

Agenda Item	11
Report No	CP/23/23

The Highland Council

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 31 August 2023

Report Title: Bereavement Services – Project Updates

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the Council's Bereavement Services projects to maintain burial ground capacity and crematorium services for the Highlands.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note:

- i. the progress of burial ground extensions in Highland;
- ii. the monitoring and governance provided by the Bereavement Services Project Board;
- iii. the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development;
- iv. work has been commissioned to review the options for cremator replacement at Inverness Crematorium and a further update will be provided to Members when the final report is completed; and
- v. the range of improvements being undertaken and developed at the Inverness Crematorium.

3. Implications

3.1 Resource – the capital budget approved for this service area 23/24 is £2.226m and funding for future years will be considered as part of the Council's ongoing capital review.

3.2 Legal – The Council has a statutory obligation to manage burial provision, memorial safety and cremations as set out in the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016.

3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) – The burial ground capacity project works with local communities where there may be changes to future burial ground provision in an area.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever – There are not considered to be Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications related to the burial ground capacity projects. Energy use and ongoing compliance with emission standards are key factors in projects related to

any changes to the cremation plant at Inverness Crematorium and appropriate technical advice will be taken for these projects.

- 3.5 Risk – If burial ground extensions or new sites are not provided there is a risk that the Council will be unable to provide burials in some locations to meet the expectations and preferences of communities. The establishment of a project board for proactive oversight and support for projects serves to reduce service risks.
- 3.6 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people) – The safety of staff and visitors in burial grounds is a statutory obligation for local authorities and memorial safety inspections are undertaken to reduce risks.
- 3.7 Gaelic – There are not considered to be any Gaelic implications.

4. Background

- 4.1 Section 3 of the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 requires each local authority to provide at least one burial ground within its Council area. The Highland Council has 245 burial grounds and Appendix 1 provides a breakdown of burial grounds per ward. The Highland Council also operates Inverness Crematorium, located at Kilvean, Inverness.
- 4.2 The table below details the number of cremations and burials undertaken since 2017.

Year	No. Cremations	No. Burials	totals
2017	1127	1690	2817
2018	1240	1771	3011
2019	1237	1594	2831
2020	1239	1445	2684
2021	1264	1713	2977
2022	1403	1677	3080

5. Burial Ground Capacity Projects

- 5.1 Through the capital programme the Council aims to provide appropriate burial ground provision in the Highlands. The team are reviewing burial ground extensions where current capacity is less than 10 years based on past trends. Information on burials and lair sales is monitored on a weekly basis following submission from all bereavement services administrative teams.
- 5.2 In August 2022, a project board was established with the purpose to lead and support the work of the team delivering burial ground extensions and new sites. The board ensures good governance in delivering the programme and the remit has been expanded to include all bereavement services capital projects including:
- Projects to develop burial ground extensions and new burial ground sites
 - Projects to maintain, develop and improve Inverness Crematorium
 - Projects to maintain existing burial grounds including works related to the memorial safety programme
 - Projects to support communities to maintain existing war memorials.

- 5.3 The Bereavement Services Project Board meets monthly, and membership includes key internal partners in delivering the projects such as the Estates management team, the Project Design Unit team and Finance. Current membership of the Board is:
- Project Sponsor: ECO Communities & Place
 - Lead and Senior User: Strategic Lead - Environmental Health & Bereavement Services
 - Project Manager: Bereavement Services Project Manager
 - Project Support: Project Co-ordinator: Burial Ground capacity
 - Senior Suppliers: Property Manager (Estates Management), Principal Engineer
 - Finance: Principal Accountant
 - Project Assurance: Programme Manager
 - Administrative Support: Service Secretary
- 5.4 The Board recognises the challenges in some areas with burial ground provision with it becoming increasingly difficult to identify available land for development of extensions or for new burial grounds. The reasons include:
- a) land availability and purchase cost.
 - b) developments costs.
 - c) land suitability and geology – land conditions and requirements must comply with SEPA guidelines for burial grounds, be relatively flat land with little or no rock formations.
 - d) regulatory requirements – the selection of any new sites or extensions must not cause any pollution to the environment, including groundwater and this is regulated by SEPA.
 - e) acceptability with local Planning considerations.
- 5.5 The team are progressing the priority sites and the Bereavement Services Project Manager has liaised with Members on priority sites where there are significant challenges such as in the Fort William area. Progress on the current approved projects is summarised in **Appendix 2**. This includes key dates and provides for effective governance through the Project Board.
- 5.6 As can be seen, the majority of projects are on track with a green RAG status. Projects recently completed include new extensions at Chapelhill, Easter Ross and Princynain, Dornoch. Photos of the completed sites are in **Appendix 3**. On other sites additional lairs have been identified and prepared on the existing burial grounds. This ensures effective use of the existing asset and allows additional time to review future options for appropriate extension or new site in the local area.
- 5.7 Two sites, Broadford Strath and Tomnacross are currently shown as an amber RAG status. A contract was awarded in July for additional capacity within Broadford Strath and options for additional capacity on the existing Tomnacross burial ground are being reviewed.
- 5.8 As highlighted, Glen Nevis burial ground in Fort William is estimated to reach full capacity by the end of 2025. Significant work has been done locally to identify a new site with adverts being placed in local press and over 20 sites being reviewed. Unfortunately, ground conditions are challenging, and a suitable site has yet to be identified. Investigations are ongoing into possible sites and local Members will continue to be updated on the position.

