

MIDDLESBROUGH COUNCIL	
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Report of:	Richard Horniman - Director of Regeneration
Relevant Executive Member:	Theo Furness - Executive Member for Development
Submitted to:	Executive
Date:	3 December 2025
Title:	Cemetery Provision – Middlesbrough
Report for:	Decision
Status:	Public
Council Plan priority:	Safe and resilient communities
Key decision:	Yes
Why:	Decision(s) will incur expenditure or savings above £250,000 and have a significant impact in two or more wards
Subject to call in?	Yes
Why:	Non-Urgent Report

Proposed decision(s)
It is recommended that Executive: a) APPROVES a virement of £0.277m from the Derisking Sites scheme to fund the additional costs for the main works as part of the Thorntree extension. If approved, the virement will be actioned as part of the Revenue & Capital Budget Forecast Year End Outturn Quarter 3 2025-26 Executive report. b) ENDORSES the proposals for short, medium and long-term burial provision c) NOTES the current status of burial plots remaining in Thorntree and Acklam Cemetery.

Executive summary
Middlesbrough Council has provided public cemeteries for over a century. Many of the historic cemeteries have now reached capacity. Currently, Thorntree and Acklam cemeteries provide for the majority of burials; however, these will reach capacity in approximately six - nine months¹, based on current demand and availability. The overriding objective is to ensure a seamless supply of burial provision in the town, the Council constantly monitors availability and demand.

¹ As of end of October 2025

This report seeks to update the Executive on the short, medium and long-term proposals to ensure that a seamless supply of cemetery provision is maintained in the town. Whilst overall, in terms of annual funeral provision breakdown, Middlesbrough's figures illustrate the breakdown of annual deaths as 87% of people being cremated with 13% of people choosing to be buried², therefore there are sufficient grounds to demonstrate a need for ongoing burial provision.

Providing new land for burials requires the strict observance of planning and environmental legislation. Therefore, the Council engaged specialists to complete a comprehensive option appraisal that will provide full project delivery and cost advice for options for Thorntree and Acklam Cemetery, from inception to the completion of all ground works. This complex work is to be inclusive of all site investigation surveys, analysis and preparation for all necessary statutory consents. These include planning permission and consent from the Environment Agency (EA) for burials, where required. A team of specialists, Gleeds and Cemetery Development and Environmental Solutions (CDS) were procured to undertake option analysis and provide design solutions for Thorntree, including some initial feasibility at Acklam. This work has now concluded at Thorntree, having been inclusive of site investigation surveys, ground analysis, and preparation for the required statutory consents. The Council is now at the stage, subject to Executive approval, where the necessary procurement, planning and other legal processes can take place to allow work to start on the extension at Thorntree, to ensure a seamless provision in the short term. A capital allocation for the main works of £2.388m was approved by the Executive as part of a wider capital report (*Capital Budget Report, 19th February 2025*) however there is now a shortfall, given the advanced detailed analysis and design development, which is now requested within this report. This report provides the outcome of the detailed analysis, leading to the proposed immediate proposals for Thorntree, along with additional actions to continue feasibility in the determination of additional space.

In order to deliver the short-term proposal, the report seeks a virement of £0.277m from the Derisking Sites scheme to prepare land for the delivery of 1258 burial plots in the short-term. In addition, the report outlines further steps to ensure the Council can secure a medium- and longer-term burial provision in the town

1. Purpose of this report and its contribution to the achievement of the Council Plan ambitions

- 1.1 This report seeks to update and inform Executive on the current and future burial plot supply, and actions proposed to tackle the limited supply and to ensure an ongoing provision. This request includes a virement of £0.277m from the De-Risking Sites Scheme to the existing cemetery capital budget.
- 1.2 In particular, the Executive are asked to approve the short, medium and longer-term proposals, to ensure a sustainable burial provision for residents in Middlesbrough. Alongside this, approval for the study at Acklam Crematorium will ensure a viable future for the cremation service offered in Middlesbrough.

² Figures as of June 2025 – as provided by Bereavement Services

Our ambitions	Summary of how this report will support delivery of these ambitions and the underpinning aims
A successful and ambitious town	
A healthy Place	
Safe and resilient communities	Provision of good quality and accessible burial space for those who require it, for both religious and non-religious purposes, is something which residents of the town would continue to need. Burial space within Middlesbrough would ensure families continue being able to bury and visit their loved ones, as and when they wish to, in sustainable and accessible locations.
Delivering best value	

2. Recommendations

2.1 It is recommended that Executive:

- a) **APPROVES** a virement of £0.277m from the Derisking Sites scheme to fund the additional costs for the main works as part of the Thorntree extension. If approved, the virement will be actions as part of the Revenue & Capital Budget Forecast Year End Outturn Quarter 3 2025-26 Executive report.
- b) **ENDORSES** the proposals for short, medium and long-term burial provision.
- c) **NOTES** the current status of burial plots remaining in Thorntree and Acklam Cemetery.

