

# Burial Space Strategy



## Findings of the public consultation As at 17/01/2014

Prepared by:

- Alan Brown
- Project & Development Officer, Environmental & Enforcement Services

*This report provides a summary of the findings of the public consultation.*

*It includes information about:*

- *The issues and options under consideration;*
- *The consultation method;*
- *The public response and views expressed;*
- *The decisions taken in light of what was learnt.*

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Burial Space Strategy**

The city council conducts more than 800 burials each year. The Burial Space Strategy aims to deliver long term sustainable burial space in Leicester.

The subject of burials is highly emotional and sensitive. The cemetery and burial plot is an important space for families and friends to visit and to commemorate their loved one.

While we are mindful of this, this means we need to find solutions to allow further burials in the city in the future, preventing a shortage of space developing, and to address the increasing costs of burial.

The consultation sought views on the principal aims of the Burial Space Strategy, which are:

1. Extending the capacity of existing cemeteries
2. Provide a new cemetery in the city
3. Changes to Rights of Burial and fee structures for graves
4. Reuse of grave plots that have unused burial space

## **CONSULTATION METHOD**

### **Objectives and techniques**

The objective of the consultation was to hear the views of service users, the general public and interested parties on the proposals included in the draft Burial Space Strategy.

As well as promoting the council's strategy to the public, it was considered that the consultation would highlight any areas of concern with the proposals, areas where amendment/improvement to the proposals might be needed, areas where further discussions were needed and highlight any unforeseen affects the proposals may have on different faith communities.

The consultation period was open from 14<sup>th</sup> October 2013 until 5<sup>th</sup> January 2014.

Participation in the consultation was principally through the completion of an online survey related to the strategy proposals. The survey, the strategy and a list of frequently asked questions were available on the consultation website. Paper copies of the survey were provided at all council cemeteries, customer service centres and libraries, as well as at the Registrar's office at the Town Hall.

Additionally, three focus group meetings were arranged with funeral directors/clergy, Leicester Council of Faiths (LCoF) and the Muslim Burial Council of Leicestershire (MBCOL).

Press releases were used to promote the consultation to a wide audience and the consultation was featured in news articles on the council's website (twice), Leicester Mercury newspaper (twice), BBC Radio Leicester, BBC East Midlands Today TV and BBC News online.

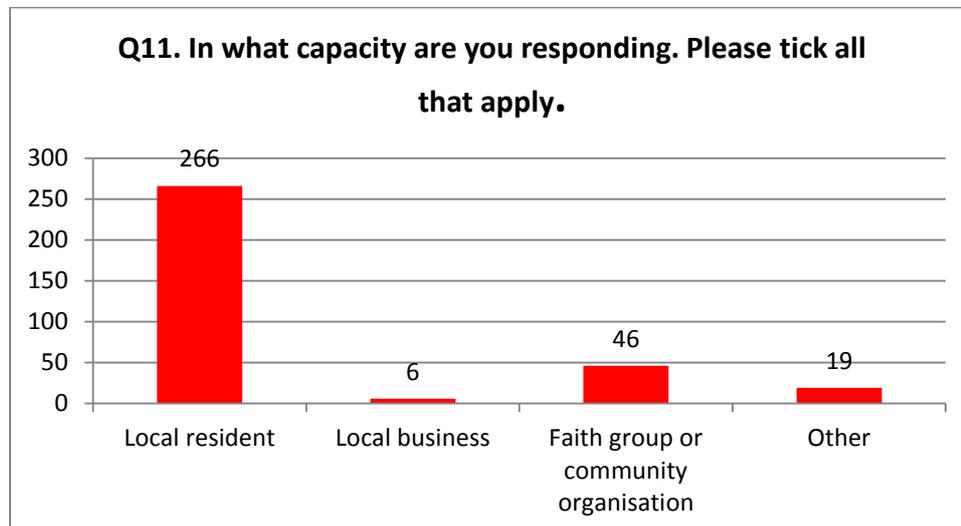
Online links to the consultation were also provided on the websites of the council's bereavement service, MBCOL and Leicestershire & Rutland Family History Society.

Posters promoting the consultation were displayed at the cemeteries.

