

Agenda Item	8.
Report No	CP/06/24

The Highland Council

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 6 March 2024

Report Title: Bereavement Services – Project Updates

Report By: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

1. Purpose/Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides Members with an update on the Council's Bereavement Services capital projects to maintain burial ground capacity and crematorium services for the Highlands.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. **Note** the progress of burial ground extensions in Highland
- ii. **Note** proposals for cremator replacement at Inverness Crematorium
- iii. **Note** the recent inspection undertaken by the Scottish Government at the Inverness Crematorium and the positive findings
- iv. **Note** the update on the feasibility of a crematorium in the Lochaber area

3. Implications

3.1 Resource:

The Council on 14 September 2023 approved a capital budget for bereavement services of £2.226m for 2023/24 and £4.168m for 2024/25 - 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. Energy use and ongoing compliance with emission standards are key factors in projects related to any changes to the cremation plant at

Inverness Crematorium and appropriate technical advice will be taken for these 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. Background

4.1 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 and **Appendix 1** provides a breakdown of burial grounds per ward. The Highland Council also operates Inverness Crematorium, located at Kilvean, Inverness.

4.2 The table below details the number of cremations and burials undertaken in the last few years:

Year	No. Cremations	No. Burials	totals
2017	1127	1690	2817
2018	1240	1771	3011
2019	1237	1594	2831
2020	1239	1445	2684
2021	1264	1713	2977
2022	1403	1677	3080
2023	1387	1716	3103

5. Burial Ground Capacity Projects

5.1 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.

5.2 As Members are aware, a project board is in place to support the work of the team delivering burial ground extensions and new sites. The board ensures good governance in delivering the programme and the remit has been expanded to include all bereavement services capital projects including:

- Projects to develop burial ground extensions and new burial ground sites.
- Projects to maintain, develop and improve Inverness Crematorium

- Projects to maintain existing burial grounds including works related to the memorial safety programme.
- Projects to support communities to maintain existing war memorials.

5.3 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:

- land availability and purchase cost.
- developments costs.
- 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.
- 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.
- acceptability with local Planning considerations.

5.4 Progress on the current approved projects is summarised in **Appendix 2**.

5.5 As can be seen, all projects are on track with a green RAG status apart from Glen Nevis, Lochaber. 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 to identify a new site with adverts being placed in local press and over 25 sites being reviewed. Unfortunately, ground conditions are challenging, and a suitable site has yet to be identified. Investigations are ongoing into possible sites and local Members will continue to be updated on the position.

5.6 Projects recently completed include works at Cill a'Bhealaich to provide additional lairs within the existing burial ground and **Appendix 3** provides a photo of this project.

5.7 In addition to the specific capital approved for 23/24, the team have been taking forward priority works through an approved £400k for bereavement services from the Health and Prosperity Strategy investment. This has been beneficial in taking forward additional projects as detailed in the table below. The balance of funding was £176k at February 2024.

Name	Area	Comments
Daviot	Inverness (Ward 19)	Extension works complete – 50+ years capacity added to site (£83k).
Cill a'Bhealaich	Skye (Ward 10)	Works to add additional lairs on existing site complete - approx. 6 years additional capacity added to site (£13.5k).
Portnalong	Skye (Ward 10)	Additional lairs to be created on existing site (budget estimate £20k).
Morar Beoraid	Lochaber (Ward 11)	Works to improve foundations for next phase of existing lairs complete – approx. 5 years capacity (£13k).
Lohcarron	Wester Ross (Ward 5)	Works to improve foundations for next phase of existing lairs underway - approx. 20 years capacity (£10k).
Kishorn	Wester Ross (Ward 5)	Initial land investigations undertaken and found to be unsuitable. Further investigations to be carried out (£3k).
St Duthus	Tain (Ward 7)	Land purchase for next extension phase ongoing (budget estimate £30k).
Skeabost/Borve	Skye (Ward 10)	Potential land available for site – investigations being undertaken (budget estimate £25k).
Ullapool Morefield	Wester Ross (Ward 5)	Initial works to add additional lairs on existing site complete – approx. 10 years capacity added through reconfiguration of

		roads and storage area layout. Further works planned for next phase on existing extension to create a significant number of additional lairs (50 years+ capacity) (budget estimate £13k).
Portree	Skye (Ward 10)	Works to add additional lairs on existing site complete – approx. 1.3 years additional capacity added to site (£6k).
Duror	Lochaber (Ward 21)	Works planned for additional lairs on existing site – approx. 25+ years capacity (budget estimate £20k).
Croy	Inverness (Ward 17)	Works planned on existing extension to allow significant number of lairs to be available for sale with estimated 50+ years capacity (budget estimate £20k).
Inverness Crematorium	Inverness (Ward 13)	£100k identified to facilitate installation of new memorial options and improve site for visitors including new paths and improvements to the flower court and cloisters area.

