

**CEMETERY ASSET – ANNUAL REPORT**

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**1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Within the cemetery inventory of 131 locations, 63 cemeteries remain “active” with lairs spaces available. This report provides the annual update on the current Argyll and Bute “active” cemetery portfolio - number of lairs available for sale and operational timescales within the Cemetery Development programme, based on data collated as at 30<sup>th</sup> September 2024.
- 1.2 It should be noted that the rate of sale of lairs, equivalent to the uptake of land, differs from the annual rate of interments (coffin burials) as generally, individual lairs are able to accept 2 or 3 interments.
- 1.3 Updated figures indicate there are approaching 13,000 lairs available for sale throughout the cemetery inventory, sufficient to sustain the burial service overall, for the next 47 years. The bulk of these are due to the assessed potential at the main cemeteries at Achnabreac (1,500 lairs) and Pennyfuir (2,000) lairs since last year’s report. However, the number of lairs available varies from several hundred in larger cemeteries to 10 or less, depending on the location. These figures are used to prioritise the cemetery development programme of existing extensions or new cemetery development sites.
- 1.4 The timescales from planning an extension to an existing or providing a new cemetery, through to operational availability vary, depending on the complexity of each project. SEPA ground water management requirements, which have become far more stringent over the last decade, local consultations with landowners and the Planning approval process all contribute to the length of time taken to deliver new cemetery lairs. For this reason the current priority list highlights development needs in 0-5yrs, 5-10yrs or 10-20yrs. The 5 year development programme has been updated with a revised budget requirement of £605k.
- 1.5 In the previous annual report officers highlighted a potential spend of £270k for schemes requiring immediate development required for 2024/25. The updated spend profile is listed in Appendix 3, which does overlap with costs from this year at Strachur/Cowal High Road and Calgary, with as of 30<sup>th</sup> October a total of £40,390 having been spent this year from the £270k. There is a total of £681k now left in the Capital Environmental Projects Budget which will cover this cost of £605k as per Appendix 3 for the next 5 years.

- 1.6 Discussions with landowners and community groups continue, on potential cemetery locations, in association with initial site investigation trial pit excavations to verify the suitability of land for cemetery development.
- Trial Pit investigations at both Cairndow and Strachur confirmed that neither site was suitable for development, due to shallow depth to water table or rock and poor soil gradings and water content.
  - A formal planning application has been submitted for Calgary Cemetery extension. In parallel with this, final arrangements are underway with the landowner to transfer ownership of a section of field amounting to 0.1Ha to the Council. This will allow the development in 2026 of phase 1 where the existing ground will be re-profiled to allow 3xdepth interment lairs.
  - Drainage and footpath improvements at Cowal Cemetery - Sandbank have provided a further 110 lair spaces available for sale within the current cemetery boundary. Trial excavations in adjacent Torlochan extension site, were carried out late July and a report sent to SEPA Mid-August as part of a pre-application consultation. This site has been considered a low risk site by SEPA and suitable for development as a cemetery extension, subject to planning approval.
  - At Kilkerran Cemetery, Campbeltown, a re-assessment of the lair spaces available indicates 115nr remain available for sale, within the property boundary of the cemetery. This includes the numbers generated through the “maximizing lair space” operation last year. Two separate trial pit investigations have been carried out in the field adjacent to Kilkerran Cemetery. Negotiations continue with landowners on the suitability of developing this area. This includes discussions with King’s Harbourmaster and Argyll and Bute Council (Marine section), regards the associated issue of sightlines to the Leading Light Navigation beacon for Campbeltown Harbour. Agreement was reached in August with both, that the development of a cemetery would not be detrimental to the navigation sightlines for Campbeltown Harbour.
  - The existing burial ground at Lismore Church has been improved through the maximising lair space process. This was achieved by removing rock, crushing and mixing with suitable soils and refilling within the current cemetery boundaries. A further 60nr full depth burial lairs are now available, for an estimated development cost of £53k.
  - Clarifications with Legal Services to determine the status of the ground previously occupied by Kingarth Parish Church, Bute to confirm if this can be converted to burial lair space. In parallel, discussions continue with the neighboring landowner towards the potential to develop a second cemetery extension in the adjacent field.
- 1.7 The cemeteries portfolio has been updated to indicate the current status of all locations which remain “active” with revised comments against each location.

