

Agenda Item	11
Report No	SR/9/21

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: Isle of Skye and Raasay Area Committee

Date: 31st May 2021

Report Title: Burial Ground Capacity Update, Isle of Skye & Raasay

Report By: Executive Chief Officer Communities and 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 Skye and Raasay area.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked:
- i. to note progress made on establishing the accurate numbers of available lair capacity and the ongoing work to secure land for burial ground expansion focusing on priority sites; and
 - ii. continue discussions on burial ground capacity with local communities.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource
Members agreed the capital budget review in January 2021. The capital budget for bereavement services is £608k in 2021/22 and £1.581m in 2022/23. This is committed expenditure for projects including extensions at Portree, Alness, Dornoch, Fort William, Dores and Kilmorack. Delays or flexibility on specific projects may be used to address critical issues of capacity at other burial grounds. Capital resources to address further burial ground extensions will be considered as part of the wider review of capital programme priorities in 2020/21.
- 3.2 In the revenue budget agreed at Council in March 2021, £20k has been included in the maintenance and repair budget for war memorials and memorial safety across Highland. A budget feed was also approved to cover the staff costs associated with

this programme of work.

3.3 Legal

Highland Council has a statutory obligation to manage burial provision and for memorial safety. The safety of staff and visitors in burial grounds is a statutory obligation for local authorities and the work around memorial safety is planned to reduce risks.

3.4 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural)

The burial ground capacity project will work with local communities on future burial ground provision.

3.5 Climate Change/Carbon Clever

The Council will avoid developing land with a high level of natural carbon storage such as peat.

3.6 Risk

The burial ground capacity project and service developments now underway aim to reduce service risks. There are risks to being able to offer advance purchase of family lairs if burial ground expansion cannot be developed timeously. There are risks that where burial ground capacity is severely constrained, we will be unable to provide burials in some locations to meet the preferences of some families.

3.7 Gaelic

In line with the Council's Guidelines on the use of Gaelic, at burial grounds where new signs are being erected or existing signs require to be replaced, bilingual signs will be erected.

4. **Background**

4.1 The Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 determines that The Highland Council is statutorily obliged to provide at least one burial ground within its area. The Highland Council currently has 268 burial grounds. The Highland Council also operates Inverness Crematorium, located at Kilvean, Inverness.

4.2 The Council is taking forward a project that will involve a detailed, strategic review of the planning of the Council's cemeteries for the next 20 years. This will include reviewing current capacity within our cemeteries and identifying potential options for consideration and as part of the Council's approach to developing its capital programme priorities.

4.3 In many locations it is becoming increasingly challenging to identify available land for development either for 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; and
- e) acceptability with local Planning considerations.

- 4.4 The project also requires:
- a) engagement with communities at an early stage. This can help to identify suitable land, involve key stakeholders and raise awareness of the capital challenges facing the Council;
 - b) continue engagement with SEPA to ensure early liaison on ground standards prior to pursuing land purchase;
 - c) considering the current specification to look at issues such as minimum land maintenance designs and key requirements;
 - d) considering other options including the development of woodland burial grounds and the closure of burial grounds to new internments where extensions are not feasible.

4.5 A Graduate Intern is working within the Bereavement Services Team, collating recent and historical capacity figures held at area office level on each of the Council Burial Grounds and comparing these records with the physical capacities in Burial Grounds. This work is crucial if, as intended, a digital recording system will be developed to maintain all future, current and historical data held by the Council in relation to Burial Grounds. Options on this are being explored including an existing system in use in Inverness, Badenoch and Strathspey recording all information relating to burials and lair purchases.

5. Burial ground capacity on Skye and Raasay

- 5.1 To mitigate against the diminishing Burial Ground capacities in some areas of Skye, Council Officers are actively looking at various locations to acquire new land suitable for the development of Burial Ground extensions, or in some cases new Burial Grounds. The highest priority sites are presented in **Appendix A**.
- 5.2 Due to low available lair capacity in some Burial Grounds, no pre-selling of lairs is permitted when Burial Ground capacity falls below 10 years.
- 5.3 Work is ongoing to address the variances between historical records, held locally, on lair availability, and survey data produced from site surveys which shows the actual number of lairs available. Lair availability and capacity data for all Burial Grounds in Skye & Raasay is presented in **Appendix B**.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer Communities and Place

