

IN
LOVING MEMORY OF
MY DEAR HUSBAND
WILLIAM GASKIN
WHO PASSED AWAY MARCH 19TH 1952
AGED 56 YEARS.
"GOD'S FINGER TOUCHED HIM AND HE SLEPT."
LOVING AND KIND IN ALL HIS WAYS,
UPRIGHT AND JUST IN HIS
SINCERE AND TRUE FRIENDSHIP
A BEAUTIFUL MEMORY TO REMAIN
AND HIS DEVOTED WIFE
MARY GASKIN
DIED DEC. 12. 1976
AGED 74 YEARS.
"GONE FROM OUR HOME
BUT NOT FROM OUR HEARTS."

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford

2016 – 2026



WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL

CONTENTS

Executive Summary	4
Background & Introduction	5
Key statistical information	6
Part 1 Management	
Staff and Cover Issues	8
Relationship with West Herts Crematorium	9
Hours of Opening	11
The Visitor Experience	13
ICT, Records Management & Administration.....	15
Lone Working Policy	17
Income Opportunities	18
Updating of Regulations for the Management of Cemeteries.....	20
Muslim & other Faith Burials (Weekend Burials)	23

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Part 2 Perception

Consultation and Engagement – Identifying Service Demands	27
Benchmarking	28
Marketing of Cemeteries	29

Part 3 Infrastructure & Environment

Quality of the Grounds and Cemetery as a Green Space	31
Building Infrastructure	34
Growth and Expansion Opportunities – The Need for Space and Green Burials	37

Part 4 Action Plan and Key Recommendations

40

Executive Summary

Watford Borough Council recently commissioned a review of its cemetery service by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM). The feedback forms the basis of this new 10-year cemetery strategy. It summarised that the service provided by Watford Borough Council in our cemeteries service is generally very good. There are dedicated, experienced and well trained staff in post who clearly care about the level of service they provide and who are committed to not only providing the highest level of service they can but also in working towards improvements to the service in the future. The core activities of the service are well provided such as grounds maintenance and grave digging. However, it also concluded that the service needed to consider modernising its service in some areas and to improve on its accessibility to the public and overall customer experience.

A number of income generating opportunities were also identified which could not only help move the service into a more financially favourable position but would also provide additional services and benefits to the bereaved. At the same time, there is the significant issue related to the provision of cemetery space and the need to provide further space as burial capacity is “running out”. Vicarage Road Cemetery is already full and the capacity at North Watford Cemetery is now limited with a finite number of years remaining. This issue is identified within this strategy.

The ICCM review also examined some key issues affecting the cemetery service in Watford. This included consideration around an enhanced weekend and bank holiday burial service to meet the needs of the Muslim Community and the need to update to the current cemetery regulations. These issues together with many others have been addressed within this 10 year strategy and will provide a transparent and unbiased way forward in improving the services for the bereaved in Watford, not only based on experience but also current best industry practice.

In particular, the review identified a number of issues and recommendations that would enhance the already good service currently provided at Watford. Whilst there is much to consider it was strongly recommended that the review and the subsequent recommendations contained within it formed the basis for a bespoke **Watford Cemeteries Strategy** which would provide a clear direction of travel for the service and enable delivery of a number of actions over the next 10 years and furthermore ensure the service is positioned to continually improve. As a consequence, this strategy has been structured over the long term (10 years) with short, medium and long term objectives included that will be reviewed annually and now form part of the Councils key aims to ensure that it can provide the highest standard of what is a very sensitive service that is utilised by many of the local population every year.

Background & Introduction

In March 2015 Watford Borough Council requested that the ICCM undertake a review of its cemetery service and provide a detailed report and recommendations to further improve and modernise this important service.

This subsequent Cemetery Strategy covers all of the issues identified and provides specific recommendations and a detailed Action Plan for the council to look at delivering. Our view is that:-

'The service is one of the most important aspects of service provision that we provide, yet it is an area we currently knew little about in relation to what the customer perceived of it, including "the bereaved", funeral directors, cemetery visitors. The Council has therefore carried out a full review of this important area that is now being used to shape the service taking into account current and future needs'.

This strategy will cover the following areas:-

Part 1: Management

- Staffing and Cover issues;
- Relationship with West Herts Crematorium (WHC);
- Hours of opening;
- The visitor experience;
- ICT and Records Management;
- Lone working policy;
- Income opportunities;
- Updating of Regulations for Management of Cemeteries; and
- Muslim Burials (out of hours burials only).

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Part 2: Customer Perception

- Consultation and Engagement – identifying service demands;
- Benchmarking; and
- Marketing of Cemeteries.

Part 3: Infrastructure and Environment

- Quality of the grounds and cemetery as a green space;
- Green Flag awards;
- Building infrastructure; and
- Growth and expansion opportunities

Watford Borough Council currently provides a burial service through its two main cemeteries located at Vicarage Road and North Watford and also maintains and manages 2 closed sites at All Saints Cemetery and St Mary's Church Grounds.

The grounds maintenance at the sites is of a very good standard. Both North Watford and Vicarage Road sites are extremely well presented and welcoming and are kept well maintained by the Council's partner, Veolia.

Veolia currently hold the contract with Watford Borough Council to provide Grounds Maintenance across the Borough after it was outsourced in July 2013. This extends to both the grounds maintenance at the cemeteries and the grave digging functions provided.

The day to day management of the service is provided by an onsite cemetery manager based at North Watford Cemetery who is responsible for all of the key elements of the service including bookings for funerals, dealing with the public, maintaining statutory cemetery records, marking and identifying graves for excavation, liaising directly with the grounds staff and monitoring of the contract with Veolia.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Key Statistical Information

Watford currently has a number of burial sites:

- (1) North Watford Cemetery;
- (2) Vicarage Road Cemetery;
- (3) All Saints Cemetery;(Grounds Maintenance only); and
- (4) St Mary's Church Grounds (Grounds Maintenance Only).

Average No of Burials Per Year:

182 Full Burials

74 Cremated Remains

Services Offered:

Full Burials;

Cremated Remains Burials

Population: 95,500

No of Registered Deaths in Watford 2013: 715



Part 1 Management

Staff and Cover Issues

At present, the Cemetery Manager is responsible for all aspects of cemetery management and works a 37 hour week as well as some occasional Saturday working. However, when on leave, attending training or is unexpectedly ill, cover is provided by a former colleague who is undergoing training via the ICCM but is now employed by Veolia. This cover has generally been effective but comes at a cost and does not provide cover when the Manager is on site attending to funerals and also relies on the Veolia colleague being available at short, medium and long term notice. Cover has also recently been provided by West Herts Crematorium as part of a Service Level Agreement but again cannot always be guaranteed.

Strategy Aim – to look at current cover arrangements and assess staffing needs as part of ensuring a more comprehensive service is provided for the bereaved, funeral directors, members of the public and cemetery visitors.

Existing arrangements currently hamper the provision of a better service for the bereaved and key service users of Watford's cemeteries.

As a lone worker the Manager is required to close and lock the office at various times throughout the day to either attend burials, meet with visitors or deal with any other issue outside of the office which also includes visiting and attending other sites.

In this modern age the current arrangements can seem antiquated and not those expected by residents of a busy and progressive Borough. While the office is closed visitors with enquires currently wait outside until the manager returns, and if the telephone is not answered (NB an answer phone service is in place), this can lead to a direct impact on the bereaved if a funeral director is trying to book or confirm a burial time on their behalf leading to frustration and increased anxiety for the bereaved.

Covering the service during periods of sickness and leave can also be an issue. Whilst arrangements are in place to cover leave in some instances this can be problematic.