3. Rationale for the recommended decision(s)

- 3.1 Burial provision in the town is extremely limited, with estimated supply remaining of around six-nine months only. Whilst it is accepted that the Council does not have a statutory duty to provide burial space, it is anticipated that the Council seek to continue to provide provision for those who wish to utilise the service.
- 3.2 Failure to provide burial provision would mean residents would have no alternative but to find provision in neighbouring authorities.

4. Background and relevant information

Short Term proposal to increase capacity

- 4.1 Thorntree is a multi-faith burial site, with dedicated burial spaces for Muslim and non-Muslim faiths. Currently (see Appendix 1) non-Muslim burials are taking place in/around Site D, with Muslim burials to the north of the site, adjacent to Site A.
- 4.2 Following analysis of the site, it is proposed that Sites A, B, and D be progressed and developed for new burial provision, with Site C proposed as an area to include new parking provision and a secure site compound for the service area, which currently they do not have. The contracted works are inclusive of all groundworks, including new drainage, footpaths, signage, roads, incoming water supply for servicing of the graves and associated soft landscaping, with some new fencing to new areas.

4.3 Sites A, C and D do not require any planning consent, the only site which requires consent is B (former play park provision). It is worth noting, the Thorntree proposed extension is identified in the Local Plan, and pre-application consultation has been undertaken which was positive. All areas will require Environment Agency statutory permission (Certificate of Lawfulness) which will be obtained alongside the planning application submission. Subject to planning, the expansion of the proposed cemetery areas will unlock between a five-six year supply (based on figures from 2024 annual burial requirement).

4.4 The table below illustrates the split (across the sites) of how many spaces are estimated in each section:

Table 1- Proposed Plots at Thorntree Extension

Site	No of Plots	Comments
A	478	Adjacent to current Muslim burials – proposed to be a combination of Muslim/non-Muslim provision (subject to demand)
B	452	Site which requires planning permission
D	328	Area where current non-Muslim burials take place
C	0	This area whilst not immediately suitable for burial – does provide a secure site compound/additional parking/associated uses for service area
Total	1258*	*Based on 2024 burial figure of 224 burials equates to an estimated 5.6 year supply (NB – average number only)

4.5 The proposed timeline for works:

November 2025 (as part of existing funding)

- i) complete detailed drainage assessment
- ii) submit planning application for Site B (13-week determination period)
- iii) application submitted for Certificate of Lawfulness
- iv) commission of consultants to undertake study at Acklam Crematorium

December 2025/January 2026

- i) procurement dialogue with contractor leading to appointment
- ii) agreed detailed site programme for delivery of works
- iii) finalise detailed costs
- iv) works contract agreed

February/March 2026

- i) preparatory works for start on site
- ii) Certificate of Lawfulness obtained
- iii) planning permission for B approved (subject to no objections)

September 2026 works completed – estimated 16-week construction period*

**estimated – subject to confirmation by contractors*

Medium Term proposal to increase capacity

- 4.6 Acklam Cemetery has 95³ plots remaining (inclusive of Muslim and non-Muslim), which equates to around six months of supply. Following assessment of the land surrounding (and some green spaces within the boundary) the consultants have been tasked with assessing, what, if any, areas could be expanded both within and adjacent to the existing cemetery. This has identified areas for further investigation (see Appendix 2 – Areas C, D and F).
- 4.7 Additionally, there is a site identified in the emerging Local Plan⁴ - Land to the east of St Mary's Church, Church Lane, Nunthorpe (see Appendix 2). This is subject to adoption of the Plan, as well as further design and feasibility. Early survey assessments (carried out in 2023) demonstrate this is likely to be suitable for burial provision, subject to usual caveats. No capital is allocated for further survey work, nor infrastructure or groundworks to provide burial provision. If this site is unlocked, this could unlock up to a further 750-1000 plots.
- 4.8 The sites are all subject to planning constraints, site investigation and compliance with further statutory guidance for burial provision. This feasibility work will assess suitability of site, undertake some desktop analysis and limited desktop site investigation which may, or may not realise additional space. Surveys are constrained by the limited budget available for feasibility, at this stage. There is no capital allocated for creation of any plots (if any of the areas are suitable) and therefore this would be subject to further capital requests being approved.

