



Committee Report

PURPOSE: Final Decision Report

KEY OR NON-KEY DECISION: Key decision affects 2 or more wards

COMMITTEE: Public Health and Communities Committee

DATE: 11 October 2024

TITLE: **Bristol Cemetery Capacity and Options for Future Provision.**

Ward(s): Cemetery within Bishopsworth Ward – Project has city wide implications

Officer presenting the report: Jon James

Job title: Head of Natural and Marine Environment

Committee Chair: Stephen Williams

Executive Director lead: John Smith: Executive Director for Growth & Regeneration

Proposal origin: Councillor

Purpose of Report:

To brief the Public Health and Communities Policy Committee of the remaining provision of Bristol's burial and cremated remains plots.

To invite the Public Health and Communities Policy Committee to consider options for future provision of burials and cremated remains plots.

This report sets out the options for:

1. Continuation of the current project to expand South Bristol Cemetery, as approved by the former Cabinet in January 2024 and planning permission secured in November 2023.
2. Continuation with the project but on a reduced scale, which would allow burials to take place outside the Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) and enable up to ten years of burial provision. This will still require the Attenuation Pond to be formed within the SNCI. This would enable a member task and finish group to consider Bristol's burial needs for the 2030s and beyond.

3. Stopping the expansion project in its entirety and ceasing providing burial plots from 2026, when the current provision ends. To set up a member task and finish group to determine the immediate and longer-term future of Bristol's burial provision.

Evidence Base / Options to consider.

1. Introduction

South Bristol Cemetery is the last council owned cemetery with space available for new coffin burials, in October 2024 there will be around 210 new plots remaining. Most coffin burials are nondenominational, however there are a few smaller areas in the cemetery dedicated for faith groups, including Muslim and Jewish burials. The table at paragraph 4 below details the usage of burial and cremated remain plots. It is estimated on the current usage of burial plots the council will no longer be able to provide nondenominational burial plots from mid-2026.

The council also runs two crematoria, one in South Bristol Cemetery and the other is located at Canford Cemetery. Alongside the cremation services, both sites still have allocated cremated remains burial plots. The council performs an average of 201 cremated remains burial plots per year, across both sites, there are 225 (100 South Bristol cemetery and 125 Canford cemetery) cremated remains plots remaining. Based on the current available plots, the council will run out of cremated remains plots in South Bristol in early 2026, and Canford at the end of 2026.

The Committee has asked for the options for future burial provision to be brought to the Public Health and Communities Committee for a decision. In development of the report officers have engaged and provided briefings with members of the Public Health and Communities Committee on the following dates:

- 20 September 2024- Public Health & Communities Policy Committee Chairs' Briefing.
- 20 September 2024 (AM meeting) - Informal meeting - Public Health and Communities Policy Committee.
- 20 September 2024 (PM meeting) - Informal meeting - Public Health and Communities Policy Committee.
- 6 September 2024- Public Health & Communities Policy Committee Chairs' Briefing.
- 16 August 2024 - Public Health & Communities Policy Committee Chairs' Briefing.

2. Background

a. Statutory obligations

The local authority has no legal obligation to provide cemeteries. Where a local authority chooses to provide cemeteries, then there are regulations and standards that must be adhered to, which are set out in the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 and subsequent amendment orders.

The minimum legal obligation of a local authority is to make provision for cremations or burials of people who have no means to do so for themselves. In Bristol this is typically between 100 and 120 per year.

The Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty applies to discretionary services

as well as statutory services. When proposing to change any existing service we provide for people then we need to consider the equality impact of that change for recipients based on their protected characteristics, regardless of our legal duty to provide. For example, different religious groups have specific requirements regarding burials. The Equalities Impact Assessment (EQIA) has considered the impact of the loss of burial grounds to specific groups who have received the benefit of this previously. See Appendix B.

b. History of the site and project

Bristol City Council currently has eight cemeteries: Ridgeway Park, Henbury, Brislington, Shirehampton, South Bristol, Canford, Avonview, Greenbank. The only cemetery with capacity for new graves is South Bristol Cemetery. This is expected to run out by mid-2026. In all other cemeteries burials can only take place in existing family graves.

South Bristol is the only existing council cemetery with space to expand.