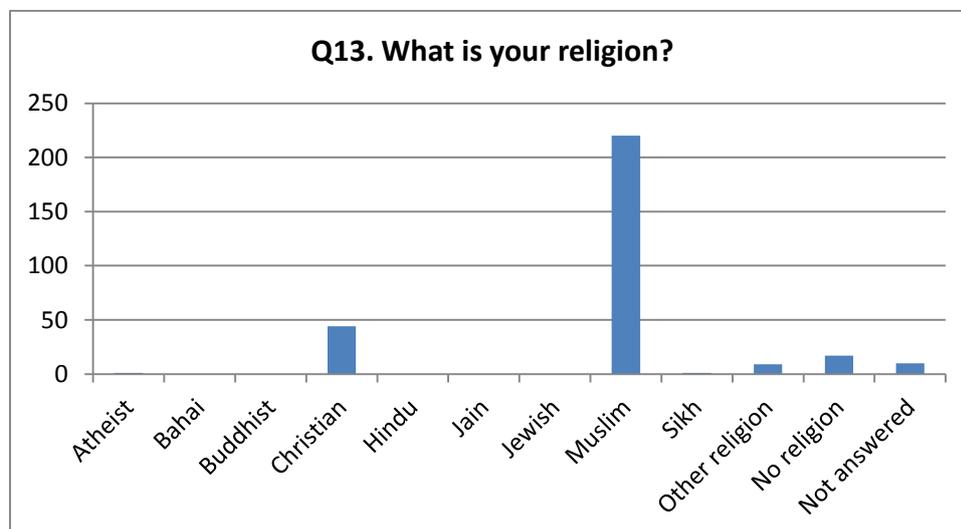
## **PUBLIC RESPONSE AND VIEWS EXPRESSED**

### **Respondents**

A total of 301 individual responses were received to the consultation.



Local residents contributed the greatest number of responses with others received from faith and community organisations, funeral directors, relatives of people already buried in the cemeteries and ex-city residents who wished to be buried in the city in the future.

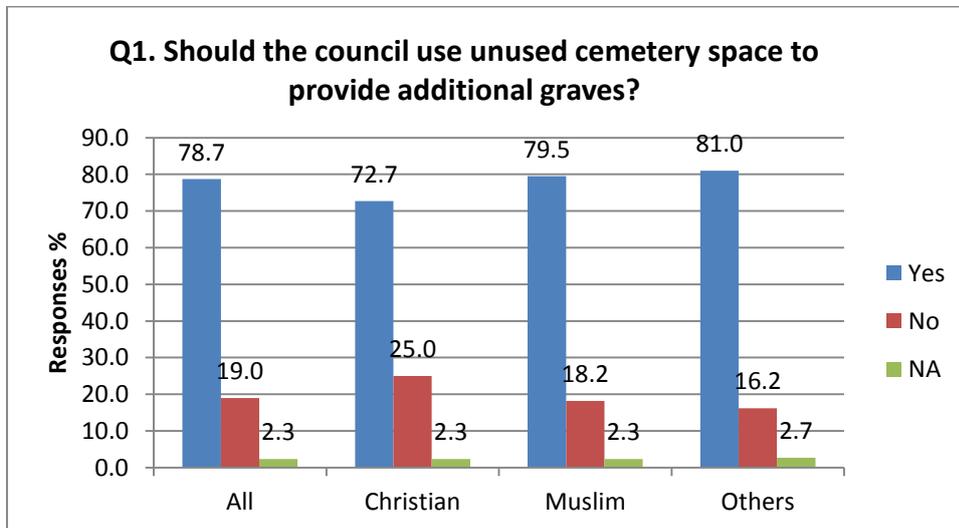


The highest number of responses came from the Muslim and Christian communities. Due to differing funeral practices among faith communities this is as expected. There was a particularly high response from the Muslim community.

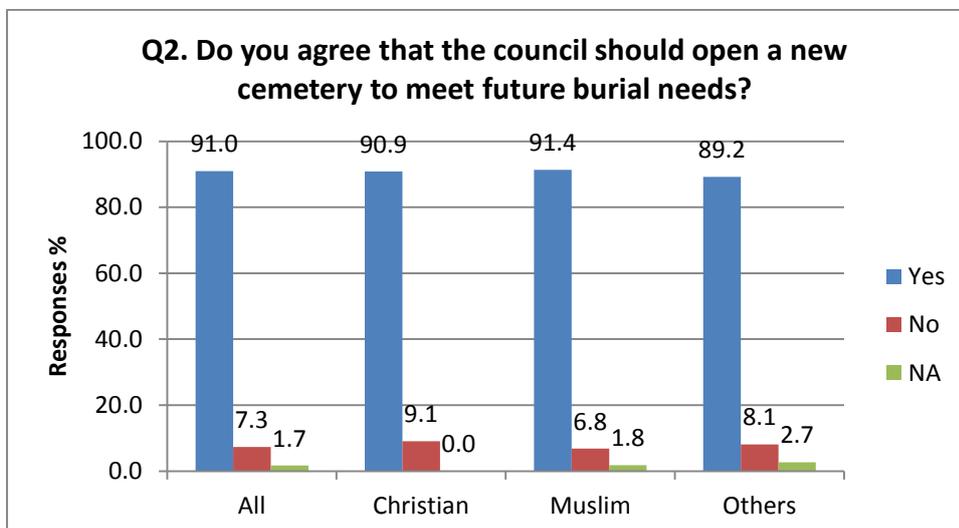
While there were no individual responses received from the Bahai or Jewish communities, members of the Bahai community were represented at the meeting with Leicester Council of Faiths. Further consultation is recommended with the Jewish community.