It would appear that neither of the 2 options above are 'guaranteed' in any way. It is clear that alternative arrangements should be considered to ensure that during periods of absence from the office by the manager (either short or long term) a degree of continuity in the service can be maintained and a full time and professional service offered.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

However, whilst there is clearly a case to increase the staff within the service, there requires a justification for a full time post given the number of burials. Additional staff resources could also assist in addressing some of the other current issues within the service such as back-feeding of historical records and implementing income regenerating initiatives. The costs of the additional post could be offset by savings in relation to current cover arrangements and income generation and capacity development.

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Review current staffing arrangements with a view to create an additional post to support the Cemetery Manager. Review the existing SLA with West Herts Crematorium

Relationship with West Herts Crematorium (WHC)

The Council currently has a Service Level Agreement with WHC. Considerable technical expertise is available locally within WHC and there are opportunities that have been identified for closer working relationships with them to assist and support the Council in relation to the day to day management of the Cemetery Service.

Strategy Aim – to look at how closer working relationships can be developed with WHC as well as wider management opportunities for a more comprehensive service at the Council run facilities.

A good and healthy working relationship exists between West Herts Crematorium and the Watford cemeteries service. However, both areas are distinctly different with skills and background in cremation and burial services respectively.

At present, the manager at West Herts Crematorium is regularly available to offer help and support to the Council's cemeteries manager when asked. There is an extensive knowledge of dealing with the bereaved between both areas.

However, the service level agreement currently in place to provide cover when required by WHC to Watford Cemeteries is neither robust nor ideal in its current format.

The manager at WHC provides the cover when requested and if available, unfortunately this is not always convenient, particularly when looking to cover short notice sickness, and it has been required to alter working arrangements at WHC in order to accommodate Watford cemeteries requests.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

When the manager is absent from WHC there is a need to ensure adequate cover in place at the crematorium and often this can only cover part days for Watford. Whilst the WHC manager has more than adequate skills to deal with the bereaved on a day to day basis the current operational knowledge of cemeteries is limited, this is further compounded by not being regularly placed at NWC in order to gain more knowledge and experience about the service.

The current situation is unacceptable from both a customer service perspective and a business perspective for West Herts Crematorium and a more robust solution needs to be considered. As identified above an additional member of staff to work alongside the manager at NWC would help alleviate this issue with the current service level agreement remaining in place to provide cover in extreme circumstances.

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Review current staffing arrangements with a view to create an additional post to support the Cemetery Manager. Review the existing SLA with West Herts Crematorium



Improving Services for the Bereaved in Watford

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Hours of Opening

Current opening hours for the cemetery are:-

<i>Month</i>	<i>Open</i>	<i>Close</i>	<i>Month</i>	<i>Open</i>	<i>Close</i>
<i>January</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>4pm</i>	<i>July</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>8pm</i>
<i>February</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>4pm</i>	<i>August</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>8pm</i>
<i>March</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>6pm</i>	<i>September</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>7pm</i>
<i>April</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>7pm</i>	<i>October</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>6pm</i>
<i>May</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>7pm</i>	<i>November</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>4pm</i>
<i>June</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>8pm</i>	<i>December</i>	<i>9am</i>	<i>4pm</i>

Cemetery office opening times are currently between 9.30am to 2.30pm from Monday to Friday. However, office opening hours do not reflect cemetery opening hours and the Cemetery manager as a lone worker often has to balance administration work, taking bookings, attending funerals as well as the needs and availability to members of the public and funeral directors. Informal feedback has indicated that the office opening hours are not long enough and need to be reassessed. The manager is in the office from 7.30 – 3.00 daily and often sees customers outside office opening times. Calls can also come into the office out of office opening times. Cemetery staff from Veolia are on site from 7.30 am and the manager uses that time to ensure graves are picked and ready for digging before the first burial which can be at 10.00am.

Strategy Aim – to assess current opening hours against the needs of cemetery users and propose hours of opening based on local benchmarking, best practice and feedback from the local community.

It is not unusual for cemetery grounds opening times to vary from the cemetery office opening times around the UK. It is generally accepted that during the summer and lighter evenings cemeteries should remain open for longer hours for the benefit of visitors, it is not however necessarily cost effective or essential that the administration and enquiries office remains open for the same hours.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

In Watford there is only one office available which is located at North Watford Cemetery. There was an additional office located at Vicarage Road Cemetery however this was closed and converted back to living accommodation some years ago as a result of the cemetery now being full.

The office at North Watford Cemetery opens to the public between the hours of 9:30 am until 2:30 pm Monday to Friday. In addition to this due to the lone worker issue at this site the office can be closed for other periods of time during these hours.

The opening hours are acceptable however not ideal. It could be very frustrating for visitors who have travelled from far away to visit to find the enquiries office closed when they arrive. In addition to this, local funeral directors are restricted as to when they can ring to book funerals.

The manager works between the hours of 7:30 am and 3:00 pm Monday to Friday and often deals with phone calls and visitors after these hours. This would indicate a need for longer opening times. Consultation with key service users such as funeral directors, religious groups, visitors and memorial masons have indicated more appropriate opening hours would be preferred.

A viable option is to extend the office opening hours to something more traditional such as 9:00 am – 5:00 pm Monday to Friday and amend working arrangements or incorporate additional staffing resources to cover the period.

It should be further reviewed if there is a need for the manager to start at 7:30 a.m. Whilst time is required to undertake administrative work and liaise with grave digging staff this could be done at a later time in the day providing that the office is manned for public enquires and to receive telephone calls.

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Review current staffing arrangements with a view to create an additional post to support the Cemetery Manager. Review the existing SLA with West Herts Crematorium; and
- ❖ Restructure the existing service and review opening times. Consult and identify needs of service users.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

The Visitor Experience

The perception of the cemetery to visitors on arrival is very important. First impressions do count. When visitors arrive at North Watford Cemetery, they park in a small car park by the Cemetery Lodge / Office. The Cemetery office is based in the main Cemetery Lodge where the Cemetery Manager lives. The office is however perceived to be dated and old-fashioned. It does not appear especially welcoming and as a reception, does not function well.

Strategy Aim – *to review the current office environment / reception area and make recommendations for improvements to enable a more welcoming environment for customers and clients.*

The current entrance to North Watford Cemetery is very welcoming and signage at the entrance is of a high quality and clear to read. Toilets are available to the left, with the office to the right and car parking is clearly signed. The entrance is nicely landscaped and the high quality of maintenance apparent throughout the site starts here. On entering the office, it is clear that the reception takes the form of a previous room of the cemetery lodge. Again this is not uncommon around the country and whilst it does not offer perhaps the best perception of a site, it does serve its purpose as being a point of contact for the public and is better than no office on site at all.

The office is of a good size but there is limited space for people to wait to be seen or any sort of private area which may be required to deal with some more emotional visitors. Most of the records pertaining to the service are stored within this office against the walls in fire proof safes; however, it would appear some other non-statutory records are stored elsewhere.

It is essential to stress that Cemetery Records are covered under the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 Article 9 which states:

(1) *A burial authority shall maintain a plan showing and allocating distinctive numbers to—*

(a) all graves or vaults in which burials are made after the coming into operation of this order or are known to have been made before that event; and

(b) the grave spaces subject to the specified rights.

