



# DEVELOPMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES

## POLICY FOR PROVISION OF WOODLAND AND GREEN BURIAL SERVICES

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The purpose of this policy document is to offer choice to individuals in terms of funeral provision. Currently the Council operate some 65 cemeteries where burials are regularly carried out and a further 66 closed cemeteries (open to the public to visit but no capacity to receive any further interments) are maintained by the Council. Over the last 3 years the Council has carried out an average of 599 burials per year. The Council also carries out approximately 550 cremations per year at Cardross Crematorium.

Each year the Council receive a limited number of enquiries from individuals seeking a green or woodland burial. As the concept of green and woodland burial becomes more popular there is an expectation that the number of enquiries will increase. Environmentally-friendly funeral provision is, for some, a logical extension of an environmentally-aware lifestyle. Currently the Council is not able to provide a woodland burial service.

This policy has been developed to allow Argyll and Bute Council to offer a different style of service to customers; it also offers an opportunity to forge new working partnerships with other service providers such as funeral directors.

The provisions of green and woodland burial services are not statutory requirements and therefore any additional costs to the Council over and above a conventional burial will be recovered through the charges.

The charges for the service will reflect the actual cost of providing burial space and long-term maintenance of the site.

## **GREEN BURIAL AND ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY DISPOSAL OF REMAINS**

As lifestyle decisions are applied to all area of life, people are becoming more aware of the legacy they will leave. Environmentally-friendly funeral provision is not only a logical extension of an environmentally-aware lifestyle, but also has an appeal as an alternative to a conventional cemetery burial.

Argyll and Bute Council, as a burial authority, can opt to offer a range of burial services within the definitions set for a burial authority within the Burial Grounds Scotland Act 1855 and Local Government Scotland Acts. Whilst guidance is limited, the key elements for disposal of the dead are quoted in the above legislation. The provision of a burial service by a local authority is viewed as very traditional and the expectation of customers has in the past been governed by religious propriety and traditional views. As the general

population become more environmentally aware, all elements of life and the legacy of actions are being examined. Burial and cremation are under scrutiny regarding their green credentials. Cremation remains the least polluting form of disposal due to very clearly defined controls on flue emissions and materials that can be used in coffins, treatment of bodies and clothing. Burials do not benefit from such controls. The use of polluting fluids for largely unnecessary hygiene treatment of cadavers along with elaborate coffin construction, oversize coffins, aesthetic finishes and non-bio coffin linings results in a residue of waste being placed in the ground which survives long after any human remains have broken down.

Almost any earth burial can be made more environmentally friendly by consideration of clothing buried with the deceased, type of material used to manufacture coffin or container, reduced use of cut flowers and floristry oasis in tributes and transport used to and from the cemetery. Whilst this policy provides some guidance for green burials the main focus of the document relates to woodland burials. Green burials will remain a choice available to individuals should they wish. Green burial practices can be applied to formal lawned cemetery burials.

## **WOODLAND BURIAL**

A woodland burial is a natural form of burial which provides environmental benefits as well as giving a sense of life after death. This type of burial is not for people who want to have a traditional site with floral tributes and a formal memorial stone. Woodland burials are for people who want to become part of a growing process after they die.

This policy sets out how Argyll and Bute Council will deliver an additional style of burial in the form of woodland burials.

The burial grounds that facilitate woodland burials will be governed by a set of rules outlining very specific criteria that must be followed from treatment of the body by funeral directors, coffin choice, adherence to no formal memorial, single depth grave interment and defined maintenance regime for the whole of a site designated for woodland burials.

The maintenance regime will consist of one cut of grass per year. Planting of bulbs may take place to enhance woodland appearance and memorialisation at the grave will only be in the form of a tree planted within a woodland plan, not necessarily planted to mark a specific grave. The site will take account of the local flora and fauna. Future maintenance regimes shall make every effort to sustain and enhance existing biodiversity.

The area will be non-denominational and no part will be reserved for a particular religion. It is the choice of individuals regarding the type of service, if any.