6. Inverness Crematorium

- 6.1 Inverness Crematorium provides a full cremation service for the Highlands, with 1387 cremations conducted in 2023. The crematorium is inspected annually by Scottish Government inspectors and every 5 years by the Federation of Burial and Cremation Authorities. The most recent Scottish Government inspection completed earlier this month which concluded the Inverness Crematorium continues to perform to a high standard and the Council is very fortunate in having such a dedicated, professional and experienced team providing a first-class service.
- 6.2 As Members are aware, work has started on a project to review the options for replacement of the current cremators. There are two key drivers for this project:
- a) The UK Government have indicated tighter emission standards for crematorium will be required. Although an exact date has yet to be confirmed there are indications that updated plant will be required in 2027 for both existing and new crematorium.
 - b) Unfortunately, the supplier of the current cremators, ATI, has ceased trading. Arrangements are in place for the regular servicing and maintenance of the plant, however, some councils have already arranged replacement of ATI cremators given some concerns on the design of the plant.
- 6.3 The Council on 14 September 2023 approved a capital budget for the Crematorium project of £1.2m with £50k allocated for 24/25 and £1.15m for 25/26.
- 6.4 A consultant's report on the options for Inverness Crematorium has been received and reviewed.
- The report details
- a) the current position with Inverness Crematorium
 - b) the new legal requirements for emission standards
 - c) an overview of current cremator manufacturers
 - d) an overview of cremator options (gas/electric) and alternative methods such as resomation
 - e) a review of the options and practicalities for fitting new cremators and required abatement plant in Inverness
- 6.5 The report recommends replacement of the current gas-fired cremators with installation of new gas-fired cremators with the required abatement plant. The report concludes that this provides the best solution for the current and future requirements of the Inverness Crematorium.

- 6.6 A project group is taking forward the recommendation through the Council's procurement process with a view to progressing the required works. A key consideration of the project will be the phasing of the works to minimise any impact on the provision of cremations and services during the refurbishment works.
- 6.7 Given the current challenges with burial ground provision in the Lochaber area the Consultant's report also provided an overview of the feasibility of a crematorium in the Lochaber area as detailed in Appendix 4.
- 6.8 The overview considers the population within a 90 minute drive time of Fort William and an estimation of the possible number of cremations per year. On the population data available the report calculates that there could be around 280 cremations per year based on the Scottish average of 70% of people opting for cremation. The report notes that generally around 1000 cremations per year is considered an indicative number of cremations to sustain a viable crematorium although this will vary dependent on fees, costs of development and operating costs (e.g., staffing and energy costs). However, the report also comments that there are a number of crematoria operating successfully in the UK with cremation numbers significantly below this number including Guernsey crematorium (416 cremations in 2022) and Manor Park in London (291 cremations in 2022).
- 6.9 The overview has provided useful information on the possible operation of a crematorium in the Lochaber area. To further inform the Council on the feasibility of such a facility a more detailed report has been commissioned. This will consider an options appraisal on a new build crematorium including the cremator type and an estimation of the costs for such equipment, construction costs and ongoing operational costs including maintenance. It is intended that a further report on this matter is taken to this Committee in September 2024.

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Communities & Place

Date: 19 February 2024

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Appendices: Appendix 1: Burial Grounds in Highland
Appendix 2: Current Approved Capital Projects
Appendix 3: Recent Project Photo
Appendix 4: Overview of feasibility of a crematorium in Lochaber

Appendix 1 – Burial Grounds in Highland

Ward	No. of Cemeteries	No. of those operational	No. of those closed
1 - North, West and Central Sutherland	25	16	9
2 - Thurso and Northwest Caithness	7	6	1
3 - Wick and East Caithness	7	6	1
4 - East Sutherland and Edderton	15	8	7
5 - Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh	34	23	11
6 - Cromarty Firth	4	3	1
7 - Tain and Easter Ross	11	6	5
8 - Dingwall and Seaforth	6	3	3
9 - Black Isle	16	7	9
10 - Eilean a' Cheo	31	16	15
11 - Caol and Mallaig	10	5	5
12 - Aird and Loch Ness	25	20	5
13 - Inverness West	2	1	1
14 - Inverness Central	3	0	3
15 - Inverness Ness-side	0	0	0
16 - Inverness Millburn	0	0	0
17 - Culloden and Ardersier	6	3	3
18 - Nairn and Cawdor	7	4	3
19 - Inverness South	3	3	0
20 - Badenoch and Strathspey	20	10	10
21 - Fort William and Ardnamurchan	13	8	5
Total:	245	148	97