(2) *A burial authority shall also maintain records, by reference to the numbers in the plan, of—*

(a) the burials made after the coming into operation of this order in any graves or vaults; and

(b) the specified rights existing in any graves or vaults, or grave spaces, and the names of the grantees thereof as recorded in the register maintained under Part II of Schedule 2 or in the registers described in paragraph 2(b) of that Part.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

The Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 is also clear as to how records should be stored under article 12 which reads:

The following, namely—

- *the plan maintained under article 9(1);*
- *the records maintained under article 9(2);*
- *the register of burials maintained under article 11(1);*
- *any register of burials in the cemetery maintained before the coming into operation of this order;*
- *the record of disinterments maintained under article 11(5);*
- *the register maintained under Part II of Schedule 2;*
- *the registers described in paragraph 2(b) of the said Part II; and*
- *the records of memorials made and kept under paragraph 16 of Schedule 3, shall be stored so as to preserve them from loss or damage and be in the charge of the officer of the burial authority appointed for that purpose.*

The storage of the records in the fire proof safe is good and compliant, however site plans are not protected in the same way and consideration should be given to this issue urgently.

The reception area is not as welcoming as would perhaps be wanted by the service. There are only two real options to improve the current office and reception area.

Option ONE – Refurbish to a modern standard and ensure that adequate storage is provided for all required items and avoid keeping boxes etc on top of safes and cupboards. Whilst refurbishment would make the area more welcoming, space is clearly the issue and therefore option two below should be seriously considered.

Option TWO – Extend the current office area to the left hand side into the garden of the tied accommodation. This could provide an ample storage area for all of the records, plans and other necessary office supplies. This would free up the existing office to be refurbished as a much more attractive reception area, which would have enough space to provide a small seating/waiting area for families and or a private interview area.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

There is no available waiting area for families congregating before a funeral service, whilst the office is not currently suitable to offer this, a mourners' shelter could be considered to be placed in the corner of the car park close to the office and main entrance as a designated waiting area for those attending funerals. A covered wooden structure would suffice with bench type seating underneath larger enough to provide a waiting area for up to 20 mourners. This would be relatively inexpensive to provide and provides an enhanced service for visitors.

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Review office layout and consider extending the building to provide a more adequate storage space for records;
- ❖ Undertake a Risk Assessment of the office space and design a more inviting area that also protects the staff from any potential health and safety issues and disregard the use of the door to the manager's accommodation for this purpose; and
- ❖ Redecorate and modernise the office and reception area.

ICT, Records Management & Administration

At present, the Cemetery Manager uses the Gower Cemetery Management Software which is backed up locally at North Watford Cemetery by the Cemetery Manager. The current system is not linked into the Council's main frame data storage system. Many records are also stored at the cemetery as old paper records and require digitising. They are currently stored in a nearby building.

Strategy Aim – *To assess current ICT provision and make recommendations for upgrading the system, backing up and records management.*

North Watford Cemetery has the Epilog system provided by Gower as its electronic administration system. The Gower system is used for the storage of records and recording of bookings, however a manual diary is also used and the information transferred across. All records dating back to the late 1990's are held on the computer system and the index data which consists of the name and date of death of the deceased for all other graves has been back fed into the system. However, it is not known if all of this data is accurate. The system also holds details of the graves at Vicarage Road Cemetery including the basic indexing data.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Not all of the historical records have been completely back-fed into the computerised system. This is work that should be considered which would not only provide a more robust record keeping system but could also in time allow for income generation through making the records available online whereby charges could be made for accessing the information either directly or in partnership with a commercial company who deal with family history and death records.

It is of concern that the Gower system is only backed up locally. Whilst it is not essential that the Gower system link to the Councils mainframe it would provide a much better failsafe if the records held on the system were backed up remotely and centrally at an alternative location. Connectivity may be an issue and options need to be discussed with the Councils own ICT team and Gower around the best options available.

Options such as remote bookings available out of hours could be considered to provide a better service to local funeral directors and families. At present if a death occurs on a Friday after 3:00 pm no time can be arranged for a burial until 9:30 am at the earliest on the following Monday. An online system would help but needs to be well managed by the staff.

Digitising of plans also needs to be considered. Gower do provide a mapping option to their Epilog system (Epic) and enquiries should be made as to this being integrated with the current operating system. This would not only provide a robust back up of the cemetery plans but also provides additional data that can be utilised by both staff and visitors much easier than photocopying existing section plans.

The Gower system is not used as the only diary for the booking of funerals and a manual diary is utilised. This does offer the manager flexibility to offer times suited to the funeral director however a more structured diary with set times for burials would allow increased booking provision.

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Discuss the current computerised administration package with the supplier and explore all options available (including market testing of new products) for improving its functionality and usage;
- ❖ Assess and carry out an audit of financial processes carried out at the cemetery, evaluating current processes and highlighting efficiencies or alternatives in relation to administration; and
- ❖ Digitising records and exploring income generation opportunities.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Lone Working Policy

The Cemetery Manager currently works at the cemetery primarily as a lone worker. Although the office is based within the manager's residence and Grounds Maintenance operatives are on site daily, the lone working policy for this staff member needs to be reviewed.

Strategy Aim – *To assess the requirements for a lone working policy but also take into account public accessibility, design of the reception and staffing / cover issues as highlighted previously.*

As a lone worker the manager is in a vulnerable position in the office should they have to deal with an irate or upset member of the public which can occur when they are affected by grief.

No significant incidents have occurred to date. The manager has access through a door directly back into their home which is kept open whilst alone in the office. This could be utilised in the event of an unpleasant situation arising. The manager is also partly protected by a long desk however this has no screen and would be relatively easy to move.

In terms of access out of the office should the main door be blocked the only option is through the exit into the house to the left. An issue does arise however should the manager be on leave or sickness as this door would then be unavailable and whoever is in the office to provide cover is effectively trapped from exiting the office should the need arise.

There also appears to be no sort of personal alarm system in place to alert anyone else of a problem. There are grounds staff on site employed by Veolia however they are not based in the office but do call in throughout the day.

A review of the layout of the office needs to be completed and should the decision be taken to refurbish and/or extend the final design should consider the health and safety of the staff and in particular acknowledge that staff do have to work alone at this site.

Action Plan

- ❖ Undertake a Risk Assessment of the office space and design a more inviting area that also protects the staff from any potential health and safety issues and disregard the use of the door to the manager's accommodation for this purpose; and
- ❖ Implement an Action Plan derived from the analysis of the risk assessment.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Income Opportunities

The Council derives income from the cemetery service in relation to a range of burial services but with more people turning to cremation, this income stream is under pressure. Charges were recently significantly increased in 2011 but are now in line with average costs elsewhere in Hertfordshire and including local cemeteries at Carpenders Park run for Harrow and Brent. Charges are however still significantly cheaper than most of the London Boroughs.

Strategy Aim – to assess all current income opportunities, pricing structures and any further opportunities for deriving income e.g. family history searches are currently not charged for and provided by the cemetery manager free of charge but take up some time.

The main sources of income for the service are derived from the sale of Exclusive Rights of Burials and Interment Fees. Other income is received in the form of permit fees for the permission to erect memorials on grave spaces.

North Watford Cemetery is an attractively and well laid out site and does have the opportunity to provide additional services which could attract a charge. Vicarage Road Cemetery has more limited options given the lack of space within the site but there are still options to consider.

There are no other options for cremated remains except burial or scattering on a grave. Consideration should be given to the provision of **above ground niches** for cremated remains, there are various suitable locations around the site and also at Vicarage Road Cemetery that could be utilised. Modern niches can accommodate a large number of remains within a very small area and further research should be undertaken and invite suppliers to look at the site and provide ideas and costs. Clearly a large number of residents choose cremation and would utilise the services of West Herts Crematorium, however they also only have a limited number of memorial options and it would appear that there is a relevant market in the area for alternative options.

There is a large grassed area at the far end of the car park which could potentially be landscaped into a formal garden of remembrance providing a range of memorial options.

