existing five year Improvement Plan for cemeteries and closed churchyards be considered through the Capital Asset Strategy Group to identify appropriate funding streams.**
- 3. The service review its medium term financial plan to re-assess the assumptions on which the budget has been set.**

Funeral Times and Office Opening Hours

- 4. Care for Your Area be asked to review working arrangements in order to establish whether there is scope to provide an extended service on Fridays and Saturdays**
- 5. Registration and Bereavement Services review office opening hours to provide, where possible, an improved service to the public.**

Safety and Security

6. In view of the experience at Durham Road Cemetery, the installation of CCTV be considered for inclusion within the five year Improvement Plan for other cemeteries.
7. Further efforts are made to establish friends groups for all of the Council's cemeteries
8. Planting be undertaken at strategic locations to deter vandals and assist with traffic control within cemetery grounds.

Maintenance

9. Localised flooding problems be investigated and any capital implications identified for consideration by the Capital Asset Strategy Group.
10. Improvements are made to the way graves are back filled and reinstated.
11. A "green" approach to the maintenance of cemetery grounds be developed.

Facilities

12. Improvements be made to the maps on display in the cemeteries in conjunction with section signage in the cemetery grounds.
13. The redevelopment of the disused chapels of Oxbridge and Durham Road Cemeteries be further explored and a feasibility study be prepared on the various potential options.

Future Provision

14. A project brief be prepared for submission to the Capital Asset Strategy Group to identify appropriate funding streams to meet the costs of extension into Area C at Billingham Cemetery (approximately £40,000) and the extension and development of a woodland cemetery at Thornaby (approximately £300,000).
15. The Land and Property Section identify additional land within the Borough for the siting of a cemetery in order to meet future burial needs.
16. Future burial provision be considered as part of the planning development framework.
17. Officers investigate alternative, space efficient ways of interring cremated remains within cemeteries.
18. The audit of space available in unpurchased graves within cemeteries be continued and upon completion grave space be offered in the following circumstances subject to appropriate consultation or awareness raising exercises:
 - Graves previously sold in perpetuity but containing no interments be identified for the purpose of cancelling Rights where the purchase

took place over 75 years ago and re-offer the Rights of Interment and Rights to erect a memorial.

- That unused space within, previously ‘reserved’ graves be used for future interments. The Committee recommended that those ‘reserved’ graves where the previous interments took place 100 years or more ago be offered first.

19. All graves be excavated, as a matter of course, to allow for 3 interments.

Publicity/ Public Awareness

20. Articles be included in Stockton News to raise awareness on the full range of burial options and alternatives together with information on grave rights and transfer and the service offered by the Council in respect of civil funerals.

21. Information leaflets be prepared on the issues to be considered when planning a “green” funeral, on how to organise your own funeral and that leaflets on planning funerals be provided to solicitors to distribute to people when they are making wills.

Extending Choice

22. A detailed business case be prepared on the feasibility of providing a crematorium for Stockton including possible funding streams and partnership arrangements.

23. The development of a woodland cemetery at Thornaby be considered by the Capital Asset Strategy Group to identify appropriate funding streams and that the extension and creation of a woodland cemetery be undertaken in one single phase to minimise the risk of subsequent phases causing damage to previously completed works.

24. The identification of further woodland burial sites be supported.

25. The Council’s current regulations in respect of type and design of coffin be reviewed to allow greater freedom of choice within the constraints of availability and safe materials.

26. Bio-degradable coffins be supplied via Bereavement Services and that a reusable coffin shell (to be used in conjunction with a cardboard coffin) and a pall be available for use.

Dedicated Benches and Trees

27. Clearer guidelines are developed in respect of the dedicated benches and trees schemes together with the introduction of appropriate fees and that the benches, trees and other appropriate memorial dedications be extended to locations other than cemeteries.

Timescales

- 28. the timescales included in the action plan for implementation of the review recommendations reflect a desire to make significant progress by December 2007.**

Appendix 1

DESCRIPTION OF CEMETERIES

Thornaby Cemetery

Thornaby was opened in 1869 and occupies an area of around 21.66 hectares (53.54 acres). In the summer of 1993, approximately 23 acres of cemetery land was leased for agricultural use, the lease coming to an end in March 2003.

This land is now intended for a variety of uses; Thornaby Circular Trail skirts the perimeter of this area and allows walkers to experience a diverse range of natural habitats. The Trail has been developed with a range of partners in the Thornaby area, including British Land, who own the nearby Teesside Retail and Leisure Park. The majority of this land is intended as an extension of the lawn sections and the development of a woodland burial area; initial talks have been held with a local property developer with the aim of allowing emergency access to a site to the north of the cemetery in exchange for assistance with the infrastructure for the cemetery extension and woodland burial area.

The cemetery offers a variety of graves to give choice to bereaved families. The traditional and lawn sections of the cemetery occupy the majority of the current burial land, including a dedicated Muslim section, which opened in November 1991.

Working in partnership with the University Hospital of North Tees, a neonatal garden for the burial of babies and infants, The Garden of St. Cuthbert was created and officially opened by the Mayor of Stockton-on-Tees on the 17 June 1999. In July 1999, the first Cremated Remains Garden within the cemetery was opened, offering graves designed for the burial of two cremated remains caskets and the opportunity for families to place a small memorial vase.