For Buddhist, Hindu, Jain and Sikh communities a preference for cremation would explain the lack of responses from these communities.

### Views and comments



Q1: In order to extend the burial capacity of existing cemeteries it is proposed to use cemetery land that is not currently used for graves, for example paths and flower beds, to provide additional graves when no new plots are available. This proposal showed significant support from all respondents.



Q2: This proposal met with the highest levels of support from all respondents.

Discussions with MBCOL indicated that they had been seeking a site to open a new Muslim cemetery to serve the city and county but had been unsuccessful to date. A number of comments were received that emphasised that the council should continue to provide separate faith sections in a new cemetery or separate cemeteries for different faiths.

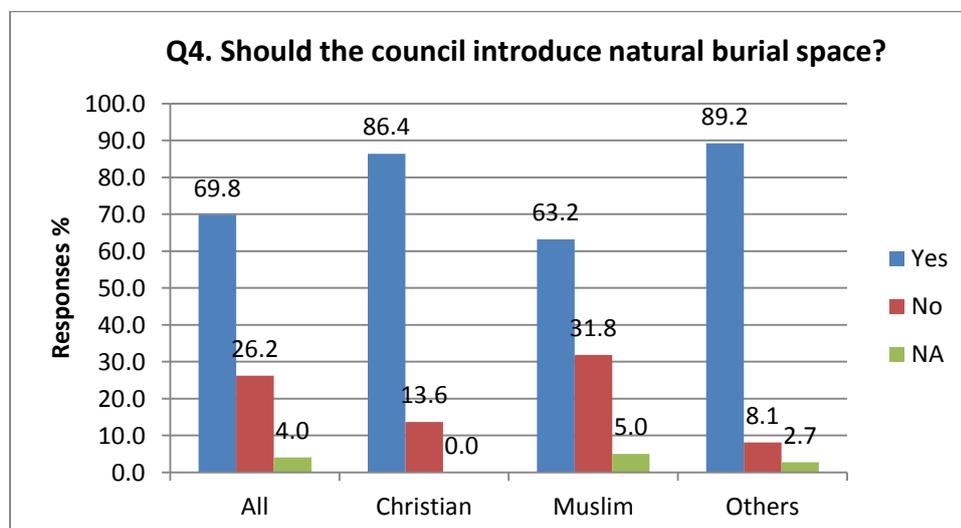
Views were expressed at the focus group meetings with MBCOL and LCoF, and in individual responses, about opportunities for potential partnership / financial support from faith communities in developing a new cemetery. How this might work will need further discussion and consultation.

Q3: When asked for comments on suitable sites for a new cemetery, responses included:

- Parks and football fields (16)
- Disused factories / brownfield sites (11)
- Land north of city around A46/Ashton Green/Greengate Lane (8)
- Unused allotments (5)
- Gartree Road area (5)
- Hamilton area (4)

