

The Highland Council

Agenda Item	7
Report No	LA/23/24

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 12th November 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 Lochaber area.

2 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to note:

- i. the progress of burial ground extensions in the Lochaber 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, with budget of £2.931m for identified projects in 2024/25 and £3.068m for 2025/26 - 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 **Impacts**

4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.

4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.

4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

5 **Background**

5.1 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 23 being in the Lochaber area. Of these 12 are operational and 11 are closed. **Appendix 1** provides a breakdown of lair availability and capacity data for burial grounds in Lochaber.

6 **Burial Ground Capacity Projects in the Lochaber area**

6.1 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 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) 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.

- 6.4 Progress on the current approved projects in Lochaber is summarised in **Appendix 2**. As can be seen, of the three current projects, two are on track with a green RAG status, with Glen Nevis on a red RAG status.
- 6.5 The Glen Nevis burial ground in Fort William is estimated to reach full capacity by the end of 2025. Significant work has been done locally with over 40 sites considered but unfortunately, ground conditions are very challenging in the area. Work is being progressed at a site surrounding the current cemetery to improve ground conditions to a manageable standard. A planning application has been submitted for phase 1 of the works to allow for significant drainage works to take place.
- 6.6 Work is ongoing on the other two projects:
- Kinlochmore burial ground – The estates team are currently taking forward land investigations in the area to secure a new site for a burial ground.
 - Duror burial ground – Design work for additional lairs on the existing site are complete. Works are expected to be completed before Spring 2025. This will add approximately 15 years capacity. Land investigation is underway for future potential extension.
- 6.7 Work is also underway to review detailed projects for the current capital budget for 2025/26 - 2028/29. For Lochaber area this includes:
- Proposals for Blarour burial ground - Design work is underway for additional capacity on the existing site with aim for works to commence early in 2025. Design could allow for over 25 years of additional capacity. New sites are also being considered for a longer-term solution in the area.
 - Morar Beoraid burial ground - recent works have been completed on preparing new lairs within the existing burial ground. Design work is ongoing for future phases of the burial ground on the existing Council owned land.

The bereavement services team will continue to engage with local members on projects in their area and their ongoing support is appreciated.

- 6.8 As reported to the Communities and Place Committee on 6th March 2024, the Council have commissioned a feasibility report on the possible operation of a crematorium in the Lochaber area.

Designation:	Assistant Chief Executive - Place
Date:	30 th October 2024
Authors:	Alan Yates, Strategic Lead, Environmental Health & Bereavement Services John Maclean, Bereavement Services Manager Rachel Robertson, Project Coordinator
Background Papers:	None
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Lochaber Burial Ground Capacities Appendix 2 – Current Approved Capital Projects

Appendix 1 – Lochaber Burial Ground Capacities

Figures as of 27/10/2024.

Name	Ward	Status	Number of prepared lairs available	Average Lairs sold per year	Current capacity in years
Acharacle	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Open	49	2.2	22.5
Anaheilt, Strontian	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Closed	-	-	-
Ardgour	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Open	19	1.7	10.9
Arisaig	11 - Caol and Mallaig	Closed	-	-	-
Blarour	11 - Caol and Mallaig	Open	21	5.9	3.6
Bunavullin/Killunaig	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Open	73	0.3	279.8
Drimnatorran, Strontian	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Open	43	2.3	18.3
Duror	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Open	5	4.3	1.2
Fort William The Craigs	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Closed	-	-	-
Gairloch	11 - Caol and Mallaig	Closed	-	-	-
Glen Nevis	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Open	62	41.3	1.5
Invergarry	11 - Caol and Mallaig	Open	47	1.0	52.5
Keil Ardgour	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Closed	-	-	-
Keil Morvern (Lochaline)	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Open	104	1.7	62.9
Kilchoan New	11 - Caol and Mallaig	Open	56	1.3	42.9
Kilchoan Old	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Closed	-	-	-
Kilmallie New	11 - Caol and Mallaig	Closed	-	3.3	-
Kilmallie Old/Mid	11 - Caol and Mallaig	Closed	-	-	-
Kilmonivaig	11 - Caol and Mallaig	Closed	-	-	-
Kilmory	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Closed	-	-	-
Kinlochmore	21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	Open	18	6.7	2.7
Morar Beoraid	11 - Caol and Mallaig	Open	37	7.0	5.3
Morar Old	11 - Caol and Mallaig	Closed	-	-	-

Appendix 2 – Current approved capital projects

	Project status RAG	Date of estimated full capacity	Proposed works start date	Go live date	Budget 2024/25 £000	Budget 25/26-28/29 £000	Comments
Glen Nevis burial ground	R	01/01/2026	01/12/2024	31/12/2025	508		Work is being progressed at a site surrounding the current cemetery to improve ground conditions to a manageable standard. A planning application has been submitted for phase 1 of the works to allow for significant drainage works to take place.
Kinlochmore burial ground	G	01/05/2027	06/04/2026	30/04/2027	15	85	Land investigation underway for replacement cemetery/extension.
Duror burial ground	G	31/12/2025	01/07/2025	30/12/2025	20		Additional lairs to be provided on existing site – approx. 15 years capacity.