An additional area has been set aside for future use as a second Cremated Remains Garden and currently serves as a quiet garden for the remembrance of loved ones and features the newly created Erimus Memorial.

The Remembrance Garden is to be a distinct part of the cemetery for the burial of cremated remains, separated from the other cemetery areas by mature hedges. A significant feature of this site is the Erimus Memorial, in memory to local servicemen, lost in the First World War, displayed on a brickwork setting. The colour theme and material of which, shall be introduced into the Garden of Remembrance.

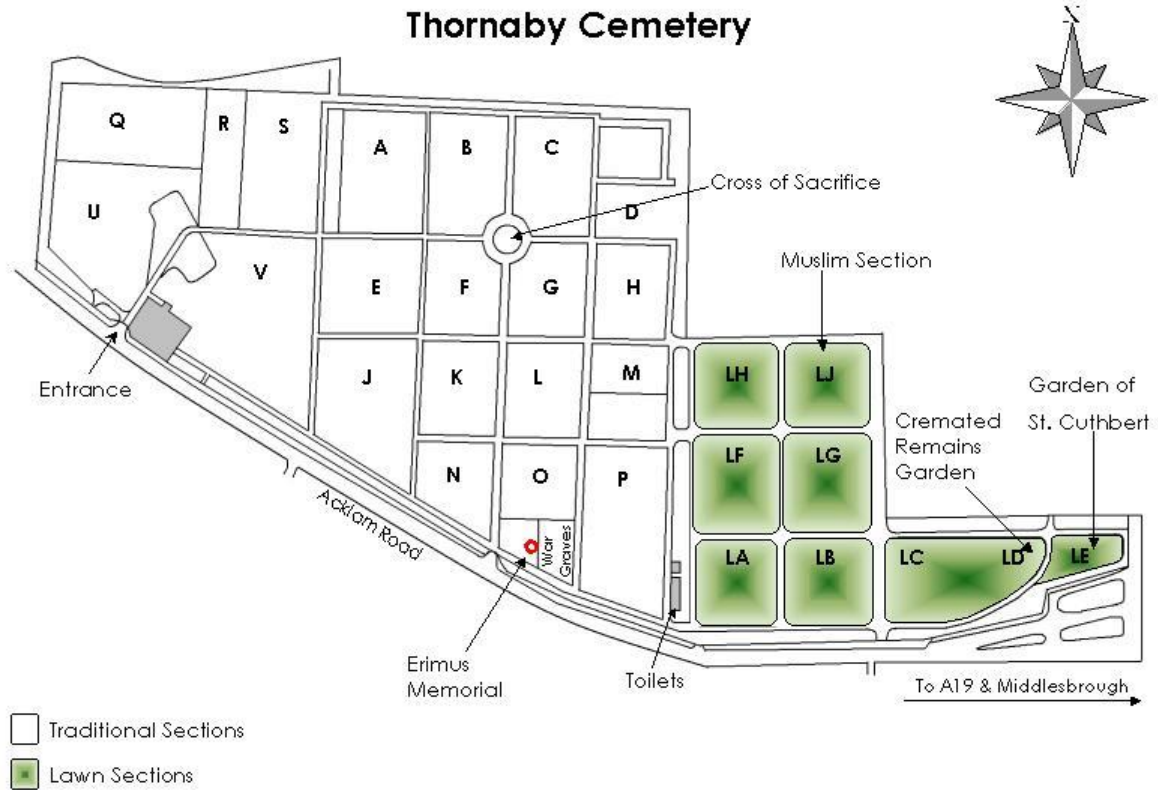
Thornaby Cemetery is the only cemetery in the Borough to have a dedicated War Graves Section, with over 30 graves. The section is maintained to the exacting standards expected by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Including burials of servicemen in other areas of the cemetery, the total number of war graves within Thornaby Cemetery is 114.

In addition to the war graves, the cemetery is also home to a 'Cross of Sacrifice' to commemorate those who gave the ultimate sacrifice; a Cross of Sacrifice is usually present in cemeteries containing more than 40 war graves.

The Cemetery of the Year Awards aims to find Britain's best cemeteries, churchyards and crematoria.

Entrants are assessed on everything from design and maintenance through to the facilities and choice offered to the bereaved. In 2006, Thornaby was named Cemetery of the Year in the 12 acres and above category.





Aerial view of Thornaby Cemetery

Durham Road Cemetery

The land for Durham Road Cemetery was acquired by Council on the 22 October 1891 and was opened for burials in 1894. The main entrance to the cemetery can be found on Durham Road, Stockton, with a secondary entrance off Bishopton Avenue, Stockton. The burial site currently covers an area of 8.553 hectares (21.14 acres). The land adjoining the Cemetery is currently classed as Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) and was acquired by Council on the 17 December 1891.

