



LONDON BOROUGH OF
HARROW

London Borough of Harrow Burial Space Context Report

September 2024

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1 Introduction

The London Borough of Harrow has prepared this context report to examine existing cemeteries in the borough, and the potential for additional land to be allocated to ensure that there is a sufficient pipeline of burial space for the future. This report will serve as part of the Local Plan Evidence Base and feed into the Council's Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP), informing planning policies and site allocations as they relate to cemeteries infrastructure.

The London Borough of Harrow is a highly urbanised area with a relatively high population density. Due to the increasing population in London and resultant pressure on land to be used for housing, there is little space left for traditional burials. Development land is becoming scarce and is typically utilised for housing unless it is specifically identified for alternate uses such as infrastructure. The Local Plan process ensures that land is allocated to safeguard burial space for use by the local community, in the manner the community's diverse beliefs require.

Cemeteries are considered a social infrastructure asset which needs to be carefully planned for and managed by local authorities. Cemeteries are particularly land intensive uses with respect to the space required, finding suitable spaces of sufficient size that are accessible and fit for purpose, proximate to the community they serve, is becoming more difficult. This has been an ongoing issue for local authorities across the country as development pressures intensify and land values increase.

Cemeteries in Harrow and surrounding boroughs are nearing capacity requiring an examination of possible solutions including the reuse of graves, increased focus on traditional cremation or green cremation, natural burials, or alternate methods. However, many religions require traditional burial space due to beliefs surrounding the afterlife being closely connected to the burial process. Alternate burial methods are not considered acceptable to these faith groups, and therefore space must be identified for their use.

1.1 Cemeteries in Harrow

The Council owns and manages seven cemeteries:

- Harrow Weald Cemetery;
- Harrow Cemetery;
- Paines Lane Cemetery;
- Eastcote Lane Cemetery;
- Pinner New Cemetery;
- Wealdstone Cemetery;
- Roxeth Hill Burial Ground, and;
- Carpenders Park Lawn Cemetery (see below).

Carpenders Park Cemetery is jointly owned with the London Borough of Brent, the site is located in Three Rivers District Council near Watford. The London Borough of Harrow owns approximately 25 per cent of the burial land at Carpenders Park, while LB Brent manages the cemetery as part of a joint delivery arrangement.

1.2 Crematoriums in Harrow

Although there isn't a crematorium in Harrow, there is a service-level and one-third ownership agreement with Breakspear Crematorium in the London Borough of Hillingdon for Harrow resident use.

LB Hillingdon have raised concerns that the three cremators are nearing the end of their useful life and require replacement over the next few years. This will require funding for Harrow's share of the cost.

There is a provision for the interment of cremated remains at the following cemeteries: Pinner New, Wealdstone Cemetery, Harrow Cemetery and Eastcote Lane Cemetery.

2 Policy Review

This Chapter details the legal and legislative framework surrounding burial space and cemeteries, as well as national and local planning policy.

2.1 Burial Law

Local Authorities have been responsible for burials since the Ministry of Justice's delegation in the 1850s. The main acts of parliament that relate to burial spaces include:

- The Local Government Act 1972: This legislation recognises Local Authorities as 'burial authorities'.
- The Cremations Act of 1902 and 1952: This legislation allows burial authorities to provide and maintain cemeteries inside and outside of their administrative areas.
- Section 74 of the London Local Authorities Act (2007): This allows the re-use of graves or where the authority requires more space. Although, remains may not be removed unless they have been buried for a minimum of 75 years, and the original remains must be reinterred in the grave.
- Section 25 of the Burial Act 1857: This legislation makes it an offence to remove buried human remains without a licence from the Secretary of State or permission from the Church of England.
- The Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977: This allows burial authorities to reclaim rights in reserved graves purchased at least 75 years ago if the rights have not been exercised and the relevant notice has been given.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2023) sets out the current national planning policy for development within England. Sustainable development is a core consideration of the NPPF which requires economic, social, and environmental roles to be considered for all aspects of development.