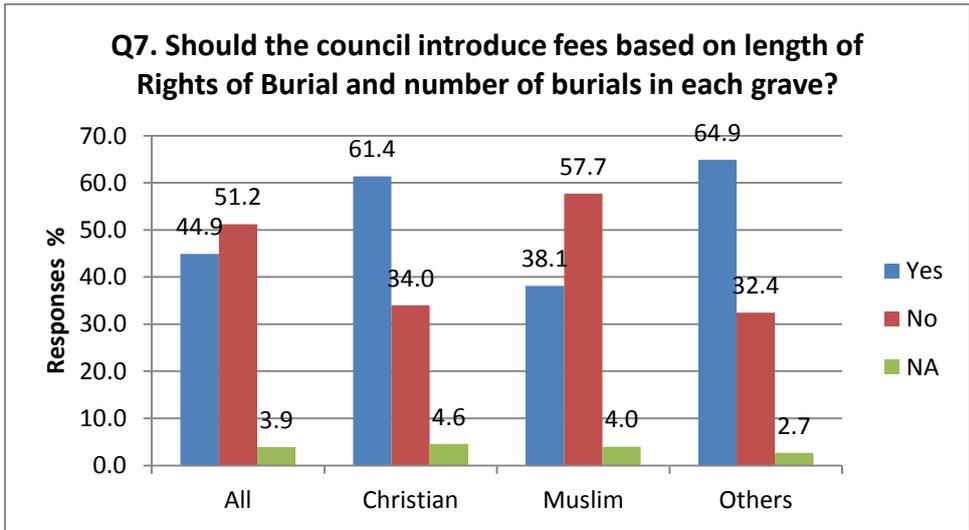
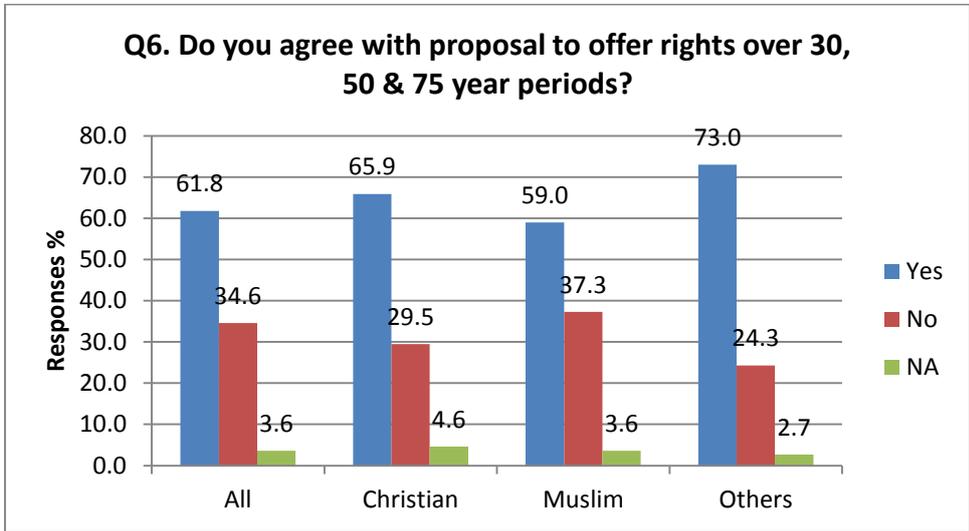
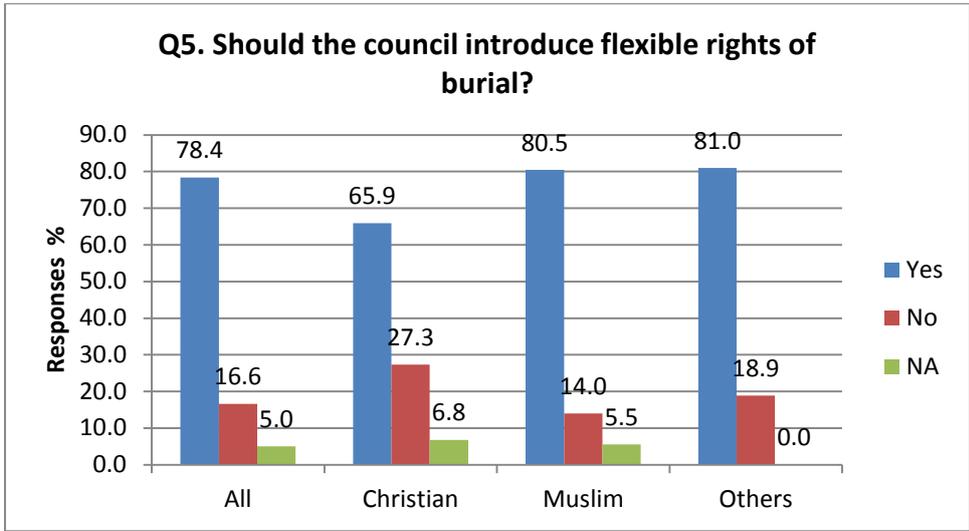
The council will take these views into account when identifying a suitable site for a new cemetery.

Eight respondents mentioned extending Saffron Hill Cemetery on to the Dorset Avenue playing fields. This extension has been already been approved and is currently in planning.



Q4: Views on the introduction of natural burial space showed significant support among Christian and other communities.

Muslim respondents showed a more mixed view towards the proposal. This is likely due to a lack of Muslim natural burial grounds elsewhere, and therefore awareness of natural burials in the community. MBCOL stated that they supported the introduction of natural burials.



Q5, Q6 & Q7: The majority of respondents supported the introduction of a more flexible system for offering Rights of Burial, although Christian support for this proposal was lower than average.

Although the majority of respondents supported a more flexible scheme there was a lower level of support, particularly within the Muslim community, for the proposed approach of offering Rights of Burial for 30, 50 & 75 years. Comments received included that short term leases were unacceptable and that graves should belong to families in perpetuity.