The land identified for the cemetery expansion is council owned land, which was formerly Elm Tree Farm. Planning consent was secured in June 1962 to develop the whole site as a cemetery. The council then secured planning consent in July 1969 for the construction of the crematorium. See Appendix A1, Section 1 for the cemetery expansion plan from 1962.

On the 26 February 2019 (at Full Council) a provision of £6m was allocated on the Capital Programme for future investment in Bristol's Cemeteries and Crematoria provision. This provision has since been reallocated to other capital projects and is no longer available.

In March 2020 cabinet approved £1.7m Capital expenditure for Cemeteries and Crematoria, consisting of £1.4m for extension of burial provision and associated quality improvements at South Bristol Cemetery and £0.3m for undertaking feasibility and options appraisal work to inform a Business Case for future North Bristol cemetery & crematoria provision. See 3 March 2020 Cabinet Paper:

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s46755/The%20Future%20of%20Bristol%20Cemetery%20and%20Crematorium%20provision%20Executive%20Summary%20v.8.pdf>

Site searches were undertaken in North Bristol to provide options of additional burial provision to supplement provision at South Bristol Cemetery between 2020 and 2022. The council commissioned an appraisal of the sites in North Bristol and identified 59 sites which had the potential of providing future burial provision as Canford was close to being at full capacity and there was no opportunity to expand. Through this work 6 sites were short listed, which had a greater in-depth feasibility study carried out. The outcome of this work was that no suitable location was identified in North Bristol.

Factors making these sites unsuitable included:

- Sites with high community and/or nature value.

- Soil and drainage issues precluding use for burials.
- Contaminated ground, unsuitable historic usage, heritage / archaeological interest.

Spaces have been utilised across the cemeteries to provide additional graves, which were not envisaged in the original design of the cemeteries, but this option has now been exhausted.

The project progress was delayed due to the COVID pandemic.

In November 2023, a decision was made to separate the South Bristol expansion project and North Bristol Cemetery & Crematoria project. Further analysis is taking place on the future of the North Bristol – Canford Crematoria – as this project relates to the replacement of cremators. It is anticipated that a paper will be coming to the committee early in 2025.

In January 2024 cabinet approved the use of £2.4m of Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL) in relation to the development of Phase 1 of South Bristol Cemetery Expansion. See 23 January 2024 Cabinet Paper:

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s91778/Decision%20Pathway%20Report%20for%20South%20Bristol%20Cemetery%20Expansion%20V1.1%2019-12-23.pdf>

c. Financials

The current annual revenue cost for the 24/25 financial year to manage and maintain the cemeteries in Bristol is forecasted at £945,563. This is currently offset by a forecasted annual income of £1,097,193 (the income is a combination of burials, cremated remains, plot fees, headstone licenses and memorial income) and will generate a net surplus to the council of £151,630. Should the provision of new burial site cease, the council would still have to maintain the current cemeteries but lose the income to offset the costs to maintain them. This would create an estimated additional annual revenue pressure of £875,998 if the Council were to stop providing new burial plots. See Appendix A1, Section 2 for details on the annual financial impact and assumptions made.

The current project is funded from the Strategic Community Infrastructure Levy (SCIL), which is considered separately to the revenue forecasting pressure of £875,998 set out above. SCIL is a levy on development projects, charged by the council based on the size and type of development. The money is used to fund infrastructure to support the growth of Bristol.

Option 2 (the reduced project with no burials within the SNCI) will require the capital cost of common drainage infrastructure to be distributed across approximately 870 coffin burial plots, rather than the 2870 plots in Option 1 (the current full project). This will increase the cost per burial plot by an estimated 30 to 40%.

d. Current Proposed Project

The council has put plans in place to expand South Bristol Cemetery into adjacent council owned land, designated as Green Belt. This expansion will provide burial

provision up to 2050. The expansion partly utilises land that is designated as a Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI). To achieve this without detriment to the SNCI, the project includes a range of ecological mitigation measures which deliver a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) within the development area. The project has been granted planning consent, including commitment to deliver these BNG enhancements.

e. Environment Incident Report

Concern was raised by a member of the public that habitat had been damaged at the site being proposed to expand South Bristol Cemetery. An environmental incident report was opened on 5 August 2024 and the outcome of the investigation has found no evidence of failure in competencies, processes, or working methods on the part of Bristol City Council officers or contractors working on their behalf. No evidence has been found that suggests birds were directly harmed through the works, or that legislation has been breached.