The NPPF does not specifically refer to the development of burial space or cemeteries outside of references to Green Belt development. NPPF Paragraph 154 states that LPAs should regard construction of new buildings in the Green Belt as inappropriate, listing one of the exceptions to this statement as the provision of facilities in relation to cemeteries and burial grounds, as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

NPPF Paragraph 155 states that cemeteries and burial grounds are an appropriate use of green belt land where they preserve its openness and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it.

These provisions within the framework establishes the potential for green belt sites to be considered for inclusion in the Local Plan as a site allocation for burial space or cemeteries.

2.3 London Plan

The London Plan (2021) considers Burial Space a form of social infrastructure. London Plan Policy S7: Burial Space states that:

- A. When preparing Development Plans, boroughs should ensure provision is made for the different burial needs and requirements of London's communities, including for those groups for whom burial is the only option. This should be informed by a needs assessment of burial space, including an audit of existing provision and opportunities for the re-use of burial space. Cross-borough and/or sub-regional working is encouraged where appropriate to identify and address the requirements of these groups and to tackle burial space shortages within the sub-region.
- B. Development proposals for new burial provision should be supported. This may include provision in one borough to assist faith groups from another borough that are facing burial space shortages. Development proposals resulting in the loss of burial provision should only be supported if it can be demonstrated that there is no ongoing or future demand.

This document is intended to be the needs assessment that examines different burial needs in line with the requirements of the local community as required by the London Plan. As there is currently an undersupply of most burial space types in the borough, this document will also identify in general terms next steps to identify potential areas for expansion of existing burial grounds, or sites for new burial grounds in line with planning policy.

2.4 Duty to Cooperate

Section 110 of the Localism Act sets out the Local Authority Duty to Cooperate, specifically that local authorities (amongst other bodies) must:

- (a) To engage constructively, actively and on an ongoing basis in any process by means of which activities within subsection (3) are undertaken, and
- (b) To have regard to activities of a person within subsection (9) so far as they are relevant to activities within subsection (3).

Those activities are outlined in the Act as being:

- (a) The preparation of development plan documents,
- (b) The preparation of other local development documents,
- (c) The preparation of marine plans under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 for the English inshore region, the English offshore region or any part of either of those regions,
- (d) Activities that can reasonably be considered to prepare the way for activities within any of paragraphs (a) to (c) that are, or could be, contemplated, and
- (e) Activities that support activities within any of paragraphs (a) to (c), so far as relating to a strategic matter.

Paragraphs 24-27 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) detail the requirement that authorities maintain effective cooperation, (25) 'Strategic policy-making authorities should collaborate to identify the relevant strategic matters which they need to address in their plans'.

Burial space has been a key feature of ongoing Duty to Cooperate meetings held with neighbouring boroughs. The following meetings have been held with neighbouring authorities.

London Borough of Brent (11/04/2024): Brent has no existing burial space capacity that could be utilised by LB Harrow. Similar issues exist with regard to land availability to meet burial space demand. Potential exists for some joint work on a West London burial space needs assessment. Flagged as a minor issue for Brent Local Plan Examination however the inspectorate were satisfied with demonstration of provision for 5+ years.

London Borough of Barnet (15/04/2024): Barnet have adequate burial space for their current needs, but no surplus that they are able to give Harrow access to. For this reason, burial space was not an issue for Barnet at their local plan examination.

London Borough of Hillingdon (10/04/2024): Hillingdon are unaware of any burial space pressures within the borough. They would be interested in joint working to undertake a needs assessment in the future.

Hertsmere Council (15/05/2024): Hertsmere only have space near Elstree which is nearly full. They may need to expand that site. The site is close to the borough boundary and could potentially warrant expansion discussion with the Hertsmere parks department.

London Borough of Ealing (16/05/2024): Ealing have little burial space capacity remaining, no capacity that could be shared. Looking to do a needs assessment, would be interested in a subregional piece of work.

Three Rivers Council (15/07/2024): Three Rivers have not undertaken a full study regarding burial space. Undertaking that work through the IDP process (Sept 2024). There has been an application to extend the cemetery at Carpenders Park.

3 Cemetery and Burial Types

Although not all are represented in Harrow, there are several different types of cemeteries and burial spaces including:

Church Graveyards: This term generally refers to a cemetery associated with a church. This may consist of consecrated or un-consecrated land.