- 1.8 The full list of “active” cemeteries with restrictions on the pre-sale of lairs is revised and updated. This now includes locations where historical local priorities had already reduced the demand on lair sales, outwith the “less than 10 years” process ratified at the November 2023 Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee are asked to:-

- i. Note the annual lairs sales figures and remaining availability;
- ii. Note the updated comments relevant to the Cemetery Development programme; and
- iii. Agree the updated list of sites, where the pre-sale of lairs is restricted.

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**2.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 This report provides the annual update on the current Argyll and Bute “active” cemetery portfolio of 63 sites - number of lairs available for sale and operational timescales within the Cemetery Development programme.
- 2.2 The comments against the individual sites have been updated where progress has been made on the development of extensions or new sites and where additional lair space has been developed in any existing facility. Updates are also given where investigations or consultations may have changed the likelihood of any planned development gaining SEPA / Planning Authority approval.
- 2.3 The report also provides confirmation of the current list of cemeteries subject to restrictions on the pre-sale of lairs – further to March and June EDI reports – to preserve the service at local levels, as far as is practicable. This highlights that there are 24 sites throughout the portfolio of “active” cemeteries, which are subject to a restriction on the sale of lairs, either through the shortage of remaining lair space or to preserve the burial facility for local communities.

**3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee are asked to:-

- i. Note the annual lairs sales figures and remaining availability;
- ii. Note the updated comments relevant to the Cemetery Development programme; and
- iii. Agree the updated list of sites, where the pre-sale of lairs is restricted.

**4.0 DETAIL**

- 4.1 The inventory of “active” cemeteries, details the remaining ground, within each property, which can be used for interments. This is expressed as an equivalent number of standard lair spaces which are available to the public to purchase the right of burial – through the lair certificate purchase process.

- 4.2 Members are reminded that the uptake of land, through the allocation of burial lairs is independent of the number of interments in each individual cemetery. In most current cemeteries and in the design of any new facility, the expectation is that a full depth lair will provide vertical space for three interments.
- 4.3 As detailed in the report and attachments, the average annual rate of lair sales is now calculated as approximately 273 lairs per annum, with 194 sold in the last 12 months. However, it should be noted that the average annual rate of interments (coffin burials) is approximately 530 interments per annum with very little fluctuation +/- 50 per year. It should therefore also be noted that there remains no “Covid spike” or other unusual variation in annual interments in Argyll and Bute since 2019.
- 4.4 In the last 12 months a total of 483nr coffin burials and a further 124nr ashes interments, were carried out within the 131 cemeteries portfolio (**Table 1**).

**Table 1 - Burial Statistics for Period 01 October 2023 to 30 September 2024**

New = first interment, Re-open= 2 <sup>nd</sup> /3 <sup>rd</sup>	New	Re Open	New	Re-Open
<b>Total all cemeteries</b>	<b>225</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>90</b>
1st Oct 2023 - 30th Sep 2024	<b>Casket Interments</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>Ashes Interments</b>	<b>124</b>

4.5 **Update of Statistics in Cemeteries programme and list of pre-Sales restrictions**

- 4.5.1 In accordance with the conclusions of the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee of December 2022, annual updates in lair sales are now recorded through interrogation of the BACAS database, used for the management of the burial service.
- 4.5.2 Annual figures are recorded from the 1<sup>st</sup> October the previous year to 30<sup>th</sup> September, to allow the most up to date figures to be included in the annual committee report. The average annual rate of sale is now calculated from available accurate data collected since September 2019.
- 4.5.3 Members are reminded from previous reports, that of the portfolio of 131 cemetery locations, 68 cemeteries are considered as “closed”, where all available land for burial lairs has been allocated. Re-opening of lairs and ashes interments are however still possible. The remaining 63 “active” cemeteries, are those where land is still available, for the purchase of the right of burial, and a lair space can be allocated to the applicant.
- 4.5.4 The portfolio of “Active” cemeteries is detailed in **Appendix 1**. This details the number of lairs sold in the last year, from end of September 2023 - September 2024 in each individual cemetery and based on the review of remaining spaces, the number of lair spaces remaining for future sale. Records indicate that 194 new lair spaces were sold throughout the asset in the last year, with a revised assessment of 12,948 spaces remaining available, an increase of over 4,000

spaces since 2021. This is partly through the development of lairs in current cemeteries, where ground has been brought into operation, including re-purposing previous hard or soft landscaped areas in the “maximising lair space” process.