In line with recommendations made by the consulting ecologist, the only way to guarantee actively nesting birds are not negatively impacted, is for scrub clearance works to take place outside of nesting bird season. Project planning of this nature should therefore take this into consideration and make reasonable efforts for them to take place during the months of October to February. However, where this is not possible due to external factors, the advice and supervision of a Suitably Qualified Ecologist is an appropriate approach to comply with environmental standards and legislation to mitigate significant risk of harm. A copy of the report can be found in Appendix A2.

3. Planning

a. Planning Process- Application No. 22/05714/FB

Planning consent was granted on 22 April 2024 following consideration at two Development Control Committee B meetings.:

- 6 September 2023 – Planning decision deferred.
- 29 November 2023 - Planning decision was approved by the committee.

The planning permission secured must be implemented within 3 years from issue.

All information that was provided to support the planning process, in support of the two Development Control Committee B meetings is contained in Appendix A1 Section 8.

In the development of the proposed scheme there have been a number of ecological reports prepared. These reports will contain details and locations of protected species and due to the sensitivity of this information it is the councils practice not to share this information publicly. It is common practice amongst other local authorities and the Planning Inspectorate to withhold ecologically sensitive information, as it avoids any risk of interference with protected species. The ecological reports have been shared with stakeholders, who were engaged with through the planning application process, to secure comments.

We have included in Appendix A3 the Ecological Mitigation Proposals which sets out the principles that will guide management of both the proposed extension, including the attenuation pond, to South Bristol Cemetery. It sets out in broad terms measures that will be taken, to ensure that those parts of the extension that are within the Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI) retain this status in the long term. The Ecological Mitigation Proposals are not a full ecological management plan as the Landscape and Ecology Management Plan (LEMP) being prepared will fully address the needs of the SNCI.

b. Alignment to Planning Frameworks

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) notes that planting within the cemeteries contributes to the green infrastructure and conserves and enhances the natural environment. In addition, the respect and responsibility along with the longevity implicit in cemeteries protects the ‘countryside from encroachment’ and helps prevent ‘urban sprawl’. – Section 13 [National Planning Policy Framework - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The Local Plan’s Core Strategy refers to Cemeteries as part of the “strategic green infrastructure network” (point 4.9.5) and promotes enhancement and extensions to existing network in Policy BCS9. - [Local plan \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#)

c. Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI)

SNCIs are sites that contain features of substantive nature conservation value at a local level. The sites are designated through Local Sites Partnerships (LSP), using an agreed set of criteria. These sites then receive a level of protection through local planning policy, in-line with the National Planning Policy Framework.

The Bristol Local Plan sets out the provisions of SNCIs with respect to local planning policy. In granting consent for the project, the Local Planning Authority confirmed the development was assessed against all relevant planning policy and deemed compliant.

4. Demand for Burials

a. Demand

Demand is determined by multiple factors including death rates, choice of cemetery, demographics of population size, wealth, trends in preferences and religious / faith choices. Bristol has an expanding population, which will not immediately impact upon death rates but will have an impact later in the 21st century. The below table provides details of the plot usage since 2013/14.

COUNCIL BEREAVEMENT SERVICE - 11 YEAR PLOT USAGE DATA

	SOUTH BRISTOL CEM		ALL OTHER CEMS		Combined Grave Av.	
	Standard Grave Plots	Cremated Remains Plots	Standard Grave Plots	Cremated Remains Plots	Standard Grave Plots	Cremated Remains Plots
2013/14	62	142	85	76	147	218
2014/15	58	136	85	80	143	216
2015/16	58	121	71	64	129	185
2016/17	67	138	70	94	137	222
2017/18	51	110	82	87	133	197
2018/19	46	129	78	79	124	198
2019/2020	36	101	93	30	129	131
2020/2021	83	107	53	88	136	195
2021/2022	113	146	0	77	113	223
2022/2023	96	122	0	65	96	187
2023/2024	71	141	0	73	71	214
TOTAL	741	1393	617	813	1358	2206
Annual Average	67	127	56	74	123	201
5 Year Average	80	123	29	67	109	190

Notes:

Coffin Burial Plot forecasted annual average sales is estimated at a rounded 5 year average of 110 per annum, allowing for the closure of other cemeteries. The 11 year average is 123 grave plots sold per annum across all cemeteries.