Through this policy 4 sites will be progressed for woodland burials:

- Helensburgh - Barbour Cemetery

- B&C – Strachur
- MAKI - Carrick Cemetery at Tarbert
- OLI - Pennyfuir Cemetery

Each site will be developed within the grounds of the existing cemetery using parts of the cemetery that naturally lend themselves for future woodland planting.

## **CHARGING STRATEGY**

Woodland burials will take place in a less formal arrangement than conventional lawned cemeteries where the density of lairs will be less than conventional cemeteries. Each lair will only be able to receive one interment. This will result in a reduced burial rate per equivalent area of conventional cemetery. Accordingly the standard charge for a green burial lair will be set at 2 times the standard lair charge and the burial charge will be equal to the standard burial. The charges will be updated on a regular basis to reflect cost recovery.

## **MANAGEMENT GUIDANCE AND RULES FOR WOODLAND BURIALS**

### **Introduction:**

A woodland burial is a natural form of burial, which provides important environmental benefits, as well as giving a true sense of creating life from death. This type of burial does not provide a traditional grave to visit or allow for leaving of floral tributes.

### **The site:**

Each site has been chosen to provide the option for green burial. They are adjacent to existing burial grounds to capitalize upon existing infrastructure, so reducing the use of non-renewable resources to construct roadways and access. The maintenance regime will be different to other sections of the burial ground and the rules covering coffin type, memorial and tributes will be applied.

### **Maintenance regime:**

The grass will be cut only once a year, which gives the area a natural feel. This will be done at the optimum time to maximise seed spread by wild flowers on site. Bulbs may be planted, by Argyll and Bute Council, to naturalize the site. Biodiversity enhancement will guide other planting.

### **The funeral:**

The area will be non-denominational (that is, it will not enforce the principles of a particular religion or faith) and no part of it will be reserved for specific religious groups. As with all other sites provided by Argyll and Bute Council, the choice whether to have a religious service, a service personal to the deceased or deceased's friends and family, or no service at all, lies with the applicant.

### **Coffins:**

Only biodegradable coffins for burial will be permitted. This is defined as coffins which are made of materials such as wicker, bamboo, wood (as long as it is not varnished and has been taken from a renewable source), cardboard and so on. Bodies that are buried in the woodland must not have been embalmed (except if repatriated), and must be wearing all natural fibres i.e. wool or cotton. Funeral organisers and other coffin suppliers will be able to provide these upon request.

### **The graves:**

The law in Scotland permits burial authorities to sell the 'Right of Burial in a Lair'. This means the actual ground continues to belong to Argyll and Bute Council, but the 'lair holder' (the named person on the records) has the right to bury one person in a defined woodland burial grave. In accordance with the law a record of the grave will be made on a plan, and in a register and each grave will be numbered. A microchip will be placed at the head of each grave to make it easy to identify in the future. Each grave will be used for one burial only (or to bury one set of ashes).

### **Plots for cremated remains (ashes):**

A special area for burying cremated remains within the semi-mature woodland will be provided, ensuring no damage to the root zone of trees. Maintenance and replacement of mature trees will be part of an overall long term management plan designed for the area.

### **Memorials and floral tributes:**

Funeral flowers may be placed on the grave but these must not include any oasis florist foam, plastic wrappings or other non-degradable material of any sort. They will be removed from the grave site two weeks after the interment.

### **Please Note:**

Floral tributes cannot be placed on graves after two weeks from the date of interment. Argyll and Bute Council have the right to remove any item which has been placed on or near a grave without notice. Individuals shall carefully consider the restrictions on the

woodland section before they decide whether to go ahead with this burial option. The above rules will be strictly applied in order to maintain the woodland setting.

**Memorial plaque wall:**

A discreet wall will be provided on site to allow people to put up a small memorial plaque made out of natural materials, such as bronze or granite. The plaque must be no larger than 200 millimetres by 150 millimetres (8 inches by 6 inches). Memorial masons and local artists can assist with this.

**Reservations and buying of lair in advance of need:**

It will not be possible to reserve a grave or buy a grave in advance on site, however, when individuals come to bury their husband, wife or partner, they can buy the grave next to if they wish to do so. This is to ensure that the woodland burial area is managed in a way that ensures that a logical pattern of interment is followed to allow for a managed planting regime and not a more random approach to interment which often exists in more traditional cemeteries.

