

**CEMETERY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME – PROGRESS REPORT 2025/26**

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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. The annual Cemetery Development report provides an update on the current Argyll and Bute “active” cemetery portfolio - numbers available for sale of lair certificates and operational timescales within the Cemetery Development programme, based on data collated to 30<sup>th</sup> September each season, for reporting at December committee.
- 1.2 This supplementary report provides an update to the Dec 2025 report, for the schemes identified as the highest priority for cemetery development. These locations are first to be developed, to increase the lairs available for sale in order to sustain the burial service at local level.
- 1.3 Within the portfolio of active cemeteries, works have been undertaken at four locations on Soil Management plans, Ecological and Archeological surveys which have to be delivered, to allow full planning approval to be gained.
- Torlochan extension - Sandbank, Cowal
  - Calgary cemetery – Isle of Mull
  - Kingarth cemetery – Kilchattan, Isle of Bute
  - Kilkerran cemetery – Campbeltown, Kintyre
- 1.4 Only the land at Torlochan is currently owned by the Council, allowing us immediate access to begin initial works to clear and level the site. Transfer of ownership at Calgary and Kingarth is underway, through colleagues in the estates team negotiating with the landowners, towards early access for the development phase. The site at Kilkerran is subject to two separate landowner negotiations, which have been protracted over the last 2-3 years, since the initial suitability of the field was confirmed, after trial pit digs.
- 1.5 Ecology surveys and reports have been produced for all four sites along with accompanying soil management plans for the development phase. So far, the archeological surveys and reports have been delivered at Torlochan and Kingarth, with no finds restricting the move to the next phase - formal design and planning application. At Calgary, there was evidence of historical Iron age to Medieval use, which will require further extensive excavation of the site to identify, catalogue and preserve any artifacts before the planning conditions can be fully discharged. The viability of this option is covered in this report.

- 1.6 The final site at Kilkerran, requires an extensive array of shallow trenches to fully investigate the presence of any archeology in the large field adjacent to the existing cemetery. This field is presently used for summer grazing by the current owner (including the unfenced section owned by MoD). There are concerns regarding the disturbance of the root structure and re-instatement of the grazing in the interim period, before ownership transfers to the Council. At present there is an impasse, meaning the viability of the land for development cannot be finally confirmed until the level of artifacts, if any, is determined.
- 1.7 Discussions with landowners and community groups continue, on other potential cemetery locations, in association with initial site investigation trial pit excavations to verify the suitability of land for cemetery development. The difficulties in finding suitable ground available for sale, has delayed progress at other Cowal and Mull locations, within the priority programme.
- 1.8 Other sites in need of expansion remain at the site search and assessment stage, where suitable ground has yet to be identified in the vicinity and which landowners consider is available for the burial authority to purchase.
- Tobermory (Phase 3) and Salen – Isle of Mull
  - Strachur, Cairndow and Lochgoilhead – North Cowal
- Primarily within the requirements for suitable site selection are the requirements to comply with the SEPA - Ground Water Management regulations with associated Soil quality and depth to rock or water table.
- 1.9 A formal planning application has been approved for Calgary Cemetery extension but with the conditions on archeology and ecology. Formal design and planning applications are to be progressed for Torlochan and Kingarth with the Kilkerran project awaiting confirmation that the two separate sections of the field can and will be made available for purchase to the burial authority.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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

- i. Note the progress on fulfilling the conditions regarding Ecology and Archaeological surveys, in pursuit of full planning approval towards the construction of additional lair space at four specific cemeteries.
- ii. Note the efforts taken so far towards finding suitable land in Cowal and Mull towards sustaining a local burial service.
- iii. Members assess the added value of further full-scale Archaeological investigations at Calgary, towards developing phase 1 of the proposed cemetery extension, as a parallel operation.
- iv. Members agree to assist and support officers in engaging further with local communities and landowners in Cowal and Mull, towards obtaining small sections of suitable ground or the development of local cemetery extensions or new facilities to preserve the burial service locally.