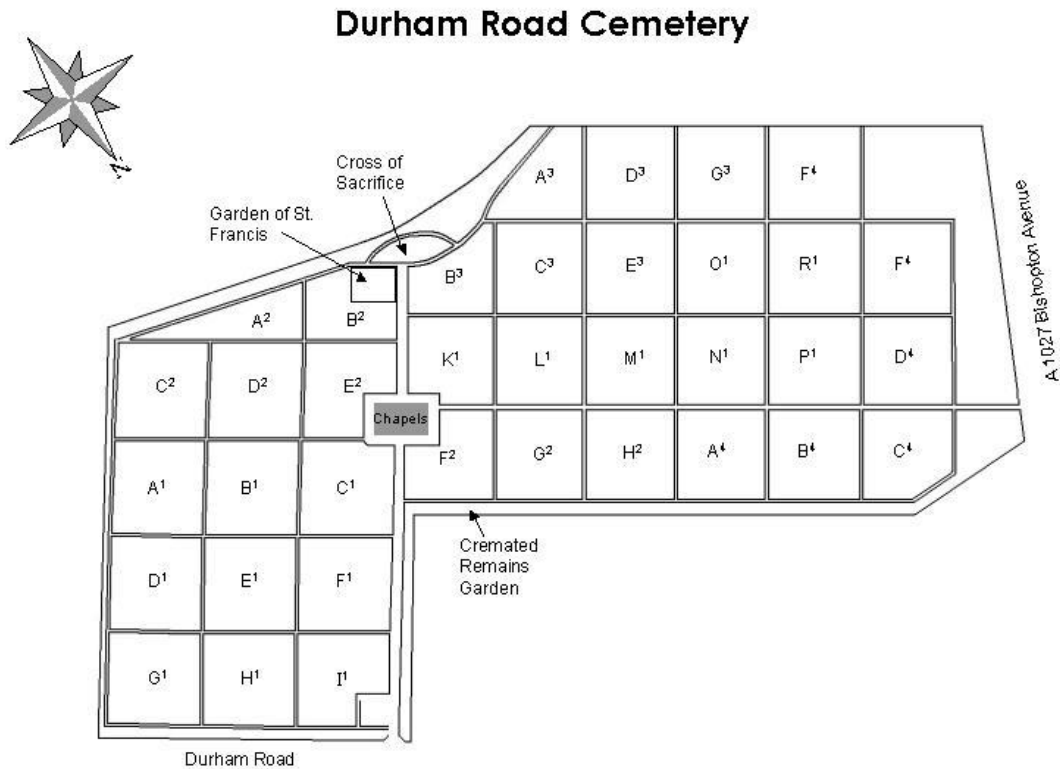
The Cemetery is divided into 'old' graves, which hold three adult interments on sections divided according to religious denominations and the 'lawn' graves, introduced in 1971, which hold two adult interments on sections that are multi-denominational; the interment of an infant may also be requested in this type of grave prior to the two adult burials.

The Cemetery has a dedicated area for the burial of babies and infants, the Garden of St Francis, which opened in March 1996. This garden is located within an area of B² section toward the Southern side of the cemetery.

Adjacent to the Garden of St Francis stands the Cross of Sacrifice, one of two within the Borough's Cemeteries, dedicated to the memory of those who gave their lives for their country.

The cemetery originally had a lodge and public toilets at its Durham Road entrance in addition to the two cemetery chapels further along the main driveway. The Lodge was demolished on 13 June 1995 owing to extensive structural damage caused by tree roots, the public toilets meeting the same fate in 1996.

The two cemetery chapels are no longer in use for funeral ceremonies, following the recommendation of the County Borough of Teesside that all cemetery chapels be closed and eventually demolished. Demolition was never carried out, but the chapels were nevertheless closed to the public. The Chapels are currently acting primarily as storage and office space for the Cemetery Staff.





Aerial view of Durham Road Cemetery

Oxbridge Lane Cemetery

Oxbridge Lane Cemetery is divided into 'old' and 'extension'; the old part of the cemetery was acquired by the Council on 23 July 1869 and opened for burials in 1871. Further parcels of land were acquired between 1925 and 1928, resulting in the extension to the cemetery being opened in 1929.

The entrance on Oxbridge Lane is used primarily for funerals within the old sections of the cemetery and has a tenanted lodge adjacent. The driveway leads to two cemetery chapels, which escaped demolition, but are no longer open to the public. As with Durham Road Cemetery, the chapels are currently used as storage and office space for the Cemetery Staff. The exterior of the chapels, however, underwent extensive improvement during 2005 as part of a wider scheme to improve the appearance of the main driveway leading from Oxbridge Lane.