Appendix 2 – Current approved capital projects

	2023/24 Capital Budget £000	Project status RAG	Date of estimated full capacity	Works start date	Works duration (months)	Site works to be completed	Estimated site settlement (months)	Go live date	Comments
Tore, Black Isle (Ward 9)	25	G	04/07/2025	08/08/2024	5	05/01/2025	6	04/07/2025	Option for additional capacity on existing site identified and works to be arranged. Land investigation underway for extension.
Mount Vernon, Thurso (Ward 2)	50	G	01/08/2025	05/09/2024	5	02/02/2025	6	01/08/2025	Land investigations underway for new extension.
Glen Nevis (Ward 21)	250	R	06/12/2025	14/06/2024	12	09/06/2025	6	06/12/2025	Site identification ongoing - 35+ sites investigated and found unsuitable. Investigation into further sites ongoing.
Portree (Ward 10)	525	G	31/01/2026	07/03/2025	5	04/08/2025	6	31/01/2026	Work progressing for next phase - phases 2A, 2B & 2C = around 600 lairs. Contract completed to increase capacity on existing site - additional 26 single depth lairs (approx. 1.3 additional years capacity).
Canisbay (Ward 3)	230	G	01/03/2026	05/04/2025	5	02/09/2025	6	01/03/2026	Design works now complete. Tender process ongoing.
Dunvegan, Skye (Ward 10)	280	G	13/08/2026	17/09/2025	5	14/02/2026	6	13/08/2026	Works to allow for additional capacity of approx. 2 years in existing burial ground now complete. Land purchase and design work for extension complete. Planning application near submission.
Reay, Sutherland (Ward 2)	50	G	11/03/2027	15/04/2026	5	12/09/2026	6	11/03/2027	Land investigations underway for new extension.
Tornagrain, Inverness (Ward 17)	20	G	07/08/2027	09/05/2027	1	08/06/2027	2	07/08/2027	Options for additional capacity on existing site being reviewed - possibility of 60 additional lairs (approx. 2 years additional capacity). Land investigation underway for extension.

Alness (Ward 6)	250	G	11/10/2027	15/11/2026	5	14/04/2027	6	11/10/2027	Site acquisition progressing with land negotiations ongoing. Design prepared - phase 1 to provide 240 lairs (approx. 24 years capacity).
Tomnacross, Kiltarlity (Ward 12)	30	G	29/11/2028	04/01/2028	5	02/06/2028	6	29/11/2028	Land acquisition ongoing. Additional capacity on existing site identified and site plan to be updated (approx. 4 additional years capacity).
Broadford Strath, Skye (Ward 10)	110	G	31/12/2029	04/02/2029	5	04/07/2029	6	31/12/2029	Works completed to increase capacity on existing site - additional 84 lairs (approx. 7.5 years additional capacity). Land sale complete for next phase. Design and phasing for future ongoing.
Kilmorack (Ward 12)	30	G	20/03/2030	24/04/2029	5	21/09/2029	6	20/03/2030	Land acquisition ongoing.
Chapelhill (Ward 7)	75		Complete		-	-	-	-	Site works complete - 82 lairs in first phase (around 40yrs based on 2 lairs/yr).
Proncynain, Dornoch (Ward 4)	176	G	Complete		-	-	-	-	Site works completed - Total capacity 722 lairs - around 70 years based on 10 lairs/yr.
Dores (Ward 12)	50	G	Closed					-	Design work complete. Joint project for road works with Housing.