Date:

Authors:

Hugh Gardner, Bereavement Services Project Manager
Alan Yates, Environmental Health Manager

Background Papers:

[Communities and Place, August 2020,](#)

[Bereavement services update and the approach to burial ground extensions](#)

Appendix A – Skye Burial Grounds with less than 6 years capacity

Name	Area	Location	Years Until All Lairs Sold	Notes
Cille a'Bhealaich	Skye and Lochalsh	West of Staffin on Northern tip	1.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Site survey carried out. - Trial pits required to determine lair depth. - Site discussions suggest if a small investment of between £35 - £50k was made, capacity could be increased by approx. 100, increasing the life of Burial Ground from 1.2 years to 20 years. Capacity is based on 5 burials per annum. This additional capacity is within the curtilage of the existing burial ground. - As funding allows, PDU will create a draft design. - Funding will be required to proceed with design and development.
Dunvegan	Skye and Lochalsh	SE of Dunvegan Castle, A850	1.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Option appraisal underway. - Initial option for land close to existing Burial Ground, does not appear to be available. - Site survey has been carried out. - PM attended the Skye and Raasay Ward Business Meeting on 10th May to brief members and enlist their help and to make the local Community aware of the issues. - Funding will be required to proceed with Land, Legal, design and development.

Portnalong	Skye and Lochalsh	South of Portnalong, B8009	2.2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Site survey carried out. - Site discussions suggest if a small investment of between £35 - £50k was made, capacity could be increased by approx. 100, increasing the life of Burial Ground from 2.2 years to 33 years. New capacity is based on between 1 and 2 burials per annum. This additional capacity is within the curtilage of the existing burial ground. - As funding allows, PDU will create a draft design. - Funding will be required to proceed with design and development.
Broadford – Strath	Skye and Lochalsh	NW of Broadford, A87	2.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Site survey complete. - Surveyor established adjacent land ownership. - Negotiations underway with Forestry regarding adjacent land. - PDU to organise Trial pits. - Negotiations ongoing between our Legal team and the Forestry’s team to establish a fair price for the land. -Options for extension exist in the existing curtilage of the Burial Ground. - Funding will be required to proceed with Land, Legal, design and development.
Portree (Phase 2)	Skye and Lochalsh	Southern edge of Portree	2.9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Site survey to take place for Phase 2.

Kilbeg	Skye and Lochalsh	Just North of Armadale	4.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Site survey to take place. - Funding will be required to proceed with Land, Legal, design and development.
Ashaig	Skye and Lochalsh	Between Broadford and Kyle	Closed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local interest in extending this Burial Ground, currently at full lair capacity. -No prospect of extending current Burial Ground due to rock formations. - Discussions ongoing with local Grazing Committee to establish suitable land. -Site meeting to be organised when COVID restrictions are relaxed.
Skeabost	Skye and Lochalsh	North West of Portree near Skeabost golf course	Closed	<p>Discussions ongoing with the Skeabost Community and several parcels of land have been selected as having potential for a new Burial Ground.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Local Amenities Foreman is to carry out trial digs to establish ground conditions.

Appendix B – Skye and Raasay Burial Ground Capacities & Lair Figures

Figures as of 12/05/2021. Figures reported weekly.

Burial Ground	Admin Office	Average lairs sold per annum	Numbers of lairs available	Current capacity in years
Ashaig - Broadford	Portree	Closed	0	n/a
Cille a'Bhealaich	Portree	6.86	10	1.5
Dunvegan	Portree	10.43	13	1.2
Edinbane	Portree	2.14	140	65.3
Glendale	Portree	4.86	162	33.4
Kilbeg	Portree	6.86	30	4.4
Kilmaluag	Portree	1.14	43	37.6
Kilmuir	Portree	3.14	149	47.4
Portnalong	Portree	2.29	5	2.2
Portree	Portree	21.71	67	2.9
Raasay Orchard Wood	Portree	3.86	163	38.9
Skeabost	Portree	Closed	0	n/a

Strath - Broadford	Portree	12.71	30	2.3
Strathaird	Portree	0.86	168	196
Struan New	Portree	2.29	58	25.4
Trien	Portree	6	130	21.7
Trumpan	Portree	5.71	288	50.4
Uig	Portree	8.28	198	23.9