

Scrutiny Commission 4th April 2023

Report Title	Green Burial Options in North Northamptonshire - Introductory Report
Report Author	Iain Smith Assistant Director Regulatory Services Iain.Smith@northnorthants.gov.uk

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Images of Warren Hill and Rothwell Cemetery

Appendix 2 – Natural Burials – Guidance for Operators

1. Purpose of Report

1.1. At the Full Council meeting held on 24th November 2022, the following Motion was approved:

“This Council resolves to scrutinise the current options for residents to choose a green burial in North Northamptonshire. Further, to develop a Green Burial Ground policy to enable appropriate guidance to be given to interested operators with potential areas identified.”

1.2 To enable this work to be taken forward, the Scrutiny Commission requested that an initial, introductory report is brought to a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission setting out the current position as to green burial options in North Northamptonshire.

2. Executive Summary

2.1. The concept of natural burial is now over 30 years old. ‘Green,’ ‘woodland’ and ‘natural’ burial sites are an established feature of funeral practice in the UK.’

In operational terms there is various adopted nationwide ‘best practice,’ and industry advice available to ensure that future green burial grounds meet expected standards and support any future feasibility study, policies etc.

The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) have extended their Bereaved Charter, to promote natural burial as an equal alternative to traditional burial and cremation.

This report sets out the

- Current North Northamptonshire offer

- Current sub regional offer for green burials
- best practice around green burial sites
- issues
- choices
- next steps

3. Recommendations

- 3.1. This is an introductory piece of work and sets out the options available to the Commission regarding a commitment to green burials as an offer to residents.
- 3.2. Scrutiny Commission is asked to consider the details within this report and to either:
- (i) recommend that a full feasibility study be commissioned at a cost to be determined and bring the results back to a future Scrutiny Commission meeting
- Or
- (ii) To take no further action.

4. Report Background

4.1 Current North Northamptonshire offer

For North Northamptonshire we currently have an area dedicated to green burials at Rothwell Cemetery, Loddington Road, Rothwell and a woodland ashes scattering area at Warren Hill Crematorium, Rothwell Road, Kettering (see images attached at Appendix 1).

The first burial at the Rothwell site took place in October 2001 and we currently have 68 interments in that area.

The current capacity and uptake of the green burial ground at Rothwell is:

- 113 plots
- 68 internments
- 2 expected per year,

Therefore, the provision at Rothwell should remain available as an option for a further 43 years.

- 4.2 The current national split is 78.5% in favour of cremation over burial. In North Northamptonshire, the split is 85% in favour of cremation.
- 4.3 Green burial grounds tend to be privately operated. Although we are not aware of any private green burial sites in North Northamptonshire, we are aware of other local authorities that have allocated land as we have at Rothwell, by providing an area for green burials within an existing cemetery.

4.3 Current sub regional offer for green burials.

The nearest alternative 'green burial' sites outside North Northamptonshire are:

- Cosgrove Green Burial Meadow – Northampton Road, **Milton Keynes**, Buckinghamshire MK19 7DF

Wellingborough/Rushden Funeral Directors use:

- Greenhaven Woodland Burial Ground – Yelvertoft Road, Lilbourne, **Rugby**, Warwickshire, CV23 0SZ
- St Albans Woodland burial ground, **Keysoe**, Bedfordshire, MK44 2JP (only reserved graves now available)
- Tithe Green Burial Ground, Luffenham Road, **Ketton**, Stamford, PE9 3RN (Rushden Funeral Directors)

Northampton Funeral Directors use:

- Olney Green Burial ground, Yardley Road, **Olney**, MK46 5EH

Corby Funeral Directors use:

- Windmills Natural Green Burial Ground, Hartwell Road, **Northampton**, NN7 2JT

4.5 There are then further sites in the Leicester/Cambridgeshire area.

- The Willows Natural Burial Ground, Barsby Leicester
- Scraftoft Burial Ground, Leicester
- Muchwood Green Burial Ground, Ramsey, Huntingdon

4.6 Best practice regarding new green burial grounds, requires the Authority to follow due planning process, and the Ministry of Justice guidance in the attached document 'Natural Burial Grounds – Guidance for Operators' and the Environment Agency requirements at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/protecting-groundwater-from-human-burials/protecting-groundwater-from-human-burials>

4.7 There is also a view that new green burial grounds should be stand-alone sites i.e., not sited with an existing cemetery or at the very least accessed via a separate entrance to reach the said 'green' area, to ensure maximum uptake. Location and landscape/landscaping are also key factors.