5.9 In addition to the specific capital approved for 23/24, the team have been taking forward works funded through the Health and Prosperity Strategy investment. This has been beneficial in taking forward additional projects as detailed in the table below. Against the total budget of £400k remains a balance of £210k at April 2023; the estimated outturn is a nil balance by March 2024.

Name	Area	Comments
Daviot	Inverness	Works complete - lairs available in extension. 50 years+ capacity (£83k)
Cille a'Bhealaich	Skye	Contract awarded to increase capacity on existing site - additional 38 lairs (approx. 6 years capacity) (£15k)
Portnalong	Skye	Options for additional capacity on existing site being reviewed (budget estimate £20k)
Morar Beoraid	Lochaber	Additional capacity on existing site - 80 lairs (approx. 11.1 years additional capacity) (£20k)
Lohcarron	Wester Ross	Additional capacity - additional 100 lairs (approx. 20 yrs capacity) (£10k)
Kishorn	Wester Ross	Land investigation undertaken (£3k)
Tain	Tain	Land available for future extension - investigation undertaken (budget estimate £30k)
Skeabost/Borve	Skye	Land available for site – investigations being undertaken (budget estimate £25k)
Ullapool Morefield	Wester Ross	Additional capacity on existing site complete - additional 36 lairs (approx. 10 years additional capacity) (£17k) created through reconfiguration of a road and storage area. Further works planned on existing extension to allow significant number of lairs to be available for sale, with 50 years+ capacity (budget estimate £13k).
Portree	Skye	Additional capacity on existing site - to create 26 single depth lairs (approx. 1.3 additional years capacity). (£6k)
Duror	Lochaber	works planned on existing site to allow lairs to be available for sale with estimated 25 years+ capacity (budget estimate £20k)
Croy	Inverness	Works planned on existing extension to allow significant number of lairs to be available for sale with estimated 50 years+ capacity (budget estimate £20k)
Inverness Crematorium	Inverness	£100k identified to facilitate installation of new memorial options and improve site for visitors including new paths and improvements to the flower court and cloisters area. This is discussed in more detail at section 6 to this report.

5.10 To support the ongoing review of the Capital Programme, detailed work has been undertaken in respect of burial grounds that are forecasted to reach capacity in the next 10 years (**Appendix 4**). It shows 28 burial grounds are currently forecasted to require capital funding to provide extensions or new sites at a total cost of £3.6m and will be considered as part of the Council's ongoing capital review.

6. Inverness Crematorium

6.1 Inverness Crematorium provides a full cremation service for the Highlands, with over 1400 cremations conducted in 2022. The crematorium is inspected annually by Scottish Government inspectors and every 5 years by the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities.

The Scottish Government's Senior Inspector of Burial, Cremation and Funeral Directors (Scotland) carried out their last annual inspection in November 2022 and found *"Inverness Crematorium to be operating to a high standard with no shortcomings noted to any aspect of the cremation process, with good practice observed throughout the different stages. The Cremation Authority are very fortunate in having such a*

dedicated and experienced small team who collectively are providing a first class service to the local community and beyond". The Cremation Inspector from the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities carried out their last 5-year inspection in October 2021 and found Inverness Crematorium provided *"an excellent level of service and did not feel it necessary to make any recommendations"*. The Crematorium was fully compliant and reviewing over 80 points of interest scored 97.2%.