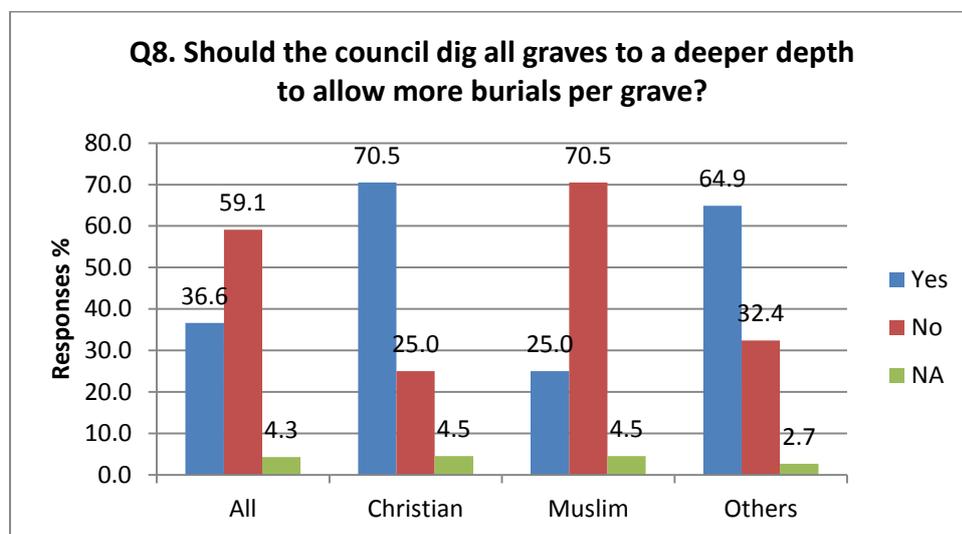
Views were expressed raising concerns about the additional choices that families would have to consider when arranging a funeral. Concerns raised stated that it may add a level of confusion, pressure to make a choice, potential family disagreement and delay when arranging funerals with too much choice for families to think about at the difficult time of bereavement.

MBCOL stated that they were particularly concerned about this in respect of Muslim burials due to the important faith requirement of burial as soon as practical after death, and suggested the possibility of developing a new 'Muslim grave' option to assist Muslim families.

The focus groups highlighted that there was a case for shortening the length of burial rights but stated a preference for a single set period (50-60 years)

The proposal to introduce a new fee structure based on the choice of term for Rights of Burial and number of grave spaces required in a grave was supported by Christian and other faiths. Muslim respondents had a different view to this proposal with only 38.1% support and 57.7% opposed.

Having considered the views and comments made in respect of these proposals, amendments will be made to the original proposals to remove short term leases, and fees based on length of Rights of Burial together with number of burials in a grave.



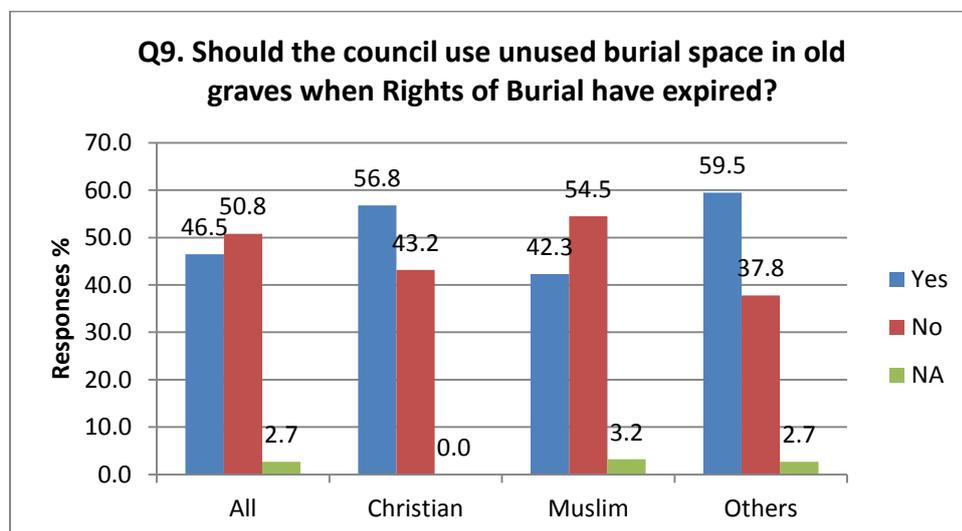
The proposal to dig all graves to a deeper depth to allow more burials per grave was supported by Christian and other faiths. Family graves containing multiple burials are already common practice in Christian communities.

The proposal was strongly opposed by Muslim respondents. The majority of Muslim graves are currently single interment.

Individual comments were received that the practice of multiple burials did not conform to Islamic practices. However, MBCOL supported the proposal of digging all graves to a deeper depth for use as family graves and stated this was already practiced in some Islamic countries, and is considered acceptable by The Muslim Council of Great Britain. MBCOL agreed that this would significantly reduce burial costs for Muslim families compared to single interment graves and reduce pressure on future grave supply.

MBCOL commented that what was needed was greater promotion of this option among the Muslim community, and MBCOL stated a willingness to work with the council to achieve this. MBCOL suggested that deeper plots should be introduced as soon as possible to maximise the number of burial spaces.

Several comments were made that due to Muslim funeral practices, deeper plots would create health and safety issues at Muslim funerals as it is common for family members to lower the deceased in to the grave. Restricting Muslim graves to double depth would enable the continuation of this practice while doubling the provision of Muslim burial space without increasing the need for additional land.