Benches could also be provided with **dedicated memorial plaques** on 10 year leases to provide a sustainable income stream. There are some beautiful areas within North Watford Cemetery which would be ideal to place dedicated seating areas which could attract a charge.

Tree dedication schemes could also easily be introduced by using current tree stock and planting new trees in designated areas. A plaque on a post in front of the tree could be provided again on a lease basis for a fixed fee.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

It is essential to consider however that the above ideas will only succeed if they are effectively marketed to both the public and funeral directors. It should also be noted that at present a number of the options above including that of Columbaria Niches for the housing of cremated remains is not offered at West Herts Crematorium.

The current price list details a charge for **searching records** and providing an extract which is £35.00. Not everyone will require an extract and some family history firms may be profiting from NWC records by undertaking research on behalf of paying clients.

A reasonable charge could be introduced for the searching of records and provision of information as several hundred searches are carried out each year by the manager. In the main this information is provided by either email or post, however a charge should be decided on based on the amount of time on average the manager spends undertaking this task.

Grave maintenance schemes could be introduced however this would be dependent on available staff resources from Veolia to carry out additional works to individual graves. This could include a range of chargeable services perhaps grouped into Bronze, Silver and Gold services and would range from the basic of a monthly wash down of the memorial, removal of weeds through to additional mowing/weeding, placing fresh flowers on a grave space on specific dates and a photograph sent to the grave owner.

At the entrance to North Watford Cemetery on the left hand side there are public toilets and a small office/mess room currently utilised by staff of Veolia (Park Rangers) however these staff are not connected to the Cemetery Service. This building is in a prime location to offer ancillary services to the bereaved such as a **florist**. Exploratory work should be undertaken with local businesses to gauge interest in opening a florist at this site.

The Authority sells the exclusive Right of Burial for new graves for a fixed period of time. An option to consider is to use these existing sales to look to both generate income and keep in touch with grave owners (which is particularly useful when dealing with memorial safety issues). A simple exercise of sending out a standard letter to grave owners after a period of 5 years offering to **extend the lease period** for a further 5 years for a fixed fee could be considered. This letter could also be used to inform service users of any changes or events connected to the cemetery and assist with longer term marketing and build on improving customer relationships.

There are clearly a number of options to be considered that could generate additional income for the service but they will require effective marketing and initial investment for them to be a success.

With the increase in cremation as a choice for the bereaved Watford Borough Council will look at how it can generate income from these families by offering high quality final resting places for cremated remains in local cemeteries.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Meet with industry suppliers to discuss the provision of new memorialisation in particular columbaria niches at both sites and consider development of a formal memorial garden near to the car park and entrance of the site at North Watford Cemetery;
- ❖ Review current memorials and seek to generate income from existing infrastructure through items such as benches and trees;
- ❖ Market the building opposite the main entrance to North Watford Cemetery as a potential business premises; and
- ❖ Maintain regular reviews and benchmarking of other council charges and establish fees & charges that assist in managing the demand from non-residents and recover costs of the service.

Updating of Regulations for the Management of Cemeteries

A number of regulations exist for the management of cemeteries in Watford that were adopted many years ago. An example would be the acceptable height of memorial stones which is no longer in line with national ICCM guidance. The adoption of these regulations was some years previously but with no apparent date as to when they became policy. They require a complete review and new policy guidelines re-written in line with current national policy.

Strategy Aim – to assess current Regulations and update in accordance with ICCM guidelines.

It is not clear when the current regulations for Watford Cemeteries were published however it is recommended that a complete re-draft be considered to ensure they are fully up to date.

The inclusion of any regulation should be justified and its purpose clearly stated within the regulations. Best practice is also to undertake a thorough review of cemetery regulations every 3 years to ensure that they remain current and fit for purpose.

The current regulations are in need of a review as in some instances could be seen to be unenforceable or overly restrictive with no justification. They also do not take into account current needs of the bereaved or any modern practices, it is therefore recommended that new regulations are prepared and introduced for the effective management of the service.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Review the current regulations and review in line with those drafted and contained as Appendix 1 of the ICCM report. Consult on revised regulations.

Memorial Safety

The issue around safety of memorials has been ongoing since the 1990's when it was discovered that in many cemeteries throughout the UK fixing methods were inconsistent and in some cases very poor which led to memorials becoming dangerous.

Unfortunately, there are many reported cases of accidents due to unsafe memorials resulting in injuries but more concerning is that a number of deaths have occurred in cemeteries around the UK due to dangerous memorials falling on children and adults, most recently a death of an 8 year old boy occurred in a Glasgow cemetery in May 2015.

The Council and Veolia need to ensure the management of our memorials safely and in line with current best practice. The ICCM policy document on the Management of Memorials will be adopted by the Council and a regular memorial inspection scheme implemented to ensure every memorial is inspected once every 5 years. To compliment this policy, the ICCM do provide training to cemetery staff around memorial safety and how to undertake testing and recording under current best practice. This will provide an ideal opportunity for relevant staff to make progress with their memorial safety programme and the workshop will ensure that all the staff involved will be suitably trained and competent in the work they are asked to carry out.

In addition to the above and should new regulations be introduced the Council will consider a suitable registration scheme for memorial masons or adopt the national register provided by the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons (BRAMM) to ensure future compliance with industry best practice in the fixing of new memorials in the future.

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Review the current regulations and review in line with those drafted and contained as Appendix 1 of the ICCM report. Consult on revised regulations; and

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

- ❖ Ensure all topple testing is up to date and carried out on a regular basis.

Addressing Historic Non-Compliance of Regulations

Enforcing regulations in cemeteries is never an easy task due to the sensitivity and emotion attached to such matters. The Council must therefore ensure that any new regulations are clear to understand by both the public and Elected Members.

In order to be fair and reasonable it is recommended that we agree a policy on how to deal with any unauthorised items such as memorials that are currently within the sites from this point forward and once the new regulations are implemented.

A sensitive approach is recommended and this would be to '**draw a line in the sand**' and enforce the new regulations from the date of implementation only. There are of course potential issues with this approach with some users feeling they are being treated unfairly as they may not be permitted options that others using the service are already afforded. In order to counter this the new regulations will include a policy on how to deal with historical issues. An effective policy to consider is to leave any unauthorised items in situ and only deal with them when they become neglected after which time the Authority will photograph the grave, remove all unauthorised items and reinstate the grave back to the standard of the new regulations which would then be subject to those controls in the future. This action will be publicised before implementation to ensure that all cemetery users are aware of the Council's stance.

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Review the current regulations and review in line with those drafted and contained as Appendix 1 of the ICCM report. Consult on revised regulations; and
- ❖ Devise and implement a policy on non-compliance.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Muslim and other Faith Burials (Weekend and Bank Holiday Burials)

There are two issues that require considering. **1)** the lack of burial space at North Watford Cemetery as described above and **2)** the current lack of burials at weekends and bank holidays. An assessment was made in 2013 for out of hours burials and associated issues in relation to cover, demand, costs and opportunities. As the demand was so low and costs prohibitive, this was not pursued. The local Muslim community have once again asked the Council to consider opportunities for out of hours burials and how this could well be provided in Watford.

Strategy Aim - to assess what opportunities there may be for providing such a service, cost and logistical issues, and local demand. The demand is currently very low and there are alternatives locally but this needs reviewing in line with the increased population growth of other sectors.

It is essential to remember that the bereaved will have various religious and cultural differences and it is the duty of the Local Authority to take all reasonable steps to accommodate those needs in the provision of its service.

