

chambers can be more expensive for customers and providers.

#### D) Find a burial site outside of Southwark

It may be possible to identify land outside of Southwark that could be purchased and used as burial space. If this is possible and not too expensive, residents of the borough would need to travel to wherever the site is to visit the graves of loved ones. The council does not currently own land that is suitable for this use.

#### E) Share a cemetery elsewhere or buy graves from a private supplier

The council could seek a partner or partners who the council could work with to find an innovative solution to the lack of burial space. A local funeral director is in the process of developing land outside the borough as a private cemetery and early discussions have been held with him with a view to purchasing space within that facility which may be operational within the next two years.

#### F) Work with other local authorities to source land for a new cemetery

As the majority of inner London local authorities are in a similar position to Southwark it may be possible to find solutions to this issue together. The council is working with neighbouring boroughs to think through the possible solutions to this issue.

#### G) Use all or some of Honor Oak Park Recreation Ground for burial space

Honor Oak Park Recreation Ground was purchased for burial space in 1901 but has been used as a recreation ground for some years as the land was not needed for burial space.

Local residents use Honor Oak Park Recreation Ground for football; the children's play area, for dog walking and general recreation. The land would provide burial for about 30 years but recreation activities would no longer be possible.

The loss of the football pitches could put additional pressure on other nearby facilities at One Tree Hill, Brenchley Gardens (open space only) and Peckham Rye Park (sports facilities and children's play) in Southwark and Blythe Hill Fields (children's play area) and Hilly Fields (sports facilities and children's play area) in Lewisham.

#### H) Stop burying in Southwark

Providing a burial service is not a statutory responsibility. The council must ensure the legal disposal of any person who dies within its boundary where no suitable funeral arrangements have been made. If burials in the borough cease the crematorium would continue to operate and hence the council could continue to meet this duty.

Maintaining cemeteries in its ownership is a statutory responsibility of the local authority. Ceasing to bury would mean a year on year reduction in income for Southwark, whilst the costs of maintenance would remain.

People wanting to bury relatives could purchase graves at cemeteries in neighbouring boroughs though they would be charged up to 3 times the standard residential rate.

### More information

For further information about this consultation please go to our website:

[www.southwark.gov.uk/parks](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/parks)

### Contact us

To contact us please email

[parks@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:parks@southwark.gov.uk)

# Cemeteries consultation

**Our cemeteries are nearly full. We want to make the right decisions about future burials and burial space in Southwark.**

**We have now started a public consultation to hear your views. This is an opportunity to speak with residents about the lack of burial space in the borough and how we plan to tackle it.**

**We want to hear from you and there will be several ways that you can get involved, including public meetings and a survey.**

**To start the discussion we have provided answers to some frequently asked questions about cemeteries in Southwark.**

## Frequently asked questions

### Q What are the options?

**A** There are several options that offer possible solutions to this challenge. They range from looking at available virgin ground within the borough, re-using existing graves, exploring burial space outside of the borough, using some, all or none of the land at Honor Oak Recreation ground, working with other local authorities, and considering the alternatives to traditional earthen burials.

Further explanation of all of the options is provided on page 3 of this leaflet.

### Q What is virgin ground?

**A** Virgin ground is land within the existing cemeteries that has not previously been used for burials. All known virgin ground has been used or has been earmarked for burials in the short term. However extensive work is being undertaken to ensure that all virgin ground has been exhausted.

### Q How did our cemeteries get so full?

**A** The council has been aware of this issue for a number of years, as this is a country wide problem which many local authorities are facing, but there is no easy solution. It is a very

sensitive subject and the council is committed to resolving this issue so as to make the right decision for the benefit of residents.

### Q Does the council have to provide this service?

**A** Southwark Council is not bound by law to bury people. The council is responsible for the disposal of any person who dies within its boundary where no suitable funeral arrangements have been made. However, this disposal does not need to be burial so cremation can be used.

The council is bound by law to maintain cemeteries, in its ownership, in perpetuity.

### Q What happens if you stop burying?

**A** The crematorium would continue to operate.

There are some people who for religious or cultural reasons or as a family tradition do not practice cremation. People wanting to bury would need to use cemeteries outside of Southwark. Council run cemeteries often charge more to people residing outside their borough.

Most neighbouring boroughs are in a similar position to us in terms of the shortage of burial space.

### Q Will the crematorium still be used?

**A** There are no plans to cease cremation operations in Southwark. 70% of people favour cremation over burial. The cremation operations in Southwark are very successful and don't create significant demands for space.

