

Cemetery Service

St Albans City and District Council is responsible for the management and maintenance of three cemeteries. These are in London Road and Hatfield Road, St Albans, and in Westfield Road, Harpenden. Both residents and non-residents may be buried in our cemeteries.

In October 2016 we increased the fees on a small number of cemetery services. However, the majority remained unchanged.

We have since undertaken a comprehensive analysis of the whole cemetery service, including assessing the amount of remaining grave space. We have also looked at the ratio of resident and non-resident burials and compared our offer to that of neighbouring councils.

The level of fees we charge for both residents and non-residents are generally much lower than neighbouring local authorities. This creates a demand for burials from non-residents that is currently not sustainable in relation to the existing grave space available.

The Head of Service and Portfolio Holder have the authority to change fees and charges. Following analysis of the service, we are proposing to increase charges including increasing the fees for non-residents based on a multiplier of 3X that of residents' fees. (Currently non-residents are charged 2X the fee of residents).

We propose that the increases will take place from 1st February 2018. The rationale behind the increase is to:

- ensure we have sufficient space to accommodate residents' needs into the future;
- focus service availability on needs of residents by reducing demand from non-residents;
- align our fees and types of services charged with those in neighbouring Local Authorities;
- provide a cost neutral service.

Evidence Base of Increase to Fees and Charges

Neighbouring Authorities

It is standard practice for Burial Authorities to charge a differential between the fees for residents and those for non-residents (see table below). In St Albans, residents currently pay half the fee that is charged to non-residents. However greater London and neighbouring authorities have a much larger differential to actively discourage non-resident interments. These average 3X the charges to residents but some authorities charge 4X fees for non-residents.

Appendix I: Change to Cemeteries Fees and Charges Update

Service	Current SADC Resident fee £	Current Ave. Neighbouring LA Resident fee £	Current SADC Non-resident fee £	Current Ave. Neighbouring LA Non-resident fee £
Burial in a Grave	661	663	1,322	1,989
Ashes Burial	159	240	318	720
Purchase of Traditional Grave	839	2,648	1,678	7,944
Purchase of Lawn Grave	700	2,156	1,400	6,468
Purchase of Ashes Plot	241	505	482	1,515
Timber Shored Grave	1,038	2,078	2,176	6,234
Combined burial and interment				
Burial and purchase Traditional	1,500	3,311	3,000	9,933
Burial and purchase Lawn	1,361	2,819	2,722	8,386
Interment and Purchase CR plot	400	745	800	2,235
All fees calculated based on 100yr lease				

In most cases, interment fees for non-residents are cheaper in St Albans than in their own district.

Non-residents, when bringing back loved ones from other areas of the country and abroad, will pay non-resident fees in their Local Authority cemetery. As our non-resident prices are the lowest in the Hertfordshire, people tend to choose St Albans. This therefore increases the use of valuable land resource for non-resident purchase and burial. These graves are often neglected as the family has to travel and they then become the responsibility of the Council to maintain for the 100 year lease.

Demand on services

Demand for services has increased significantly over the last couple of years, especially to purchase plots. If this trend continues it will continue to increase pressure on the service and impact the availability of plots for residents in future years. Although the forecast numbers of burials is lower for 17/18 than 16/17, there is still a positive increase in trend from previous years.

Service	2016/17		2015/16		Increase Change %	
	Res	Non	Res	Non	Res	Non
Burial in a grave	133	30	97	22	37	36
Burial of Ashes	68	28	59	20	15	40
Purchase of Grave or Ashes Plot	155	36	89	23	74	57
All figures exclude children's services						

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Current and Future capacity

Officers have assessed the number of years of space left in the cemeteries. This is shown in the table below:

Type of Plot	Years Remaining		
	Westfield Rd	London Rd	Hatfield Rd
Grave Plots	33	17	N/A
Muslim Grave Plots	N/A	1.5	N/A
Reclaimed Grave Plots	N/A	N/A	<4
Cremated Remains (ashes) Plots	Currently <5 years new areas have been identified		
Sanctum Vaults	10 Due to disparity of cost of ashes plot, uptake is low		
Vase Block	10 Due to disparity of cost of ashes plot uptake, is low		
Forecast use for 17/18 year is based on 1 st half actual plus average of last 2 years 2 nd half, by cemetery and plot type			
We will soon need to provide more space to accommodate the need of both residents and non-residents			

There are very few ashes plots left. However, officers have earmarked areas in the three cemeteries that could be developed as new gardens of remembrance.

We are seeing an increase in Muslim community interments at London Road. The burial practises allow only one burial per grave. There are therefore only 1.5 years left of allotted grave space. Although other areas of the cemetery can be used for these interments, it will impact on the remaining space for other types of burials.

Proposed Fees and Charges

The new fee structure will allow the Council to achieve a cost neutral service, while better protecting available capacity for residents. The lifetime (100yrs) cost for maintaining a plot is circa £1,300. This is based on the 2017/18 cemetery budget figures including the cost of grounds maintenance (which had previously not been considered as part of cemeteries expenses). It anticipates that future maintenance costs are covered by inflation. The current fees and charges present a shortfall in the Council's ability to carry out maintenance for the lifetime of the cemetery.

The total 17/18 service costs exceed the budgeted income by circa £116k. If the demand for the service remains in line with the 15/16 year, the proposed fees would result in a net cost of £2k. See Appendix J with proposed fees and charges.

Other changes in current cemeteries regulations

The additional changes below will help to safeguard grave space for residents and extend the amount of years available for burial.

Where residents move out of the District into nursing homes maintain their eligibility for 'resident fees', but reduce this from 60 months to 48 months (see note below*).

Maximum of 2 ashes burials per plot (currently, only 4% of all ashes plots have 4 interments). This will decrease the ashes plot size and therefore will increase future burial space for ashes interments.

Charge for services that the Council does not currently charge for. There are a number of services in addition to the basic burial fees that other Authorities charge for. These items often take more officer resource to carry out. (An example of this is 'plot selection' of a particular grave rather than the next available space. This involves additional paper work and officer/client site meetings).

Restrict use of Reclaimed Graves for St Albans District residents only, as there are limited spaces available at Hatfield Road.

*Note: Figure based on Killik report on 'Cost of Care in Later Life' which indicates that median length of time spent in a care home is 841 days (or c. 28 months).

Future cemeteries projects under consideration

- Land acquisition projects – Identify and purchase land to extend existing cemeteries and/or to provide new cemetery space.
- Creation of Mausoleum at London Road – This will enable the Council to offer an additional service, while optimising space.
- Creating new gardens of rest within existing cemeteries – Provide more areas for burial of ashes.