At present a burial can usually be accommodated at North Watford cemetery within 24 hours Monday to Friday however only limited provision is offered for Saturday mornings providing the booking is made before noon the previous day and Veolia / WBC staff are available.

There are a number of issues that will be considered to provide an enhanced burial service outside of the current usual working hours to include weekends and bank holidays. Consultation will be essential in developing this option.

Standard Requirements for an Enhanced Out of Hours Burial Service

In order for a burial to take place the death must first be registered with the Registrars of Births Deaths and Marriages in the District where the death occurred. This is a legal requirement under Section 15 of the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953.

As this process must be completed before burial the Registration Service must be available at weekends and Bank Holidays to carry out the statutory registration process. In addition to this it is usual at Watford for 2 gravediggers and the Cemetery Manager to attend all funerals.

In order to provide an out of hours service Watford Borough Council would need to implement a standby system every weekend and for bank holidays. It is arguable however whether religious holidays such as Christmas Day, Good Friday and Easter Sunday should be included in any agreement.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Standby costs alone would be **significant**, and in addition to this overtime costs would be incurred when staff are called out.

The Registration service must also be included in future consultation to ensure they are available to provide the required paperwork outside of normal office hours.

Cemetery users should also be consulted on the provision of extended burial times covering weekends. It should be remembered that for many Sundays are a traditional day to visit loved ones' graves and other cemetery users may raise concerns about any changes to the current permitted burial times.

Service Demand

Burial Figures for North Watford Cemetery are detailed below which shows around a fifth of all burials taking place at the site are for the Muslim community. It is known that there are a number of Muslim sects who use the facility, however for the purposes of this report total Muslim numbers have been used including the burial of children to ensure a complete picture is shown.

Year	No. of Full Burials	No. of Muslim Burials	% of Muslim Burials
2010	175	38	21%
2011	144	28	19%
2012	152	26	17%
2013	169	39	23%
2014	166	41	24%

5 Year Average	160 per year	34 per year (22 Adults 12 Children)	20%
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The above table shows demand for the service to be around 20% of all burials carried out at North Watford Cemetery to be for the Muslim Community, however of those only 9 have been arranged for a Saturday over the last 5 years. The trend however is increasing and in 2014 almost a quarter of all funerals were for the Muslim community.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Whilst there is a clear demand to provide a service for the Muslim Community the number of burials undertaken at weekends as a percentage of total Muslim burials is only 5% of all deaths. It is not clear from the data available whether any requests for weekend burials over the last 5 years have been declined due to operational reasons or regulations.

The average number of Muslim burials is currently 34 per year, it is clearly impossible to state exactly how many funerals will be required at weekends throughout the course of a whole year. The formula to offer a best estimate would be $34 \text{ deaths} \div 12 \text{ months} = 3 \text{ funerals per month}$. It would therefore be a safe estimate to assume at least one of those 3 would require a weekend funeral.

Cost vs Demand

There are potentially significant costs issues associated with the Council providing an weekend and bank holiday service and of course operational and staff resources to also consider. Engagement with a number of neighbouring authorities has already taken place; the results show a varying range of service levels being provided and a range of costs. However it should be noted that it does not appear that there is a 'perfect solution' already in place that could be easily adopted by Watford Borough Council and the Council has reviewed the results of this exercise together with the projected costs, resource implications and demand for the service in relation to this 10 year strategy.

The Council has considered allowing the Muslim community to manage their own burials entirely, but only on the same basis as currently is carried out in St. Albans where the "Gardens of Peace" currently manages out of hours burials on behalf of the council. They are a Registered Charity which operates a cemetery for all sections of the Muslim community based in Ilford but manages the out of hours service in St. Albans in partnership with the Council. It is important to note that this option would require the community to ensure that they comply fully with all relevant burial legislation and the processes set out by the Gardens of Peace.

Spatial Demand

There is also a general pressure on suitable burial space for all denominations and groups throughout the Watford area so whilst this is a significant issue for the Council it forms the basis for an overall strategy to identify burial land in general but does not preclude the fact that some existing areas of land are running out faster than others and so sourcing a viable alternative for the Muslim community remains paramount and is a priority.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Deliver a weekend and bank holidays service for the Muslim community and to work in partnership with the Gardens of Peace to deliver the service based on recipients covering the cost of the service; and
- ❖ Incorporate demand for Muslim burial space into the audit of burial space availability to the planning of alternative site proposals for the future. .



Improving Services for the Bereaved in Watford

Part 2 – Perception

Consultation and Engagement – identifying service demands

Watford Borough Council has an excellent track record of local community engagement and consultation, yet there had been no recent consultation with cemetery users, clients, funeral directors or the bereaved in recent years. Informal feedback has been received over the years that the service is a good service but issues arise over lack of availability, opening hours, Muslim burials availability etc. In 2010/11 Policy Development Scrutiny Committee set up a Task Group to review the services for the deceased. The Task Group met and produced a final report in November 2010, which was then considered by Cabinet at its meeting in December 2010. An action plan was produced and Policy Development Scrutiny Committee reviewed the action plan and asked for a further update in a year. Since then, no further engagement had occurred especially with users, direct and indirect until the 2015 review.

Strategy Aim – to develop a consultation and engagement plan with users, partners, faith groups, cemetery visitors to ascertain issues and feedback in relation to the cemetery service.

At present, no formal stakeholder groups exist connected to the Cemeteries service. Whilst there are informal groups and clear good working relationships are in place between management and funeral directors and memorial masons these relationships should be formalised and regular (perhaps twice yearly) meetings should be arranged to both gauge views and opinions of stakeholders and discuss future plans, changes and new ideas for the service.

This form of customer engagement can be extremely useful and beneficial to the service and pave the way for much improved relationships with regular service users.

Customer feedback from the bereaved is also important and should be sought through questionnaires soon after the funeral has taken place. This will help identify any perceived shortfalls in the service and allow them to be addressed quickly and allow regular improvements to the service.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Restructure the existing service and review opening times. Consult and identify needs of service users; and
- ❖ Develop a consultation and engagement plan to include Funeral Directors as well as carry out regular user surveys.

Benchmarking

Watford has traditionally managed cemeteries as a standalone service without any formal benchmarking although more informal benchmarking is carried out locally in relation to pricing structures.

Strategy Aim – To look at local, regional and national benchmarking in relation to pricing, quality and overall provision of service, grounds maintenance and make recommendations.

At present it is not possible to benchmark the service against anything other than the Charter for the Bereaved of which Watford Borough Council is a member.

Watford offers a Bronze level service based on the national scoring of the Charter for the Bereaved which is completed annually by Charter Members. There are 3 levels based on the score achieved, these being bronze, silver and gold.

The Charter is a good benchmarking tool and does allow for continuous improvement to the service by introducing new ideas and services and simply turning a No into a Yes on the annual questionnaire. The service has increased its score of previous years by making regular changes, this should continue and the service should challenge itself to achieve a silver level within the next 2 years.

No other benchmarking is regularly undertaken with the exception of checking fees and charges with neighbouring Authorities. With the exception of the Charter for the Bereaved the only other national benchmarking tool which could help the service is the APSE benchmarking service for cemeteries and crematoria. Although the annual return is quite detailed to complete the information returned can be extremely valuable and also puts the service into a benchmarking group which would allow for the sharing of good practice and ideas. In addition to this staff should be encouraged to attend regular ICCM Branch Meetings and events such as the ICCM Learning Convention to network and learn about new trends and ideas.

The formation of a Local Benchmarking group should be considered initially involving the Bereavement Service/Cemetery Managers of the Authorities who form the management committee of West Herts Crematorium namely:

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

- Dacorum Borough Council;
- Hertsmere Borough Council;
- St Albans City & District Council;
- Three Rivers District Council;
- Watford Borough Council; and
- West Herts Crematorium.