5. Issues and Choices

5.1 Issues

Natural burials are at this time a niche market led by the private sector but with increasing awareness of climate change and environmental issues, it will grow. However, as experience with crematoria shows, the private sector is swift to

move into a potential market, which is a threat to anything this Council may wish to offer.

Funeral directors continue to be the gatekeeper to the funeral market. If a customer approaches a larger funeral director to request a natural burial, it is likely that they will have access to their own resources and unlikely that the Council cemetery will be used. This should be seriously considered as it may significantly limit the available market.

The scope for income generation with natural burials beyond the burial fees is unknown currently. A form of annual maintenance fee will need to be included, as traditional memorials etc. are not permitted yet the site will still need to be maintained (although the purchase and planting of native trees and shrubs as memorials could be explored). If this is not possible then the costs will be the responsibility of the Authority. Consideration will have to be given as to how to set a reasonable fee which is competitive in the market and covers costs.

Given other pressures, including the development and growth of towns and villages across North Northamptonshire and the capacity of existing cemeteries, there is a need to invest in current cemetery grounds and ensure there is sufficient provision of additional future traditional cemetery ground space based on the expected current life of cemetery grounds (see below), which may well need to take a higher priority for North Northamptonshire Council at this time.

Facility	Estimated capacity (years) - Figures from 2023
Warren Hill Cemetery	35 (14 in original area)
Broughton Cemetery	11 (potential for extension)
Burton Latimer Cemetery	16
Cransley Cemetery	64
Desborough Cemetery	8
Pytchley Cemetery	241
Rothwell Cemetery (Traditional)	10
Rothwell (Green)	86
Rothwell (Muslim)	31
Corby Shire Lodge Cemetery	20
W'boro Doddington Road Cemetery	Awaiting figure
W'boro Stanton Cross (proposal)	5000m ²
Non NNC (Town Council provision) *	
Thrapston	Aware there is a lack of capacity
Higham Ferrers	10
Irthlingborough	20 – 25
Oundle	50
Raunds	Full
Rushden	7

*Once these cemeteries are full, there will be an impact on NNC cemeteries or a request to assist with the provision of new sites.

5.2 Choices

The current level of demand for green burials is low and future demand is unknown. There will be a future increase in demand if there is evidence that a green burial does have a much lower impact on the environment and if it proves to be a less costly service. However, with the current level of demand, there is still 43 years capacity at the current 'green burial' site at Rothwell Cemetery.

Outside of North Northamptonshire, as listed above, there is a variety of private provision options for North Northamptonshire residents. The first green burial site was set up in Carlisle in 1993, and the number of sites has steadily grown since then.

There are now over 270 green burial sites in the UK and people are becoming increasingly aware of and interested in green burials, but there are few statistics available. Membership fees are based on the number of burials per year, with the upper limit being 71 – 80 burials per year. A recent survey found that around ten per cent of people say that they would like a natural burial¹.

Scrutiny could consider the following if they wish to include work on green burial options and the development of a policy going forward.

- (a) 'How has the first generation of 'green' burial grounds developed and, can they meet ever-more acute demands in terms of climate resilience and sustainability whilst remaining financially viable?'
- (b) Is there a demand for 'green' burials within North Northamptonshire and would residents choose a green burial ground provided by the Council rather than a private facility?
- (c) Should investment in a "green burial offer" override the need for investment in current traditional cemetery grounds for future use?

6. **Next Steps**

6.1. A feasibility study could be undertaken to scope out the considerations of offering a further green burial facility within North Northamptonshire, to enable a decision on whether a green burial ground is an option within North Northamptonshire. This should include.

- (a) Suitability of land owned by the Council.
- (b) Identification of suitable land which the Council could purchase for the purpose of providing a green burial ground within North Northamptonshire.
- (c) The requirements for providing a green burial ground.
- (d) The scoping of costs for providing a green burial ground.