Appendix 3 – Photo of recent project

Cille a'Bhealaich – new lairs in existing burial ground

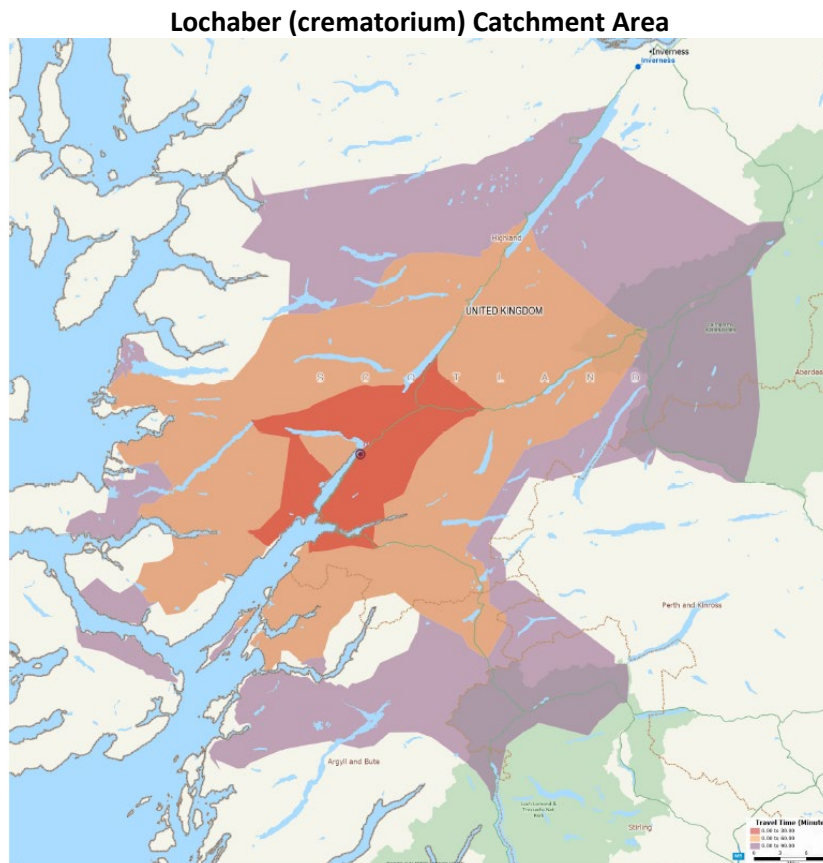


Appendix 4 – Overview of feasibility of a crematorium in Lochaber

Lochaber – commentary on this area as a potential site of a crematorium

As part of the feasibility, Rose PM was also asked to investigate the viability of a new build crematorium in the region of Lochaber. In order to consider the viability of a new crematorium located in this area, it is first necessary to review the population data and other similar facilities in the surrounding catchment area.

From previous market research undertaken by Rose PM, it is accepted that, on average, a family will travel up to 30 minutes to a crematorium or church for a loved one's funeral. However, in a rural environment there are exceptions where families will travel further.



(Image - Drive time map showing catchment zones from Fort William)

As illustrated in the map above, a 90-minute catchment area (indicated by the purple-coloured band) encapsulates Oban, Glencoe and Fort Augustus. Currently there are no existing crematoria in this area.

The population living within the three drive time bands shown (covering an hour and a half drive time) is 40,539 of which 9,132 people are over 65 years of age (i.e. 22.5% of the overall population).

From 2019 ONS information (pre-pandemic), the approximate death rate for the UK is around 1 in 100 people. Based on the population living within the three time bands, this would equate to approximately 405 deaths per annum. If the percentage of people in Scotland opting to be cremated at 70% is applied, there will be approximately 283 potential cremations per year in the area defined. The average life expectancy of men and women in Lochaber is 77.8 and 81 years respectively, compared to the Scottish average of 76.6, and 80.8 years respectively.

