

Thurrock Council Cemetery and Burial Strategy 2022 to 2032

Introduction

Cemeteries are important spaces. In developing this strategy Thurrock Council are keen to ensure that we share the aims and ambitions for Cemeteries and Burials for the next ten years. We also want to ensure that policies relating to burials and memorials are clear, well communicated, and consistent.

Our vision is to ensure that all cemeteries in the Borough are maintained to a standard that reflects the respect due to those buried there. That the valuable green space created by burial grounds are pleasant quiet environments that can be used for remembrance, relaxation and reflection. It is also important that Thurrock's burial grounds reflect and support the diversity of the Borough, creating spaces for all faiths.

Thurrock Council manages 9 cemeteries and 4 closed church yards. In addition to ensuring the beauty of the sites, burials in Thurrock need to be sustainable. We need to ensure that we have sufficient capacity to accommodate the needs of residents.

Aims and Ambitions

The following are the key aims of the service. These are focused on ensuring clarity of process, quality of environment and inclusivity.

1. To provide cemeteries for Thurrock residents that are beautiful, peaceful and well used
2. To offer burial spaces that support a diverse range of cultural and individual needs
3. To ensure that our policies relating to burials and memorials are clear, well communicated, and consistent
4. To ensure that procedures for the purchase and use of burial sites and memorials are clear, efficient, and compassionate

Future ambitions for Thurrock Burial Services are:

- To improve levels of accessibility for all cemeteries and closed church yards managed by Thurrock
- To undertake a feasibility study to assess the practicality and need for a crematorium in Thurrock
- To open a green burial site in Thurrock, further increasing the diversity of burial options available to residents
- To assess the use and condition of the chapels that are located within some of our burial sites and ensure that they are maintained appropriately.

Consultation

Engagement with and feedback from stakeholders including residents and communities is important in ensuring that the Cemeteries and burials grounds in Thurrock meet the needs of communities. To this end a public consultation was undertaken commencing in June 2022.

There were 88 responses to the consultation and the key messages from respondents were:

- Strong support for the development of a crematorium and for provision of natural burials

- Agreement that the level of maintenance of the burial grounds is good with a clear desire to see more trees planted as well as areas of meadow
- There is understandably concern relating to the enforcement relating to memorial items on graves, with ambiguity amongst respondents if the enforcement should be restricted to new items
- There is a strong view that when unstable head stones are required to be laid down, notification of the reason or action should be published both at the cemetery entrances as well as adjacent to the memorial itself.
- The potential refurbishment of chapels was strongly advocated
- There is a strong consensus that memorials in terms of benches and trees should be offered.

In addition to engagement with residents, we work closely with Undertakers and memorial masons within the Borough. The close communication with those organisations helps to ensure that burials proceed as efficiently and smoothly as possible.

Legislative Framework

Whilst the views and requirements of communities and that those using the burial grounds is very important. The policies and procedures that are in place relating to burials and memorials are required to be compliant with legislation.

There is currently no statutory duty for Local Authorities to provide burial spaces for residents, however, it is a requirement that existing burial grounds are well maintained.

The key legislation that applies to Burials and Burial grounds includes:

- The Local Government Act (1972)
- The Local Authorities Cemeteries Order (1977)
- The Public Health Act (1857)
- Ecclesiastical Laws
- National Planning Policy

Included in the legislation is a requirement that the Council provide Public Health Burials for those deceased who do not have relatives or where relatives have not been able to be traced.

The Planning Policy provides guidance regarding the number of plots that should be made available by Local Authorities. This is linked to population levels and burial patterns, in terms of the proportion of burials and cremations evidenced within that population group.

The legislation also requires that headstones within burials grounds are assessed for safety through routine inspections. Those memorial stones found to be unsafe are required to be laid down to avoid risk of injury or damage.

Policies

To ensure compliance with the legal framework as well as to ensure that Thurrock Cemeteries are maintained to a high standard and accessible for all, Thurrock specific policies relation to Burials and Memorials have been developed. The table below provides a summary of those policies with the full documents included as appendices to this strategy.

Policy	Appendix	Overview
Potential Future Cemetery Extensions	1	Identification for potential sites for the extension of existing cemeteries to ensure sufficient capacity to meet demand.
Thurrock Cemetery Regulations	2	<p>Overview of all aspects of Cemetery and Burial Management including, but not limited to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sites • Opening hours • Plot and Section types • Maintenance regimes • Purchasing of burial plots • Installation of memorials
Memorial safety policies and procedures	3	Guidelines regarding safety testing and permitted memorials within different sections of cemeteries