- 6.2 Work has already started on a project to review the options for replacement of the current cremators. There are two key drivers for this project:
- a) The UK Government have indicated tighter emission standards for crematorium will be required. Although an exact date has yet to be confirmed there are indications that updated plant will be required by 2027 for both existing and new crematorium.
 - b) Unfortunately, the supplier of the current cremators, ATI, has ceased trading. Robust arrangements are already in place for the regular servicing and maintenance of the plant.
- 6.3 It is forecasted that the work to replace the cremators will take approximately 12 months. Although as detailed at 6.2 (a) the updated plant does not need to complete until 2027, work has already been commissioned to review the options for Inverness Crematorium and the final report is expected in September 2023. A further update will be provided to Members on this matter in due course.
- 6.4 As reported at 5.9, there is £100k funded through the Health and Prosperity Strategy investment to support ongoing improvements at the Crematorium. These are aimed at improving the experience of families and visitors to the crematorium and the range of memorial and remembrance options. These works are in addition to specific maintenance issues which are already being arranged such as re-lining of the car park and required re-painting of handrails.
- 6.5 The progress to date includes a new paved area by the car park as shown in **Appendix 5**. This new area has a number of purposes as it will allow movement of families and visitors from the chapel to the car park via the flower court and cloisters without disturbing waiting parties. The route through the flower court and cloisters also raises awareness of the remembrance tower and the memorial option of the remembrance books. As shown in the design in Appendix 5 the circular area will be used for memorial benches with options to install a central memorial feature or a memorial tree. The design also allows further paths to be installed in the future allowing access to possible new remembrance gardens.
- 6.6 Other improvement options being developed include the Digitisation of remembrance books to allow digital display within the crematorium and online is also being progressed and available from 24/25. Subject to further engagement with Members and stakeholders, officers are also looking to take forward further memorial options such as wall plaques in the flower court, and other products to hold cremation urns. The aim is to have these additional improvements available from 24/25.
- 6.7 As mentioned in 6.5, further development of grass areas by the car park is also being considered for possible new remembrance garden areas. Preliminary discussions with charities are being held on improving memorial options for families that have tragically lost a baby or child. These improvements may require some additional funding to be identified.

7. War Memorials and Memorial Safety

- 7.1 Members will be aware of the significant work undertaken by the Council and communities in repair and refurbishment of war memorials for the 2018 First World War Centenary Commemorations. The team continue to support communities with repairs to their war memorials and the 23/24 capital budget for such works is £20k. The Council is the custodian for over 180 war memorials.
- 7.2 In addition to any structural works, the Amenities and Waste/Street cleansing teams also assist communities in the upkeep of war memorials. The effort put in by communities and the teams from Communities and Place is recognised and appreciated by the Royal British Legion Scotland. This was noted recently in the 2023 Highlands & Islands war memorial awards with winners in their specific categories for Dingwall, Fort William and Golspie and a special commendation for the war memorial in Ardgay.
- 7.3 The 23/24 capital budget for bereavement services also has £35k to support the ongoing programme on memorial safety throughout our burial grounds. Scottish Government guidance makes clear the statutory obligation local authorities have for the safety of staff and visitors in burial grounds, primarily under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Occupier's Liability (Scotland) Act 1960. The guidance was created in response to recommendations made in January 2018 following a Fatal Accident Inquiry (FAI) into the death of a child.

Designation: ECO Communities & Place

Date: 10 Aug 23

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Background Papers:

Appendix 1 – Burial Grounds in Highland

Ward	No. of Cemeteries	No. of those operational	No. of those closed
1 - North, West and Central Sutherland	25	16	9
2 - Thurso and North West Caithness	7	6	1
3 - Wick and East Caithness	7	6	1
4 - East Sutherland and Edderton	15	8	7
5 - Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	34	23	11
6 - Cromarty Firth	4	3	1
7 - Tain and Easter Ross	11	6	5
8 - Dingwall and Seaforth	6	3	3
9 - Black Isle	16	7	9
10 - Eilean a' Cheo	31	16	15
11 - Caol and Mallaig	10	5	5
12 - Aird and Loch Ness	25	20	5
13 - Inverness West	2	1	1
14 - Inverness Central	3	0	3
15 - Inverness Ness-side	0	0	0
16 - Inverness Millburn	0	0	0
17 - Culloden and Ardersier	6	3	3
18 - Nairn and Cawdor	7	4	3
19 - Inverness South	3	3	0
20 - Badenoch and Strathspey	20	10	10
21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	13	8	5
Total:	245	148	97