6.2 A report establishing the provision and capacity of traditional cemetery grounds and offerings should also be provided, to allow for the future planning of sufficient cemetery ground capacity to meet ongoing demand in North Northamptonshire

7. Implications (including financial implications)

7.1. Resources and Financial

- 7.1.1 If the decision is made to commission a feasibility report, then an initial estimate for a desk top review would be around £10k (subject to confirmation via formal quotations against a project brief). In the first instance, this cost should be accommodated within the existing 23/24 budgets for the Place and Economy Directorate. However, if this were not achievable, a request to use the 23/24 Corporate Contingency Budget, which currently stands at £3.746m, would be required the use of the contingency budget would be reported to the Executive as part of the monthly budget monitoring report.
- 7.1.2 Whilst the 'one-off' costs for the feasibility study could be accommodated within existing budgets either in the Place and Economy Directorate or from the Corporate contingency budget. The feasibility Study will need to consider the wider business case and the costs and benefits that could result from this project, this could include costs, relating to staffing, land acquisition, provision and maintenance of required infrastructure, procurement, ICT and any additional income that could be generated from this project and whether this would result in an overall cost pressure or cost benefit to the authority. Furthermore, before progressing with this project the cost benefit would need to be considered against the cost of future maintenance and further provision of traditional cemetery grounds in North Northamptonshire as part of the Council's wider strategy around the future funding of Bereavement Services provision.

7.2. Legal and Governance

- 7.2.1. There are no legal implications arising from this report as it is a discussion paper to facilitate a decision on whether to explore the offer of green burials by North Northamptonshire Council in the future.

7.3. Relevant Policies and Plan

None have been identified for this paper.

7.4. Risk

- 7.4.1. There are no relevant risks in the corporate risk register nor any new risks to be recorded in the risk register because of this report.
- 7.4.2. If a green burial site was to be considered, then risks will arise, such as;
- (a) the means to provide ongoing funding to maintain the site to standards against a potential deficit of income generation as compared to traditional cemeteries through a lack of a traditional memorial offer.
 - (b) the pressure on current burial sites regarding space going forward and maintenance of current provision;

(c) the uptake of a green burial offering.

leading to consideration as to whether resources need to focus on traditional burial sites and leave the green burial offer to private sites as is the current position, or would the Council wish to provide both.

7.5. Consultation

7.5.1 To ensure the offer is what is required by potential service users, consultation and engagement would need to be undertaken. Local Funeral Directors and Service Users would need to be consulted on:

- (a) future demand for additional green burial sites
- (b) services/standards expected to meet service user demand against potential NNC sites available
- (c) and/or 'call for sites' as part of any future 'green burial policy' development and/or service provision.

7.5.2 Our own research via the ONS shows – Deaths in North Northamptonshire over the following years (*):

January 2020 – December 2020 = 3513

January 2021 – December 2021 = 3436

January 2022 – September 2022 = 2580 *latest information available.

(*) we have no information on the number of these deaths that resulted in green burials.

7.5.3 A snapshot of views from 9 local funeral directors indicates that are potentially 240 green burial opportunities per year. However only 1 respondent replied that they had been asked to provide them, while 8 would be interested if green burials were offered locally.

7.6. Consideration by the Executive

7.6.1. This is a first report to enable discussion on whether the Council moves to consider offering a green burial service within North Northamptonshire and has not been considered by the Executive at this stage.

7.7. Equality Implications

7.7.1. There are no equality implications resulting from this discussion report. Should the decision be made that a feasibility paper is required, then the appropriate Equality Screening Assessment will be completed as part of the ongoing process.

7.8. Climate Impact

7.8.1. Any feasibility study would need to include an assessment regarding the environmental impact differences between a traditional and a green burial.

Sources do quote some statistics between the two, but these would need to be verified. In addition, the landscape of a green burial cemetery, by the nature of it, has a lack of memorials thereby creating a more natural environment and the use of more sustainable coffins, should have a measurable lower impact on the environment.

7.8.2. There is also the need to evaluate whether existing crematoria should be upgraded to greener technologies and if so with what and when together with consideration of the implications that funding and completing of the work would bring.

7.9. **Community Impact**

7.9.1. If land is identified, which is either owned by the Council or is suitable for purchase by the Council as a green burial ground, then consideration will need to form part of the feasibility study of any distinct community impact as a result.

7.10. **Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.10.1. At this time, there are no implications under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, for the Council to consider under its equal statutory responsibility with the Police to exercise its various functions with 'due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area'.

8. **Background Papers**

8.1. **¹Source**

[Ask Statista Research](#)

Release date

January 2021

Region

United Kingdom

Survey period

June to July 2020

Number of respondents

1,606*

Age group

18 years and older

Method of interview

Online survey

Supplementary notes

*100 funeral directors and 1,506 people involved in organizing a funeral over the past 4 years

²[Natural Death Centre](#)