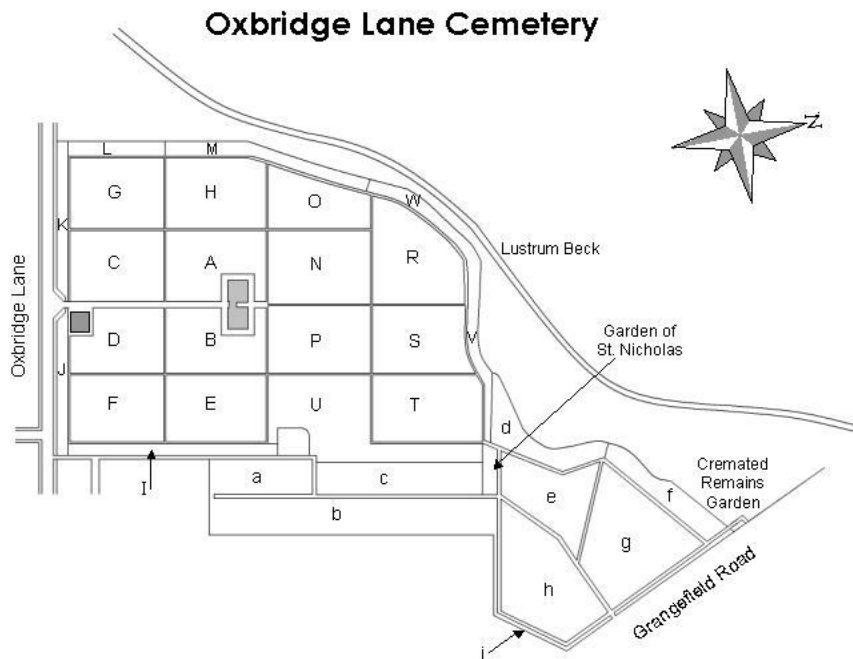
A secondary entrance is located on Grangefield Road, serving the cemetery extension.

The Cemetery covers an area of around 10.73 hectares (26.51 acres), with no provision for future extension.

The cemetery is divided into sections containing traditional graves for the burial of three adults, arranged according to religious denomination and multi-denominational Lawn graves, which will accommodate two adult burials, with the option of the interment of an infant prior to the two adult interments. In addition, there are dedicated sections for Muslim and Jewish burials, which are virtually full, save for several graves purchased solid for future use.

In June 1994, the Borough's first babies' burial garden, the Garden of St Nicholas, opened within the cemetery for the burial of stillborn babies and infants up to the age of one month. The garden underwent extensive improvement works in 2005 to create a focal feature and seating area.

The final addition to the cemetery was the opening of a dedicated section for the burial of cremated remains in September 2004. The cremated remains garden is divided into four sections with a central art feature. Four benches are located within the garden, based upon the theme of the four seasons and designed in conjunction with Grangefield Comprehensive School and County Durham Artist/Blacksmith Graeme Hopper.





Aerial view of Oxbridge Lane Cemetery

Billingham Cemetery

Land for the creation of Billingham Cemetery was acquired by the Council from Imperial Chemical Industries on 15 September 1966; the cemetery opened for burials in 1969. The land was originally considered as a site for the construction of a crematorium, with remembrance garden and a cemetery, however, the decision of the then Development Committee in June 1965 was that there was no immediate need for a crematorium in Billingham. It was thought prudent that a site be reserved for future development of a crematorium, but that at that time, estimated usage, construction and maintenance costs and staffing costs were considered uneconomic.

The entrance to the cemetery is located on Wolviston Back Lane, near Cowpen Bewley village. The Cemetery covers an area of around 2.264 hectares (5.594 acres) and is divided into seven sections. Six of these sections are laid out or intended for use as lawn graves, suitable for the interment of two adults; these will

also accommodate the burial of an infant prior to the two adult interments. There are currently three sections, A, B and D used for lawn grave burials.

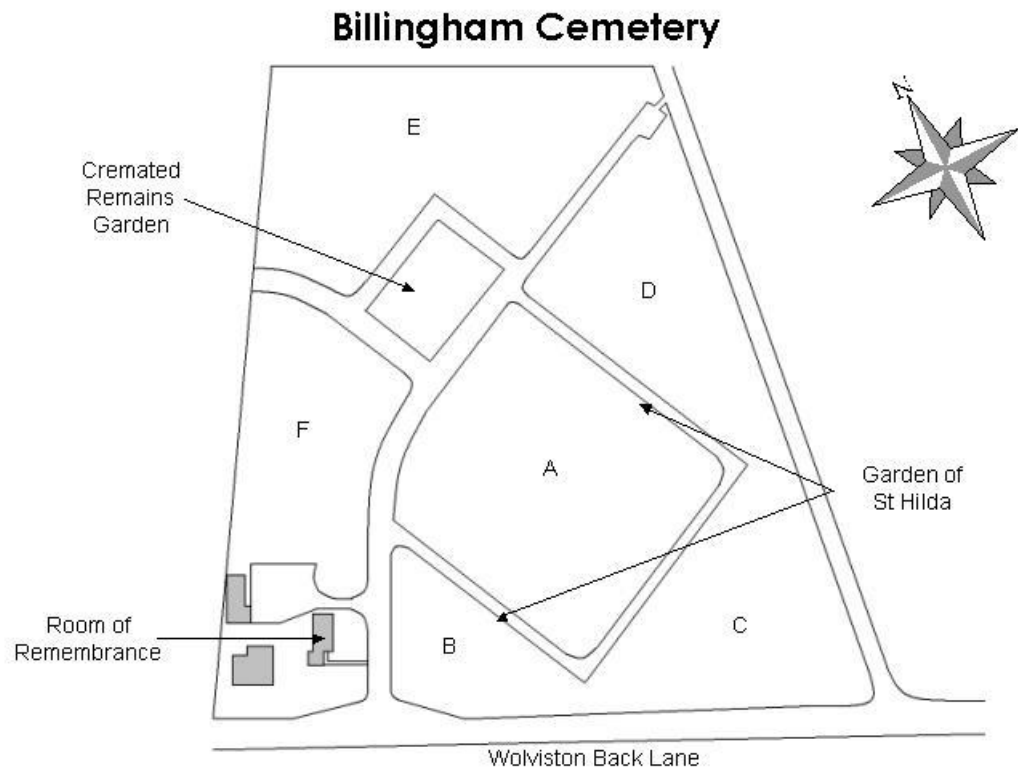
One section of the cemetery has been developed for the burial of cremated remains in graves that will accommodate two cremated remains caskets; the garden is divided into four sections with a central specimen tree and seating area. The first burials in this section took place in June 2000.

