

Eco Bicester Strategic Delivery Board

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Report title: Cemetery Provision for Bicester	
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to outline the situation with regard to the lack of burial space in the current Bicester cemetery, the steps taken so far to try to resolve the issue, and to outline future requirement with proposed solutions.
- 1.2 Bicester needs approximately 10 acres of land in order to satisfy local need for burials of all types for the foreseeable future. A site of approximately (1ha) 2.43 acres would provide sufficient space for approximately 40 years at current death rates but the Town Council are seeking to take a longer term view to avoid the problem reoccurring.

2. Background

- 2.1 The issue of reducing burial space in Bicester cemetery was identified some years ago and Bicester Town Council have been making attempts to resolve the problem ever since. Currently the population of Bicester is approximately 32,000, and stands to rise to 50,000 over the next 20 years, with a significant increase coming in the next 4 -5 years, as approximately 2,500 committed dwellings start to come on-stream on the Kingsmere (South West Bicester), Gavray Drive and Phase 1 NW Bicester developments.
- 2.2 The capacity in the existing cemetery, at current rate of use, will be exhausted in approximately 12-18 months time. If no alternate measures are found, this will mean that the cemetery will have to close, and local people will have to make alternate burial arrangements.
- 2.3 A number of possible solutions have been pursued by Bicester Town Council in an attempt to resolve the issue. These include:
 - Engaging a cemetery consultant to review the existing cemetery and to locate any area that could be used as a grave space. This has proved successful prolonging current use on a grave by grave basis, and has included such measures as removing shrubs, benches, using pathway verges and identifying trees that can also be removed to provide further spaces. These measures are currently being used to identify potential double depth spaces, since the remaining free space can now only be used for single depth graves due to a seam of rock running through the cemetery and the height of the water table not being conducive to double depth graves.

- Engaging Carter Jonas to work alongside Bicester Town Council to encourage the provision of land for a new cemetery through the emerging CDC Local Development Framework.
- The ground conditions of areas around the periphery of Bicester (outside the parish boundary) were tested by Applied Geotechnical Engineering in 2006, in an attempt to identify those areas most suitable for the development of a new cemetery. The two areas identified as offering the best potential were land at Middle Wretchwick Farm (S E of Bicester) and land off Lords Lane (N of Bicester).
- The cemetery consultant orchestrated further studies, including the appointment of Turftrax Ground Management in 2008 who advised further on the suitability of potential sites. A Tier1 hydrological risk assessment report was required and subsequently provided, and a summary of the findings was:
 - S E Bicester - low vulnerability
 - N W Bicester – Moderate vulnerability
 - SW Bicester – Moderate vulnerability

The consultant conducted a desk top exercise on ground conditions on land that is now within the red line for the N W Bicester masterplan site and concluded that some areas may be suitable for cemetery/burial provision, but that more detailed work was required.

- Approaches have been made to the developers of the Kingsmere site and the Gavray Drive site requesting a few acres of land for burial purposes, but in both cases, the request was declined.
- In 2007 applications were submitted for above ground burial chambers on a number of parcels of Bicester Town Council land, but were refused.
- In 2009, an application to extend the current cemetery by 1.2 metres into Pingle Field was approved, providing a further 60 single depth grave spaces. However, subsequent information has been received that there is a high voltage electricity cable running under the current fence line. The electricity company will move the cable, but at a cost of £30,000 - £40,000, making this small extension unviable. This option will therefore not be pursued further.
- In 2011 Bicester Town Council employed its consultant to carry out a site visit to ascertain where the best sites would be across the NW Bicester allocation area. To inform masterplan discussions.

3. NW Bicester

- 3.1 The LDF draft core strategy identifies the need for a new cemetery at Bicester. Draft Core Strategy policy **BIC 6** States;

We will continue to work with Bicester Town Council to identify and secure a suitable site as part of strategic development at Bicester, to enable delivery of a new cemetery for the town at the earliest opportunity. Developer contributions will be sought towards the establishment of the facility.

3.2 NW Bicester is identified in the draft Core Strategy as the strategic allocation for the growth of Bicester. The emerging masterplan for the NW Bicester site has identified three possible burial ground sites. Ground conditions for two of these sites are at present unknown. However the remaining site, to the north of the first phase of development, some information is available. Some general ground condition research has been carried out by Hyder, including a 7 meter bore hole sunk on the NW perimeter of the site, adjacent to a triangle of land that is currently identified in the masterplan as a possible burial ground site. Data currently available suggests that that ground water levels may be low enough to satisfy Environment Agency requirements for burials, but more data needs to be collected to support this. Other 1.5 metre deep holes have been dug over the area north of the railway line, but these are too shallow to be conclusive for the purposes of this exercise. A walk over survey of land north of the railway line has also been undertaken by the Town Council's consultant which has confirmed that this land has potential for burial use.

Next steps

3.3 As NW Bicester is the identified direction of growth for the town in the draft Core Strategy work will continue with P3Eco and their consultants in consultation with the Town Council to identify suitable land within the NW Bicester site for a burial ground and to ensure that any further work on ground conditions ensures that appropriate testing is carried out to ensure the sites identified are viable for burial use.

3.4 The Co Operative have also expressed an interest in running a 'green' burial site at NW Bicester as a commercial proposition. They acknowledge that this will not necessarily meet all residents needs but that it would fit appropriately with the Eco Town aims and ethos.

4. Recommendations

1. That Bicester Town Council are thanked for the work they have done in raising this issue and seeking a solution.
2. That the SDB support further work on masterplanning being the appropriate mechanism for the identification of land at NW Bicester to meet the Town's needs for burial space.
3. That the SDB acknowledge the Town Council's aspiration for a long term site but that at the present time sites of less than 10 acres are not ruled out.