An agreed benchmarking template could be completed annually to compare service standards, costs and income and the group work together to look at ways to collectively improve. Quarterly meetings should be sufficient for the group to be effective and it may be surprising how useful the regular sharing of knowledge and experiences can be.

There are many benefits of establishing a local group in addition to sharing useful local data the benchmarking group can work effectively together to explore improved and efficient ways of working and look to identify collective opportunities that benefit all customers and service users. This may include items such as standardisation of application forms, memorial regulations, memorial safety policies and registration schemes.

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Establish a local benchmarking group with neighbouring Authorities; and
- ❖ Aim to achieve Chartered for the Bereaved Silver standard by 2018

Marketing of Cemeteries

Although signage at both cemeteries is now excellent, no publicity or marketing material exists for the cemeteries covering what is on offer, service provided, who actually provides it, costs, contact details. This is in stark contrast with the nearby West Herts Crematorium.

Strategy Aim – Assess opportunities for the marketing of the cemetery service in relation to the development of a brochure, social media, internet, advertising and other potential opportunities.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

As detailed above in the section covering income opportunities marketing of the service and the services offered is key to raising its profile and generating additional income.

West Herts Crematorium is an excellent example of how to produce good marketing material with glossy brochures, neatly drawn maps, information and application forms and lots of good quality information all with a specific corporate brand and logo which is easily recognisable. Quality information like this promotes a quality service and is clearly the way Watford need to go in marketing its cemetery services.

A brochure (including a detailed and professionally drawn map) promoting the services offered must be considered and include contact and ownership details about the sites as well as information around the types of services and facilities available, this would be essential should the Council decide to expand its current provision of services and consider provision of new memorial options, green burials or columbaria. The internet should also be used and dependent on local IT policy consideration should be given to a dedicated web page for the service. This could provide extensive information about the service, memorial options, price lists, forms and maps and be regularly updated to inform service users of any changes or upcoming events.

As detailed earlier once all of the historical records are back-fed onto the computer system links through the cemetery website could be used to access records and generate income. The service will also consider marketing and promoting itself through holding regular events such as an annual Christmas Memorial service or an open air memorial service during the summer. These could be sponsored by a Local Funeral Director or Memorial Mason and a collection made to be given to a local charity. Involving the Mayor at such events will help raise the profile of the service significantly. Consideration should also be given to working more with the local community and the service should look to assist with the formation of a Friends group, this is likely to be particularly beneficial to Vicarage Road Cemetery given its age and amount of local history it contains. A properly constituted friends group can seek charitable donations and grant funding to carry out repairs and improvements to sites and preserve local history. In the current period of austerity within local government seeking additional income sources to assist with improvements and preservation is sensible as is generating local public interest in the sites.

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Improved marketing of the service through a rebranding exercise and modernisation of all produced literature, application forms and information for the public. Explore option of a dedicated cemeteries web page;
- ❖ Develop income stream through using historical records to provide family history research information as well as accessing potential funding through Friends groups, community groups or similar.

Part 3 – Infrastructure and Environment

Quality of the grounds and cemetery as a Green space

The grounds of both cemeteries are maintained by Veolia having outsourced the service in July 2013. This covers all works related to grounds maintenance including grass cutting, shrub maintenance, weed control, tree management, litter management and clearance as well as grave digging / backfilling. The quality of the open space at North Watford Cemetery and Vicarage Road Cemetery is generally very good with recent improvements to the entrances, external works of both chapels, car parking and signage. However, there are no long term development plans for improving the grounds – they are simply maintained to an agreed standard. North Watford Cemetery has the potential for further improvements and could well satisfy Green Flag Award standards for entry to the award. Vicarage Road Cemetery may also have the potential for a future HLF Parks for People bid as it has considerable local historical interest.

***Strategy Aim** – to review the quality of the spaces and grounds maintenance specification against current standards and as part of any potential masterplan development, highlight opportunities for improvements. To also review and challenge the current practices related to grave digging and backfilling and ensuring full compliance with agreed good practice.*

The grounds maintenance at both sites is extremely good and of a very high standard. Grass is well maintained throughout both sites and there was no evidence of overgrown areas, poorly managed shrubberies or litter problems.

The maintenance specification provided to Veolia (Document P&OS16 – Cemeteries) has already been reviewed. The document is concise and covers general requirements for grave digging, backfilling and exhumation all of which are well covered and clearly set out in the specification.

The management of the grounds maintenance does not appear to be an issue given the high standards already at the site.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Green Flag Awards

Watford Borough Council already has a good track record in managing its parks and open spaces with Green Flag awards at 6 of its parks awarded in 2015. The cemeteries should be viewed as just as an important open space as the towns parks and achieving a green flag not only recognises the hard work and efforts of the staff working at the site but also raises the profile of the site and provides a mechanism to introduce a continuous method of improvement for the site.

All Green Flag sites are judged on 8 key criteria and a number of factors contribute to each of these headings as detailed below:



- **A Welcoming Place**
- **Healthy, Safe and Secure**
- **Clean and Well Maintained**
- **Sustainability (including recycling)**
- **Conservation and Heritage**
- **Community Involvement**
- **Marketing**
- **Management**



A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Cemeteries are still a fairly recent addition to the Green Flag process and the number of sites appears to grow on an annual basis. There are a number of benefits to achieving this nationally recognised award most notably the fact that it recognises the hard work and dedication of staff at the site and also serves to raise the profile of the service.

In looking at the key criteria above it should be noted that Watford cemeteries are clearly already some way towards satisfying the criteria to achieve a further two Green Flags for its cemeteries in the future. Some work is required of course such as the preparation of a management plan or strategy, improved marketing and community involvement, however given that the Council has already achieved 6 awards there is clearly an in-house resource that should be utilised to assist the cemetery service achieve Green Flag status in the future.

This should form the basis of an improvement strategy for the cemetery service to not only seek Green Flag recognition but also to drive continuous improvement through the service over a longer period.

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Look to generate interest with the local community with a view to establishing a Cemetery Friends Group;
- ❖ Hold and promote annual memorial services for all to attend. Suggest 1 summer and 1 winter event (Christmas);
- ❖ Explore options of additional income generating ideas through industry suppliers, Friends Groups and existing partners; and
- ❖ Review grounds and buildings maintenance specification to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the bereaved.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Building Infrastructure

Both cemeteries have a number of buildings including occupied lodges, chapels, ancillary buildings and maintenance yards. Some have been improved whereas others require investment or possible alternative uses sought. The recent Property Review needs to be taken into consideration as part of the assessment of buildings at both cemeteries.

Strategy Aim – To assess all buildings in both cemeteries in relation to condition, usage and accessibility and take into account the wider recommendations of the Property Review and to make further recommendations based on the needs and operation of the cemetery service.

Buildings at North Watford Cemetery

There are a total of 4 buildings at North Watford Cemetery all of which are in generally good condition externally. However, consideration should be given to improvements or alternative uses to some of these buildings.

- **Office & Living Accommodation (Main Entrance)**

It is not uncommon for cemetery lodges to continue to be occupied by operational staff and can be seen as a benefit to the service in terms of security whilst still generating an income through receiving an annual rent.

Information around the office has been covered in section 1 under the visitor experience and it is recommended that improvements are undertaken to make this more welcoming and consideration given to important areas such as records storage and security of staff working alone.

There is scope to extend the office to accommodate an improved store and would allow a complete remodelling of the main reception area. In addition to this consideration should be given to provide an external waiting area for mourners to gather under in advance of a funeral arriving.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

- **Toilets & Mess Room (Main Entrance)**

Opposite the main office at North Watford Cemetery is a building incorporating public toilets and a mess room utilised by staff from Veolia.