Sections A and B each accommodate a row of pathside graves suitable for the interment of babies up to the age of one month and collectively known as the Garden of St Hilda.

There is a tenanted lodge to the left of the entrance to the cemetery, and behind it, the Room of Remembrance, which accommodates the Cemetery's Book of Remembrance and public conveniences. Following its recent refurbishment, the room would also be suitable for small-scale funeral ceremonies.

Further into the cemetery, there are additional cemetery offices and storage facilities, currently used by the Cemetery Staff.

Only the three sections of cemetery currently in use as lawn grave sections have been drained with 'French drains', additional sections requiring drainage works prior to use for burials.





Aerial view of Billingham Cemetery

Egglescliffe Cemetery

Egglescliffe Cemetery was originally under the jurisdiction of Egglescliffe Parish Council, with the Local Authority offering a grave digging service. The Council assumed control of the cemetery in June 1979, with legal confirmation being completed in May 1983.

The Cemetery occupies an area of approximately 0.1812 hectares (0.4478 acres), and as such, is by far the smallest of the Borough's Cemeteries. The main entrance to the cemetery is found on Butts Lane, with a secondary, infrequently used entrance close to the pathway running between the cemetery and the churchyard of the Church of St John the Baptist.



Aerial view of Eggescliffe Cemetery

Appendix 2

Fees Comparison with other Tees Valley Local Authorities

	Stockton	Middlesbrough	Darlington	Redcar & Cleveland	Hartlepool
Purchase of Rights					
Lawn/Traditional 100yrs	£369.00	£500.00	-	-	£445.00
Lawn/Traditional 50yrs	£314.00	-	£425.00	£296.00	-
Cremated Remains Garden	£74.00	-	-	£99.00	£102.00
Babies Burial Garden	£50.00	waived	-	£148.00	-
Right to Erect Memorial only	£217.00	-	-	-	-
Transfer of Rights	£60.00	-	£30.00	-	£21.00
Woodland Grave	-	£670.00	-	£328.00	-
Concrete/brick Vault	-	£760.00	£850.00	-	£675.00
Interment Fees (private)*					
Adult Interment	£244.00	£331.00	£392.00	£340.00	£273.00
Child**	-	waived	£82.50	£170.00	£138.00
Infant/baby	£26.00	waived	waived	£65.00	£138.00
Cremated Remains	£88.00	£80.00	£67.00	£76.00	£105.00
Scattering Cremated Remains	£19.00	£10.00	-	£31.00	-
Clinical Samples/body parts	£66.00	£16.00	-	-	-
Cremation Fees (private)*					
Adult	-	£340.00	£374.00	-	£410.00
Neonatal/infant	-	waived	-	-	£12.00
Child**	-	waived	£82.00	-	£19.00
Body Parts	-	£25.50	£65.00	-	-
Environmental Surcharge	-	£30.00	-	-	-
Memorial Fees					
New Memorial	£178.00	£100.00	£120.00	£129.00	-
Additional Inscription	£21.00	£7.50	£35.00	£26.00	-
Wooden Cross	£30.00	£27.00	-	£26.00	-
Memorial Vase	£26.00	£10.00	£35.00***	£26.00	-
Kerbstones	-	£53.00	£50.00	-	-
Neonatal memorial	£15.00	-	-	-	-
Miscellaneous					
Search of Registers	£15.00	£7.50	-	£13.00	£13.00
Saturday Morning burial surcharge	£175.00	-	-	-	-
Saturday Morning Cremation Surcharge	-	£32.00	-	-	-
Non Resident Surcharge - burial	+100%	+25%	+100%	+50%	+100%

Non Resident Surcharge - cremated remains	+100%	+25%	+100%	+50%	+100%
Non Resident Surcharge - cremation	-	-	-	-	-
Non Resident Surcharge - grave	+50%	+25%	+100%	+50%	+100%
Non Resident Surcharge - neonatal grave	+50%	£124.00	-	+50%	+100%

- * Family funerals only, other arrangements in place for hospital contract funerals
- ** Middlesbrough - up to 16 years of age, Darlington - up to 18 years of age, Hartlepool - up to 12 years of age
- *** Includes one inscription

Appendix 3

**VIEWPOINT FOCUS GROUPS
SUMMARY
19 & 20 FEBRUARY 2007**

To gain the views of the general public in order to inform the scrutiny review of cemeteries and memorials, it was decided to hold focus groups consisting of adult Viewpoint Panel Members.