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**2.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 This report gives details on the progress of the Cemetery Development, priority schemes programme, included as part of the annual update paper on available lair space, presented at the 2025 December EDI Committee meeting.
- 2.2 The priority programme is currently valued at £635K, including the addition of a further £30k scheme at North Bute cemetery – Cnoc-an-Raer to maximise lair space within the current ownership boundaries. The majority of works on the programme involves the creation of new cemetery space on land adjacent to existing cemeteries, acquired from current landowners. The exception being Torlochan extension, adjacent to Sandbank (Cowal) cemetery, where the land is already owned by the council.
- 2.3 Conditions related to planning approval, require several tests and investigations to be carried out at each new location of a proposed cemetery development. Primary in this, is compliance with the SEPA Ground Water Management Regulations (checklist presented in December 2025 EDI paper) which restrict the locations which are suitable for development. Initial trial digs to determine the soil type and depth to water table or rock-head, confirm if the land is suitable for development. Further to this, the production of a soil management plan and Ecological and Archaeological surveys require to be carried out for each new location, as conditions of full planning approval.  
The full list of priority schemes and budget allocation are detailed in **Appendix 1**
- 2.4 Works within the boundaries of Ach nabreac Cemetery – Lochgilphead and Cnoc-an-Raer Cemetery - North Bute, commenced in January 2026. The main work involves soils treatments to remove buried obstructions and associated internal road extensions, servicing the improved lairs.
- 2.5 Activity at other sites on the priority list have been confined to the production of the Ecology and Archeology surveys, in the past 12 months, where land has been identified as suitable and there is an agreement with the landowner. These have been completed at Torlochan-Cowal and Kingarth – Bute. The archeological survey at Calgary uncovered evidence of Iron age or Medieval settlement and a further investigation may be required, to fulfill the planning

conditions. Access issues and land acquisition negotiations have delayed the completion of the archeological survey at Kilkerran – Campbeltown.

- 2.6 In Northwest Mull and North Cowal the search for suitable land continues, with initial trial digs at all previous potential locations highlighting poor quality ground conditions, at the initial trial digs stage of site selection.

### 3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- i. Note the progress on fulfilling the conditions regarding Ecology and Archaeological surveys, in pursuit of full planning approval towards the construction of additional lair space at four specific cemeteries.
- ii. Note the efforts taken so far towards finding suitable land in Cowal and Mull towards sustaining a local burial service.
- iii. Members assess the added value of further full-scale Archaeological investigations at Calgary, towards developing phase 1 of the proposed cemetery extension, as a parallel operation.
- iv. Members agree to assist and support officers in engaging further with local communities and landowners in Cowal and Mull, towards obtaining small sections of suitable ground or the development of local cemetery extensions or new facilities to preserve the burial service locally.

### 4.0 DETAIL

- 4.1 The Schemes list in Appendix – 1, details the cemetery locations identified as a priority for the expansion of lair space. The progress to date has been varied and this report will be presented in three parts.

- Development of existing cemeteries, to Maximise Lair Space.
- Development of suitable land adjacent to existing cemeteries.
- Search for suitable land, for new cemetery locations.

- 4.2 Works within the boundaries of **Achnabreac Cemetery – Lochgilphead** and **Cnoc-an-Raer Cemetery - North Bute**, commenced in January 2026. The main works require the bulk excavation of areas of land to full lair depth, to allow the removal of rock or other materials in an efficient single operation, similar to the treatment, carried out in 2024 at Lismore cemetery. This is required due to issues related to delays in excavating new lairs in advance of a burial service, due to encountering rock or boulders in tight excavations. The soil will then be replaced and compacted back to original ground level and re-turfed / seeded. Internal roads improvements will be carried out in conjunction with the lair depth improvements, to maintain efficient burial services at these locations.

