

### Cemeteries and Churchyards

#### Introduction

- 11.1 This typology encompasses both churchyards contained within the walled boundary of a church and cemeteries outside the confines of a church. This includes private burial grounds, local authority burial grounds and disused churchyards. Although the primary purpose of this type of open space is burial of the dead and quiet contemplation, these sites also have considerable value for the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.
- 11.2 Some churchyards contain areas of unimproved grasslands and various other habitats. They can make provide a sanctuary for wildlife in the urban settlements and often offer historic value in the more rural landscapes.
- 11.3 Cemeteries and churchyards can be a significant open space provider in rural areas. In some instances, cemeteries and churchyards may be the only open space within a settlement. They can therefore function as an area of open space, as well as fulfilling their primary purpose.
- 11.4 In urban areas especially, although representing a relatively minor resource in terms of the land, they can be important for nature conservation. The local plan indicates that the provision of cemeteries is one of the only land uses where development will be permitted in the green belt.

#### St John's Churchyard, Bromsgrove



- 11.5 Only a small number of residents identified cemeteries and churchyards as their favourite type of open space in Bromsgrove (1%). 49% of residents stated that they do not visit cemeteries and churchyards, however 23% of residents visit cemeteries and churchyards at least once a month.

#### Current position

- 11.6 There are currently 18 cemeteries and churchyards in Bromsgrove. North Bromsgrove Fields in Catshill is a natural open space site that has been identified as a cemetery extension.
- 11.7 The distribution of sites across the district is summarised in Table 11.1 overleaf.

**Table 11.1 – Provision of churchyards and cemeteries in Bromsgrove**

Analysis area	Current provision (hectares)	Number of sites	Smallest site (hectares)	Largest site (hectares)	LDF population (2026)	Provision per 1000 population (2026)
Bromsgrove North	0.97	2	0.39	0.58	12,575	0.077
Bromsgrove West	2.89	5	0.30	1.11	14,154	0.204
Bromsgrove East	2.40	3	0.53	1.13	10,429	0.230
Bromsgrove North East	1.12	1	-	1.12	12,706	0.088
Bromsgrove Central	10.75	7	0.16	5.54	48,192	0.223
<b>Overall</b>	<b>18.13</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>5.54</b>	<b>98,056</b>	<b>0.185</b>

11.8 It can be seen from Table 11.1 that:

- sites are unevenly distributed, with the majority of sites located in Bromsgrove Town (7) and Bromsgrove West (5). Only one site is located in Bromsgrove East
- the size of cemeteries and churchyards is varying with sites ranging between 0.16 hectares and 5.54 hectares
- the greatest current provision (10.75 hectares) and highest provision per 1000 population (0.223 hectares) is found in Bromsgrove Central. This is largely due to the location of Bromsgrove Cemetery in this area of the district.

### **Setting provision standards**

#### ***Quantity standard***

11.9 No quantity standards have been set for cemeteries and churchyards. PPG17 Annex states: "many historic churchyards provide important places for quiet contemplation, especially in busy urban areas, and often support biodiversity and interesting geological features. As such many can also be viewed as amenity greenspaces. Unfortunately, many are also run-down and therefore it may be desirable to enhance them. As churchyards can only exist where there is a church, the only form of provision standard which will be required is a qualitative one."

11.10 For cemeteries, PPG 17 Annex states: "every individual cemetery has a finite capacity and therefore there is steady need for more of them. Indeed, many areas face a shortage of ground for burials. The need for graves, for all religious faiths, can be calculated from population estimates, coupled with details of the average proportion of deaths which result in a burial, and converted into a quantitative population-based provision standard."

11.11 Consideration should therefore be given to the need for additional burial space as the population increases. Consultation with the council's cemeteries and churchyards officer indicates that there is sufficient burial capacity for the foreseeable future. However, as highlighted by the preparation of a cemetery extension at North Bromsgrove Fields (Catshill), proactive planning is essential in order to ensure the adequate provision of cemeteries across the district.

### **Quality**

11.12 The quality of cemeteries and churchyards can be particularly important in encouraging local residents to use these sites for recreational purposes.

11.13 The quality of each site has been assessed through a detailed site visit and the completion of the pro forma described in Section 2. This is provided in detail in Appendix G. It is important to note that the quality score represents a snapshot in time and records only the quality of the site at the time of the visit.

11.14 Analysis of the quality of cemeteries and churchyards highlights that:

- 48% of respondents to the household survey rate the quality of cemeteries and churchyards as average. 24% of residents feel the quality of this typology is poor. Similar results are portrayed within the five analysis areas
- PMP site assessments reveal that the quality of cemeteries and churchyards is excellent, with the average quality score of a site being 86%
- Wythall Cemetery (100%), St Laurence Parish Church (98%) and St Bartholomew's, (98%) are the highest scoring sites in the district. These sites should be considered as examples of good practice
- site assessments undertaken by an independent consultant indicate that the toilets and footpaths at Bromsgrove Cemetery are in need of enhancement.

