Dear Sir/Madam,

Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel Meeting
– 10th October, 2013
Agenda Item No. 8 – Burial Land Allocation Review

With reference to the above Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel meeting on the 10th October, 2013, I now attach the report of the Burial Land Allocation Review which was marked “to follow” on the agenda.

Would you please bring this report with you to the meeting.

Yours faithfully,

ALAN FRANKS
Managing Director

To: All Members of the Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel
1. Introduction

1.1 A Working Group was set up, by the Planning & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Panel (OSP) following a request from the Muslim Community to review and make recommendations relating to the allocation of burial land in the Borough.

1.2 The Working Group met on several occasions, commencing on 17 July 2013 and was chaired by Cllr B Sheppard. The group also included Cllr J Foster, Cllr P Hickling and Cllr J Sheppard.

1.3 The initial meeting set out the scope of the work (Appendix A). It was agreed that the working group would review the current arrangements, take evidence from all faith groups as to their requirements, bearing in mind the religious, culture and customs of each group, with a view to identifying land availability, an equitable and fair way of allocating land and the position relating to provision of a new cemetery.

2.0 Recommendations of the Working Group

That the Planning & Environment OSP consider the information provided and approve the recommendations made by the working group for inclusion into the Director – Governance and Recreation’s report to Cabinet on 6 November 2013 on Cemetery Policies/Future Operations

1. That the Oaston Road Cemetery, Nuneaton burial land allocation should remain as at present;

2. That the Officer responsible for Cemeteries put in place an equitable formula for burial land allocation for new cemeteries based upon population, need and faith. This formula to be reviewed at least every 5 years to take into account changing faith populations locally;
3. That the burial land allocation at Marston Lane, Bedworth be designated by faith, in a fair and equitable manner, allowing for provision of a consecrated Roman Catholic, a Muslim, a children’s and a kerbed burial areas;

4. How the Council has allocated plots for each faith should be done in a transparent way and it is recommended that an Equality Impact Assessment be carried out to accompany the formalisation of the policy:

5. That the Cemetery Officer arrange an accompanied visit to Marston Lane Cemetery for the faith groups to assess suitability of plots there meeting their requirements; and

6. That new cemetery provision be identified and created as a matter of urgency.

3. **Evidence**

Evidence was provided on the number of burial plots available by faith at each of the borough’s cemeteries. (Appendix B).

3.1 **Muslims**

3.1.1 The working group received evidence from several of the Muslim Community Leaders (Nuneaton Muslim Society, Nuneaton Khalifa Muslim Society, Nuneaton Muslim Women’s Group) who explained that currently Muslim burials take place in Oaston Road Cemetery and there is limited capacity remaining. The working group also referred to the Equalities Officer for advice on the issues for consideration.

3.1.2 There have been a number of out of borough burials in Oaston Road and it was felt that this was an indication of the disparity between different areas fees and charges. There was a fear that if the disparity remained marked in this way the result would be an increase in out of borough burials and a reduction in the number of plots available for local Muslims.

3.1.3 The Muslim faith did not allow for cremations. The Muslim community were therefore requesting a favourable increase to the area available to them for future burials and that this additional land should be conducive to the weekly, monthly visitation needs of mourners and relatives of the deceased.

3.1.4 Whilst suggesting that this should be done in a fair and equitable manner based on the number of years and plots available so that usage of the cemetery can be enjoyed by all residents of the borough.
3.1.5 The Muslim speakers gave a commitment to consider other options for maximising burial land following consultation within their community groups but in the meantime the Nuneaton Muslim Society would be charging an additional amount to out of borough burials with a view to preventing loss of the remaining spaces at Oaston Road.

3.1.6 The Members were thanked for the faith sensitive way in which it had worked with the faith communities over the years and in particular the way it had worked with the Muslim community leadership to pioneer local burial services envied by many elsewhere.

3.2 **Roman Catholic**

3.2.1 The representative from the Roman Catholic Church in the Borough was pleased to be involved in the evidence giving session and shared with the working group the requirements of the Catholic community.

3.2.2 Only Oaston Road Cemetery has a designated, consecrated area for Catholic burials and it too was being depleted with only a 3-4 years capacity left.

3.2.3 There has been an increase in the numbers of Polish and Eastern Europeans in the borough many of whom are Catholics so numbers are increasing.

3.2.4 There is no evidence as to what the make up of Catholics are as a proportion of Christians so there is a difficulty in knowing whether they out number the Muslims or not. However, the burial rates per annum are very similar. It would not therefore be feasible to ask the Roman Catholics to give up any of its current allocation at Oaston Road.

3.2.5 On further discussion it was requested by the Roman Catholic spokesperson that they would prefer to have some consecrated ground set aside at Marston Lane Cemetery extension and/or an new cemeteries, as this would be preferred to the more generic allocation there at present.

3.3 **Church of England**

3.3.1 The Church of England representative’s main concern for the Church would be that the allocation was done fairly and equitably on the basis of need, from the different faith groups.

3.4 **Other Religions and Customs**

3.4.1 The other groups considered were the Nepalese. The Cemetery Officer advised that generally the community cremated their dead and therefore, although invited to attend, the Nepalese community would not be unduly impacted on by this review.
3.4.2 An area of Marston Lane Cemetery had been designated for children’s burials, an area also to take the larger more elaborate kerbed style graves that some communities prefer.