### Q Why don't we cremate instead?

**A** 70% of Southwark residents opt for cremation over burial. However 30% of people still want to be buried. This trend has not changed much over the last few years.

Some people's religion or culture requires that they must be buried and cannot be cremated.

### Q What is the demand for the burial service?

**A** 30% of people in Southwark opt for burial. This equates to around 210 new plot purchases per year and a total of 380 burials per year. The rest of the burials are reopening of graves for two people that have already been purchased.

### Q What are other boroughs doing?

**A** Many boroughs are about to run out, if they haven't already. Some boroughs are selling their cemeteries to private operators, others are re-using graves, some are re-opening previously closed cemeteries, others own enough land to create new cemeteries.

### Q Why can't we re-use the old graves?

**A** It is possible by law to re-use private (purchased) graves that are older than 75 years old (good practice is to wait until they are 100 years old) and this is an option that we are considering.

Please see a summary of this option on page 3 and 4 of this leaflet.

### Q Why are you considering using Honor Oak Recreation Ground as burial space?

**A** It is only an option at this stage and we have declared that this is the council's least preferred option. It was originally bought by the council in

the early part of last century (1901) as burial ground, but has been used as a recreation ground because burial space was available elsewhere.

### Q What is the designation of the land at Honor Oak and doesn't this protect it from being used as cemetery space?

**A** The whole area that was purchased as cemetery space is designated in the Southwark UDP/Core Strategy as Metropolitan Open Land. Burial space is considered a suitable use for Metropolitan Open Land.

### Q Why can't we move the play area at Honor Oak?

**A** It would be possible to move the play area but it is a matter of how much this would cost and where the money would come from.

### Q Where else in the Honor Oak area can people play football, walk their dog, and take their small children to play?

**A** In Southwark, the following sites are available for a variety of activities including football, dog walking and children's play: Peckham Rye Park, One Tree Hill and Brenchley Gardens. In Lewisham the following sites are available: Blythe Hill Fields, Hilly Fields and King's College Sports Ground at Brockley Rise.

### Q What happens now?

**A** On pages 3 and 4 we have listed a summary of the options we think are open to us. We are asking the public to consider these and tell us their preferences. Once we have the results of this consultation we will make a decision on developing our burial provision.

## Explaining the options

### The range of options available to the council includes:

- A) Re-use of common graves
- B) Re-use of private graves
- C) Use of burial chambers
- D) Find a burial site outside of Southwark
- E) Share a cemetery elsewhere or buy graves from private owner
- F) Work with other local authorities to source land for a new cemetery
- G) Use all or some of Honor Oak Park Recreation Ground
- H) Stop burying people in Southwark

### A) Re-use of common graves (public graves owned by the council)

i) **Top up** It is possible to re-use common graves by making up the soil level on top of the area of graves in order to provide the appropriate depth for new burials. This prevents the disturbance of human remains. It is also possible to use chamber systems on top of common graves to achieve the same effect.

ii) **Faculty re-use** It is also possible to re-use areas of common graves on consecrated land. This is land that has been dedicated for sacred use in a ceremony performed by the Bishop. With permission or 'faculty' from the Church of England, providing the graves are old enough, the remains can be exhumed and reburied in another area of consecrated ground.

### B) Re-use of private grave areas

Legally burial authorities in London can re-use privately purchased graves after 75 years but it is best practice to wait until they are over 100 years old and only once notices and letters have failed to identify living relatives who can make a claim to the grave.

i) **Reclaiming space** In the past some graves have been purchased to accommodate 2 or more people but subsequently not fully utilised. In these circumstances it is possible to reclaim and sell remaining space. This option still requires notices and every effort to be made to identify any living relative.

ii) **Dig and deepen** It is also possible to re-use private graves through a practice called 'dig and deepen' where the human remains are reburied at a greater depth to allow for burials on top. This allows the appropriate depth for the new burial and does not disturb the human remains already buried within the grave.

The City of London, Newham and Croydon councils re-use and it is considered to be the most sustainable option by industry experts however few local authorities are currently undertaking re-use schemes.

None of the graves in Camberwell New Cemetery are older than 100 years old. Due to its significance in terms of conservation and heritage, the potential to re-use private graves at Nunhead Cemetery is limited. This option would therefore only be applicable to Camberwell Old Cemetery.

### C) Use of burial chambers

The installation of chamber systems or mausoleum systems is popular approach to burial taken in some European countries. Due to the nature of the systems it is possible to fit more graves into a space compared to traditional earthen burials. However some argue that this relocates the problem of lack of space to above the ground.

These systems require less maintenance, but the initial costs of purchasing and installing burial