Three sessions were held. All sessions were facilitated by Judith Trainer. Jenny Elstob and Tanya Harrison also attended sessions.

A summary of the comments made at the sessions is set out below:

Introduction - Experience of Visiting Cemeteries

There was mixed response. Some of the group did not visit cemeteries at all; others had experience of visiting cemeteries to visit graves of family members. One member played in her local cemetery as a child and one visited cemeteries in relation to local history.

Condition of Cemeteries

**How would you describe the overall condition of cemeteries?
Good/bad examples?**

In general, the groups felt that the cemeteries were well kept and in a good state of repair. Thornaby and Billingham cemeteries were cited as particularly good examples. It was felt that Oxbridge and Durham Road cemeteries were not in such a good condition. As these cemeteries were close to towns, the groups felt that these were more prone to vandalism.

**What do you think about the:
-planting,
-condition of roads and footpaths?**

In general, the groups felt that planting and landscaping were good. Suggestions included:

- More trees
- More seats
- More pathways between graves to prevent people getting muddy and to save walking on other graves (Drainage problems were highlighted at Thornaby cemetery)
- Planting of prickly bushes at boundaries to deter vandals.

Do you think that the cemeteries are accessible?

All groups felt that the cemeteries were accessible. It was stated that most of them were on bus routes.

More parking would be appreciated. Parking at Thornaby was felt to be a particular problem because of its location on a main road.

Do you think that cars should be allowed to drive in cemetery grounds?

Two of the groups felt that cars were not generally a problem although more passing spaces would be desirable. One group felt that cars should be restricted from driving to grave sides, although it was acknowledged that cars should be permitted for the elderly and disabled. Again, more parking at entrances would be welcomed.

Do you think that dogs should be exercised on cemetery grounds?

The groups felt that in general, although cemeteries were not the place for exercising dogs, they should not be banned as they were reassuring for elderly and vulnerable people. All members felt that dogs should be kept on a lead at all times.

What type of facilities do you think should be provided at cemeteries?

Suggestions included:

- Water taps
- More seating
- Bigger dustbins
- Compost bins for compostible waste
- Toilets
- Some form of shelter
- Someone on hand to answer queries

Overall Ideas for Improvement?

Suggestions included:

- Visitors Book
- Cemetery Maps showing location of graves

Disused Chapels

How would you like to see the disused chapels at Oxbridge Lane and Durham Road used?

Suggestions included:

- Remembrance Room/ place to leave cards
- Place to hold information on the cemetery
- Toilets
- Café run by a "Friends Group"
- Use as a chapel again
- Illuminate both Chapels
- All groups thought that it would be a good idea to redevelop them for civil funerals

Anti Social Behaviour

Why do you think that some cemeteries are more prone to anti social behaviour and vandalism than others?

Most people felt that the location was the key factor with cemeteries close to towns having the biggest problems eg Durham Road, Oxbridge

Other comments were that cemeteries were sometimes too quiet, there was a lack of supervision and lighting.

One member commented that where graves have a lot of clutter and ornaments on them, this might attract vandals.

What do you think could be done reduce the incidence of anti social behaviour?

Suggestions included:

- Locking cemeteries at night
- More lighting
- CCTV cameras
- Planting prickly hedges at low perimeter walls
- Ask Neighbourhood Wardens to patrol the area
- Phones to enable people to call for assistance
- Make cemeteries more attractive places to encourage more people to visit them
- Establish "Friends Groups" to keep an eye on things
- Children need to learn about cemeteries and taught to respect them – could encourage schools to visit/ put work experience children into placements with funeral directors/ have a pet cemetery corner

Extending Choice

Participants were sent information on alternative burial options and asked what they thought about the alternatives

All panel members were very interested in the different options and many said they wished that funeral directors provided more information on alternative options and green burials. There were a lot of positive comments about woodland burials and green alternatives, although sensitivity need to be exercised when offering cardboard coffins for example so people did not think that this option was for "paupers funerals".

What would be your own preference?

Many people were interested in green and woodland burials although it was acknowledged that everyone would have individual preferences.

Are there any other burial alternative that should be offered?

Other suggestions included:

- Burial at sea
- Provision for BME communities

- One lady suggested a pet burial area
- The option to have your ashes scattered on a river

What are your thoughts on Civil Funerals and Memorial Ceremonies?

People felt that this should be down to personal choice. It was felt that this might require a change in “mind set”, however, as not everyone was religious, these options could be popular.

Panel Members felt that it would be nice to have somewhere to gather with friends and family after a civil ceremony.

In respect of the current funeral times and office opening hours, do you think that these are reasonable? Should the Council make any changes to the times?

It was felt times were restrictive and that there was scope for more flexibility in respect of Saturdays and Sundays and on Bank Holidays (the Christmas period could be particularly difficult). One suggestion was to have one late night.

It was suggested that people registering a death should be separate from people registering a birth.

