

Burial Space Strategy – Frequently Asked Questions

Q1. Why are you consulting on a Burial Space Strategy?

Burial space is a finite resource. The council currently operates four cemeteries but only Gilroes & Saffron Hill have space for new graves. There is a need to consider the future provision of burial space in Leicester as these cemeteries fill up.

Q2. Does the Council have a statutory obligation to provide cemeteries and burial space?

No. The council has no obligation to provide cemeteries although it must maintain existing cemeteries. There are a growing number of private cemeteries and crematoriums in the UK.

Q3. How many burials does the Council provide each year?

We currently provide over 800 burials a year. We also carry out more than 3,000 cremations annually.

Q4. Why do we need a new cemetery?

We are not proposing opening a new cemetery in the short term but do need to identify, plan and secure a new cemetery site for the future for when no new burial space is available in the existing cemeteries.

The population and built environment of Leicester is increasing. Land in the city is a valuable and finite resource and land for a new cemetery has to compete with the needs for residential, commercial, employment, food growing and leisure developments.

Q5. What do you mean by introducing natural burial space?

The interest and demand for natural burials has grown in recent years as an alternative option for people concerned about the potential environmental impacts of modern funerals.

Natural burial is a term used to describe the burial of human remains where the burial area creates habitat for wildlife and/or preserves existing habitats (woodland, species rich meadows, orchards, etc).

Q6. What do you mean by unused cemetery space?

Not all space in a cemetery is used for burials as land is used to provide access to graves or planted features such as flower beds. When no new graves are available in a cemetery this space could be used to provide additional burial space. Many urban cemeteries, particularly in London, now have graves excavated in every available space as space for new burials runs out.

Q7. Why are you proposing changes to the Rights of Burial and fees?

The Council currently charges a set fee for all graves regardless of the number of burials made in a grave. Every purchased grave is sold on a 99 year lease known as Rights of Burial.

We are proposing to improve burial options for bereaved families by offering a choice of rights periods over 30, 50 & 75 years and charging for graves based on burial capacity (1, 2 or 3+ burials). This will offer fairer and potentially lower burial costs for many families. Additionally, some families do not wish to purchase a grave for such a long period of time, or stop visiting and maintaining their graves and memorials.

For example, currently a grave for 3 people costs the same as a grave for one person and must be leased for 99 years. The new scheme will mean that you can choose how long you want to lease a grave and the costs of a grave for one person will now be cheaper than a grave for two or more people over a similar period of time.

Q8. Why are you proposing to dig graves deeper?

A deeper grave will mean more burials can be made in each grave plot. This will increase the burial capacity of a cemetery and therefore relieve the pressure on providing new land for burials in the future.

Q9. What do you mean by reusing graves? Will you be disturbing / digging up previous burials?

We **will not** be disturbing / digging up any previous burials when we reuse old graves. We will only be using the spare depth in a grave that is available above any previous burials. Not all graves will have unused burial space and therefore won't be reused. This will only happen when the Rights of Burial have expired and not been renewed.

For example, a family may purchase a grave (dug to a depth to allow three burials) with Rights of Burial for 30 years and use it for one or two burials only. At the end of the 30 years the rights holder will be offered the opportunity to renew their rights to say who is buried in the grave. If they do not renew the rights, the council can reuse the grave plot by using the unused burial space above the previous burials.

Q10. What will happen to the headstone / memorial on a reused grave?

The right to place a memorial on a grave runs with the rights of burial. When these have expired there is no longer a right to have a memorial on the grave so if a grave is to be reused these will be removed. The holder of the expired rights will be contacted prior to removal and offered an extension to rights period. All removals will be catalogued (photographed & recorded) and handled sensitively.

Q11. What are other burial authorities doing to meet shortages of burial space?

It is important to emphasise that our strategy is based on current legislation and best practice from burial authorities across the UK. Many authorities have introduced flexible burial rights periods and deeper graves, while others have restricted burials to residents only. In London, where burial space is in extremely short supply, a special Act of Parliament allows these authorities to reuse graves more than 75 years old.