

FAREHAM

BOROUGH COUNCIL

Report to the Executive for Decision 06 February 2017

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| Portfolio: | Streetscene |
| Subject: | Holly Hill Cemetery Extension |
| Report of: | Director of Operations |
| Strategy/Policy: | |
| Corporate Objective: | Clean and Tidy Borough |

Purpose:
To consider a proposal to meet demand for burial space in the Western Wards.

Executive summary:

Holly Hill Cemetery is the only open cemetery serving the Western Wards of the Borough and there are currently no burial plots available. Officers have been investigating opportunities to establish new cemetery provision on land in the vicinity.

Consideration was given to developing a new cemetery on the Coldeast site on the land adjacent to the new Holly Hill Leisure Centre as part of the proposals to provide community infrastructure on the site. However, a feasibility study concluded that it was not cost effective to construct a new cemetery at this location.

A feasibility study has been completed to consider the potential to extend the existing Holly Hill Cemetery. This has concluded that the site is suitable for a cemetery and meets the requirements of the Environment Agency, but would require the removal of some trees and vegetation.

Careful consideration has been given to the design of a cemetery extension which includes retaining the significant trees on the site. The design provides 377 burial plots which are considered sufficient to last for approximately 30 years at the current rate of demand for burials.

To construct the cemetery extension a budget of £300,000 will be required and it will take approximately two years to complete. Further works will be undertaken to provide additional tree planting and landscaping on the cemetery site and land adjacent to the Holly Hill Leisure Centre to mitigate the loss of trees that will need to be removed.

Recommendation:

That the Executive:

- (a) agrees to the provision of an extension to the Holly Hill Cemetery; and
- (b) approves a budget of £300,000 to construct the cemetery extension.

Reason:

To ensure there is an adequate provision of burial plots in the Western Wards of the Borough.

Cost of proposals:

The cost of constructing the cemetery extension is estimated to be £300,000 which can be met from Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding.

Appendices:

A: Location Map Showing Proposed Holly Hill Cemetery Extension

Background papers:

Holly Hill Cemetery Extension Feasibility Study and Tier 1 Risk Assessment

Holly Hill Cemetery Extension Feasibility Study and Tier 2 Risk Assessment

Reference papers:

None

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Executive Briefing Paper

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| Subject: | Holly Hill Cemetery Extension |
| Briefing by: | Director of Operations |
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INTRODUCTION

1. Holly Hill Cemetery is the only open cemetery serving the Western Wards of the Borough. It was opened in 1957 and has been a very popular location for burials due to its pleasant and tranquil surroundings. The cemetery has capacity for 1154 grave spaces, not including cremated remains.
2. In September 2005 the Executive received a report that highlighted there were a limited number of burial plots available at Holly Hill. This situation was being compounded by the significant number of grave spaces that were being pre purchased.
3. The Executive agreed to cease the permission to pre-purchase graves at Holly Hill Cemetery in 2005 and asked officers to investigate with landowners the potential to purchase land to develop additional grave spaces within the vicinity, including the site at Coldeast.

BACKGROUND

4. Initial investigations concluded that there was limited opportunity for new provision and that the former Coldeast Hospital site offered the best potential for the development of a new cemetery provision.
5. The Council and the Homes and Communities Agency agreed an arrangement for the provision of new community infrastructure on the site as part of a development agreement. The subsequent plans included the new leisure centre and community infrastructure on the Coldeast site which incorporated the provision of a new cemetery.
6. The feasibility study concluded that the land required additional drainage and levelling as well as a new access road and car park to service the cemetery. Although the site could accommodate 538 burial plots the construction cost was very high at just over £1,044,000 which equated to £1,940 per adult grave.

7. The cost of constructing the new cemetery on the Coldeast site was considered too high and sufficient budget was not available. Therefore it was decided not to proceed with plans to construct the cemetery at this location and to consider alternative locations within the surrounding area.

CEMETERY EXTENSION - FEASIBILITY

8. Given the high cost of infrastructure needed to service a new cemetery, consideration was given to the potential to extend the Holly Hill Cemetery. A feasibility study was commissioned to look at the suitability of the surrounding land and the ground conditions in particular.
9. The feasibility study concluded that there was only one area of land, to the south west of the cemetery that could accommodate a sufficient number of burial plots to make an extension a viable proposition. The area in question is illustrated in appendix A.
10. Trial pits were dug in the area as part of a risk assessment to determine groundwater levels. This concluded that an unsaturated zone could be maintained beneath the grave depth. There are some controls in relation to groundwater levels required but no additional drainage is needed.
11. The results were shared with the Environment Agency, which has indicated that the risk of not being able to develop a cemetery at the location is low and manageable. Subject to a number of controls in relation to groundwater, they would have no objection to the extension of the cemetery. Development Management have a statutory obligation to consult the Environment Agency as part of any planning application for an extension to the cemetery.
12. The site identified is predominantly low quality woodland with a number of significant trees. Development Management have been consulted and have indicated that the proposed area is designated as countryside and the relevant policies relating to any loss of trees would apply. Careful consideration of the implications for the loss of trees has been given in the design and layout of the cemetery extension which is described in more detail later in the report.
13. There is also a need to consider habitats important to biodiversity. A phase one habitat survey has been carried out and identified that further assessments and information will be required to help inform the mitigation strategies to accompany the planning application. These include determining the bat potential of trees, the presence of stag beetle populations, great crested newts and dormice. The relevant studies required would be undertaken as part of the planning application process.