Traditional Cemeteries: Most cemeteries are non-denominational and are able to accommodate most types of funeral service or ceremony.

Private Land Burials: If the freehold to a property is held there is the right to carry out a burial on that land. After any burial takes place, its details must be recorded on the deeds to the property. (More information here: <https://www.harrow.gov.uk/births-deaths-marriages/register-office-fact-sheet>)

Natural Burials Sites: These are often privately-owned burial sites and reflect an interest in more environmentally friendly forms of body disposal.

Cremation: Ashes can be buried in any of the above burial sites either within an existing burial plot or in separate smaller plots.

The exclusive right of burial is granted for a period of 50 years. Due to declining land reserves the Council operates a policy of using the next available space for the allocation of all new graves. It is not possible for 'purchasers of exclusive rights of burial' to select a space, but prior to purchase, an appointment may be made to view the allocated plot. No person shall be allowed to hold at one time the exclusive right of burial in more than three spaces except by express permission of the Council.

3.1 Types of Graves

Two types of graves exist in LB Harrow cemeteries:

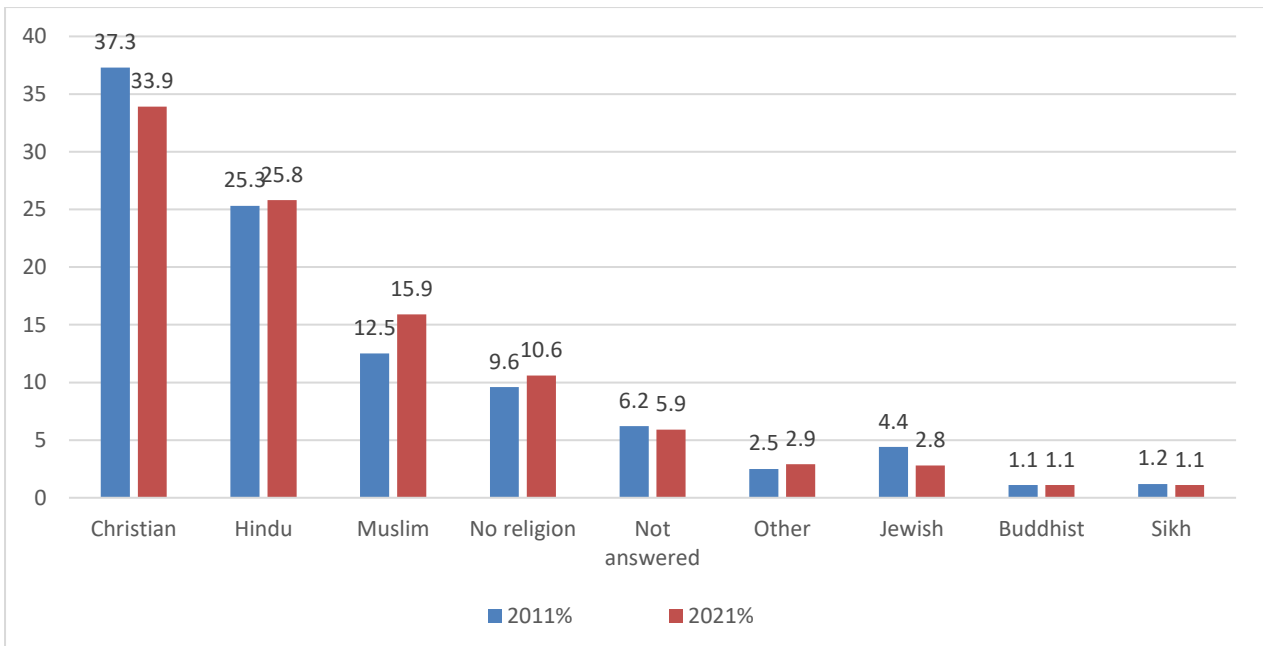
Purchased (private) grave: Is one in which someone has purchased the exclusive right of burial for a fixed period and may decide who is buried in the grave. This does not constitute ownership of the land itself.

Unpurchased (common) grave: Is one in which no one has purchased any exclusive rights and where the council may decide who is buried in the grave.