- 4.5.5 However, as intimated in previous reports, there remain local pressures on lair availability, requiring a programme of cemetery extensions or development of new sites. The overall “operational time remaining” until all lairs are sold, is based on the annual average rate of sale, which mitigates any localised increase or decrease in sales in any particular year.
- 4.5.6 The completion of the maximising lairs operation at Lismore Church has provided 60nr additional full depth lairs, through the excavation to 2m depth and crushing of rock, mixing with soils and backfilling to existing levels within the current cemetery. Provided these lairs remain restricted to Lismore residents only on a No-Presale basis, this should maintain the burial service at this location for the next 100 years at the current annual rate of lair sales, allowing for the added capability now, for multiple depth interments per lair. Improvements to drainage within Cowal Cemetery Sandbank has allowed the development of a further 110 lair spaces within the existing boundaries, extending the operational time remaining in this location to 5.5 years, provided the no-presale measures remain in place, until the Torlochan extension is developed.
- 4.5.7 The process of locating suitable sites for extensions or new developments is becoming increasingly difficult, due to environmental and planning constraints. The introduction of the 5yr, 10yr and 20yr colour coding system was designed to highlight the Cemetery Development programme sequence. There are however some statistical variations year on year which may change the “hierarchy” of cemeteries in need of expansion. Generally, the list of priorities remains unchanged from that given in the Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee in March 2023 report. The annual cemetery update report allows members to keep track of any changes and overall progress.
- 4.5.8 Comments on the activities to preserve lair availability, or towards developments or extensions, are updated against the relevant cemeteries within the record. In some cases the colour coding may have changed but it should be noted that this purely statistical calculation will be affected, where the restriction on pre-sale has been introduced. The increase in the operational time remaining, being the object of the exercise. This does not however, change the previous urgency of a particular site, in the search for additional suitable land.
- 4.5.9 The list of cemeteries with pre-sale restrictions has been updated to include locations where previous local arrangements preserved lair space in parallel with those “10-year rule” locations ratified at the Nov 2023 Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee. This indicates 24 sites, or over 1/3 of the “Active” portfolio are subject to a restriction on lair sales for one of several reasons, under section 3 of the updated Cemetery Management Rules. Notes indicate the reasons for restrictions and measures to mitigate if practicable
- Appendix 2.**

## **4.6 Cemetery Development Programme – recent progress**

4.6.1 Cemeteries within the “5 year development programme” remain the focus for the securing of suitable land, however there has been limited success with investigations of selected sites in the past year.

- As intimated in the Nov 2023 paper, trial excavations at the potential site at Forest View - Strachur proved that the ground was unsuitable due to the shallow depth to rock. Contact resumed in August 2024 with local landowners, to determine if other potential plots were available on land, south of Strachur at Balliemeanoch and Glen Sluain.
- A similar exercise was carried out on land in Cairndow, adjacent to Kilmorich Cemetery. This also proved the ground to be unsuitable due to depth to water table and rock and the composition of the excavated material, making it unsuitable for development. Enquiries with local landowners did not identify any other potential areas for development.
- Trial excavations on Council owned land at Torlochan – Sandbank, for the potential Cowal Cemetery extension, proved that the ground conditions were suitable. This was confirmed by an initial pre-application report accepted by SEPA in August, towards progressing ground clearance in parallel with the planning approval process to the Planning Authority
- At Kilkerran, a re-assessment of the remaining space confirms 115nr lairs are available, including previous works on maximizing lair space. An area adjacent, but out-with the cemetery ownership boundary, has been removed from the calculations, for remaining lair space.
- Two separate trial pit surveys have been carried out in the field North of Kilkerran Cemetery – Campbeltown. This defined the area that was suitable for development and confirmed the original assessment that much of the field immediately adjacent to the existing cemetery has limited depth due to rock. There is however, informal approval from SEPA to the proposal for a limited development, where material quality and depth allow. This still has the potential to generate up to 2,000 lair spaces initially.

4.6.2 The parallel issue at Kilkerran, related to the sightline to the Navigation Beacon for Campbeltown harbour, has been reviewed and discussed.