- 4.3 Four cemetery extensions have been identified on land immediately adjacent to current burial grounds. Trial pit test digs were carried in advance to confirm that

the soil quality and depth to water table or rockhead were suitable for the development of full depth lairs to allow 3 x interments. Initial contacts were made with landowners to gain access for this initial test, as a first step towards the eventual transfer of ownership to the burial authority. **Budgets - Appendix - 1**

#### 4.3.1 **Torlochan extension – Sandbank – Cowal cemetery**

Responsibility for this section of council owned land was transferred from the Housing portfolio to the cemeteries remit in 2023. Initial trial digs confirmed similar ground conditions to the adjacent Cowal cemetery. Ecology survey and soil management plans were developed, with no significant restrictions on development. The archaeological survey did not uncover anything significant, with most evidence of previous use dating to WW2, with no restriction on the use of the area, or requirement for further investigation.

The site is now available for initial clearance and re-profiling in advance of formal design and planning application. An indicative design drawing will be further developed and formatted to compliant design drawings for formal planning application, during 2026

#### 4.3.2 **Kingarth Cemetery – Bute**

There was a delay in gaining access to the field adjacent to the current cemetery, as the area is used for silage production. After the final cut in October, trial digs proved the ground conditions to be ideal for the development of full depth lairs. The ecology and soils management plans were completed in parallel, with no specific requirements. Shortly after the Archaeological trenches were excavated, with no artifacts or historical structures uncovered on what is essentially agricultural land.

In parallel, advice was previously obtained from the Archaeologist on the potential for the introduction of lairs, within the footprint of the storm damaged Kingarth Church, demolished in 1968. The advice is that there is likely to be remaining sub-surface structures and potentially interments within the building, meaning this area was not suitable for development. Estates colleagues are now in discussion with Mount Stuart Trust to procure a section 75m x 20m adjoining the current cemetery, equivalent to approximately 2% of the area of the productive field. Formal design drawings and a planning application will be progressed, during 2026.

#### 4.3.3 **Calgary Cemetery – Mull – progress to date**

Formal planning approval was obtained for Calgary in Nov. 2024 but with conditions, requiring Ecology, Archeology and Soils management plans. Works had previously been carried out in partnership with the landowner, to upgrade the access track, gates and field fencing, as work in kind, towards the transfer of ownership of land south of the current cemetery. The design drawings indicate the requirement to raise the level of the field for the new extension, to allow 3x interment depth lairs.

The Ecology and soils management plans were complete with limited requirement on the proposed construction.

Archeological excavations in July 2025 uncovered evidence of iron age to medieval occupation. A second visit in Nov. 2025 confirmed this likely extended over the whole of the proposed area and further investigations

concluded land to the north of the current cemetery had similar history. This will require further investigation, recording in-situ and potential recovery of historical artifacts, to fully comply with the planning condition.

#### 4.3.4 **Calgary Cemetery – Options for further development.**

The proposed location for Calgary cemetery extension remains the best site for development. However, to comply with the planning approval, the advice from HES – West of Scotland Archeology Service is the whole area requires a full depth excavation to uncover any historical information, before the site can be developed into a cemetery.

An initial estimate from the Archeological consultant to the value of £35k for site investigation and potentially a further £35k offsite work towards cataloguing and publication of results. This is effectively an additional cost of up to £425 per burial lair provided (~165nr in approved plan)

Balanced against this is the area would then be clear to construct the first phase of the embankment to the raised level for 3x interment lairs. The saving would be in the initial soil excavation cost and the fact the site is now fully clear for a quick ph1 construction. This is estimated at £30k for the first 50 lairs but more may be possible given the available volume of soil, estimated at approximately 1,900 cu.m. giving an out-turn cost of £100k - £120k for ph 1. As this would provide sufficient lairs to sustain the burial service for a further 70-80 years, this still represents a viable project to progress, towards sustaining the burial service in the area.