Q9: The reuse of graves with expired Rights of Burial met with the lowest levels of support from all communities and was opposed by the Muslim community.

Many respondents commented that they were opposed to this proposal, and in particular, against the reuse of graves by unrelated persons. One respondent commented that the forced reuse of graves was unethical.

There is no intention to introduce compulsory reuse of graves even though unused burial space in a grave is a valuable resource.

No previous burials in a grave would be disturbed and graves where every burial space had been used would not be reused.

It is not considered that this option will be widely taken up while new grave plots are available in a cemetery. However it would prove beneficial in older cemeteries where new graves are unavailable or for potential use for welfare funerals.

Views were expressed that family descendants should have a say on any future reuse. This is possible, but it is very important that family descendants ensure that the Deed for Rights of Burial is legally transferred to relevant family members should they wish to retain rights beyond the initial term.

Owners of Rights of Burial for a grave will have the opportunity to renew their lease with no restriction on the number times a lease can be renewed. Effectively this means that a family can have exclusive use of a grave for perpetuity.

Several respondents raised concerns regarding what would happen to memorials on graves to be reused and particular memorials/graves of heritage value. It is not intended to remove memorials just because the Rights of Burial have expired, although memorials may be removed if the grave is to be reused. While memorials remain the property of the family who erected them, the right to erect a memorial on a grave expires with Rights of Burial. Full records will be kept for all graves and memorials.

Q10: Other comments.

A list of other comments received at Q10, and responses to those comments, is provided as Appendix 1.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### **Recommendations**

1. The council will identify and secure a site for a new cemetery to meet future burial needs.
2. When no new graves are available in a cemetery, an assessment of the cemetery will be carried out to identify locations where additional burial spaces can be created.
3. The council will introduce natural burials when developing a new cemetery.
4. The council will reduce Rights of Burial to 50 years with renewal of rights for 10 year periods thereafter.

*The original proposal has been modified to reflect comments received during the consultation concerning short term leases and the potential impact of too many choices in selecting graves at the time of bereavement. Families will not have to decide how long they want Rights of Burial at the time of bereavement as these may be extended at a later date.*

5. Single depth graves will no longer be provided and all graves will be dug to allow further burials. Where ground conditions allow graves will be dug to accommodate up to four burials, except Muslim graves which will be dug for two.
6. Reuse of old graves will only be permitted in the following circumstances:
  - i. A grave has unused burial space
  - ii. No previous burial is disturbed
  - iii. No current Rights of Burial apply to the grave
  - iv. Applicant for new burial agrees to interment in an old grave
  - v. No significant heritage grave and/or memorial be disturbed

### **Further dialogue**

Contact has been made with Chairman of Hebrew Congregation to seek views on the strategy.

## Appendix 1 - Individual responses to Burial Space Strategy consultation

Q10 Comments	Response
<p>I am not overly religious and do not object to most of the points raised as all valid, i agree digging deeper and families being able to bury more in a single plot make sense, but dont agree that once somebodys term expires whether it be 99 years or less that they could then have un related persons buried in the same plot as them, headstone removed etc.</p> <p>This is mainly as i would like to think my family will long outlive me but as a family we will always have a place for other relatives to come and share their thoughts and show respect. Single larger family plots would get my vote moving forward.</p>	<p>No one may be buried in a grave without the permission of the owner of the Rights of Burial. Families are able to extend the Rights of Burial so no unrelated persons may be buried in a grave.</p>
<p>In reference to Q.8 we feel that after the first burial has taken place at a deeper depth, the subsequent burials on top should only be that of an immediate family member or relative or as agreed by the owners of the plot</p>	<p>No one may be buried in a grave without the permission of the owner of the Rights of Burial. Families are able to extend the Rights of Burial so no unrelated persons may be buried in a grave.</p>
<p>I think the forced reuse of already used graves is unethical.</p>	<p>Compulsory reuse is not proposed.</p>
<p>If any graves are removed the head stones should be respectfully displayed in another part of the cemetery.</p>	<p>The right to erect a headstone expires with Rights of Burial. Headstones remain the responsibility of the relevant permit holder.</p>
<p>Cremation is the solver to all burial needs + woods &amp; fields to scatter ashes</p>	<p>Cremation is not permitted in some faiths.</p>
<p>it would have been helpful to have a few explanatory notes to describe what rites of burial etc are.</p>	<p>Further information was available on the consultation website or by request.</p>
<p>Q4. Distasteful; best left to the private landowners.</p> <p>Q5. A good constructive idea in principle.</p> <p>Q6. Needs working through</p>	<p>Q4 - disagree. Natural burial supported by majority of respondents.</p> <p>Q5 - noted.</p> <p>Q6 - the proposal has been modified to reflect consultation feedback.</p>
<p>Some families may wish to maintain the rights of existing graves, as the council sold them at the time, old families still wish to attend &amp; reopen graves</p>	<p>No changes to existing Rights of Burial are proposed.</p>
<p>Some old fashioned values remain, it is important to respect the needs of families and sometimes in the current climate where people are passionate about tracing ancestors and family tree research selling off previously purchased family member plots and having mixed family plots can be upsetting to both families?</p>	<p>The need to preserve graves for future generations needs to be balanced with the need to provide sustainable burial space.</p>