**Woodland maintenance:**

Woodland management produces a different appearance to more formally maintained burial grounds, parks and open spaces. The woodland will be managed to conserve and enhance natural local biodiversity. The woodland burial section will look very different from the neat and tidy appearance of a traditional cemetery. Most sites have some areas of mature woodland on site. Burials will take place at a sufficient distance from these trees to protect them from root damage.

**Trees:**

As burials progress, the council will plant a native mix of woodland trees in the area. The Council will supply the trees and plant one native species at the head of the graves during autumn and winter. The trees will be planted such that they will form a woodland canopy in the future. Developing a woodland with wild flowers will create a peaceful area that future generations can enjoy.

**CONTACT WITH FUNERAL DIRECTORS, MEMORIAL MASONS AND LAIR HOLDERS ADVISING OF POLICY AND RESPONSIBILITIES.**

This policy and the management rules for the green burial services, including restrictions, will be circulated to memorial masons and funeral directors once per year at the beginning of the financial year, with new service charges associated with burial and cremation.

Provision of information to lair holders, will be carried out at the point of purchase of right of burial, through a suite of information including lair certificate and management rules. Any amendments to the policy and rules will be circulated to parties as and when required.

## **ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN IMPLEMENTING THE POLICY**

Responsibility for implementing and complying with this Policy lies with individuals at all levels within the Council.

The Amenity Services Manager is required to monitor action being taken by performance managers and report to Head of Service as required.

Amenity Services Performance Managers are required to: Ensure regular and accurate information is available to customers and other stakeholders.

Lair holders are required to: Follow the Argyll and Bute Council management rules for Green Burial Service and woodland burial sites within traditional cemeteries.

## **WEBSITE INFORMATION**

The policy including guidance and rules will be posted on the Argyll and Bute Council website along with information on how to green a more traditional funeral and burial if the restrictions of woodland green burial are too formal for an individual's requirements.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

The environmental issues surrounding bereavement are becoming more important and the inclusion of the cremation process in the EPA 1990 is the most recent example of this.

### **CREMATION**

Cremation has progressed from coke fired to gas and electricity over a period of 100 years. Almost all cremators use gas, a finite fossil fuel, and as such suffer from a less than good environment record; however upgrades to machinery and well trained operators can reduce gas usage and statutory control on emissions means pollutants are eliminated from flue gas emissions.

Cremation was promoted to slow down use of land needed for burial, as land was in great demand for food production following two world wars. The added Argyll factor of finding land suitable for burial also adds to the case for cremation. The Environmental Protection Act 1990 requires that all cremations must comply with specified emissions requirements by 2013.



As a result, a cremation replacement programme is taking place providing a cleaner, greener and cost effective disposal method.

Burial is sometimes suggested as a more environmentally acceptable alternative to cremation however such comments ignore the impact of herbicide, petrol and diesel engines used in lawnmowers, diggers and vehicles transporting gravediggers to rural locations.

Pollutant effects of burial on water, including concerns over embalming and hygiene treatments and the effects of burial of coffins made from other than wood and wood derivatives, is largely unknown.

The environmental, visual and heritage value of burial grounds and gardens of remembrance has been largely ignored. Providing tranquil idylls, the value of nature as therapeutic in the grieving process along with the thought of life going on in a cemetery is a powerful image.

Older sites often have the oldest trees in an area where habitats for wildflower, mammals, insects, bats and birds exist. Old memorials also provide habitat for lichens and mosses.

An awareness of the below will serve to create a more environmentally friendly disposal:

- Use of floral arrangers
- Oasis and plastic wrap in wreaths and flowers
- Car sharing to and from funerals
- Use of environmentally friendly/sustainable timber for coffins
- Use of other than wood coffins

## **EFFECTIVENESS OF POLICY**

The effectiveness of this Policy will be monitored through feedback collected within 3 months of the service being used and will take the form of a written request to lair holders and funeral arrangers regarding their experience of our service.

## **POLICY REVIEW DATE**

This policy will be reviewed no later than May 2016 and earlier should there be a significant demand for this burial option.