Future Provision

Do you think that the Council should ensure that there is sufficient burial space locally?

In general, people felt that cemeteries should be provided locally and preferably on a bus route, although it was acknowledged that movement of population might not always make visiting a cemetery easy. Some people felt that more land should be available for burials and commented that this should be investigated.

What would be a reasonable travelling distance?

Suggestions included:

- No more than 15 minutes
- A couple of miles
- Good to have cemeteries within towns (good to have the green space)

Some graves have reserved spaces. A number of these are over 100 years old. Do you think that the Council should consider using the space left in the grave for other burials? What would be a reasonable time period?

Although panel members had reservations about this (particularly about the placement of memorials), it was generally felt that this was something which should be considered. It was generally felt that this should only be considered for graves over 100 years old and subject to consultation with family members. It was felt that further consultation need to take place on this issue.

Do you think that there should be a crematorium in Stockton?

Unanimous yes. The other crematoriums were so busy – Middlesbrough in particular. Parking it also a problem a Middlesbrough Crematorium. A crematorium in Stockton would need to have ample parking.

Where would be the best place to site a crematorium?

On the outside of town but should be accessible and have lots of parking. Some suggestions:

- ICI block in Billingham
- Thornaby
- Near the prison

Overall Comments

Where safety checks are being made on graves, they should only be laid down two at a time thereby minimising distress to visitors.

What happens to the temporary cross that marks the grave before the gravestone is erected?

Some felt that it was appropriate for children's graves to be in a separate area; one or two members felt that children's graves should be integrated with the other graves.

The Council should produce a tasteful leaflet on alternative burial options for people when they register a death. There could be more publicity in the press and Stockton News. Information could also be provided to people when they make a will.

**Environment and Regeneration Select Committee – 5 March 2007
Questions for Funeral Directors**

Opening and Funeral Times

1. In respect of the current funeral times and office opening hours, do you think that these are reasonable? Should the Council make any changes to funeral and opening times?

- Set times are restrictive
- Should consider extending funeral times in the evenings especially on Fridays
- Muslim funeral directors are under pressure to make arrangements for burial as soon as possible – It would be helpful if someone could be in the office from 8am to commence talks
- It would be helpful to be able to proceed with weekend funerals without any difficulty even if this means an extra charge (like Middlesbrough) at least people would have the choice
- Later funeral times in the summer should be considered
- Might be helpful to communicate with the office electronically but would need to be sure that the message had got through

Cemetery Facilities

2. How accessible are the Council's cemeteries? What improvements if any can be made?

- Generally all cemeteries are quite accessible.
- Where possible cemeteries should be one way systems.

3. Do you think that cars should be allowed to drive inside cemetery grounds? Why?

- Yes otherwise there will be a lot of walking. Some people are elderly or disabled.

4. What type of facilities do you think should be provided at cemeteries?

- Water
- Waste bins/baskets
- Toilets
- Map of cemeteries

5. Do you have any thoughts on how the disused chapels at Oxbridge Lane and Durham Road and the Billingham Remembrance Room could be used in the future?

- Civil Funerals – there has been a big increase in the last 12 months
- For remembrance and prayers.
- Non religious funerals – somewhere to go.
- Somewhere to sit before funeral
- Remembrance place
- For use by other Faiths also
- Don't forget limited life span at some cemeteries so would need to carefully consider use carefully

Alternative Options:

6. What burial options, including coffin choice and alternatives, to you offer?

- Thornaby Funerals offer casket and shelf system
- Would like woodland burial site
- Not aware of re-useable coffins at MBC
- People tend to prefer traditional funerals
- Some alternatives are expensive (e.g. wicker coffins)
- Islam do not cremate, they are buried without a casket or coffin
- Embalming is offered by qualified embalmers an around £35 – Permission is needed for embalming – Sometimes advise is it carried out when people want to visit the deceased or where there is to be a delay before the funeral
- A lot of firms are now buying special fluids that are less harmful to the environment
- SBC would only need small woodland area as MBC have a small one – although Middlesbrough are not a good example of a woodland site
- Very often people are interested in cardboard coffins until they see them
- A lot of misconceptions about what is “green”
- More people are planning their funerals ahead
- Some but not all funeral directors used funeral packs

7. What are your thoughts on Civil Funerals and Memorial Ceremonies?

- There has been an increase in civil funerals. The funeral directors present said that they used Tyne Tees Humanist Celebrant as this would cheaper than using the Council
- Muslim community would not entertain them

Future Provision

8. You will be aware that there is a lack of burial space in some areas of the Borough. Do you think that the Council should ensure that there is sufficient burial provision space locally?

- Muslims do not cremate hence would appreciate enough grave space for all future burials
- Not viable for funeral directors to jointly procure a private burial space as they are all different types of companies
- Yes the Council should ensure enough burial provision – ideally this should be local
- Now with second and third generation Muslims, there is less burial in homeland and therefore added pressure on burial space

9. What, in your opinion, is a reasonable distance to travel to a cemetery?

2/3 miles

10. Some graves have reserved grave spaces some of which are over 100 years old. Do you think that the Council should consider using the space left in the graves for other burials? What do you think would be a reasonable time period to elapse before re-use is considered?