3.2 Faith Based Burials

While most burials are relatively straightforward, some burial requirements differ on the basis of faith. In Harrow, additional provision is required for Muslim and Greek Orthodox burials which have specific requirements. Consideration of these requirements is required in the planning of faith based burial ground to cater to the needs of the deceased and mourners.

The table below highlights the range of religions represented in Harrow and the percentage of Harrow residents which identify as belonging to each religion. As of the 2021 Census, the three main religions in Harrow were Christian (33.9%), Hindu (25.8%), and Muslim (15.9%).



3.2.1 Christian Burials

The 2021 Census recoded that 33.9% of Harrow residents identified as belonging to the Christian faith. Although there are many denominations of Christianity, burial practices generally involve a Church service followed by mourners gathering at the grave to lower the coffin/casket into the ground. Christians may also be cremated, which involves meeting at a crematorium to burn the casket and body instead of burial at a grave. The cremated remains are often placed in an urn which may be kept by the family or buried.

3.2.2 Hindu Burials

The 2021 Census recoded that 25.8% of Harrow residents identified as belonging to the Hindu faith. The Hindu faith generally believe that humans are in a cycle of death and rebirth called samsara. When a person dies, their soul is reborn in a different body. Some believe rebirth happens directly at death, others believe that a soul may exist in other realms. The body is often considered to be of no use after death as the soul has departed, therefore little relevance is placed on preservation of the body.

When a person of the Hindu faith dies, their body is washed, anointed and dressed. Mourners then gather and pray. Hindu's are traditionally cremated within 24 hours of death, the ashes are then gathered and consecrated in a nearby water body. The preference for cremation means that there generally aren't Hindu areas in cemeteries, and there is significantly less demand for burial space.

3.2.3 Muslim Burials

The 2021 Census recoded that 15.9% of Harrow residents identified as belonging to the Islamic faith (Muslim).

According to the Islamic faith, when Muslims die, they enter a state of waiting (Barzakh) until the day of judgement, at which point they are brought from their graves to Allah, to face judgement on how they lived their earthly lives.

According to Islamic law, bodies must be buried as soon as possible which requires a timely undertaking of funeral, burial and mourning rituals. There are typically five stages that follow the death of a Muslim person:

- The final bathing (ghusl) of the deceased – tajheez;
- The shrouding (kafan) of the deceased – takfeen;
- The funeral prayers - janazah salah;
- The funeral procession - carrying the bier to the grave;
- The burial of the deceased – tadfeen;

Muslim burial sites require a proximate tap and hard surface area for mourners to wash their hands. The washing of a deceased person's body and shrouding must be undertaken before the body arrives at the cemetery. Muslim graves are required to be oriented at right angles to Mecca with the deceased placed on their right side. Mourners typically place handfuls of soil on top of the grave before it is filled.

It is important to note that Muslims are always buried and never cremated. Muslims are also required to be buried side by side with space between each body, and never on top of one another. Due to these rules, the space required for Muslim burials is significantly higher than some other religions or non-religious people.

Harrow Council provides for the burial of persons of the Muslim faith at Harrow Weald Cemetery. The Muslim section is designated as section 'A' and is located immediately as a person enters the cemetery from the gate on Uxbridge Road. Additional Muslim graves are available at Carpenders Park, although spaces are limited.

3.2.4 Greek Orthodox Burials

According to the Greek Orthodox faith, a soul and body are separated at a person's time of death. This means that when the body is buried and decomposes, the soul remains (i.e. doesn't die with the body). The Jewish faith believes in a similar process.

The Greek Orthodox community will bathe and clothe the body immediately after a person has died. After this, the body is placed in a casket where it is blessed with holy water. This signals the commencement of a three-day wake. During the 40 days after the death, the Greek Orthodox believe that the soul completes obstacles and faces judgement.

The Greek Orthodox Church believes in resurrection of the body, so cremation is viewed as a sin. The religion also stipulates that the deceased must be buried facing East, a priest then seals the grave with sand and oil.

As the Greek Orthodox community do not allow cremation, they have additional need for burial space.

