

Burial Ground Strategy

2024–2034



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If you would like some help understanding this or need it in another format please contact 030 33 33 3000.

Foreword

This is our council's first burial strategy and a positive step forward to ensuring that we will continue to deliver effective control and management of the burial service and future development of cemeteries for the benefit of our communities across the region.

Dumfries and Galloway Council has a statutory responsibility to provide a means of burial across our region.

As the burial authority and as detailed within the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016 our council has a responsibility for the management of burial grounds and a legal obligation under the Health and Safety at Work Act, etc 1974 and the Occupiers (Scotland) Act 1960 to ensure as far as reasonably practicable, cemeteries are maintained in a safe condition.

Dumfries and Galloway has 183 burial grounds under its control, both in terms of management and maintenance responsibilities. 96 of these are classed as closed to new interments.

Our council does not own or manage a crematorium. There is one crematorium within Dumfries and Galloway which is privately owned and managed.

In developing this strategy extensive consultation took place in 2023 with our communities, families, stakeholders and faith groups to ensure that all needs are met. It is recognised that the burial service needs to be sympathetic to and meet the needs of the bereaved and the wider community of Dumfries and Galloway for both the short and longer term.

This burial strategy has been developed around the eleven themes which have been highlighted during our consultation process and our future service delivery will concentrate on these themes and required actions to deliver on these.

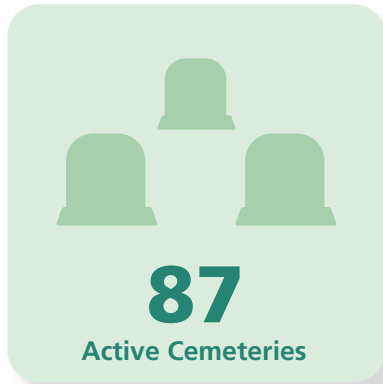


The Chair of Communities Committee, Councillor Ian Blake confirmed "It is important that Dumfries and Galloway has a strategy for the delivery of its burial service to ensure that the service is fit for purpose, managed within resources, is inclusive and most importantly meets the needs of the residents of Dumfries and Galloway."

The Vice Chair of Communities Committee, Councillor Jackie McCamon stated "It is recognised that burial grounds have an important place within Dumfries and Galloway and this is reflected in our strategy, to ensure that the long term needs and requirements of the public are considered."

The burial service is delivered by our Community Assets Team who are based in each of the operational areas of Dumfries and Galloway.

On average the council conducts 837 interments and 191 casket interments each year.



The consultation process – How we developed our region’s strategy

14 Community Conversations were held across Dumfries and Galloway, 12 were in person events, 1 in each ward and 2 were conducted online.

An online survey was carried out which received over 1000 responses.

3 Focus Groups were also held with partners and key stakeholders including Faith Groups, the Dumfries and Galloway Interfaith Group, funeral directors and stone masons. The Youth Council and Stranraer Place Plan Group met and provided their feedback.

A Members Seminar.

Stakeholder Impact Assessment which included representatives from the Equality and Diversity Working Group and Tackling Poverty Reference Group

The key highlights from the consultation throughout 2023 were as follows:

- Pre-purchase Scheme – respondents wanted the Pre-purchase Scheme to remain, even though it could not be consistently applied throughout the whole region.
- Our current Burial Ground Management Rules should be kept but updated – these should be enforced where possible by the council, particularly in relation to heavily adorned lairs; dogs should be on leads at all times; and rules should be displayed in all cemeteries.
- The Council should use the terms of the Burials and Cremations (Scotland) Act 2016 to reclaim lairs that remain unused after a period of 50 years.
- Closed cemeteries should have the addition of wildflower areas to promote biodiversity and encourage wildlife whilst keeping paths to headstones and memorials
- Areas should be designated within our cemeteries for the interment of caskets only
- There should be memorial walls, benches, plaques and trees within our cemeteries – these should not be time restricted.
- There should be a maximum number of ornaments permitted on graves and the council should enforce this.

Theme 1 - Cemeteries and Capacity

Dumfries and Galloway Council operate 87 active cemeteries across the region. 12 of these cemeteries are estimated to have lair space limited to under 15 years capacity, as at 31 December 2023. The remaining capacity within active cemeteries is analysed on an annual basis, based on a 5 year average of interments. Cemeteries are highlighted when they have under 15 years capacity remaining, with full analysis and consideration given to potential extensions from when 10 years remain.