#### 4.3.5 **Kilkerran North Extension – Campbeltown – progress to date**

Initial trial excavations to determine ground conditions in the field north of the current cemetery took place in January and March 2024. This confirmed that there was sufficient land available, free from shallow rock to allow the development to progress on the footprint suggested. The area identified totals 16,000 sq.m. and could provide approximately 3,000-3,500 burial lairs over an operational duration of over 50 years. Temporary access was gained from the landowner in June 2025 to carry out the Ecology survey and Soil Management plan, utilizing an electric fence to allow safe access whilst the rest of the field remained in use as summer grazing for cattle.

The extensive grid of trenches required for the Archeological survey have been delayed awaiting the end of summer grazing but also due to the concerns on the potential loss of root matrix and re-instatement of grazing before the following spring. Until such time as the presence or otherwise of any archeology in the field can be confirmed, the true viability of the site as a cemetery development is unknown.

#### 4.3.6 **Kilkerran North Extension - Delays towards development.**

Until a full archaeological survey has been carried out, it is unlikely that full planning approval for a cemetery development will be granted by the planning authority. Access to allow this survey to proceed, is presently at an impasse with the landowner. If evidence of historical use was uncovered in the initial trenches, it is unlikely that a full exploration of the site would be considered viable, based on the equivalent estimates for Calgary above, for a site one 16<sup>th</sup> of the area of Kilkerran.

There is a related issue with the small section of land owned by MoD where a lease agreement has been offered rather than outright sale. The burial authority is unlikely to be able to sell the exclusive right of burial to lair certificate holders, in perpetuity, if the authority is only a tenant.

4.4 On **Mull**, the area around Salen is served by **Pennygowan** cemetery which is nearing capacity. Immediately adjacent land is either peaty soils, shallow rock or too close to water courses to comply with SEPA regulations. Initial enquiries on suitable ground have not resulted in any willingness from landowners to sell small areas of ground considered necessary for agricultural production. There is a potential to expand an historical cemetery **Cill an Aileen** at Aros, within FLS - forestry land but this is still to be assessed as viable, given the costs of development within a wooded area. In **Tobermory**, there is no scope to further expand the cemetery at **Baliscate**, due to land use constraints. There is therefore a similar need to find a third cemetery site close to the main center of population. Officers respectfully request the assistance of local Elected Members in engaging with local communities, towards understanding the constraints and requirements of cemetery development, with a view to obtaining small parcels of land to preserve the burial service at local level. **100 lairs plan – Appendix-2**

4.5 **North Cowal** has several cemeteries which are at critical capacity and subject to the “no pre-sale of lairs” policy, to preserve remaining lair space. **Garelochhead cemetery** adjacent land is heavily wooded and cost prohibitive for development. Land on B839 towards Pole is being considered for investigation. **Kilmorich church – cemetery**, Cairndow is almost full, with land adjacent subject to difficult ground conditions and close to water courses. Trial digs on land farther uphill on the public road in May 2024 also found saturated ground which was unsuitable for cemetery development. **Strachur church – cemetery extension** is also close to full, despite additional lairs space being developed in recent years. Areas close by are within the flood plain and have been discounted by SEPA in consultation, so would not gain planning approval. Trial digs in the field opposite Forest View, adjacent to A816 proved to be of poor quality, with rock encountered a shallow depth and with restrictions due to water courses. Initial discussions regarding land farther south on either side of River Cur, at Balliemeanach and Sluain have not resulted in any suitable land being assessed. Officers respectfully request the assistance of local Elected Members in engaging with local communities, towards understanding the constraints and requirements of cemetery development, with a view to obtaining small parcels of land to preserve the burial service at local level. **100 lairs plan – Appendix-2**

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

- 5.1 The cemetery portfolio has sufficient overall capacity for the next 50 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 measures above. However, the site selection and development programme is

now a much longer process than may have been the case historically. Delays have been encountered in delivering additional lair space on new land, due to additional planning approval conditions on Ecology and Archaeology surveys. Land acquisition processes have also been delayed for various reasons.

