

## Argyll and Bute Council Cemetery Consultation Paper

1. Argyll and Bute Council, along with other Local Authorities across Scotland is experiencing increasing pressure on burial land within its area. The council is responsible for managing and maintaining 131 cemeteries which range from small churchyard cemeteries to large municipal cemeteries. Although a cemetery may be classed as closed, under the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016, local authorities in Scotland are responsible for the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of burial grounds. This effectively requires a sustained budget to maintain ongoing costs for the upkeep of cemetery grounds, the council spends £905k per year on cemeteries alone.
  - 1.1 The upkeep of cemetery grounds is not just about cutting the grass surface, other large expenses for Burial Authorities are the ongoing re-levelling of lairs due to settlement followed by strimming round headstones which do not have memorial borders. To ensure sustainable options for looking after the dead in Argyll and Bute, we need to review our cemetery management policy now which includes standard lair borders and memorial headstones to reduce the amount of labour intensive upkeep required.
2. Of the 131 cemeteries in the Argyll and Bute cemetery estate, 64 remain available for the purchase of new lairs. Sixty seven are already 'closed' to the sale of lair spaces and have space only to allow for the re-opening of existing lairs where depth remains or for the interment of ashes.
3. Argyll and Bute Council currently sell burial lairs for open cemeteries only, however we estimate in the next five years we will have sold all available lairs in 12 cemeteries and in ten years another 9 cemeteries.
4. Action is now needed to allow a planned and sustainable cemetery portfolio which delivers best value across Argyll and Bute. Without effective planning, we will have areas with far more burial lairs available than others.
5. Current records show there are:

8,000 available lairs for sale across Argyll and Bute's cemeteries.

Effectively we do have sufficient lair space across our cemetery portfolio, however we are, year on year, reducing the number of cemeteries with available lairs to be sold. This means in certain areas local burials will not be possible in the cemetery of choice and will have to take place in another cemetery. We currently have over 8000 lairs available for sale.

There are also some additional 1,439 lairs which have been sold but not used with 70 years having elapsed since the sale, these remain empty.

6. Current Cemetery Practice:

- No further development of closed cemeteries, interments only taking place in existing lairs where space allows. No new lairs are available or will be provided in closed cemeteries.
- Available lairs sold on request in the 64 cemeteries where lairs are available, interments carried out when required and ad hoc work carried out to extend cemeteries to meet demand where extension works are cost effective and achievable.

## 7. Community Group Partnership Working:

7.1 Argyll and Bute like other Scottish Local Authorities are experiencing budget cuts and reduced resources. There are a small number of volunteer groups who carry out works in various locations across Argyll and Bute. There is merit in engaging with our local communities to gauge their views on whether there would be sufficient community volunteer support to assist in the upkeep of our cemeteries which will in turn identify a sustainable method of balancing community burial needs with our statutory duty in line with best value and reductions to funding.

## 8. Key aims of the consultation:

We need to take steps now to ensure that options are available for people when they need them in the future. We have identified various options, and would like to find out what our communities think before developing plans for Argyll and Bute in the longer term. We anticipate options would take 10 years to develop and implement, so things would not change quickly.

- Over the next 10 years we would like all open cemeteries to have a target of at least 10 years burial capacity based on a rolling 5 year average of previous interment numbers. The policy is caveated based on the deliverability of additional lairs at any particular burial site, which will be assessed on a case by case basis
- We will stop developing and extending 57 of our current 64 remaining sites ONLY once all of the available lair space is exhausted.
- Future Development of Cemeteries will only be carried out in Helensburgh, Dunoon, Oban, Campbeltown, Lochgilphead, Islay and Mull main cemeteries.
- New lairs are now sold in line with the Burial and Cremations Scotland Act 2016 which means burial rights are no longer indefinite. Therefore the Council has the ability to reclaim the lair if not used in 50 years after the date of purchase.
- If there are areas where Community Groups would like to work with us to provide partnership maintenance works within burial grounds, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss that.

9. Based on these options, we propose to run the following public consultation. We would provide explanatory information in the survey to inform people about the need to consider these issues.

## Survey Questions:

Demographic Question at the beginning of the survey - to be added.

Are you responding as an Individual/Organisation/ comment box for organisation.

- I. Do you agree with Argyll and Bute's current policy
  - No further development of closed cemeteries which would mean no new lairs will be provided in closed cemeteries: Yes/No/Don't Know
  - Interments only taking place in existing lairs where spaces allow— Yes/No/Don't Know
- II. Do you agree we should reduce the number of cemeteries within the Argyll and Bute area and identify on main 'municipal' site in the four administrative areas as well as one on Mull and Islay. Yes/No/Don't Know/Comments
- III. If you answered Yes to No II. above, do you think the current main sites listed in paragraph 2 above are:
  - Fit for purpose Yes/No/Don't Know
  - Should be extended to increase lair availability Yes/No/Don't Know
  - or
  - Should another site be identified to create more lair space Yes/No/Don't Know
- IV. Do you have a preference on whether you would like to be buried or cremated? (Comments Box)
- V. We should standardise our lair borders to reduce maintenance costs for the lair owner as well as the council. Yes/No/Don't Know
- VI. Would you be interested in volunteering to assist in a community driven cemetery maintenance programme? (ie cutting grass/hedges, weeding etc) Yes/No
- VII. What would you need to help you in a community driven maintenance programme?