These are shown in table below:

Area	Cemetery	No of lairs remaining	Anticipated remaining capacity - (years)
Annandale & Eskdale	Hoddom Cemetery, Ecclefechan	15	4
	Hutton & Corrie Churchyard, Boreland	9	4
	Moffat Cemetery	23	3
	Dalton Cemetery	8	8
	Kirkpatrick Fleming	45	11
Nithsdale	Sanquhar Churchyard & Cemetery, Sanquhar	100	10
	St Michael's Churchyard & Cemetery, Dumfries	426	12
Stewartry	Dalbeattie Cemetery, Dalbeattie	50	6
	Castle Douglas Cemetery, Castle Douglas	87	6
	Southwick Cemetery, Dalbeattie	9	9
Wigtown	Whithorn, Newton Stewart	55	6
	Inch Church, Castle Kennedy, Stranraer	5	1

At the time of writing this strategy, work is ongoing to explore sites for extensions within the following communities:

- Moffat
- Dalbeattie
- Castle Douglas
- Sanquhar
- Inch (Castle Kennedy)

In the past it has been customary for the council to extend all cemeteries when they reach capacity. This may not be possible in future due to availability of land, suitability of land due to strict SEPA guidelines and land purchase costs. It may become necessary for people to be buried in neighbouring towns and villages. We appreciate how important it is for people to be buried in their local area and will make every effort to extend cemeteries where possible.

Financing Extensions

Future financing of cemetery extensions will be progressed through existing Public Realm (Land Asset Class) Capital Budgets.

At the exploratory stage of considering a cemetery extension a business case will be prepared detailing full projected costings.

These will then be considered and built into the existing Public Realm Capital Budget for agreement by members at an appropriate committee.

This will ensure that prior to an extension project starting the funds are set aside solely for this purpose and will therefore allow the seamless completion of the project.



Theme 2 - Re-claiming Unused Lairs

Under the terms of the Burial and Cremations (Scotland) Act 2016 the council is able to reclaim lairs for burials. These are lairs within older parts of our cemeteries which families have purchased but which have remained un-used for more than 50 years.

Using these lairs would allow more burials to take place in existing cemeteries and would therefore increase the capacity of the cemetery.

Respondents to our survey in 2023 indicated that they would be keen that the council make use of all available ground to ensure that families could remain within existing cemeteries.

The first step will be to carry out a desk top survey of our older cemeteries to assess what ground is available. This development will initially concentrate on cemeteries which have lower capacity particularly those noted within the table in Theme 1.

Significant investigation will require to be carried out to determine whether there are surviving relatives as well as communication with the local community. Consideration will also be given to the access to the reclaimed area as this needs to be fully accessible to all and have a good path network adjacent to it.



Theme 3 - Burial Fees and Charges

As of 1 April 2024, our current charges for burials in Dumfries and Galloway are shown in the table below.

Item	Charge
Lair Purchase	£643.00
Lair Purchase (Non-resident)	£896.00
Interment Fee	£971.00
Interment Fee (Non- resident)	£1,256.00
Burial of a child aged 17 and under	£0.00
Stillborn	£0.00
Casket Interment	£238.00
Casket Interment (Non-resident)	£358.00
Surcharge for Saturday Work	Charge as above + 50%
Surcharge for Sunday/Bank Holiday Work	Charge as above +100%

In Dumfries and Galloway, the current cost to purchase a lair and burial is considerably lower than many other local authorities across Scotland.

In Dumfries and Galloway, the current cost of purchasing a lair and an interment is £1,614.00. Through a benchmarking exercise during the consultation phase it was demonstrated that the highest charge in Scotland for an interment in 2023 was £2,837.00 and the lowest was £1,075.

It would be anticipated that future fees and charges would increase each year which would be agreed by the appropriate committee. Burial fees and charges as well as other information regarding the burial service can be found at:

[Funerals, burials and cremations - Dumfries and Galloway Council \(dumgal.gov.uk\)](https://www.dumgal.gov.uk)

Theme 4 - Management Rules

The Burial Ground Management Rules were initially agreed in 2009, these have been reviewed and amended to reflect the legislative changes from the Burials and Cremations (Scotland) Act 2016.

