



## Interim Report

### Yeovil Cemetery Project

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## Yeovil Cemetery Project

### 1. Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The existing Yeovil Cemetery at Preston Road, administered by the Joint Crematorium and Cemetery Committee, which serves the town of Yeovil and the adjoining parishes of Brympton and Yeovil Without is approaching capacity. Although it is understood that the councils do not have a Statutory Duty to provide for burials, there is nevertheless a strong community need and justification to continue to be able to provide local burials and consequently an urgent need to find more burial space. A previous option of using land at the Crematorium has been ruled out conclusively.
- 1.2 An officer and councillor project group representing the councils has appointed Clive Miller Associates Ltd (CMA) to investigate the situation and a report was made to the Yeovil Joint Burial Committee. The Project objectives were agreed as; 'To identify, evaluate, acquire and make available suitable additional land to meet the short, medium and long term burial needs of the Yeovil Town (and adjoining parishes) for the next 75 years.
- 1.3 It is possible that an area of land adjoining the Cemetery to the east, at the Fiveways School site owned by Somerset County Council (SCC) might be available and could possibly be acquired. This land has an area of approx 0.18 Ha (0.45 acre). Although burials have declined historically in favour of cremations, the recent burial rate over the last few years has been fairly constant at around 50 p.a. At a burial density of 500 per acre this land could provide up to 4.5 years capacity, though higher densities would add more years accordingly. It has been assessed from a technical point of view; there is no contamination and the geology and water table are acceptable. A response from SCC to an enquiry about land purchase is currently awaited.
- 1.4 Regardless of whether this land could be acquired, the medium-long term needs of the town will still need to be addressed and if a suitable site to serve for the next say 75 years – perhaps up to 4 hectares (10 acres) - can be identified, acquired, permitted and implemented, this might also meet the short term need as well as the long term ones.

## 2. Consultation responses and research

- 2.1 Consultations and research has been carried out with relevant SSDC and Yeovil TC officers and councillors to obtain advice about burial and crematorium demand rates and costs.
- 2.2 Planning officers have advised in respect of relevant planning policies and landscape considerations. They have also advised that the draft 'regulation 123' list of infrastructure projects that the Council may wish to fund through the proposed Community Infrastructure Levy does not currently include cemetery provision, so suggest that comments and evidence on this issue are submitted by the closing date of Thursday 24 March 2016.
- 2.3 The opportunity was also taken of writing to eight parish councils located adjoining or close to Yeovil to identify their current burial provision and future needs or plans. The Mudford PC response was of particular interest; the proposed urban extension would add 750 houses to the parish. If agreed, the PC would hope to be able to procure extra land adjoining the existing cemetery to meet the added need. Discussions have been had with Planning Officer Simon Fox about the possibility of this being (part) funded via s106 planning obligations. Investigations with the landowner have revealed a willingness to sell the land but at a very significant land value.
- 2.4 A review of possible sites around the periphery of Yeovil was carried out by members of the project group. Possible areas for site searches are shown on the appended plan. Subsequently a meeting was held with a major local landowner to explore possible site options. This revealed a willingness to provide some land, but also the question of land values was discussed. It was stated that demand for agricultural land around Yeovil (not just that with some immediate development potential or hope value) was particularly strong because landowners in the process of selling land for development were creating a unique market place as a result of their need to replace land lost from their farm businesses.
- 2.5 No further work has been carried out at this point to investigate the current crematorium situation or to evaluate the future needs, however, on-line research indicates that there have been a significant number of new crematoria/cemetery projects implemented and run by various private companies in partnership with local authorities.
- 2.6 Current burial and cremation costs in Yeovil are appended.

## **3. Options**

- 3.1 Regardless of whether it proves possible to acquire the SCC land adjoining the existing cemetery, it will be necessary to acquire additional land to meet the long term burial needs of Yeovil. The capital costs of acquiring a new site and providing the infrastructure to operate it are detailed below.
- 3.2 The relatively high capital costs compared with the relatively low volume of burials and the consequent revenue income, has led some consultees to suggest that a new combined cemetery and crematorium, funded and run by the private sector may be the most feasible option to pursue.
- 3.3 Options for possible sites are numerous in theory as there are a great many locations which are not prominent in the landscape and which can be accessed by public transport as well having good links to the main road network. In reality there may be very few sites which landowners are prepared to release and there is an expectation that a significant premium over and above agricultural land values would need to be paid.
- 3.4 If a crematorium is to be included, access to the mains gas network will also be required.

## **4. Capital Costs and Revenue Income**

- 4.1 Land acquisition and project implementation costs for both a new 'out of town' cemetery site and a small extension to the existing cemetery are considered in a separate confidential report because such details are considered to be 'commercially confidential' at this stage and their publication could compromise the achievement of best value for money in land acquisition and other procurements.
- 4.2 It has been estimated that the overall costs of projects to meet the short, medium and long term burial needs of the Town are in the region of £1.25M. This estimate is a very general one only and must be treated with extreme caution. Each potential site will have its own issues to resolve and only once a draft design is produced for a specific site can more accurate costs be estimated.

## **5. Funding and implementation**

- 5.1 It has been suggested that a possible source of funding is the Community Infrastructure Levy and that in the absence of any significant revenue income to pay for the provision, a 'bid' should be submitted to include this project on the draft list of 'regulation 123' projects for approval.

## **6. Possible next steps**

- 6.1 If the 'bid' is accepted in principle it would be appropriate to look at the cemetery project in more detail, including exploration of possible sites.