Cremated Remains Plot (Ash Interment) forecasted annual average sales is estimated at 127, allowing for only south Bristol, given there has been no change in cremation provision in the city.

There has been a drop in the death rate over the past four years, which has been linked to the measures put in place during the Covid pandemic and milder winters. This trend has now started to reverse, and this year it is returning to the historic average death rate.

There has been a period of unprecedented population growth in Bristol since 2002 and if trends continue, the total population of Bristol is projected to reach a total population of 545,600 by 2039. Whilst this will have no immediate impact and the number of deaths is expected to remain steady up to 2039, the impact will be felt towards the end of the 21st century.

b. Coffin burial demand forecast.

Based on historical data from all our cemeteries, the future demand for coffin burial plots is estimated to average 110 plots per year until 2035. This means that our current provision of nondenominational plots is enough to last into mid-2026. There are a range of factors that influence the viability of using specific areas of the cemetery for coffin / cremated remains burials. These are summarised in Appendix A1, Section 3.

It should also be noted that a fluctuation of 10% on the estimated demand would affect our current provision by only one or two months.

South Bristol Cemetery - Non-Denominational Coffin Burial Plot Availability Forecast - Sensitivity Scenarios		
Forecast Case	Plots Used Per Year	Forecast Capacity End
Low Forecast	80	April 2027
Mid Forecast	110	July 2026
High Forecast	140	May 2026
Note: The Mid Forecast has been used for modelling plot usage		

Within South Bristol Cemetery there are areas allocated for use by specific religious and belief groups. These are Jewish, Polish, Chinese, Muslim and Bahai. The number of remaining coffin burial plots available differs for each group. See Appendix A1, Section 4 for more detail on remaining capacity.

c. Cremated remains plot demand.

Based on historical data from South Bristol Cemetery, the future demand for cremated remains plots is estimated to average 127 plots per year until 2035. This means that our current provision of cremated remains plots is enough to last until mid-2026. It is important to note that if South Bristol Cemetery ceases to provide cremated remains plots, there would be an increased demand at Canford Cemetery. This impact would reduce the duration for which Canford could also continue to offer these plots.

d. Alternative Burial Provisions.

Currently, the only known site within the city boundary that has burial space available is Arnos Vale, which is run by a charitable trust. Our understanding is that the burial space for new burial plots at Arnos Vale is negligible.

The closest alternatives for burial space are in South Gloucestershire. The first is Kingswood Remembrance Park, managed by South Gloucestershire Council and located in Kingswood. The second is Woodland Memorials, privately managed and situated near Earthcott Green. Additionally, Westerleigh Crematorium, located in Westerleigh, offers a limited number of coffin burials.

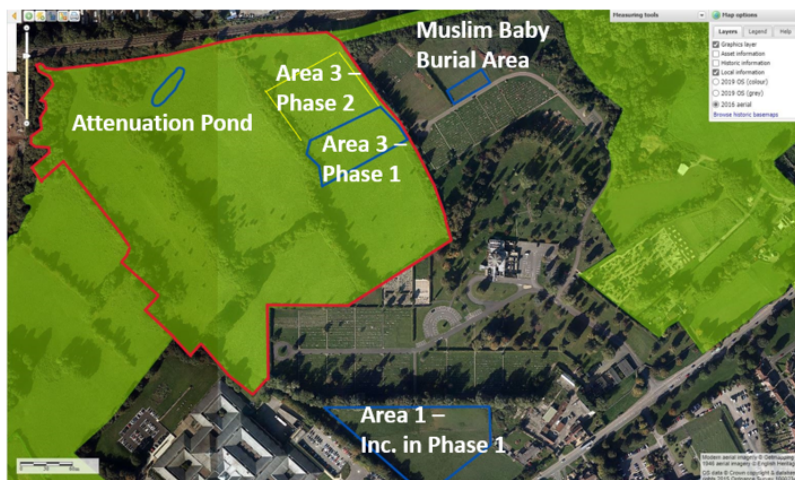
For cremated remains, there are more options of memorialisation available. The most significant provider for cremated remains burials are Westerleigh Crematorium.