During our community engagement work we consulted on the revised Management Rules and respondents were in agreement with the contents. 1001 respondents felt that the management rules were easy to understand and contained what they would expect.

Respondents stated that they would like the rules to be enforced, particularly around heavily adorned graves, and also suggested that the rules are clearly displayed within our cemeteries and should be re-worded in plain English taking into account all religious beliefs. They also requested that dogs should be on leads at all times within cemeteries.

We have taken on board the feedback received and will ensure that these rules are displayed in all our active cemeteries.

Theme 5 - Ornaments on Graves

This topic forms part of the management rules but also impacts upon grounds maintenance. This is a very sensitive issue, it is recognised that leaving mementoes on graves forms part of the grieving process.

During consultation respondents stated that they wanted the Council to enforce the rules around adornments on graves and felt that these should be restricted in number as large numbers of ornaments made cemeteries look untidy and affected the maintenance of the ground.

There are instances where families place a large number of items on the lair space which interferes with maintenance of the burial ground and impacts on adjacent lairs.

As part of the development of the Burial Strategy for Dumfries and Galloway 2024 – 2034 and the refreshing of the Burial Ground Management rules, in conjunction with our communities, the rules have been enhanced and where possible will be enforced.

It is strongly recommended that only a small number of ornaments will be permitted which should be positioned on the base of the headstone. If the headstone is of a style which does not have a ledge base then the ornaments should be placed directly in front of the headstone only. No planting of trees, shrubs or flowers will be permitted and no placing of fences, paved areas, gravel, or other items which could hinder maintenance.

Throughout the consultation, respondents confirmed that the placement of unauthorised items which are beside or encroach on adjacent family lairs causes distress as well as impacting on the lair maintenance. It is therefore anticipated that all family members should be considerate towards others within cemeteries.

Theme 6 - Pre-Purchase Scheme

Dumfries and Galloway Council currently operates a pre-purchase scheme which enables people to purchase a lair within a cemetery in advance. This is particularly used by people who take out funeral plans and make their own funeral arrangements.

Our current scheme is not available in all our burial grounds due to the number of lairs available.

We have given consideration as to whether we should provide a scheme which is not equally applied across all our cemeteries and we consulted with communities on this issue. The public clearly stated that whilst they understood that the service could not be consistently applied they still very much wanted to have it available wherever possible.

Dumfries and Galloway Council have committed to continuing to provide this service. Lair pre-purchase will only be available in cemeteries which have at least 10 years of lair-space available which is calculated on an annual basis.

In addition families will continue to be permitted to purchase an adjacent lair at the time of an interment (this will cease when a cemetery reaches 5 years capacity).

Theme 7 - Grounds Maintenance

Grounds maintenance operations within our cemeteries are carried out following good horticultural practice, using suitable machinery and are carried out when weather permits. Since 2007 our council has operated a cut and leave policy which means that grass cuttings are not collected and are left spread over the maintained area.

The undernoted table details the operations and frequencies of works carried out within each of our cemeteries.

Lift & Level Sunken Lairs	Sunken lairs shall be reinstated to match surrounding ground levels when they are discovered by Streetscene Operatives or reported by members of the public.
Remove floral Tributes	Floral Tributes shall be removed and disposed of no later than 28 days after an interment or sooner if they have withered or have been defoliated by wildlife.
Remove Holly Wreaths	Holly wreaths shall be removed and disposed of between the 1st & 12th of March.
Weed Control – Footpaths/roadways	Hard surfaces shall be sprayed with non-selective herbicide on 2 occasions per annum in May/June and Aug/Sept when weather permits.
Grass Cutting	Grass areas shall be cut using suitable machinery once every 14 days between April and October weather permitting. The number of cuts will be 15 per annum. Grass clippings will not be collected and will remain spread over the maintained area
Grass Edges	Grass edges shall be strimmed once every 28 days between March and October weather permitting. The number of cuts will be 8 per annum.