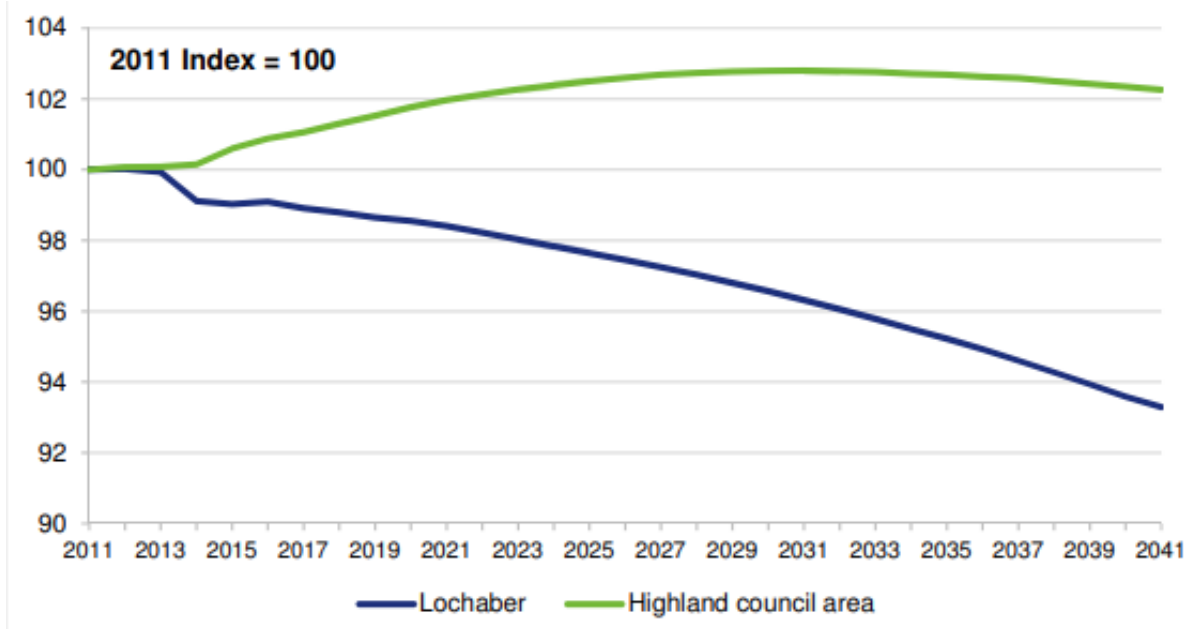
Attribute	0 To 30 Min 0 To 60 Min 0 To 90 Min		
Drive-Time Rings.ID	1	2	3
Estimated Average Weekly HH_Income	0	0	0
2018 Population	11,043	20,554	40,539
2018 Male	5,397	10,019	19,942
2018 Female	5,646	10,535	20,597
2018 Age <5	582	961	1,780
2018 Age 5-9	628	1,099	2,075
2018 Age 10-14	698	1,219	2,251
2018 Age 15-19	618	1,109	2,166
2018 Age 20-24	676	1,075	2,048
2018 Age 25-29	693	1,073	1,996
2018 Age 30-34	693	1,125	2,084
2018 Age 35-39	632	1,115	2,161
2018 Age 40-44	609	1,129	2,198
2018 Age 45-49	764	1,473	2,937
2018 Age 50-54	835	1,665	3,397
2018 Age 55-59	757	1,635	3,368
2018 Age 60-64	685	1,410	2,946
2018 Age 65-69	577	1,287	2,759
2018 Age 70-74	636	1,279	2,531
2018 Age 75-79	424	834	1,666
2018 Age 80-84	293	576	1,162
2018 Age 85-89	187	364	716
2018 Age 90+	56	126	298

The number of cremations necessary to sustain a viable crematorium is generally assumed to be approx. 1000 per annum although this will depend on fee levels, cost of development, energy and staffing costs etc. Assuming this average to be the case however, and based on a total population of 40,539 this notional “sustainable” figure would not be met by a considerable margin and the crematorium would run at a loss.

The population of Lochaber increased by 7% in the period from 2002 to 2021. Over this period, there was a 39% increase in the 65+ age group and a 10% reduction in the population under 16 years of age. The population aged 16-64 years increased by 4%.

The National Records of Scotland (NRS) population projections for the Lochaber area from 2011 to 2041 estimate that the population will decline by 7% over the period (and will decline by 5.6% between 2018-41), compared with a 2% increase across the Highland Council area from 2011 to 2041. Within the overall projections, it is estimated that there will be decreases in all age groups up to 65, whilst there will be a 37% increase in 65–84 year-olds and the number of people aged 85+ will nearly triple. People aged 65+ will account for almost one third of the Lochaber population by 2041.

Index of NRS population projections (2011-2041)



Source: National Records of Scotland (2018)

Based on Rose PM's industry experience, using a steel frame construction with 1 chapel/ 1 abatement system and a small area for offices we would expect costs for a new crematorium to be around £4.5 million - £5 million (excluding land costs and proximity to utilities).

As described previously the normal formula for assessing a crematoriums viability is based on a population of at least 100,000 people living in the catchment area which should result in around 1000 cremations. However, should it be decided that running a profitable facility is of secondary importance to providing a cremation service to the population living in the lower highlands then this might not be relevant.

There are a number of crematoriums operating successfully in the UK which have cremation figures significantly below what would normally be expected. Based on the 2022 statistics, these include Manor Park Crematorium in North London (291 cremations), Middleton Crematorium in Rochdale (411 cremations) and Guernsey Crematorium (416 cremations). Of these one is on an island (Guernsey), and one is a supplementary site to an existing crematorium (Middleton and Rochdale).