- The Council’s Harbourmaster raised no objections to the proposal.
- The strip of land owned by MoD adjacent to Kilkerran Road would be required, to develop a safe vehicular access. Whilst there was initial reluctance to release this land, the MoD strategy for Campbeltown later allowed this area to be considered for sale to the Council.
- The meeting with MoD-King’s Harbourmaster and A&BC Harbourmaster late August, concluded that a cemetery development in the field north of Kilkerran cemetery would not be detrimental to the sightlines to the navigation beacons, provided standard headstones were used. ABC Harbourmaster did suggest a condition of lair sale, restricting the use of solar powered LED lit tributes, on the line of sight.
- Contact with landowners through Estates and Legal Services is now progressing towards purchasing the land required to provide a new cemetery with compliant vehicular entrance and parking facilities.

- The remaining space for 70 lairs at Carrick Cemetery was released for use, with a restriction on pre-sale. As the land to the North of the existing cemetery, is not available and the land to the South is unsuitable, an alternative site will be required for a new cemetery in the Tarbert area.
- Other sites within MAKI area will be monitored and plans will be developed in parallel with the main cemetery issue in Campbeltown.

4.6.3 A review of the development plans for Cowal and Bute cemeteries was carried out in July to clarify the priorities within the 5 year programme.

- This identified the potential for further areas within Kilmun Cemetery to maximise lair space, to preserve the burial facility at this location for a further 2-3 years. Investigation works are scheduled for Winter 2024-25
- Trial excavations are planned to confirm the suitability of ground to maximise lair space within the original Kingarth Cemetery – Bute on the footprint of the original church building. In parallel with this, discussions continue with the adjacent landowner, towards access to the fields to allow site investigation for a possible PH2 Kingarth cemetery extension.
- A review of the topography and flood plain mapping of the Strachur area highlighted the difficulties in finding suitable land close by. Initial assessment of land south of the village, on the Glenbranter road and also at Balliemeanoch off A815, has been pursued initially with landowners. Further options North or West of Strachur, bounding Loch Fyne would appear to be limited by the steep slopes immediately adjacent to the road.
- Land north of Inveronich - Lochgoilhead may be sufficiently removed from the river and flood plain to allow a small cemetery development. Land ownership enquiries and potential site surveys are to be pursued.
- Trial excavations and SEPA consultation has confirmed the suitability of Torlochan extension site adjacent to Cowal (Sandbank) cemetery.

4.6.4 The main Lorn cemetery at Pennyfuir has sufficient space for 2,000 lairs

- Footpaths and headstone foundations, are being developed within current section Y, by the cemetery team, as required.
- The access road network has been developed, from the proposed new carpark area, along with the first terrace for lair space in the adjacent land (purchased 2006) in what will become Section AA once completed. This will include the current woodland burial site and potential expansion.

4.6.5 On Mull, the extension to Calgary cemetery is in the final stages of ownership transfer, to allow the area to be further developed, with a potential for full depth multiple interment lairs, to preserve the facility here for 50 – 100 years.

- There may be scope to maximise lair space at Pennygowan Cemetery in front of the exiting cemetery extension but recent inspections did not find any other suitable ground nearby, able to be developed further.

4.6.6 The cemetery portfolio in Helensburgh and Lomond remains the area with the highest number of lairs available for sale, with no critical cemetery locations. This takes into consideration the measures in place to preserve lair space.



- No pre-sale of lairs at Barbour Cemetery, due to there being no adjacent or nearby land for a further extension.
- Local residents and no pre-sale restrictions at Luss and Faslane. A further 4 lair spaces have been developed and brought into use, at Faslane.
- Arrochar cemetery can be extended to the retaining wall bounding the A814 Footpath. Initial ground investigation works will be carried out this autumn / winter. If practicable, a suitable boundary treatment, potentially hedging similar to the existing, will be put in place prior to lair development.

#### **4.7 Cemetery Development Programme - Priorities for 2025**

4.7.1 The Cemetery Development programme will continue to be delivered within the list of priorities, as the identification and confirmation of suitable land allows locations to then be obtained. The parallel measures, to maximise lair space and when necessary, restrictions on sale of lairs, will be used to preserve the burial service at as many “Active” cemeteries as practicable.

4.7.2 The 5 year programme has been expanded and is updated with a revised budget requirement of £605k **Appendix 3**

4.7.3 The development programme in MAKI will focus on the following

- Pursue the transfer of ownership, design and planning application of PH1 of Kilkerran–North cemetery extension. For completion 2027-28 est £250k
- Investigate the rock depth in sections of Achhabreac Cemetery and pursue a maximizing lair space / depth solution similar to that successfully completed this year on Lismore est £50k
- In parallel, investigate options for expansion or new sites at other cemeteries within the 10year programme.