3.5 **Equalities**

3.5.1 The Equalities Officer provided the following comments:-

3.5.2 From the 2011 census, there are 79,627 Christians and 2,895 Muslims in the Borough. However, it is not possible to ascertain how many Catholics there are in the borough as the census did not break down Christianity into the various denominations.

3.5.3 Whilst clearly there are more Christians than Muslims, it would be inconclusive to allocate burial plots based on the whole population of the borough. A better approach would therefore be to allocate burial plots based on the demand and/or usage of plots.

3.5.4 There would be a concern with any decision based on moving a plot allocation from one faith to another certainly at Oaston Road as this would not be possible in an equitable way. The fairest way to achieve this would be to look at the demand/usage from each faith and work on these figures to plan for a future allocation.

3.5.5 Once a decision is made it would also be recommended that an Equality Impact Assessment be produced to accompany the formalisation of the allocation policy.

3.5.6 Consultation with the relevant faith groups was important to the working group to establish their thoughts and views on burial land allocation as there may be issues which had not been considered by the Council.

3.5.7 By further consulting the faith leaders on a fair and equitable allocation policy it will assist with gaining a commitment to and approval of the final allocation decision.

3.6 **New Cemetery Provision**

3.6.1 There has been a requirement for further burial land for some time. Currently there is work being undertaken at Eastboro Way to ascertain the level of the water table and flooding issues on the proposed new cemetery extension there.

3.6.2 Various options were put forward to provide additional space at Oaston Road for Muslim burials however, these proved to be unworkable at the current time.
3.6.3 Also there has been some land identified within the Borough Plan for a new cemetery and Members await with interest to see what these proposals are in the coming months.

4. Conclusions

4.1 The Working Group having considered the issues raised by the various faith groups based on their requirements and made the following conclusions.

4.2 All faith groups were keen that the distribution of both the current cemetery provision at Marston Lane and any new cemetery land would be done on a fair and equitable basis.

4.3 The working group considered the requests from the Muslim community regarding increasing the number of burial plots, particularly at Oaston Road Cemetery, but felt that this was not a viable option given the numbers currently available. The Roman Catholics, the Christian and Muslim groups had a similar timeframe of burial plots left at Oaston Road based on the number of burials per annum.

4.4 It would be several years before a new cemetery would be provided allowing for planning, preparation of the land and so on. Whilst this would relieve the shortage in the mid term in Nuneaton the working group felt that a short term solution could only be found by utilising existing provision.

4.5 It was therefore suggested that the faith groups should go and visit the Marston Lane Cemetery and consider the viable options available to them there, to allow an increase in the numbers of plots to a satisfactory level which could also enable them to accommodate out of borough burials more easily.

4.6 The Chair of the working group wished to thank all those involved with this worthwhile review and in particular those that attended meetings and gave evidence.

Cllr B Sheppard
Chair, Burial Land Allocation Review Working Group
## SCRUTINY REVIEW: SCOPE

### REVIEW TITLE: Allocation of Burial Land – Chair Cllr B Sheppard

### AIMS & OBJECTIVES:
To find a solution to burial land provision, for all faiths, in a fair and equitable way.
- to hear the views of the different faith groups
- to understand the different religious requirements/customs
- to identify a suitable solution to the cemetery land deficit

### WHAT WILL BE INCLUDED
- Allocation of Land
- Identify what is equitable through data analysis etc
- Identify land availability
- New Cemetery

### WHAT WILL BE EXCLUDED
- Flooding Issues

### KEY TASKS
- Consult with the Stakeholders
- Gather data from Cemetery Officer regarding burials in/out of borough, faiths etc
- Set questions for the stakeholders
- Identify a solution to the burial land provision issues and get agreement from all faith groups

### STAKEHOLDERS, OUTSIDE AGENCIES, OTHER ORGANISATIONS *
- Muslim Society – Yaseen Ahmedabadi
- Khalifa Muslim Society – Yussef Kahlifa/Osman Sheikh
- Nepalese Community – Om Gurung
- Catholic Church – Our Lady of the Angels
- Cof E Church – St Nicolas Church – Don Jones/Richard Hare Bedworth diocese

### EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS
Is an impact needs assessment required?

The Equality & Diversity Officer will be asked to input to the review to ensure that all bases are covered with regard to equity across faith groups and their requirements.

### LINKS/OVERLAPS TO OTHER REVIEWS:
Eastboro Way Cemetery extension and other possible cemetery provision being considered by Parks section so will be working with them.

### RESOURCE REQUIREMENTS
Member and Officer time may require site visit etc.
REPORT REQUIREMENTS (Officer information)

Draft & Final Report required. Recommendations to Cabinet for consideration and possible recommendations relating to new cemetery provision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REVIEW COMMENCEMENT DATE</th>
<th>COMPLETION DATE FOR DRAFT REPORT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17 July 2013</td>
<td>Draft report by 6 September 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Report to PEOSP 3 October</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Key tasks and stakeholders may be subject to change as the review progresses.*
## Appendix B

### Approximate No. of new graves and cremation plots remaining as at 31.8.2013 in the Council’s cemeteries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Oaston Road</th>
<th>Stockingford</th>
<th>Marston Lane</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Muslim Section</td>
<td>34 – 39</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C of E Section</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic Section</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graves (no denomination)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cremation plots</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is an additional section of land in Marston Lane cemetery which has not yet been allocated.