

Cemeteries and churchyards

Definition

- 13.1 Churchyards are encompassed within the walled boundary of a church and cemeteries are burial grounds outside the confines of a church. These include private burial grounds, local authority burial grounds and disused churchyards. The primary purpose of this type of open space is for burial of the dead and quiet contemplation but also for the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

Picture 13.1 St John the Baptist – Bere Regis



Strategic context

- 13.2 Cemeteries and churchyards can be a significant open space provider in some areas. In other areas they can represent a relatively minor resource in terms of the land, but are able to provide areas of nature conservation importance via unimproved grasslands and other various habitats. They are often among the few areas of greenspace where the local community is able to have some contact with the natural world.
- 13.3 Although many have restricted access they still provide a useful resource for the local community. A wide variety of habitats can be often be found supporting the other open space types such as natural and semi-natural areas.

Audit

- 13.4 The total amount of land at cemeteries and churchyards is currently 11.913 hectares. This equates to a current provision level of 0.27 hectares per 1,000 population.
- 13.5 There are a number of working cemeteries in Purbeck. Hill View Cemetery in Wareham has between 24-30 burials a year and capacity for over 100 years. In Swanage the only active cemetery is Godlington. They currently experience approximately 60 burials a year (including ashes) and predict that they will be full within 20 years with no expansion prospects.
- 13.6 In East Lulworth there are both Catholic and Church of England burial grounds. Both have substantial room at the moment with no plans for expansion. The cemetery in Moreton currently has less than 10 burials a year and has no need to expand in the short to mid term.
- 13.7 Legislation relating to the maintenance of memorials means that investment will need to be made in the future.
- 13.8 The other cemeteries and churchyards, which are now closed, are overgrown sites but still serve a purpose by attracting wildlife.

Consultation

- 13.9 The **household survey** highlighted the following key issues for respondents who use cemeteries most frequently (only seven respondents):
- there was a very low response rate of people that use cemeteries and churchyards frequently and naturally 100% of respondents felt this typology was important to them. Taking a more general analysis of the household survey shows 73% of all respondents felt that cemeteries and churchyards were important although unsurprisingly 32% only use such facilities occasionally and 47% do not use such facilities at all
 - returning to those respondents who do use cemeteries and churchyards most frequently, the majority of respondents having issues of some sort with litter (75%), anti-social behaviour (67%), dog fouling (67%), noise (67%) and vandalism and graffiti (50%)
 - in terms of quality, the highest levels of satisfaction were related to boundaries, information and signage with 100% of respondents being either satisfied or very satisfied. High satisfaction levels were also reported for the provision of litter bins and planted and grassed areas
 - the highest dissatisfaction levels were attributed to the provision of toilets and parking where 75% of respondents were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. This was followed by the provision of seats and benches at 67%
 - the majority of respondents (67%) are prepared to travel between 15 and 30 minutes to cemeteries and churchyards and 43% would expect to make this journey by car. From the household survey, the greatest proportion of people (53%) would expect to walk to cemeteries and churchyards and 41% would expect to drive.
 - in terms of site access, there were generally relatively high levels of satisfaction throughout with the highest associated with signage and the ease of access to these sites by public transport

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- two issues where some dissatisfaction was evident were opening times and the ease of access on foot.
- 13.10 From the **internal consultations**, comments specific to cemeteries and churchyards indicated issues surrounding the capacity of some churchyards as many are full and residents are not keen for people from outside the District to be buried in Purbeck. This view was not confirmed by our other consultations.
- 13.11 One comment made at the **drop-in sessions** indicated that churchyards are generally well maintained although the cemetery behind the car park in Swanage is perceived to be of substandard quality
- 13.12 Information gathered from **Parish Council and external consultations** did not highlight any issues specific to cemeteries and churchyards.

Quantity

- 13.13 No quantity standards are to be set for cemeteries and churchyards. PPG 17 Annex states:

"many historic churchyards provide important places for quiet contemplation, especially in busy urban areas, and often support biodiversity and interesting geological features. As such many can also be viewed as amenity greenspaces. Unfortunately, many are also run-down and therefore it may be desirable to enhance them. As churchyards can only exist where there is a church, the only form of provision standard which will be required is a qualitative one."

- 13.14 For cemeteries, PPG 17 Annex states:

"every individual cemetery has a finite capacity and therefore there is steady need for more of them. Indeed, many areas face a shortage of ground for burials. The need for graves, for all religious faiths, can be calculated from population estimates, coupled with details of the average proportion of deaths which result in a burial, and converted into a quantitative population-based provision standard."

- 13.15 This does not relate to a quantitative hectare per 1,000 population requirement.

Quality

- 13.16 There are no definitive national or local standards for the quality of cemeteries and churchyards.
- 13.17 Cemeteries and churchyards in Purbeck scored highly for quality aspects. The lowest scoring sites were East Street cemetery (site ID 140) and West Lulworth graveyard (site ID 344) with scores of 40%. The highest scoring was St Nicholas Church (site ID 295) with 85%, followed closely by the two sites at St. Mary's Church (Site ID's 286 and 287) with scores of 80%.
- 13.18 In addition, cemeteries and churchyards provide the following wider benefits to the local area:
- ecological
 - structural and landscape
 - 'sense of place'

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- cultural and heritage value.

13.19 The household survey indicated that the highest rated aspirations for cemeteries and churchyards were: well kept grass with flowers, trees and shrubs. They should ideally have clear footpaths, a café and be clean and litter free with seating and litter bins.

Accessibility

13.20 With regards to accessibility there are no definitive national or local standards.

13.21 The average site access score was 57% which suggests a good standard of site access. The highest scoring site was The Church of St. Edward, Corfe (site ID 136) with 86% whilst an additional eight sites had a score of 60% or above. The lowest scoring site was All Saints Church, Bere Regis (site ID 326) with 33%.

13.22 Disability access to church sites is often problematic due to their age. Many older sites have a large number of steps, uneven walkways and often have off-road parking. Wheelchair users are rarely able to park next to the facility. As cemeteries are often Council owned and relatively new, disabled access is not such an issue.

13.23 The most popular means of getting to cemeteries and churchyards on foot, and the 75% threshold is 15 minutes.

Summary and conclusions

13.24 While it is inappropriate to set a quantity standard for cemeteries, there will be steady demand in the District for this type of space. Planning for future provision should be based on predicted death rates, burial and cremation rates.

13.25 Although needed for the burial of the dead, cemeteries and churchyards provide an open space to be used on an opportunity-led basis – ie where there are churchyards and cemeteries, there are opportunities for wildlife and use of the open space by the public for walking and relaxing.

13.26 The quality of cemeteries and churchyards remains particularly important – many people use cemeteries and churchyards as amenity green space for peace and contemplation. We recommend that the Council develops a local quality standard. Such a standard should incorporate the main aspirations highlighted through the consultation undertaken for this project, namely that they should:

- be well-kept grass with appropriate flowers, trees and shrubs
- offer a clean and litter free environment with clear pathways
- have appropriate and good quality ancillary facilities.

C&C 1	Protect and enhance (where required) all the existing cemeteries and churchyards in the district.
C&C 2	Develop and adopt a quality standard for cemeteries and churchyards in the district.