The toilets are currently adequate but consideration should be given to refurbishment in the near future and a review as to whether they satisfy current DDA requirements. The room between the toilets is currently utilised as a mess room and is used by Veolia staff however these staff are not connected to the cemetery service.

As stated previously, a better use of the building to be considered would be to offer a lease to an individual or a company to operate a cemetery related business from this building such as a florist or perhaps a memorial mason. Not only would this bring in a new income stream for the service from the lease but would further enhance the visitor experience at the site. Florists have successfully been opened at a number of sites around the UK generally by individuals looking to establish a new business. Not much space is required and the required infrastructure of water and electricity is already in place making this an excellent opportunity.

- **Mess Room & Operational Yard**

There is a small operational yard at North Watford Cemetery which is utilised by the staff contracted to Veolia. It provides adequate storage for plant and equipment and reasonable mess and toilet facilities for the staff. Security throughout the whole site is good given there is only a single entrance and the manager lives on site however the excavator whilst stored in the locked compound is not secured in a shed or container and a review of this should be considered if space allows.

- **Cemetery Chapel**

There is a burial chapel located in the centre of the site that is utilised for burial services. Externally it is attractive and well maintained and common of small burial chapels found in many cemeteries around the UK.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Internally the building requires investment to bring it up to a more acceptable including a problem with the roof which appears to have water ingress and dated and ineffective electric heaters. There is a basic music system used to provide music at services however this is only a domestic CD player and consideration should be given to installing something more commercial.

Buildings at Vicarage Road Cemetery

- **Living Accommodation**

At the main entrance to the site there is a large well maintained property. This is utilised as a domestic property in the same way as that at North Watford Cemetery but does not have an enquiries office attached. The occupant is employed by Veolia and undertakes duties associated with the security of the site. No changes are planned here.

- **Toilets**

There are toilets located close to the main entrance of the site and are generally kept locked.

- **Cemetery Chapel**

The chapel located at Vicarage Road is similar in size and design to that at North Watford Cemetery. It is also well maintained and attractive and has recently been restored.

Internally it is basic with hard wooden seats in place and there does not appear to be music system. It is however clean and well lit from the large ornate Victorian windows. The only heating is the electric heaters placed at a high level (similar to those at North Watford Cemetery). Should areas of Vicarage Road cemetery be reused in the future then this chapel may become more frequently used, however at present it may be better suited to an alternative but cemetery related use.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Review grounds and buildings maintenance specification to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the bereaved.

Growth and Expansion Opportunities – The Need for Space and Green Burials

No new grave spaces are available at Vicarage Road Cemetery and there is now limited space left at North Watford Cemetery. Burial space is especially limited in relation to the Muslim section which has circa 2 years of space remaining. The Council has identified 1 potential site at Lower Paddock Road on the site of the former parks depot (under council ownership). There are also no current opportunities for Green Burials in Watford.

Strategy Aim – To assess the local need for Green Burials, assess the success elsewhere through localised benchmarking and review the proposed alternative sites and scope for cemetery extensions, green burials and possible capacity. There is also a need to review how many years left there are at NWC based on current demand.

Burial Space is a major issue facing Burial Authorities throughout the UK and Watford is no different. We have recognised that space is running out and we need to identify options for sites in the future. As of 1st January 2011 records state that North Watford Cemetery had 4 hectares of land available for burials. 4 hectares = approximately 9.8 acres. However, examining the site shows that only approximately 1 acre would appear to be currently available for immediate use. A thorough site survey needs to be undertaken to establish an exact current position in relation to available land and mapped onto the GIS system to assess exact availability.

From the data supplied and based on there being 1 acre of land available it has been calculated that there is currently around 12 years' worth of burials remaining at North Watford Cemetery based on current death rates and land usage. Calculations state that the figure could be 12 years however it is known that certain areas are unsuitable for burial and cannot be utilised, therefore the area available will be closer to **7- 9 years of space remaining**. At present the service is undertaking an average of 160 full burials per year this is made up of around 75 new graves and 85 re-opened graves.

The common formula to identify available burial space is:

- number of acres available (1) ÷ average number of annual burials (75) x number of graves per acre (900) = number of years available (12)

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

If new grave spaces are set out as 9' x 4' (36 square foot) most cemeteries can accommodate around 900 graves in an acre of land to include paths and minor landscaping. Based on this assumption North Watford Cemetery currently has 12 years of burial space left in total, however some of the land area is known to be unsuitable for burial reducing that capacity to an estimated 7-9 years and consideration has also to be given for provision of land for different faiths such as the Muslim community.

Whilst 7-9 years may seem a considerable life span for the cemetery it is essential to be aware that establishing a new burial ground can take a considerable amount of time (3-4 years) due to the needs associated to satisfying the Environment Agency and gaining planning consent. Therefore, work needs to commence as soon as possible in looking to identify new ground and ensure it is reserved for future use or alternatively/additionally to examine ways to increase the capacity of the land to lengthen the period of availability such as grave re-use or policy restrictions on who can be accepted for burial, and charging policies to deter non-residents.

Grave Re-Use

The ICCM have previously undertaken a study of Vicarage Road Cemetery and recommended that grave re-use could be considered at this site either through legislation under the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 to reclaim graves where the rights have expired and have never been exercised. An alternative option being undertaken by other Authorities at present is to apply for consent to the local church diocese to exhume remains from consecrated areas of burial. These remains can then be re-buried at the end of the row of the same section freeing up new space for burials. Whilst this can be sensitive consideration will be given to this option at Vicarage Road cemetery. There are also a number of practical considerations to be assessed here including accessibility and for grave digging.

New Cemetery Options

There is often a perception among residents that “there is never enough green space”, but when Watford assessed the amount of green space over a range of open space typologies (Parks & Gardens; Amenity Green Space; Natural Green Space; Outdoor Sports Facilities; Children and Young People; Cemeteries), as a town, Watford is very well endowed, and many of the wards have excellent provision of green space over a range of typologies. Some deficiencies do occur, especially with regards to natural green space, but overall, Watford is well provided for. However, accessibility is an issue for many and the Watford Green Spaces Strategy advocates adopting green infrastructure principles and developing a strategic green space network for the town. By setting standards of provision Watford can concentrate on those sites that are most important which need to be protected at all costs as well as continually enhanced.

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

But there are a number of sites that are not performing well and may be deemed low quality and/or low value. Several sites fall into this category at present. There is a clear policy on how these sites should be treated; either enhancing the quality of these green spaces as long as it is possible to improve and enhance the value of them or if this is not possible, consider the space surplus to requirements in terms of its current use and consider alternative uses (which could include potential provision as cemetery space). However, this must be considered in the light of wider planning policies (Local Plan Part 2) such as the need to determine **other typology deficiencies** in the area within distance thresholds, whether enhancement is realistic and determine community value by local consultation.

Woodland and Natural Burial

Woodland and Natural Burial grounds have been operational in the UK since 1993 when the first area was opened in Carlisle as part of its existing cemetery. Since then the concept of woodland burial and associated services such as natural burial and meadowland burial has grown steadily in the UK resulting in both the private and public sector venturing into this market.

The basic concept is that the deceased is laid to rest in an existing woodland area, or a woodland is created around new burials and the site managed as a natural woodland area. The Council will visit providers in the area to gain their views and also look at the service provided by private sector organisations.

With the exception of Woodcock Hill Cemetery and Carpenders Park there appears to be no other provider in the area of woodland or natural burials.