- 5.3 The revised estimated budget of £635k still sits within the Capital Environmental Projects Budget available funds. Costs over the past year have been confined to Ecology and Soils plans and Archaeological investigations amounting to £16,787.30 with further costs of approximately £3,500 for Kilkerran survey. The additional full archaeological investigation and reporting at Calgary, estimated at £70,000, is still considered a viable option, in the overall scheme of cemetery development. Officers recommend proceeding with this towards the construction of phase 1 cemetery extension with 70 – 80 year operational duration.

## **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 £635K 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 12,700 lairs (Oct 2025) throughout the portfolio of 63 “active” cemeteries.
- 6.4 HR – None known.
- 6.5 Customer Service – Cemetery development programme aims to provide and maintain the burial service at local level wherever practicable.
- 6.6 Risk – Land suitability, availability and development costs, may affect the viability of retaining a local burial service.
- 6.7 Climate Change – None known.
- 6.8 Fairer Scotland Duty: None known.
- 6.9 Equalities - protected characteristics – None known.
- 6.10 Consumer 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.

6.11 Island Communities – 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.

6.12 Children’s Rights and Wellbeing – None known.

**Executive Director with responsibility for Roads and Infrastructure Services,  
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February 2026

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## **APPENDICES**

Appendix-1 Cemetery Development programme - Priority Schemes 2025-30

Appendix -2 Cemetery land requirement – 100lairs Standard Details.

APPENDIX 1

ARGYLL and BUTE COUNCIL

CEMETERY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME 2025-2030

EDI – March 2026

DISTRICT	CEMETERY	DEVELOPMENT WORK CONTENT	WORKS DURATION	ESTIMATED VALUE
Kintyre	Campbeltown Kilkerran - North Extension	Purchase land - Boundary fence - Form new vehicular access and parking area. Initial ph1 roads , footpaths and headstone foundations (500 lairs) – Of 2,000 potential	2025 - 2028	£250,000
Mid-Argyll	Achnabreac-Lochgilphead	Maximise Lairs through excavation , removal/treatment of rock outcrops, reinstatement to existing levels.	2025 - 2026	£50,000
Mull	Calgary - Extension	Complete land transfer - Boundary fence - form embankment using existing land to maximise depth. Ph1 parking , footpaths and headstone foundations (50 lairs)	2025 - 2026	£30,000
Cowal	Sandbank extension Torlochan Phase 1	Clear and re-level site - Boundary fencing - Form access link roads between existing cemetery and Gochan access road. Form footpaths and headstone foundations, expand parking. ( ph1 - 2 200 - 450 lairs )	2025 - 2027	£150,000
Cowal	Strachur New Cemetery site required	Confirm a suitable site - purchase land - develop area for local requirements only - access road / parking , footpaths and headstone foundations ( ~200 lairs tbc)	2025- 2028	£75,000
Bute	Kingarth - Second extension	Test land for suitability - purchase area - Boundary Fence - develop links to existing - Footpaths / Headstone foundations. (~500 Lairs for similar area as PH1 ext)	2025 - 2027	£50,000
		<b>REVISED BUDGET REQUIREMENT</b>	<b>2025 - 2030</b>	<b>£605,000</b>

Additional scheme to maximise lairs space within existing cemetery boundaries.

Bute	Cnoc-an-Rear (North Bute Cemetery)	Formation of internal roads and soil treatments to allow access to un-used land within current ownership .	2025 - 2026	£30,000
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Note :-

The Priority Investment Plan (PIP) for Amenity Assets 2025-26 indicates Cemetery Development as PRIORITY 1 within the top three asset development requirements. A revised funding package of £635K is indicated against this priority line.

The current Capital Budget Programme Monitoring, has a value of £688k against Environmental Projects , the bulk of which is expected to be used to fund the 3-5 year cemetery development programme.

Standard layout of 100 Lairs, including footpaths and headstone foundations.

100 Lairs in 4 rows 25m x 14m = 350 sq.m.