<p>I think the idea of using plots for several graves or using already used graves that have expired for more than one coffin is completely insensitive. It defies the age old sense of leaving people to rest and disturbing what has always been peaceful, spiritual grounds. The resolution is to create more graveyards rather than disturbing what has lay to rest for in some cases centuries. The city is not a place for graveyards and natural burial grounds and graveyards in more private areas are much more appreciated when people go to see their loved ones rather than the hustle and bustle of a town centre. Graves are a part of history not be messed with. Dont let it be another important peice of history disturbed because of 'ideas for the future'.</p>	<p>Many graves are already used for more than one interment. No previous burial will be disturbed during reuse.</p>
<p>Maximise investment in land that can be forested with natural burials and utilised and is attractive for the scattering of ashes. Where necessary purchase land outside the city boundary ...</p>	<p>The council will introduce natural burials.</p>
<p>If a families grave would be disturbed surely the descendents should have a say, as i myself have looked for but cannot find my own relatives born in the city</p>	<p>No one may be buried in a grave without the permission of the owner of the Rights of Burial. Records are kept for all burials in Leicester.</p>
<p>No doubt there are spaces across leicestershire, which are derelict. I find half if these questions quite disturbing. Looks like the dead won't rest in peace.</p>	<p>No previous burials will be disturbed during reuse.</p>
<p>What will happen if the family are unable to be contacted. Will you automatically use a family plot to bury on top of the remains already interred there?</p>	<p>Owners of Rights of Burial should keep the council informed of any change in contact details.</p>
<p>There are on avarage 100 people who attend Muslim funerals, Digging a deeper grave to allow the placing of two deseased would put more stress and pressure on the burial staff. At a Muslim funeral it is traditional that close family members lower the coffin in to the grave, whilst this is taking place other people who attend the funral gather around the grave causing a mass crowd that stops burial staff from attending to the grave if it is needed. Digging deeper would mean that the grave would need shoring in to prevent the walls of the grave to collapse and the safety of people above. How do grave digging staff remove the shoring out of the grave when there are mass crowds around the grave causing them to get in the way. You have looked at the proposal for digging deeper but have you considerd the difficulty and pressure it can cause from all staff members point of view that digs the graves? I also understand that the city council now have a flat rate of pay for all staff on overtime. What is to guarantee that the staff will want the exstra stress and pressure for a flat rate of pay whilst doing out of work hours berials? Every one seems to be proposing things but not actshally going to the people of the heart of the job. How do they feel? Do they have a say? Are they happy, after all they are the ones that make such unique and outstanding berials take place within hours of death and have done for many years!</p>	<p>Graves for multiple burials can be found in many Muslim cemeteries. Safe working conditions will be adopted by the council's Bereavement Services team.</p>
<p>Thanks for the questioner, just another suggestion, council burial committee have visit to the mosque &amp; churches to have meeting with public or organise meeting with public at both cemetery &amp; get their views also.</p> <p>Thanks Again</p>	<p>The consultation was widely publicised and supported by focus group meetings with Leicester Council of Faiths, clergy from Leicester Diocese and Muslim Burial Council of Leicestershire.</p>