Shrub Bed Maintenance – Weed Control	Shrub beds shall be sprayed with non-selective herbicide on 2 occasions per annum when weather permits taking care not to damage the existing shrubs.
Shrub Bed Maintenance – Pruning	Shrub beds shall be assessed in autumn each year and pruning will be carried out between November and March if required.
Litter Collection	The entire site shall be checked on one occasion per week and all litter/debris will be removed
Litter Bins	Litter bins shall be checked on a twice weekly basis and emptied if required. Any spillages shall be removed at the time of emptying.
Leaf Clearance	Leaves shall be raked or brushed up on site and removed once they have fallen on one occasion between November and February.
Tree Maintenance	Any pruning or remedial works requiring to be carried out on any tree shall be done on an as required basis.
Closed Cemeteries	Grass areas shall be cut on 3 occasions per annum in May, July & September using suitable machinery when weather permits. All other maintenance is carried out as detailed above

Closed Cemeteries – Wildflower Areas	<p>Cut to 75mm in Late March/early April using suitable machinery leaving all arisings.</p> <p>Cut to 75mm using suitable machinery, in September. The arisings shall be left on the ground for 1-2 weeks, then removed by either raking or by mechanical means and appropriately disposed of.</p> <p>All pernicious weeds shall be removed by manual methods or spot treated with an approved selective herbicide when they become visible</p>
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Wildflower Areas Within Closed Cemeteries

During our Community Conversations and consultation we discussed the option of introducing wildflower areas within our closed cemeteries to add interest and colour, as well as providing a natural habitat for wildlife. People received this very positively and 77% of respondents stated that they would be keen for this to happen.

Therefore, wildflowers will be introduced in those closed cemeteries where suitable ground and soil conditions are present to allow them to establish, flourish and reproduce. It may take several years for these areas to fully establish.

Memorial Headstone Safety Project

Lairholders are responsible for the maintenance and repair of their lairs, including memorials and headstones and Dumfries and Galloway Council are responsible for the safety of members of the public, visitors and our team members within our cemeteries.

Dumfries and Galloway Council is a burial authority. Burial authorities have a legal obligation under the Health and Safety at Work Act etc.1974 and the Occupiers Liability (Scotland) Act 1960 to ensure that, as far as is reasonably practicable, cemeteries are maintained in a safe condition. A programme of memorial/headstone safety inspections is a permanent responsibility of all burial authorities.

It is recognised that any work progressed within our cemeteries requires to be completed in a sensitive and respectful manner, this has and will continue to be a priority for council officers and our contractors.

Following the very sad death of an eight-year-old boy in Glasgow in 2015, as a result of being hit by a falling headstone, Dumfries and Galloway Council like other local authorities started a programme of works in our cemeteries to inspect and make safe memorials/headstones in line with national guidance.

The Scottish Government 'Burial Grounds Memorial Safety - Guidance for Scotland's Local Authorities' and The Ministry of Justice 'Managing the Safety of Burial Ground Memorials' Guidance is the primary focus of our headstone/memorial safety inspection regime and progressing the project within Dumfries and Galloway.

Further information regarding the Memorial/Headstone Safety project is detailed as follows:

[Headstone Safety - Dumfries and Galloway Council \(dumgal.gov.uk\)](https://www.dumgal.gov.uk)





Development of a Memorial Masons Registration Scheme

Safety is of paramount importance within our cemeteries. We are currently carrying out inspection on all headstones and memorials and making safe, where required, through our Memorial Headstone Safety Project. It is also important that any new headstones are installed in a safe and competent manner in order to support the Headstone Safety Project.

We have developed a Memorial Mason Registration Scheme which we will require any memorial mason working in a Dumfries and Galloway Council Cemetery to be a member of. This will ensure that Dumfries and Galloway Council know who is working within cemeteries at all times and will allow for ad hoc inspections of work to be carried out to ensure safety within cemeteries.

The scheme will require all masons to operate to British Standard 8415; BRAMM Blue Book and NAMM Working Code of Practice, and that they have relevant insurance – this will ensure that they shall be working to the highest standards of workmanship and competence within our cemeteries. Stone Masons will not be permitted to further sub-contract work to another mason unless they are also part of the scheme.