- People would be horrified – they would be likely to travel further than share a grave
- Linthorpe Rd MBC have done this
- Muslims would welcome this within the Muslim sections

11. Do you think that there should be a crematorium within Stockton Borough?

- A Stockton Crematorium would be ideal but would depend on the demand
- There may be slow take up at first as people would want cremation in the same place as other family members
- Hartlepool has its own crematorium and Hartlepool is smaller than Stockton
- Some evidence that people will travel further to go to a crematorium in their own Borough

12. Where would be the best place to site a crematorium?

- Either Thornaby Cemetery or park / church land between Yarm Lane and Bowesfield Lane
- At the site of the original application – Letch Lane is accessible

Other Comments

13. Please provide any other additional comments on how the service can be improved which you would like to Committee to take into account as part of its review

- Need to keep pathways clean
- Durham Road is a mess Billingham and Thornaby are in good condition

Faith Group Visits

Dr Mohammed Riaz, Hartington Mosque
Mr M Hussain , Northcote Street Mosque
Chinese, Sikh and Hindu community feedback from Satnam Singh

Office opening and funeral times

Muslim Community -

There is a cultural tradition for burial to take place as soon as possible following death.

During the summer months, Friday prayers take place at 2pm. This causes a problem for burials that take place on a Friday as the last timed slot for burial is 2:20 and it is a rush to get to the cemetery in time following the funeral service. This is less of a problem during the winter period as Friday prayers are at 1pm.

Middlesbrough offer weekend and bank holiday burials and this would be welcomed in Stockton if possible. Similarly any process that could be put into place regarding speeding up the registration of death would be welcomed though it's recognised that the informant has to be present to sign.

On average, it was thought that around 6 burials per year lead to problems over a weekend.

Accessibility

Thornaby cemetery contains the designated area for Muslim burials but it was noted that there was a lack of parking and a need to park on main road which may lead people to take their cars inside the grounds.

Provision

Concerns exist regarding the issue of drainage in the area of Muslim burial plots. Recognition that department are looking at the drainage issue. Serious 'sinking' of graves has occurred. The Muslim community are looking into the possibility of purchasing grave sections and employing someone to create brick vaults, which would then be used to inter the body.

Sikh and Hindu's community would appreciate a designated area for the scattering of ashes, thought this would need to be next to running water that leads to the main stream.

In the past, 70-80% of the Muslim community preferred to be buried in their country of origin. However, this has now changed around and this likely to add to the increase in demand for burial space. Mosques are asking people to not reserve a plot in advance for this reason.

Muslim community would prefer to see improved provision of facilities for washing hands. Muslim men carry out the actual backfilling of the grave, with their bare hands and therefore need to clean them afterwards. Maps of the cemeteries would be another benefit.

Something that could be looked at was the treatment of old Quran's. Muslims believe that old and worn copies of the Quran should receive special treatment; as part of this they cannot be burnt. Previously they were scattered at sea however this process has been ended due financial considerations.

Some cemeteries have looked at the provision of underground 'chambers' in order to bury them. At present large numbers are being held in storage. It is to be investigated whether Qurans could be buried nearby to Muslim graves (would not be allowed to be buried *with* the Quran in the same grave for religious reasons). A suggestion was put forward that would involve digging a grave as if it were for 2 adults, then to bury the Quran in one grave, backfill and then the body to follow as normal. Dr Riaz was to check on the acceptability of this.

In Pakistan, cemeteries can be renewed 200 years after the last burial on that site. (This to be double checked by Dr Riaz).

Chapels

There was no interest in the possible future use of the disused chapels.

Burial options

For Muslims, there would be agreement with the development of green, woodland burial sites. However, religious concerns regarding the siting of plots would need to be addressed, graves in relation to the direction of Mecca etc. In theory, Muslims only need to be buried in a shroud anyway, with coffins only being used due to the nature of the ground in this country.

In Stockton, the Muslim community prefer to only use embalming when they have to i.e. when the body is being transported by air, airlines insist on embalming before travel. Similarly, the Sikh community avoid embalming.

Crematoriums

Muslim community have no requirement for crematoria. Sikh and Hindu communities require a crematorium but state that current needs are met mainly through the Middlesbrough site. No foreseeable increase in the demand, and the community remains a relatively small part of the population.

Sikh funerals can attract upwards of a few hundred people. In general, community tries to avoid booking funerals for peak times due to traffic issues. Police escorts are provided if funeral convoy would exceed 10 vehicles. Issues of timing and numbers attending may need to be borne in mind should Stockton develop a crematorium. The Scandinavian idea of 'promession' (centred on the 'freeze-drying' of bodies), it was thought unlikely to win approval.

General comments

Mr Riaz stated that he had intended to request a meeting anyway, before this one arose.

Mr Riaz was under the impression that there was a second area of land allocated for Muslim burial space in Thornaby. This wasn't the department's understanding and will be investigated.

The Chinese community were consulted on the issue but were unable to attend the meeting. It is recognised that the subject of death is a sensitive one for the Chinese community.