<p>Any grave should be left as it is. The dead are still people to those living. Alternative cemetery sites should be sought without disturbing existing graves in any form.</p>	<p>Unused burial space is a valuable resource and should be used for future burials to reduce pressure on land resources.</p>
<p>They should leave current grave how they how and Kreate more space for new graves. Do not touch current graves.</p>	<p>Unused burial space is a valuable resource and should be used for future burials to reduce pressure on land resources.</p>
<p>I think that faith based communities would be open to raising funds to pay for extensions and new cemeteries so long as the requirements of their faith were respected. Income could be generated through an opt in Cemetry payment at the time of issuing the council tax demand. Increasing fees impacts families already experiencing hardship. A collective community fund would share the burden across Leicester.</p>	<p>Partnerships with faith communities will be explored during the development of a new cemetery.</p>
<p>The current system seems fine. Although, the concept of sharing graves does not rest well with many. The idea if natural graveyards is a good one.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>
<p>I think the whole idea of reusing graves is absurd and proposterous, no matter how much of a practice that other council's might use. Once I am buried, I do not want another grave on top of mine, irrespective of if whether my grave permission has expired or if nobody visits.</p> <p>The best thing would be to buy more land to build new cemeteries; this offers a lot more value in that the council is able to regenerate areas such as frog island, as I mentioned, as well as provide new graves.</p> <p>If the level of investment is concerned, the public should be approached to raise money for further investment. It is intended that this would garner a positive response, as everyone has a family member in a cemetery and know that one day, they will be there too.</p>	<p>Many graves are already used for more than one interment.</p> <p>Continually buying more land to build cemeteries is not sustainable and increases the long term maintenance liability.</p> <p>Options of funding a new cemetery will be explored during the development of a new cemetery.</p>
<p>Any decision taken by LCC with respect to muslim burials, should be strictly in accordance with Islamic rules and practises. Multiple burials in one grave and short term leases for the graves are unacceptable. It is the responsibility of LCC to locate suitable Muslim burial sites from their own land availability and also look from other sources. this is an extremely important issue which has to be dealt with in a sensitive manner. Leicester City Council has been in the forefront of looking at the needs of the Muslim community and i am sure that it will continue to lead in this important area. Thank you for giving us the oppportunity to air our views in this extremely important subject.</p>	<p>Muslim Burial Council of Leicestershire and the Muslim Council of Great Britain agree that layered graves containing multiple burials are acceptable in Islam and are common in some Islamic countries.</p>

<p>New burials should not be placed on an exiting grave even when it's time has expired.</p> <p>Expiring graves should have a automatic extension option in the original contract for the appropriate fee or let head of family's concerned decide on the graves future.</p>	<p>Unused burial space is a valuable resource and should be used for future burials to reduce pressure on land resources.</p> <p>Automatic extension would not be possible due to the length of time involved.</p>
<p>Religions require a certain requirement when burials take place how can the space of someones loved one be used up with another.I think this is absurd.Im al for the idea of woodland or meadows being used.</p>	<p>No previous interment will be disturbed during reuse. Only unused burial space will be utilised.</p>
<p>We need space for life ...means life</p>	<p>Noted.</p>
<p>commenting on the expiry dates and re-digging of graves after a certain length of time would require consultation of different religious belief groups to ascertain what is allowed and not allowed for the graves to be dug up or if additional burials could take place on each grave.</p>	<p>Consultation has included feedback from different religious groups.</p>
<p>As a council you let new houses and flats be built in Leicester. So you should have seen this coming. More people in the city means more deaths in the city. Its not rocket science. As normal you have left it to let and your get out is to ask us what to do. So if it all goes Pete tong you can blame us. I don't think you should put the prices up.</p>	<p>Consultation is part of a considered approach to planning future needs. There are no immediate shortages of burial space.</p>
<p>The cost for burial is far too high. Please reduce the fee price.</p>	<p>Noted. The cost of providing graves is higher than the fee charged. More burials per plot reduces the overall cost of burials overtime.</p>
<p>Always a sensitive area. I wish Councillors and their Local Government Officers wisdom and insight in moving forward.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>
<p>At present, graves are for family members with headstones bought by the family as a memorial to the family members who have died and are buried there. What would happen to these? i would not be happy for non-family to be buried there too!</p>	<p>Headstones are the responsibility of the relevant permit holder. The right to erect a headstone expires with Rights of Burial. Families are able to extend the Rights of Burial so no unrelated persons may be buried in a grave.</p>
<p>Re. Q8: Burials in one grave plot should preferably be a family member/relative of the person who is buried first, in essence it would work as a family grave.</p>	<p>No one may be buried in a grave without the permission of the owner of the Rights of Burial.</p>
<p>My family's grave is there with 3 burials and several cremations, under no circumstances would we like it reused for moral, ethical, religious and other reasons.</p>	<p>No one may be buried in a grave without the permission of the owner of the Rights of Burial. Families are able to extend the Rights of Burial so no unrelated persons may be buried in a grave.</p>

<p>This strikes me as immoral; graves should be eternally exclusive to those interred therein.</p>	<p>Rights of Burial may not be granted that exceed 100 years.</p>
<p>Some families could still maintain the right</p>	<p>No changes to existing Rights of Burial are proposed. Families are able to extend the Rights of Burial in a grave.</p>
<p>I disagree with graves being reused.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>
<p>Answered 'no' to 8, because there ought to be options. Whenever possible, 'dig deep'. However, if a couple simply want a grave for two, this should be permissible.</p> <p>Answered 'no' to 9, because in older graves, there is (at Welford Rd, Belgrave, Gilroes &amp; Saffron Lane) a 'haphazard' style of internment. I would leave well alone, and make changes looking forward.</p>	<p>Q8 - A grave for two is permissible although it will be dug deeper to allow future burials. Digging graves to a depth for two loses potential burial space.</p> <p>Q9 - noted</p>