Theme 8 - Religion and Belief

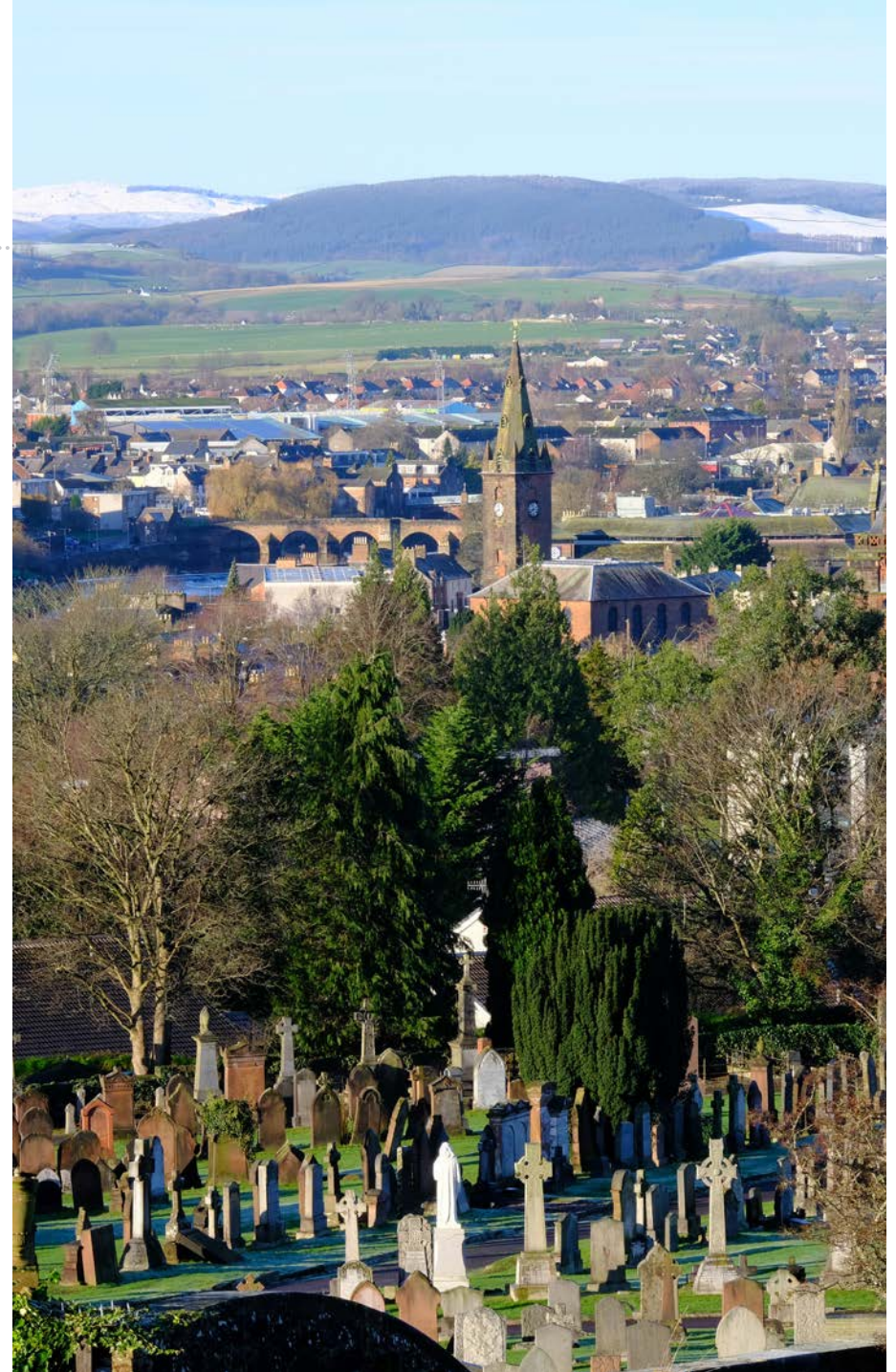
Dumfries and Galloway is an inclusive council and wishes to ensure that our burial service meets the needs of all faiths and none.

During our consultations we engaged with faith groups to ensure that their needs were being met.

91% of respondents believed that appropriate processes are in place to support an interment for all faiths.

We will continue to have open and regular communication going forward to ensure we continue to provide a burial service which meets the needs of all Dumfries and Galloway citizens.

Any future cemeteries will have names that are not associated with any individual faith; and there was seen to be no requirement for further designated areas within burial grounds for any individual faith.



