

Agenda Item	9
Report No	CC/15/24

The Highland Council

Committee: Caithness Committee

Date: 12 August 2024

Report Title: Bereavement Services – Project Updates

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive – Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides an update to members on the work being undertaken on burial ground capacity and new burial grounds in the Caithness area.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note:

- i. the progress of burial ground extensions in the Caithness area.
- ii. the challenges with identifying and developing suitable land for burial ground development

3. Implications

3.1 **Resource** – The Council on 14 September 2023 approved a capital budget for bereavement services of £2.226m for 2023/24 and £4.168m for 2024/25 - 2028/29.

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.

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 area. The Highland Council has 245 burial grounds with 14 being in the Caithness area. Of these 12 are operational and 2 are closed. **Appendix 1** provides a breakdown of lair availability and capacity data for burial grounds in Caithness.

5. Burial Ground Capacity Projects in the Caithness area

- 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 The Bereavement Services Project Board meets regularly, to support the work of the team delivering burial ground extensions and new sites. The board ensures good governance in delivering the programme and membership includes key internal partners in delivering the projects such as the Estates management team, the Project Design Unit and Finance.
- 5.3 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) developmental 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.
- 5.4 Progress on the current approved projects in Caithness is summarised in **Appendix 2**.
- 5.5 As can be seen, the projects are on track with a green RAG status, with the exception of Mount Vernon which has an amber RAG status. Good work has been undertaken by the bereavement services team, local amenities team, the project design unit, estates and legal to progress solutions with the support and input of local members.
- An extension to **Mount Vernon Cemetery, Thurso** is planned – land purchase negotiations are underway to extend the current cemetery following in-house land investigations.

- Land investigations at **Reay Cemetery** are underway for potential extension.
- Investigations found the area surrounding the current **Wick Cemetery** to be unsuitable for an extension. The Bereavement Services Project Team are working closely with the local amenities team in Wick and initial work is underway to find a suitable new site.
- Land investigations are planned within the current **Keiss Cemetery** boundary to allow for additional lairs. Land investigation is also underway for potential larger extension through land purchase.
- Works to the extension at **Canisbay Cemetery** are underway and progressing well. Works are expected to be completed by September 2024. The extension will allow for an additional 500 lairs / 100+ years capacity and will allow for the reversal of the lair purchase restrictions that are currently in place. **Appendix 3** provides photos of the ongoing works.

5.6 Work is still ongoing to review detailed projects for the current capital budget for 2024/25 - 2028/29 of £4.168m. The bereavement services team will continue to engage with local members on projects in their area and their ongoing support is appreciated.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 25 July 2024

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Background Papers:

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Caithness Burial Ground Capacities & Lair Figures

Figures as of 14/07/2024. Figures reported weekly.

Name	Ward	Status	Number of prepared lairs available	Average Lairs sold per year	Current capacity in years
Bower	2	Open	168	1.7	96.6
Canisbay	3	Open	25	4.2	6.0
Corsback	2	Open	32	3.4	9.4
Dunnet	2	Closed	-	-	-
Halkirk	2	Open	90	9.3	9.7
Keiss	3	Open	15	3.7	4.1
Latheron	3	Open	531	6.7	79.3
Olig	2	Open	156	7.7	20.2
Reay	2	Open	11	3.5	3.2
Thrumster	3	Open	80	2.1	38.3
Thurso Mount Vernon	2	Open	60	39.7	1.5
Watten	3	Open	39	4.4	8.8
Wick	3	Open	136	39.1	3.5
Wick St Fergus	3	Closed	-	-	-

Appendix 2 – Current approved capital projects

Name	Total Capital Budget £000	Project status RAG	Date of estimated full capacity <u>prior to any works</u>	Works start date	Works duration (months)	site works to be completed	Estimated site settlement (months)	Go live date	Comments
Mount Vernon, Thurso	£180k	A	01/01/2026	01/12/2024	6	01/06/2025	6	01/12/2025	Land purchase ongoing following inhouse land investigations.
Reay	£145k	G	01/09/2027	01/08/2026	6	01/02/2027	6	01/08/2027	Land investigations underway for potential extension.
Wick	£170k	G	01/01/2028	01/12/2026	9	01/06/2027	6	01/12/2027	Initial discussions under to find suitable new site for replacement cemetery.
Keiss	£77k	G	01/08/2028	01/07/2027	6	01/01/2028	6	01/07/2028	Land investigations ongoing.
Canisbay	£215k	G	01/07/2030	10/06/2024	4	10/10/2024	6	10/04/2025	Extension works underway and expected to be finished by October 2024.

Appendix 3 – Ongoing construction works at Canisbay Cemetery