4 Existing Provision

4.1 Existing Cemeteries

Harrow has eight existing cemeteries all of which are at or approaching capacity. Some of the existing cemeteries may have potential for expansion into abutting land. This will be confirmed by a thorough evaluation of each cemetery and the Council's land holdings to be undertaken in due course.

The table below details the existing cemeteries in Harrow and the latest information available relating to their status and potential for expansion.

Additional information on each of the Harrow Cemeteries can be found on the Council website (<https://www.harrow.gov.uk/births-deaths-marriages/harrow-cemeteries>).

Cemetery Name	Faith-based Provision	Potential for expansion	Existing Area m ²
Harrow Weald Cemetery, Stanmore (Est. 1937)	Some Muslim burial capacity 2 adult plots + 20 children's	Some	57,141 m ²
Harrow Cemetery, Harrow (Est.1887)	NA	None	25,376 m ²
Paines Lane Cemetery, Pinner (Est. 1860)	NA	None	9,826 m ²
Eastcote Lane Cemetery, South Harrow (Est.1922)	NA	None	13,149 m ²
Pinner New Cemetery, Pinner (Est.1933)	Some Greek Orthodox burial capacity 11 adult plots	None	79,366m ²
Wealdstone Cemetery, Wealdstone (Est.1902)	NA	None	25,551m ²
Roxeth Hill Burial Ground, Harrow (Est. 1873)	NA	None	2,271 m ²
Carpenters Park Lawn Cemetery, Watford (Est. 1954)	Some Muslim burial capacity	Potential for expansion, application submitted through Three Rivers.	29,265 m ²

Cemetery Name	Faith-based Provision	Potential for expansion	Existing Area m ²
Breakspear Crematorium, LB Hillingdon		Three existing cremators nearing the end of their useable life. Funding required to sustain the current agreement with LB Hillingdon.	

4.2 Forecast Mortality

The population of Harrow is growing, requiring more homes, employment opportunities, commercial services, infrastructure, and burial space for residents. Between the last two censuses (held in 2011 and 2021), the population of Harrow increased by 9.3%, from just under 239,100 in 2011 to around 261,200 in 2021.

Harrow is considered a demographically older borough compared to most others in London. Between the last two censuses, the average (median) age of Harrow resident increased by two years, from 36 to 38 years of age. The borough had a higher median age than London as a whole in 2021 (35 years) but a lower average (median) age than England (40 years).

As shown in Table 1 below, the London Borough of Harrow had an average age-standardised mortality rate of 761.6 persons per 100,000, and an average of 1,668 deaths per year.

Table 1: Deaths registered by area of usual residence, UK (ONS 2017-2021)

Year	Age-standardised mortality rate	Deaths
2017	711.2	1,501
2018	700.6	1,509
2019	687.8	1,526
2020	862.7	1,941
2021	845.7	1,865
Average	761.6	1,668

The number of deaths per year in the borough are significantly higher than the number of burials, indicating that a many are being cremated or buried out of the borough. As of 2022, the percentage of bodies being cremated stood at 82.4% (<https://www.cremation.org.uk/progress-of-cremation-united-kingdom>). The percentage of cremations in the UK has been steadily increasing since it was first officially used in 1882 and is now the preferred method of disposing of deceased bodies.

Table 2: Burials in Harrow Cemeteries, London Borough of Harrow (2020-2024YTD)

Year	Burials in Harrow Cemeteries
2020	110
2021	175
2022	168
2023	134

Year	Burials in Harrow Cemeteries
2024 (YTD June)	49
Average (*not including 2024 YTD)	147

4.3 Provision Gap

The gap in provision of burial space in Harrow Cemeteries has been calculated to be between **200-300 burial spaces per annum**. There are several assumptions underpinning this figure:

- The Cremation Society (UK)'s data has been used to present the assumption that 82.4% of bodies are cremated in the UK as of 2022. It is highly likely that the percentage of bodies being cremated will increase over the coming years in line with current trends.
- The ONS figures for the number of deaths in the borough over the last five years have been averaged to provide a general figure of 1,668 deaths p/a to base these calculations on. Assuming 82.4% of bodies (1,374) are cremated, the remaining 294 (on average) bodies would likely be buried.
- The average number of burials in Harrow cemeteries over the last five years is 147 p/a. It is assumed that more people would be buried in Harrow cemeteries if there was more grave space availability. At present it is likely that many people go outside the borough because there is greater availability there.
- Harrow is a relatively elderly borough when compared with Greater London averages. It is likely that the number of people dying each year will increase slightly over the next 20 years.