Theme 9 - Casket Only Interment Areas

During Community Conversations and consultation, we advised the public that we are experiencing far higher numbers of casket interments than previously. We have very few specific cremation casket areas within our cemeteries which results in lairs suitable for full coffin interments being used up for the interment of cremation caskets.

The idea of creating cremation casket only areas in our cemeteries was very positively received, and it was felt that in these difficult financial times this option would help to reduce the costs associated with a funeral.

It is proposed that the charge for a cremation casket lair will be set at 50% of the standard lair purchase fee.

We would propose carrying out an assessment of our cemeteries in the first instance to identify suitable areas; and then phase in the use of these areas over the next 2-3 years. This will be delivered and monitored through the action plan.



Theme 10 - Memorial Walls, Benches, Plaques and Trees

We currently have Memorial Walls; plaque columns or wall plaques available in the following cemeteries:-

Stewartry	A&E	Nithsdale	Wigtown
Castle Douglas Cemetery	Annan	Dunscore	Glebe Cemetery, Stranraer
	Johnstonebridge	Sanquhar	Whithorn Cemetery
	Dornock	Kirkholm	
	Tundergarth	St Conal's	
	Gretna Parish	Troqueer	
		St Michael's, Dumfries	

We also offer a service where people can install memorial benches or plant trees to commemorate loved ones.

During our consultation we suggested that all of these items be sold for a set time period (10-15 years) after which time families could renew their purchase or their plaque could be removed and the space sold to others.

Respondents were not in favour of this idea and felt that all such items should be sold in perpetuity but understood that this would mean that space would be extremely limited.

We have committed to expanding our offer of memorial walls and plaque holders to include more cemeteries going forward through the public realm capital programme.

Theme 11 - Evolving and Developing Burial Systems

Dumfries and Galloway Council have a Burial Management System (BACAS) which has been in use since 2013.

Records of all burials since 2013 are currently on the system but anything preceding 2013 is still held within ledgers.

971 respondents felt that the council should improve opportunities for genealogical research through a digitised burial system. 25% of respondents stated they would be interested in supporting the council through volunteering to help add the historical lair records to a digitised system.

This is very much a long term aspiration as it would take several years to input all of the historical data that we hold.

We are very keen to work with our communities and develop volunteering opportunities for those who have expressed an interest in supporting the development and progression of digitising our burial records.

The following is an initial burial strategy action plan detailing key high level delivery options within agreed priorities and themes. Each of these will be expanded to include realistic milestones and will be monitored through the pentana management system to ensure progress.



Theme	Action	Anticipated Start Date	Completion Date
Theme 1 – Cemeteries and Capacity	For Noting		
Theme 2 – Reclaiming Unused Lairs	Review of all cemeteries to be conducted and assessment made as to viability	2024	Ongoing
Theme 3 – Burial Fees and Charges	For Noting		
Theme 4 – Review of Management Rules	Review of Management Rules	June2024	
	Develop appropriate signage for display of Management Rules and install in all active Cemeteries	2024/25	2025
	Review of Management Rules	2029	
Theme 5 – Ornaments on Lairs	Carry out a review in all cemeteries to identify heavily adorned lairs.	2024	
	Agree and develop process and communication plan for informing lairholders of the requirement of the burial ground rules	2024/25	
Theme 6 – Pre-purchase Scheme	Permit pre-purchase scheme in all cemeteries with 10 years capacity remaining		Effective Immediately
Theme 7 – Grounds Maintenance	Development of Wildflower Areas within closed cemeteries	2024	Ongoing
	Development of a Memorial Masons Registration Scheme	2024/25	
Theme 8 – Various Religions and Beliefs	Continue to have open dialogue with Faith Groups to ensure that all needs are met	Ongoing	Ongoing
Theme 9 – Casket only interment Areas	Carry out review in all cemeteries to identify areas which would be suitable for casket only area	2024	
	Create and map out appropriate areas and commence usage	2024/25	
	Agree fees and charges	June 2024	
Theme 10 – Memorial Walls, Benches, Plaques and Trees	Explore options in all active cemeteries to determine if there is space for these to be incorporated.	2024	Ongoing

Theme	Action	Anticipated Start Date	Completion Date
Theme 11 – Evolving and Developing Burial Systems	Continue to explore options for Burial System which will permit for genealogical research	2024	Ongoing
	Explore options to develop volunteering opportunities for digitising records.	2024	Ongoing