It is essential that the Council establish early what type of woodland burial area it intends to provide.

Action Plan:-

- ❖ Explore woodland and natural burial options as well as assess opportunities for new formal sites in the Borough in the light of wider planning policies (Local Plan 2); and
- ❖ Review the previous ICCM report on grave reuse at Vicarage Road cemetery and undertake consultation on this issue.

Action Plan & Key Recommendations

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
1.0		Prepare a comprehensive Cemetery Strategy document for the Cemetery Service based on the ICCM Cemetery Review of 2015.	CT	S	Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An agreed direction of travel for the service • Allows prioritisation over the short, medium and long terms • Provides Corporate buy in to the modernisation and improvements to the service • Ability to plan and budget for required changes
2.0		Review current staffing arrangements with a view to create an additional post to support the Cemetery Manager. Review the existing SLA with West Herts Crematorium	CT / CMT	S	Revenue budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensures a more robust and customer friendly service can be provided • Provide a constant office presence • Provides a more structured arrangement for cover in the event of leave and sickness

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
3.0		Restructure the existing service and review opening times. Consult and identify needs of service users	CT / CMT	S	Existing staff resource Revenue budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved service provision • Provide more traditional 9-5 Service • Staff always available to deal with bookings/queries/phone calls
4.0		Review office layout and consider extending the building to provide a more adequate storage space for records	CT / CMT B&P	S,M	Capital budget Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More attractive and welcoming environment • Improved compliance with statutory legislation
5.0		Undertake a Risk Assessment of the office space and design a more inviting area that also protects the staff from any potential health and safety issues and disregard the use of the door to the managers accommodation for this purpose	CMT B&P	S	Existing staff resource Revenue and capital budgets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More attractive and welcoming environment • Improved compliance with statutory legislation • Safer working environment for staff

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
6.0		Redecorate and modernise the office and reception area	B&P	S	Capital budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More attractive and welcoming environment • Improved facilities for the bereaved
7.0		Discuss the current computerised administration package with the supplier and explore all options available (including market testing of new products) for improving its functionality and usage. Assess opportunities for digitising records and exploring income generation opportunities.	ICT / CMT	S	Revenue budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved data storage • Improved records management • Improved booking service • Ensure daily offsite data back up
8.0		<p>Assess and carry out an audit of financial processes carried out at the cemetery, evaluating current processes and highlighting efficiencies or alternatives in relation to administration.</p> <p>Implement an Action Plan derived from the analysis of the risk assessment.</p>	CMT	S	Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved Service Provision

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
9.0		Meet with industry suppliers to discuss the provision of new memorialisation in particular columbaria niches at both sites and consider development of a formal memorial garden near to the car park and entrance of the site at North Watford Cemetery.	CMT Veolia	S,M	Capital budget Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Generation • Improved Service Provision • Practical use of existing assets • Use of otherwise redundant spaces in both cemeteries
10.0		Review current memorials and seek to generate income from existing infrastructure through items such as benches and trees	CMT Veolia	S	Existing staff resource Revenue budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income Generation • Improved Service Provision • Practical use of existing assets (benches, trees etc)
11.0		Look to provide improved waiting facilities for the bereaved through a mourners shelter near to the entrance of the site to allow public to wait in advance of a funeral cortege arriving	CMT	M	Existing staff resource Capital budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved public facilities

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
12.0		Market the building opposite the main entrance to North Watford Cemetery as a potential business premises	CT Legal Veolia	S, M	Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Income Generation Improved Service Provision Practical use of existing assets
13.0		Review the current regulations and review in line with those drafted and contained as Appendix 1 of the ICCM report. Consult on revised regulations. Devise and implement a policy on non-compliance.	CT Legal	S	Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Modernised regulations Improved Service Provision Better meeting needs of the Bereaved Establish a way forward to deal with historic issues of non conformity
14.0		Deliver a weekend and bank holidays service for the Muslim community and to work in partnership with the Gardens of Peace to deliver the service based on recipients covering the cost of the service;	CT / CMT Legal Veolia	S	Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will provide an enhanced service to those who require funeral services at weekends Provides a fully transparent and costed option Allows for the Authority to decide how the costs should be attributed

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
15.0		Establish a local benchmarking group with neighbouring Authorities including maintaining regular reviews and benchmarking of other council charges and establish fees & charges that assist in managing the demand from non-residents and recover costs of the service.	CMT	S, M	Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share good practice • Improved local working relationships • Establish annual benchmarking data sets
16.0		Look to generate interest with the local community with a view to establishing a Cemetery Friends Group.	CMT	M	Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generates public interest in sites • Can lead to securing grant funding for infrastructure improvements • Community benefit
17.0		Develop a consultation and engagement plan to include Funeral Directors as well as carry out regular user surveys.	CMT	S	Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community benefit

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
18.0		Review grounds and buildings maintenance specification to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the bereaved	CT Veolia	L	Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures regular review of costs Can make changes to meet new or future demands
19.0		Explore options of additional income generating ideas through industry suppliers, Friends Groups and existing partners;	CMT	M, L	Existing staff resource Revenue budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consult on the implementation of new goods and services with key stakeholders Explore options utilising existing partners (Veolia) Establish new memorial schemes and ideas from current industry suppliers
20.0		Improved marketing of the service through a rebranding exercise and modernisation of all produced literature, application forms and information for the public. Explore option of a dedicated cemeteries web	CMT	S, M, L	Existing staff resource Revenue budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improved customer experience Better accessibility to information Improved income opportunities

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
		microsite				
21.0		Develop income stream through using historical records to provide family history research information as well as accessing potential funding through Friends groups, community groups or similar.	CMT	M, L	Existing staff resource Revenue budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate additional income through using existing records • Opportunities to partner with existing specialist companies
22.0		Hold and promote annual memorial services for all to attend. Suggest 1 summer and 1 winter event (Christmas).	CMT Veolia	M, L	Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generates interest in the service • Good local PR • Opportunity to generate funds for local charities

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
23.0		<p>Explore woodland and natural burial options (at Lower Paddock Road Depot only) as well as assess opportunities for new and alternative sites in the Borough in line with the current Green Spaces Strategy and in line with wider planning policies (Local Plan 2). This will include re-assessment of existing green spaces and whether other typologies of open spaces could be re-designated as cemetery usage.</p> <p>Incorporate demand for Muslim burial space into the audit of burial space availability to the planning of alternative site proposals for the future.</p>	CT DC	S,M	<p>Existing staff resource</p> <p>Capital budget if land purchased or developed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New burial option • New Income stream
24.0		<p>Review the previous ICCM report on grave reuse at Vicarage Road cemetery and undertake</p>	CT Veolia	M, L,	<p>Existing staff resource</p> <p>Revenue budget</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential to re-use old burial space

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

No.	Corporate Aim	Action	*Who	S,M,L Priority	Resource Requirements	Outcomes and Benefits
		consultation on this issue				
25.0		Consider options related to provision of land outside the Borough if options within the borough boundary are not successful.	CT	L	Capital budget if land purchased or developed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New burial option
26.0		Aim to achieve Chartered for the Bereaved Silver standard by 2018	CMT	M	Existing staff resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good local PR Improved customer experience

DEFINITIONS

CT – Client Team

Com – Communications Team

CMT – Cemetery Management Team

B&P – Buildings and Projects Team

Improving Services for the



A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

DC – Development Control (Planning)

S – up to 24 months

M – 2 years to 5 years

L – 5 years to 10 years

For further information, please contact

A Cemetery Strategy for Watford Borough Council 2016-2026

Environmental Services Client Team

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WATFORD
BOROUGH
COUNCIL