Appendix 2 – Current capital projects

Name	2023/24 Capital Budget £000	Project status RAG	Date of estimated full capacity prior to any works	Works start date	Works duration (months)	site works to be completed	Estimated site settlement (months)	Go live date	comments
Broadford Strath	110	A	23/01/2024	27/02/2023	5	27/07/2023	6	23/01/2024	Site acquisition progressing - Contract awarded to increase capacity on existing site - additional 84 lairs (approx. 7.5 years additional capacity). Land acquisition ongoing to secure land for next phase.
Portree	525	G	04/10/2024	09/11/2023	5	07/04/2024	6	04/10/2024	Planning application progressing for next phase - phases 2A, 2B & 2C = around 600 lairs. Contract awarded to increase capacity on existing site - additional 26 single depth lairs (approx. 1.3 additional years capacity).
Tomnacross	30	A	29/11/2024	04/01/2024	5	02/06/2024	6	29/11/2024	Land acquisition ongoing. Options for additional capacity on existing site being reviewed.
Dunvegan	280	G	20/04/2025	25/05/2024	5	22/10/2024	6	20/04/2025	Works to allow for additional capacity of approx. 2 years in existing burial ground now complete. Design progressing for new extension on adjacent land including new car parking.
Tore	25	G	04/07/2025	08/08/2024	5	05/01/2025	6	04/07/2025	Options for additional capacity on existing site being reviewed. Land investigation underway for extension.
Thurso Mount Vernon	50	G	01/08/2025	05/09/2024	5	02/02/2025	6	01/08/2025	Site identification ongoing - Land investigation underway for new extension.
Glen Nevis	250	R	06/12/2025	17/12/2023	12	11/12/2024	12	06/12/2025	Site identification ongoing - 20+ sites around Fort William investigated and proved unsuitable. Meeting with local Members 26 June 2023 to update with issues of land acquisition. Two further sites being investigated.

Canisbay	230	G	01/03/2026	05/04/2025	5	02/09/2025	6	01/03/2026	Works to allow for additional capacity of over 4 years in existing burial ground now complete. Land investigation underway for extension.
Reay	50	G	11/03/2027	15/04/2026	5	12/09/2026	6	11/03/2027	Site planning progressing - options for extension being considered - additional land owned by THC in immediate area.
Ullapool Morefield	0	G	01/06/2027	06/07/2026	5	03/12/2026	6	01/06/2027	Next phase of existing extension - site survey to be undertaken. Additional capacity on existing site complete - additional 36 lairs (approx. 10 years additional capacity).
Tornagrain	20	G	07/08/2027	11/09/2026	5	08/02/2027	6	07/08/2027	Options for additional capacity on existing site being reviewed - possibility of 60 additional lairs (approx. 2 years additional capacity). Land investigation underway for extension.
Proncynain, Dornoch	176	G	13/09/2027	18/10/2026	5	17/03/2027	6	13/09/2027	Site works completed - Total capacity 722 lairs - around 70 years based on 10 lairs/yr. Landscaping works ongoing.
Alness	250	G	11/10/2027	15/11/2026	5	14/04/2027	6	11/10/2027	Site acquisition progressing - Land negotiations ongoing. Design prepared - phase 1 to provide 240 lairs (approx. 24 years capacity).
Kilmorack	30	G	20/03/2030	24/04/2029	5	21/09/2029	6	20/03/2030	Land acquisition ongoing.
Chapelhill	75	G	21/06/2031	26/07/2030	5	23/12/2030	6	21/06/2031	Site works complete - 82 lairs in first phase (around 40 yrs based on 2 lairs/yr). Landscaping works ongoing.
Dores	50	G	Closed		5	na	6	Closed	Land acquisition and design ongoing.

Appendix 3 – Photos of recent projects

Proncynain Cemetery, Dornoch



Chapelhill Cemetery, Tain



Appendix 4 – sites being reviewed for projects in next 10 years

Name	Area	Estimated closed date
Arisaig	Lochaber	04/05/2026
Kinlochmore	Lochaber	12/11/2026
Blarour	Lochaber	06/02/2027
Wick	Caithness	30/06/2027
Petty - Tornagrain	Inverness	08/08/2027
Roskean	Ross & Cromarty	26/03/2028
Abernethey	Badenoch & Strathspey	24/04/2029
Kilvean	Inverness	24/04/2029
Morar Beoraid	Lochaber	26/05/2029
Cille a'Bhealaich	Skye & Lochalsh	20/10/2029
Portmahomack Tarbat	Ross & Cromarty	25/03/2030
Kingussie New	Badenoch & Strathspey	15/06/2030
Lairg	Sutherland	26/01/2032
Golspie New/Old	Sutherland	08/03/2032
Melness	Caithness	06/05/2032
Urray West Church/Urray New	Ross & Cromarty	03/10/2032
Watten	Caithness	13/10/2032
Laggantygown	Badenoch & Strathspey	22/01/2033
Halkirk	Caithness	09/03/2033
Tore	Ross & Cromarty	05/07/2033
Kirkhill (Wardlaw)	Inverness	03/10/2033
Corsback	Caithness	21/10/2033
Cawdor	Nairn	17/12/2033
Kiltarlity	Inverness	04/02/2034
Ardgour	Lochaber	25/08/2034
Ardersier	Inverness	03/01/2035
Annat	Ross & Cromarty	12/03/2036
Skeabost	Skye & Lochalsh	currently closed

Appendix 5 - Inverness Crematorium - new pathway



Design with benches and possible future paths