5. The Current Project Overview

1. Current cemetery site, expansion areas and Site of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCI)

This section describes the status of the proposal as agreed by Cabinet and planning permission secured on 22 April 2024. The development areas comprise Area 1 and Area 3 plus the Attenuation Pond with associated underground drainage. Area 3 is split into a Phase 1 and a Phase 2. The Attenuation Pond and Area 1 would be constructed during Phase 1. (Please note that the below image does not identify Area 2 as it was discarded from the original cemetery land use study at South Bristol as the gradient

was considered too steep to be used for burials). The Muslim Baby Area is located within the current cemetery site. This proposed project and associated funding would need to continue to ensure Muslim baby burials can continue.



Light green shading shows the extent of the Colliters Brook SNCI
Redline is the boundary of the SNCI area subject to the ecological enhancements which form part of the project ecological mitigation measures and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) calculation.

Under the approved scheme (Under option 1) the Cemetery expansion would be undertaken in two phases; the first phase would use 3% of the Bristol City Council grass land for a Cemetery from 2025 and the remaining 97% of the land would continue to be used as grazing land. Phase 1 would provide burial provision up to the year 2039 with 1,550 standard burial plots, 260 baby burial plots, 800 cremated remains plots and 230 memorialisation plaques. Phase 2 would utilise a further 10% of grazing space and provide a further 1,300 standard burial plots from 2039 onwards, adding a further 10 to 15 years provision. This leaves 87% of the current grazing provision, which would remain in use as grazing land until approximately 2050.

See Appendix A1, Section 5a. and 5b. for tabulated information of proposed cemetery capacity and forecasted usage up to year 2051.

Undertaking the Area 3 development in two phases manages the capital expenditure required and would allow the grassland identified for phase 2 to be made available for grazing.

See Appendix A1, Section 6a. to 6e. for details of the proposed cemetery expansion design. Including revised design for the reduced size attenuation pond (pending planning submission to amend the consented design)

2. Ecological impact of current scheme as consented.

- i. Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) – as of August 2023: 2.82% gain in Resource Equivalency Analysis (REA) habitat units, 107% gain in hedgerow units, and a 0.19% gain in river units. Noting the reduction in the attenuation pond size will

increase the final BNG score.

- ii. SNCI land cemetery land usage: The development covers 3.7% of Colliters SNCI. The vast majority of this 3.7% being grassland. The development would cover only 9.7% of the western end of the SNCI for which the project will deliver a Biodiversity Net Gain, mainly comprising grassland.
- iii. Grazing impact: Phase 1 (2024)- The calculated 3% net reduction in grassland available for cattle grazing in Phase 1 is 2,265 sqm (0.56 acres). This equates to 1.15% of the Yew Tree Farm's present grazing area. Phase 2 (From 2039) Reduces available grazing by a further 8,204sqm or 2 acres. Equating to a 10% net reduction in grazing
- iv. New pond and planting – The drainage attenuation pond is a new feature within the SNCI, it is simply constructed by excavation, natural in appearance without hard features. The pond will provide a new wet area with a proposed 495 aquatic plants. There is significant evidence to support the ecological value of ponds. Please see supporting detail in Appendix A1, Section 7.

6. Options – The paper considers three options all of which can be implemented immediately without a requirement to undertake significant new design, apply for a new planning consent or to seek additional funding. **Please refer to Appendix G Options Appraisal Matrix for further analysis.**

1. **Continuation of the current project to expand South Bristol Cemetery** – Proceed with the project as consented, including burials within the SNCI – Delivering approximately 1,550 standard coffin burial plots, 800 cremated remains Plots and 260 Baby Burial Plots in 2025, with Phase 2 to follow in circa 2039.
2. **Continue with the project but on a reduced scale** – Remove Area 3 from the project – no burials within the SNCI area. Only proceed with Area 1 expansion. This will still require the Attenuation Pond to be formed within the SNCI.

Deliver approximately 870 standard coffin burial plots, 800 Cremated Remains Plots and 260 Baby Burial Plots in 2025. Provides forecasted provision for up to 10 years.

Additionally, set up a member task and finish group to determine the mid- and long-term future of Bristol's burial provision.

3. **Stop the expansion project in its entirety** – This would result in no additional burials; no works or grassland restoration within the SNCI and no works to existing drainage system. The council has sufficient land to offer burials until mid-2026. After that time residents would need to seek burial ground outside of the city. At present the costs of maintaining the city's cemeteries are offset by the income from providing burial services. Option3 would create a new revenue budget pressure of £876k from the date burial provision ceases.