4.7.4 In OLI, the development programme will mainly be island focused.

- Complete the transfer of ownership at Calgary, obtain planning permission and develop ph1 of the cemetery extension = 50 lairs/35 yrs Est £30k
- Maximise lair space at Pennygowan and investigate potential new cemetery sites for Salen and Tobermory.
- Commence process for an extension at Sorobay (Tiree) cemetery.
- In parallel – continue to develop Pennyfuir cemetery as part of operational expansion of current section Y and infrastructure in proposed section AA.

4.7.5 The largest number of “critical” sites are in B&C, where several work streams are planned to progress in parallel.

- Pursue design and planning application of Torlochan extension to Cowal (Sandbank) cemetery, towards development 2026 – 27 Est £150k
- Investigate potential to maximise lair space in Kilmun cemetery to preserve the burial service at this location for as long as practicable.

- Liaise with the local community and landowners on other potential sites south of Strachur for a new cemetery Est £75k
- Investigated potential to maximise lair space on footprint of old Kingarth Parish Church, within existing cemetery and in parallel pursue talks with adjacent landowner, towards potential PH2 cemetery extension Est £50k
- Develop next phase of Cnoc-an-Rear cemetery, within existing boundary.

4.7.6 The cemetery portfolio in H&L, taking into account, the measures already in place to preserve available lairs, have sufficient capacity at present.

- Potential extension to the front of Arrochar cemetery, within ownership.

## **5.0 CONCLUSION**

5.1 The cemetery portfolio has sufficient overall capacity for the next 47 years operation but locally, restrictions are in place to preserve remaining lair space.

5.2 The Cemetery Development programme is currently focused on providing additional cemetery space, based on the most urgent need, subject to the measure above. However, the site selection and development programme is now a much longer process than may have been the case historically.

5.3 The previous estimated budget of £270k has been partly spent (£40,390) and the remaining budget still sits within the Capital Environmental Projects Budget. The updated figures take into account development work which now shows a profile for estimated costs required over the next 5 years, again this can only be an estimate until works commence in case there are problems below the surface with rocks or issues with purchasing land which can affect costs. There is no requirement at this time for an extra budget line as the current budget is sufficient to cover the estimated works.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 Policy – The Management Rules for Burials revised policy 2023, provides a process where lair sales can be restricted when cemeteries have less than 10 years remaining capacity.

6.2 Financial – Cemetery extensions and new developments require Capital funding, to provide “ready to use” infrastructure to sustain the burial service at local levels. Est £605K within next 3-5 years.

6.3 Legal – The Council, as Burial Authority, must provide at least one cemetery. At present, there is available space for approximately 13,000 lairs, throughout the portfolio of 63 “active” cemeteries.

6.4 HR – None known.

6.5 Fairer Scotland Duty: None known.

6.5.1 Equalities - protected characteristics – None known.

- 6.5.2 Socio-economic Duty – Provision of the burial service at local level sustains the business models of both the Council and private providers and reduces the overall cost to customers.
- 6.5.3 Islands – The programme of cemetery development locations, highlights the desire for the retention of a local burial service, including at least one “active” cemetery on main inhabited islands, wherever practicable.
- 6.6 Climate Change – None known.
- 6.7 Risk – Land suitability, availability and development costs, may affect the viability of retaining a local burial service.
- 6.8 Customer Service – Cemetery development programme aims to provide and maintain the burial service at local level wherever practicable.
- 6.9 The Rights of the Child (UNCRC) – None known.

**Executive Director with responsibility for Roads and Infrastructure Services  
Kirsty Flanagan**

**Policy Lead for Roads, Transport and Amenity Services, Councillor John  
Armour**

December 2024

**For further information contact:**

Jim Smith, Head of Roads and Infrastructure Services

Hugh O’Neill, Network and Standards Manager

Callum Robertson, Assistant Network and Standards Manager

**APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Active Cemeteries - Lair Sales and Development programme

Appendix 2 – Active Cemeteries - Restrictions on Pre-Sale of Lairs (updated 2024)

Appendix 3 – Cemetery Development Programme - Capital budget 2025-2030