### **Accessibility standards**

11.15 With regards to accessibility there are no definitive national or local standards for cemeteries and churchyards. There is also no realistic requirement to set catchments for such typologies as their locations are not dependent upon the location of the population.

### **Quality standards**

11.16 As highlighted, it is only appropriate to set a quality standard for cemeteries and churchyards. This should take into account any national or local standards.

11.17 Due to the low number of residents who identified cemeteries and churchyards as their favourite open space, it is not possible to develop a quality standard based on the aspirations of current users. Consultations with residents indicated that cleanliness and maintenance, alongside perceived safety were of particular importance to local residents.

11.18 Site assessments undertaken by PMP reveal the average quality score of a cemetery and churchyard to be 86%. This highlights the excellent quality of this type of open space in Bromsgrove.

- 11.19 The council should continue to maintain this high standard at all cemeteries and churchyards in the district.
- 11.20 Key issues relating to the quality of specific sites should be considered and the findings of the quality assessments should be used to identify and prioritise those sites in need of significant improvement.

**Applying provision standards – identifying geographical areas**

- 11.21 Given that it is not appropriate to set any local quantity or accessibility standards it is also not appropriate to state areas of deficiency or need or to examine the spatial distribution of these sites.
- 11.22 It is however important to consider the quality of the provision of cemeteries and churchyards and the value of the current provision and to strive to achieve the quality criteria set for all churchyards and cemeteries.
- 11.23 Sites scoring well in terms of quality should be considered examples of good practice. The value of cemeteries and churchyards in the promotion of biodiversity and provision of habitats should be reinforced.

<b>CC1</b>	Stakeholders should recognise and promote the nature conservation value of closed cemeteries and churchyards and develop a greater awareness of ecological management of cemeteries and churchyards.
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- 11.24 In areas of limited open space provision (or where churchyards are the only open space type), churchyard and cemetery sites are of particular importance. In these areas, enhancement is crucial to ensure local residents value this type of open space. This is particularly the case in rural settlements where the provision of other types of open space is limited.

<b>CC2</b>	In areas of limited open space provision, churchyard and cemetery sites are of particular importance. The quality of cemeteries is of paramount importance if sites are to be promoted as opportunities for rest and relaxation. Quality improvements should be made where required using the essential and desirable features as a guide.
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- 11.25 Consultation with the council’s cemeteries and churchyards officer indicates that there is sufficient burial capacity for the foreseeable future. However, as highlighted by the preparation of a cemetery extension at North Bromsgrove Fields (Catshill), proactive planning is essential in order to ensure the adequate provision of cemeteries across the district. The Local Development Framework should facilitate the provision of further burial space to ensure the ongoing and sustainable provision of local cemeteries.

<b>CC3</b>	The Council should keep under review the opportunities for the reuse, expansion or acquisition of suitable land to ensure the continued and sustainable provision of local cemeteries.
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## SECTION 11 – CEMETERIES AND CHURCHYARDS

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11.26 The management and maintenance of sites that come into council ownership is a big challenge for the council as these sites are often in poor condition and require significant maintenance. It is therefore recommended that a programme of qualitative enhancement to these sites is created as a way of managing these churchyards and increasing their value to the local community. Consideration should also be given to the promotion of community involvement in such sites eg through the development of local friends groups.

<b>CC4</b>	Seek to create a programme of qualitative enhancements for new churchyards that come into council ownership. Give consideration to the promotion of community involvement in the management and maintenance of cemeteries.
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### Summary

- 11.27 Cemeteries and churchyards can be significant providers of open space, particularly in rural areas. In towns they can represent a relatively minor resource in terms of the land required, but are important for nature conservation.
- 11.28 Local standards for accessibility and quantity have not been set. Despite this, it remains important to consider the future delivery of cemeteries and churchyards anticipating future demand as well as assessing the current level of provision.
- 11.29 The quality of cemeteries and churchyards is currently good in comparison to other typologies. This high standard should be maintained. Analysis of the quantity of cemeteries in the district indicates that supply is likely to be sufficient to meet demand over the LDF period. There is a cemetery extension which has been set aside at Catshill.
- 11.30 In some instances, cemeteries and churchyards are the only type of open space within a village, making them a particularly valuable element of the rural green space network. Enhancements to accessibility and quality should be prioritised in these areas.
- 11.31 The wider benefits of churchyards are significant and it is wrong to place a value on churchyards and cemeteries focusing solely on quality and accessibility. In addition to offering a functional value, many cemeteries and churchyards have wider benefits including heritage, cultural and landscape values.
- 11.32 The key priorities for the future delivery of cemeteries and churchyards across the district therefore include:
- recognise and promote the nature conservation value of closed cemeteries and churchyards and investigate the implementation of ecological management
  - the Council should keep under review the opportunities for the reuse, expansion or acquisition of suitable land to ensure the continued and sustainable provision of local cemeteries
  - seek to create a programme of qualitative enhancements for new churchyards that come into council ownership.