This option would not stop the works on the Muslim burial area already contained within the current Cemetery site, which forms part of South Bristol capital scheme.

7. Risks – Please refer to Appendix G Options Appraisal Matrix for an assessment of the relative

risks, benefits, and disadvantages for the three Options outlined above.

Officer Recommendations: -

That the Committee for Public health and Communities:

1. Notes the contents of the report and details provided within the appendices.
2. That the Committee for Public Health and Communities provides Officers with a preferred option to progress.
3. Authorises the Executive Director Growth and Regeneration in consultation with the Chair of the Public Health and Communities Policy Committee to take all steps required to progress the preferred option including procuring and awarding contracts over the key decision threshold.

Corporate Strategy alignment:

1. Fair and Inclusive - Working alongside different communities and religious beliefs to provide essential facilities. 2. Well Connected Work - with cultural partners to ensure the future provision of the service gives a good level of service and provision for Bristol's diverse communities

City Benefits:

1. Provision of burial space and maintain a cremation service for the city to meet the long-term population requirements. Provision of high-quality bereavement services. Potential for increased income for the council for revenue budget

Consultation Details:

1. As part of the planning process for the expansion of the South Bristol Cemetery stakeholder engagement was carried out for the approved scheme. Please refer to Appendix F for details.

Background Documents:

March 2020 Cabinet Paper, Item 14 of Cabinet Agenda::

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s46755/The%20Future%20of%20Bristols%20Cemetery%20and%20Crematorium%20provision%20Executive%20Summary%20v.8.pdf>

Decision for item 14:

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/ieDecisionDetails.aspx?AllId=16600>

January 2024 Cabinet Paper, Item 18 of Cabinet Agenda:

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s91778/Decision%20Pathway%20Report%20for%20South%20Bristol%20Cemetery%20Expansion%20V1.1%2019-12-23.pdf>

Decision for item 18:

Revenue Cost	£N/A	Source of Revenue Funding	N/A
Capital Cost	£N/A	Source of Capital Funding	N/A
One off cost <input type="checkbox"/> Ongoing cost <input type="checkbox"/>		Saving Proposal <input type="checkbox"/> If yes - existing or new saving? Choose an item. OR Income generation proposal <input type="checkbox"/>	

Professional Comments Section:

1. Finance Advice: This report seeks the Public Health and Committee’s view on the possible expansion of South Bristol Cemetery. The options include expanding South Bristol Cemetery so that it can continue to meet demand for the foreseeable future, limiting the expansion of the Cemetery to exclude the Site of Nature Conservation Interest which would means the Cemetery is at full capacity in a decade or stop all expansion and reach full capacity in 2026.

As set out in Appendix A1 the Council forecasts to receive £1.1m per annum relating to the burial of coffins and cremated remains. If there was no available capacity for burials this income would reduce to c. £54k relating to residual second burials. Expenditure would also be reduced with the reduction of staff and various cost of sales savings. However, the expenditure reduction is only forecast to be £167k per annum meaning that South Bristol Cemetery would change from delivering a moderate net income of £152k to a significant net cost of £724k. This pressure would have to be met within the Parks and Green Spaces budget with savings required from the maintenance of the city’s open spaces.

Finance Business Partner: Ben Hegarty, Finance Business Partner Growth and Regeneration, 17 September 2024.

2. Legal Advice: The procurement process must be conducted in line with the 2015 Procurement Regulations/Procurement Act 2023 and the Councils own procurement rules. Legal services will advise and assist officers with regard to the conduct of the procurement process and the resulting contractual arrangements.

Legal Team Leader: Husinara Jones, Team Manager/Solicitor 11 September 2024

3. Implications on IT: I can see no implications on IT regarding this activity.

IT Team Leader: Alex Simpson – Lead Enterprise Architect 11 September 2024

4. HR Advice: There are no HR implications evident

HR Partner: Celia Williams, HR Business Partner 18 September 2024

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal

YES

Appendix A1 – Further Background Information – Bristol Cemetery and Options for Future Provision.

Appendix A2 – Environmental Incident Report – South Bristol.

Appendix A3 – Ecological Mitigation Proposals.

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)	YES
Appendix C – Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	YES
Appendix D – Decision Risk Assessment	YES
Appendix E – Exempt Information	NO
Appendix F – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	YES
Appendix G – Options appraisal matrix	YES
Appendix H – Business case / financial analysis	NO