4.3.1 Faith Requirements

Considering the needs of different faith groups within the borough, the highest demand is likely to come from the Muslim and Christian cohorts.

Because of their religious beliefs, almost all Muslim residents will be buried. If current trends continue, there is also likely to be an increase in the percentage of Muslim residents in the borough as there was a significant increase between the 2011 Census (12.5%) and the 2021 Census (15.9%). This would increase demand for local burial space over time.

Christian residents represent 33.9% of the borough however preferences for burial or cremation differ according to specific denominations. The majority of denominations are accepting of both burials and cremations, for this reason the national preference for cremation (rate of 82.4%) has been applied to this cohort.

Table 3: Percentage of population by faith and preferences for burial or cremation

Faith (Census 2021)	%	Preference
Christian	33.9	Burial and Cremation
Hindu	25.8	Cremation only
Muslim	15.9	Burial only
No religion	10.6	N/A
not answered	5.9	N/A
other	2.9	N/A
Jewish	2.8	Burial preferred
Buddhist	1.1	Cremation preferred

Faith (Census 2021)	%	Preference
Sikh	1.1	Cremation preferred

4.3.2 Space requirements

Space requirements in cemeteries have changed over time, and also differ between cemeteries. For the purposes of forecasting space requirements, it is assumed that with the inclusion of 2ft and 4ft 'walls and ways' **every 10 grave spaces require 45m²**.

Assuming that 200 grave spaces are required (at the low end) per year, this would require approximately 900sqm of space, or at the higher end, 300 grave spaces would require 1,350sqm.

4.4 Conclusion

An assessment of the Council's Cemeteries and surrounding areas for expansion is required to ascertain where future burial space supply will be located. Identified demand for future burial space is estimated to be between **200-300 grave spaces, requiring between 900-1,350sqm of land per annum.**

To meet this demand, several locations should be identified for expansion of existing cemeteries. New burial space may be suitable in other areas across the borough, potentially within the green belt.

Harrow Cemeteries should identify how many existing graves may be reusable for additional burials. This will partially assist in meeting future demand.

4.5 Next steps

The Council is currently reviewing its existing cemeteries and landholdings to identify potential for expansion or new facilities; external support has been secured to undertake this work. As noted above, an application has been made to Three Rivers Borough for the expansion of the Carpenders Park Lawn Cemetery.

Furthermore, the Council is working with two neighbouring boroughs to identify potential sites for shared cemetery space outside of London but within an appropriate travel time from the boroughs; this work is on-going.

Should any new sites for burial space come forward within Harrow, these would be assessed against the requirements of Strategic Policy 06: Social and Community Infrastructure, and Policy CI1: Safeguarding and Securing Social Infrastructure, as well as any other policies relevant to the site and proposal.

5 Appendix A

Two meetings have been held between representatives from Harrow Council and the Harrow Muslim community on the 6th of December 2023 and the 10th of April 2024.

These meetings were set to discuss the burial needs of the local Muslim community, highlighting that there is little remaining Muslim burial space and ensuring that there is available burial space over the next 20 years. These meetings will be ongoing as the Council works to find additional space.

The meeting agendas are set out below.

Meeting 01

Date: 6th December 2023

Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Aims and objectives of the meeting including the role of the Council.
3. Current burial capacity - Harrow and surrounding areas
4. Cemetery land requirements - size, location and access
 - Approximately 100 burials per annum. X 20 years = 2,000 burial plots
5. Local plan process – next steps
6. Land acquisition
7. Next steps

Meeting 02

Date: 10th April 2024

Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Aims and objectives of the meeting including the role of the Council.
3. Current burial capacity - Harrow and surrounding areas
4. Cemetery land requirements - size, location and access
 - 0.6ha in the short term. = 1,500 spaces
5. Local plan process – next steps
6. Land acquisition
7. Next steps