Longer Term proposal to increase capacity

- 4.9 Feasibility work at Acklam, may or may not unlock further provision which adds further pressure to secure additional sites for medium-long term burial provision. Therefore, it is proposed that further work is undertaken to assess future cemetery sites within the town boundary. As expected, unallocated land (which is not earmarked for development) is limited within the Council's ownership boundary, however there are some sites which may have some potential to develop, but require further desktop analysis, in the first instance.
- 4.10 It is proposed that all these sites are assessed, and the outcome be brought back to the Executive, should any of the sites be viable with a detailed breakdown and of potential plot provision and capital cost requirement.

5. Ward Member Engagement if relevant and appropriate

- 5.1 Thorntree Members have been consulted and are comfortable with the proposals. Members are keen to see additional spaces unlocked as soon as possible and support proposed feasibility for both Acklam, and new sites analysis. Acklam Members have also been consulted and updated. As part of longer-term plans to increase capacity, ward members will be engaged as those areas emerge as options.

³ As of 13th October 2025 – changes daily/weekly

⁴ Publication Local Plan, March 2025 (submitted for Examination, Sep 2025)

6. Other potential alternative(s) and why these have not been recommended:

- 6.1 The Council could elect to not provide future burial space, but this has been rejected on the basis that significant proportions of the community continue to opt for burials.

7. Impact(s) of the recommended decision(s)

Topic	Impact
Financial (including procurement and Social Value)	The financial implications of the recommended decision have been assessed in the context of the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP). As the additional £0.277m funding required is proposed to be provided through a virement for the Derisking Sites scheme there is no impact upon the Capital Programme nor the Capital Financing revenue budget. A VAT assessment has been undertaken, and the proposal is considered to be standard rated. There are no implications for the Council's partial exemption position, and advice has been sought from the VAT team where appropriate. Procurement requirements have been reviewed in line with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules. The proposed procurement route is an exemption due to limited timescales and contractor expertise, and the Procurement Team has been consulted to ensure compliance. Where applicable, the procurement process will incorporate social value considerations, including local employment, sustainability, community benefit, in line with the Council's Social Value Policy.
Legal	The Local Government Act 1972 provides that Local Authorities (as burial authorities) may provide and maintain cemeteries whether in or outside their area. This also extends to burial purposes under the Cremation Acts of 1902 and 1952. The Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 further provides that a burial authority may enclose, lay out and embellish a cemetery in such manner as they think fit, and from time to time improve it, and shall keep the cemetery in good order and repair, together with all buildings, walls and fences thereon and other buildings provided for use therewith. The Council should be mindful of our legal title and consider all relevant due diligence and desktop searches to establish whether the new land to be used is affected by any rights or easements (e.g. water mains/gas pipes etc.) which may be interrupted by these proposals (both in respect of short term and longer-term solutions). The Council should also be mindful of the planning and environmental risks highlighted above relating to the Acklam proposal and the potential liabilities that may arise therefrom. All contracts will need to comply with internal Contract Procedure Rules, procurement rules, and any requirements of

	the Funding Agreements, including passing down any relevant responsibilities to contractors.
Risk	The proposed recommendations are key to and consistent with supporting delivery of the Council's strategic priorities and risks, as set out in the Council Plan. Failure to approve proposed option and actions would inevitably lead to the Council not being able to offer burial plots in the town.
Human Rights, Public Sector Equality Duty and Community Cohesion	There are no disproportionate adverse impacts on any group or individuals with characteristics protected in UK equity law. An impact assessment has been carried out and is attached – see Appendix 3. It found that the proposal will support the Council to continue to meet the needs of individuals and groups. It was particularly relevant to those groups that require burials in relation to their religious beliefs
Reducing Poverty	This action has no direct contribution to measures which reduce poverty for residents in Middlesbrough.
Climate Change / Environmental	There are no disproportionate adverse impacts on the aspirations of the Council to achieve net zero, net carbon neutral or be the lead authority on environmental issues – see Appendix 3
Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers	This action has no additional impact upon Children and Young People Cared for by the Authority and Care Leavers.
Data Protection	There are no Data Protection issues of consequence for this proposal.

Actions to be taken to implement the recommended decision(s)

Action	Responsible Officer	Deadline
To deliver infrastructure to create c1258 new burial plots in Thorntree Cemetery	Nasreen Younis	September 2026
Undertake feasibility desktop study for new cemetery provision	Nasreen Younis	April 2026

Appendices

1	Block Plan of Thorntree Proposals
2	Acklam and Nunthorpe – Sites for Investigation
3	Impact Assessment

Background papers

Body	Report title	Date
N/A	N/A	N/A

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