

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 12<sup>th</sup> June 2025

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Executive Director Environment and Regeneration

**PORTFOLIO:** Environment and Urban Renewal

**SUBJECT:** Cemetery Infrastructure Works

**WARD(S)** Borough wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide Members with details of essential work required to be undertaken to refurbish aging infrastructure and update the grounds with a range of environmental enhancements at three of the Council's cemeteries.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDED: That;**

- 1) Members approve the proposals set out within the report.**
- 2) Members approve that Council be asked to include £1.971m within the Council's Capital Programme, over 4 years, to fund the proposed works as set out within the report.**
- 3) Delegated authority be granted to the Executive Director Environment & Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Regeneration, to prepare and approve all necessary documents, contracts and funding arrangements required to complete proposed works.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Council is responsible for four cemeteries within the Borough. This report concentrates on the three older sites being: Widnes Cemetery (Birchfield Road), Runcorn Cemetery and Halton Cemetery, which date back to 1898, 1860 and 1800 respectively. All are now closed to new burials. These sites are now in a transition phase from fully active working burial grounds to sites that continue to provide the opportunity for residents and others to visit for contemplation and reflection for passed loved ones. The three sites also have the potential to provide general amenity/park use and significant environmental additions: for wildlife and habitat creation as well as increased tree canopy as part of the Big Halton Forest project. The sites can also be considered as an important element for contributing towards Halton's response to climate change.

- 3.2 The sites were originally designed and laid out according to the era that they were developed in but are now outdated and do not meet with modern demands. Pathways and carriageways are in severe need of resurfacing and entrances and boundaries require attention to brickwork, masonry and metalwork to ensure they remain in safe order and important heritage features are preserved. Members are advised that the deteriorating infrastructure and water runoff/flooding issues are the cause of enquiries from Councillors and complaints/negative comments. The number of enquiries, complaints and comments are difficult to quantify as the majority are relayed verbally to Cemetery Team staff through telephone and on-site conversations with members of the public and Funeral Directors. Carrying out the improvements will also reduce the risk of potential future insurance claims from members of the public - There have been 2 claims made against the Council in the last 12 months.
- 3.3 The proposal is to undertake extensive works to address the declining infrastructure by rationalising elements and concentrating renewal on the primary routes and important features within the sites. Where possible, this will involve reducing hard surfacing, thereby reducing surface water runoff and creating additional green space for habitat creation and tree planting. In some places, this will include a change from vehicle to pedestrian only access routes, to reduce future wear and tear on pathways. The total cost for the works, including all fees, contingency sums and inflation is £1.9m. A full breakdown of costs is set out in section 5 of the report.
- 3.4 Images to show issues and problems associated with the aging infrastructure, along with opportunities for repair and enhancement, are shown in appendix 1. The proposed masterplans to illustrate how the sites will be adapted and improved to ensure that they continue to be fit for purpose and add further benefits for the community into the future, are shown in appendix 2.
- 3.5 It is recognised that any works undertaken in the cemeteries should be delivered in a sensitive way and proposals have been developed that allow for a phased approach to gradually deliver changes with minimal disruption caused at any one time. A phased approach of spreading the work over four years will also spread the cost of the work over a number of financial years. However, this will increase costs by separating works contracts and increasing preliminary and contractor 'on costs'.
- 3.6 The primary benefits of the proposal will include:
- The rationalisation of path and circulation systems; reducing wear and tear and improving the visitor experience.
  - Improvements to surface water drainage; reducing instances of flooding to graves and pathways.
  - Additional tree planting.
  - Porous surfacing to parking bays.

- Interpretation information to celebrate important local people buried in the cemetery sites.
- Information about nature and habitats that can be found in the cemeteries that will be complemented by the works.

3.7 The project will also include community engagement, building on the establishment of groups such as the Friends of Widnes Cemetery and encouraging further 'friends of' groups in Runcorn. Volunteers will also be able to directly contribute to improvement works.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Policy HE2 Heritage Assets & Historic Environment, the cemeteries are non-designated heritage assets and hold significant value and cultural importance for Halton residents. Improvements will safeguard and promote this heritage for future generations.

4.2 The proposals are in accordance with policy CS21/HE4 - Green Infrastructure, supporting the delivery of programmes and strategies to protect, enhance and expand green infrastructure across the Borough including adaptations for climate change.

4.3 The proposals are in accordance with Environmental legislation, which places a duty on local authorities to look for ways to support nature recovery and promote habitat creation. There is potential for sections of older cemeteries to provide Bio-diversity Net Gain (BNG) credits.

4.4 Policy HE5 Trees & Landscaping, the cemetery improvements will include additional softworks increasing the amenity value as well as providing an opportunity for tree planting, which will also contribute to The Big Halton Forest project.

#### **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 In the last 12 months, £142k has been spent on filling potholes, repairs to boundaries and repairing old drainage systems. This repair work, whilst fixing immediate issues, are generally reactive to address a problem or safety concern and do not fully address the underlying issue of failing infrastructure across the cemeteries in the long term.

5.2 The breakdown of infrastructure repair costs is set out below:

1	Access Rationalisation of Roads, Path and Related Hard Surfaces	£839,991
2	Public Realm and Furniture Infrastructure Enhancements	£113,874
3	Drainage and Surface Water Enhancements	£426,773
4	Security, Site Boundary and Entrance Improvements	£65,514
5	Bio Diversity and Nature Enhancements	£42,110

6	Soft Landscaping Enhancements	£233,316
7	Additional Memorial Vault Provision	£145,928
8	Site Investigation and Survey Works	£9,000
9	Inflation over 4-year programme	£93,825
	<b>Total</b>	<b>£1,970,331</b>

- 5.3 It is proposed that the improvement works are spread over a 4-year period as shown below:

Year 1	£469,127
Year 2	£683,048
Year 3	£607,988
Year 4	£210,168

- 5.4 In order to facilitate the works, it is proposed that the total costs above are built into the Council's Capital Programme. In the first instance, this would be funded through prudential borrowing. However, due to the nature of the works, there will be opportunities to seek out external funding. Where possible, external funding will be utilised as a priority to reduce the borrowed sum.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence**

The proposals will provide enhanced green spaces that can be visited and enjoyed by all residents.

### **6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy**

None identified.

### **6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families**

None identified.

### **6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need**

None identified.

### **6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future**

As per section 9 below, the proposals will have a positive impact on the Council's actions towards delivering climate change improvements.

### **6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community**

The proposals will provide safer infrastructure and enhanced, well maintained green spaces, that encourage increased general usage by Halton residents helping increase natural surveillance.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

- 7.1 The cemeteries' aging infrastructure is a growing concern, with a number of complaints and claims for slips/trips and damage from potholes (as referenced in para 3.2). Not following this programme of works could result in an increasing number of complaints and claims resulting in compensation and could cause considerable damage to the Council's reputation.
- 7.2 Whilst undertaking alteration/improvement works in such a sensitive landscape will present a very particular set of issues, the proposals will be carefully tailored to ensure minimum impact to families attending graves and will result in considerable overall improvements to the sites and enhanced visitor experience.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 None

## **9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The planned proposals to reduce hard surfaces, manage surface water on site, increase habitat areas and tree canopy are all important elements towards delivering climate change improvements. Work will be undertaken to survey and record increases in species as part of the project.
- 9.2 Proposals will include reuse of materials, to limit waste and reduce vehicle movements required to complete the works.

## **10. LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

None under the meaning of the Act.