DESIGN & LAYOUT

14. The Council employed Cemetery Development Services Limited (CDSL) to prepare a detailed design for the cemetery extension on the area of land which is approximately 0.6 acres. This was done in conjunction with the Council's Principal Tree Officer and Parks & Open Spaces Manager.
15. The Council's existing tree survey was added to a topographic survey of the site as a starting point for the design. There are a total of 27 trees on the designated area of land with a height greater than 6 metres. The key aim was to maximise the number of burial spaces and locations for cremated remains whilst maintaining appropriate screening from the car park to the south and retention of the significant trees.

16. Taking these elements into consideration the final design provides for 377 additional burial plots which should be sufficient for 30 years provision at the current rate of burials. There is also provision for 240 cremated remains.
17. Six of the existing mature trees have been accommodated into the design and these are the most significant on the land. This will reduce the impact of the tree removal by maintaining some screening and a relatively unchanged skyline from the car park view.
18. New entrance walling, railings and gates to the extension will be constructed, in keeping with the entrance to the existing cemetery which will be unaffected. There will be a wall with railings, a hedge and new trees planted along the southern boundary with the car park.
19. Access to the cemetery extension will be from both the eastern end of the car park and western end of the cemetery with a 3 metre path through the length of the entire cemetery. This will include redesigning the footpaths in the areas of the public conveniences as well as re-landscaping to provide an improved layout and appearance.
20. The proposed layout of the cremated remains and headstone borders ensures that there is no loss of any significant trees. This greatly reduces the visual impact as the bulk of the tree canopy will remain.
21. The intention is to plant new trees around the cemetery extension to assist with the screening. There will also be a separate tree planting scheme on the opposite side of Barnes Lane on the Coldeast site. This will incorporate tree planting on the meadowland between the leisure centre and the large attenuation pond to screen the area and further mitigate the loss of existing trees.
22. Visual models of the new cemetery and the new tree planting scheme on the Coldeast site have been developed and will be used as part of the public display in conjunction with the planning process.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

23. The estimated cost of constructing the cemetery extension is £276,000. There are possible additional costs for planning related studies that may be required. These are estimated at £24,000 and have been included as a separate figure for contingency. Therefore, a capital budget of £300,000 is required to allow the project to proceed.
24. Assuming that the full capital budget is required to construct the cemetery and that 377 adult graves are provided, this equates to approximately £800 per grave space. The alternative site adjacent to the Holly Hill Leisure Centre would have provided 538 adult plots at an estimated cost of £1,044,000. This equates to £1,940 per adult grave.
25. Officers from the department of Finance and Resources have advised that the provision of a cemetery is listed on the CIL Infrastructure Delivery Plan and there are currently sufficient funds available to cover the capital cost of constructing the cemetery.

PROGRAMME

26. The proposed programme of works below would be subject to planning consent and it is anticipated that an application would come forward in Spring 2017.

27. The work to remove the trees and vegetation on the site needs to be programmed to avoid the bird nesting season and therefore would be undertaken in September 2017. This would be closely followed by ground preparation and levelling of the whole site which could, weather permitting, be completed by December 2017. This newly levelled area would then need to settle for a further 9 to 12 months before the first burial could take place.
28. In the meantime, works to the perimeter of the site could commence in March 2018, this would include fencing, installing new entrance gates, walls and railings. The hedge and tree planting, both on and off site, could also be undertaken at this time.
29. Depending on the weather, ground conditions and the rate of settlement, the internal pathway and construction of some of the concrete memorial plinths could be constructed between September and December 2018. Detailed 'as built' grave layout plans would also need to be produced at this time together with the updating of computer systems to enable the administrative aspects of the burial service to commence.
30. The cemetery extension could potentially open and be available for burials in January 2019. Consideration will be given to the opportunity for an earlier date to commence burials, if the ground settlement conditions allow.

CONCLUSION

31. The feasibility study has concluded that it is possible to provide sufficient burial spaces in an extension of the Holly Hill Cemetery to meet demand for burials in this local area for up to 30 years.
32. Although there will be a loss of some trees, the design has been developed to ensure that all of the significant trees are retained. A programme of planting to mitigate the loss of trees will be implemented around the proposed site and also on land at Coldeast.
33. The estimated cost of constructing the cemetery extension is £300,000. This is significantly less than the cost of providing a new cemetery which was originally proposed to be constructed on land adjacent to the new Holly Hill Leisure Centre.

Enquiries:

For further information on this report please contact Mark Bowler. (Ext 4420)