

Cemeteries Strategy

Analysis of stakeholder consultation

June 2025

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Introduction

Background

Kensington and Chelsea Council owns and manages two cemeteries, and both are outside the borough. Hanwell Cemetery was completed in 1855 and is located off the Uxbridge Road in Hanwell. Gunnersbury Cemetery, founded in 1929, is adjacent to Gunnersbury Park which borders Acton, Chiswick and Brentford. Between them, these cemeteries have approximately 24,000 grave plots, but we are running out of space for new burials. We need your help to create a strategy for the future burial needs of Kensington and Chelsea's residents.

Shortage of burial space is an issue for many cities, including London and we have looked into what other cemetery providers have done to create more capacity. Methods used elsewhere include:

- Reusing older graves, either by occupying unused space or burying existing remains deeper in the grave to create more space.
- Creating new grave space by adding soil (mounding) over older graves to create new burial space above.

Finding suitable space for a new cemetery within London is exceptionally difficult, as there are many competing demands for any available land, such as for housing, leisure, retail and business. There are also very specific requirements for land to be suitable for burial, making it even more difficult to find an available and suitable site. This is therefore not a realistic option. If we cannot find a solution, we will stop accepting new burials when there are no more grave plots left, and this could happen within the next couple of years. Current grave owners would still be able to use remaining space in their purchased plots, but no new grave plots would be available to be purchased.

Residents would of course be able to purchase grave plots at other cemeteries within and around London, however this would likely be much more expensive, as this Council offers discounted rates for residents. Additionally, income from cemeteries goes towards the cost of maintaining them, so any future loss of income from burial fees would also put pressure on the Council's finances.



Introduction

Consultation methodology

An online survey was promoted via various avenues, including the Council's Consultation and Engagement Hub, social media, Council website, posters and leaflets in public spaces including the two Cemeteries and libraries, direct contact with over 100 faith leaders and funeral directors. In total, 43 responded to the survey. Drop in sessions were also made available in the north, south and centre of the borough and at Gunnersbury Cemetery and attracted 11 people to feedback in person. These resulted, for residents, in a chance to ask questions; creating an ongoing review of the FAQs document on the council website. The document is included in the section 'Drop ins' of this report. Feedback received from faith groups and faith leaders is also included in the report.

Appendix

An appendices document is also available on request, containing data tables and all comments made by respondents to the survey.

Acknowledgements

This is a very sensitive issue and before any decision is made the Council want to hear residents' views. This is the very first stage of consultation, and if there is in principle support for grave reuse, more site-specific consultation will take place. The Council would like to thank all residents and stakeholders who took the time to provide feedback.



Results at a glance



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Results at a glance

- The majority of respondents (34 out of 43) knew that Kensington and Chelsea Council owns Gunnersbury and Hanwell Cemetery, but only about a sixth (seven out of 43) are currently grave owners there and the same number have friends or family buried there (seven out of 43).
- More respondents chose 'cremation' when asked if they had thought about forms of final rest than other options, with cultural/religious or financial reasons being given as the most popular reasons that influenced their decision.
- When asked what would most influence their choice of cemetery, more respondents (who previously declared they'd choose burial or they are yet to decide) stated it'd be the proximity to where they live or grew up than other options.
- Over three people in four, who choose burial, said they would consider burial in Gunnersbury or Hanwell Cemetery.
- Nearly two-thirds of respondents (28 of 43) did not think the cemeteries should stop accepting new burials when they became full and therefore support reuse of graves and/or mounding.
- When asked what reuse practice they would agree to in principle, 'Remaining capacity left within a grave being used by someone else' and 'Remains being buried deeper in the ground and the whole grave then reused for up to three burials', the most chosen option was the latter (chosen by 25 people out of 28). Most respondents said they would consider both options for themselves or a family member (19 and 22 out of 28).
- When asked about mounding, respondents were supportive of the principle (23 out of 28) and would consider it for themselves (20 out of 28).



Survey Analysis



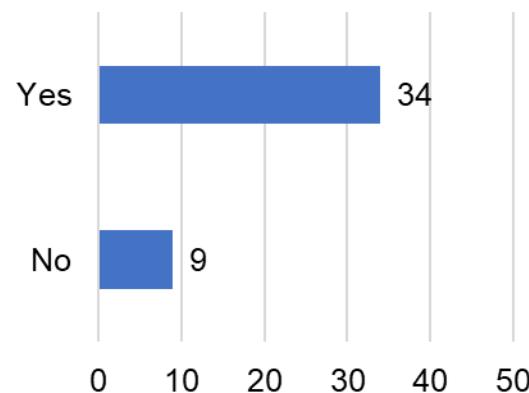
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Gunnersbury and Hanwell Cemetery

Respondents were asked about their awareness of the Council owning and managing Gunnersbury and Hanwell Cemeteries.

- The **majority** of respondents (**34**) were **aware**.
- About **a fifth (nine)** of respondents were **not aware**.

**Are you aware that the Council owns and
manages two cemeteries: Gunnersbury Cemetery
and Hanwell Cemetery?**



Base: All respondents (43)



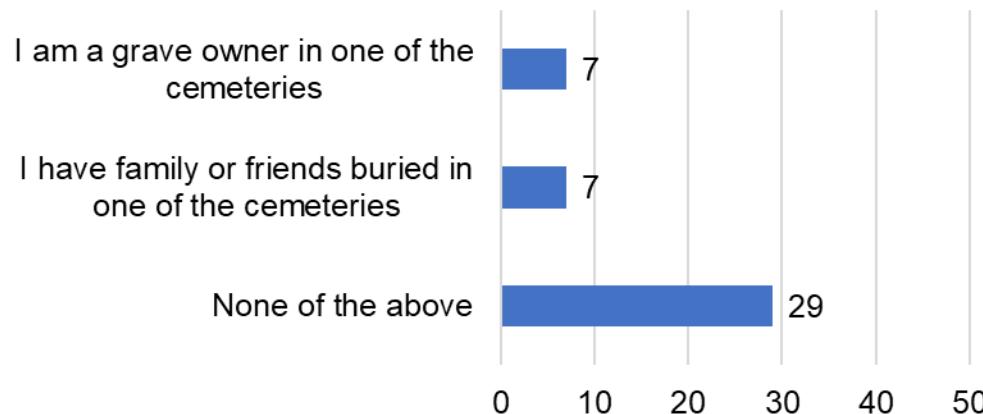
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Gunnersbury and Hanwell Cemetery

Respondents were asked if they are existing grave owners or have friends or family buried in Gunnersbury Cemetery or Hanwell Cemetery.

- About **one sixth (seven)** of respondents are '**grave owners in one of the cemeteries**'.
- **Seven** respondents have '**family or friends buried in one of the cemeteries**'.
- **Two thirds** of respondents (**29**) selected '**none of the above**'.

Are you an existing grave owner or do you have friends or family buried in Gunnersbury Cemetery or Hanwell Cemetery



Base: All respondents (43)



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Forms of final rest

Respondents were asked if they had thought about burial, cremation or another form of final rest.

- Just under a quarter (10) of respondents chose **burial**.
- Two in five respondents (17) selected **cremation**.
- Roughly a quarter of respondents (11) are **yet to decide**.

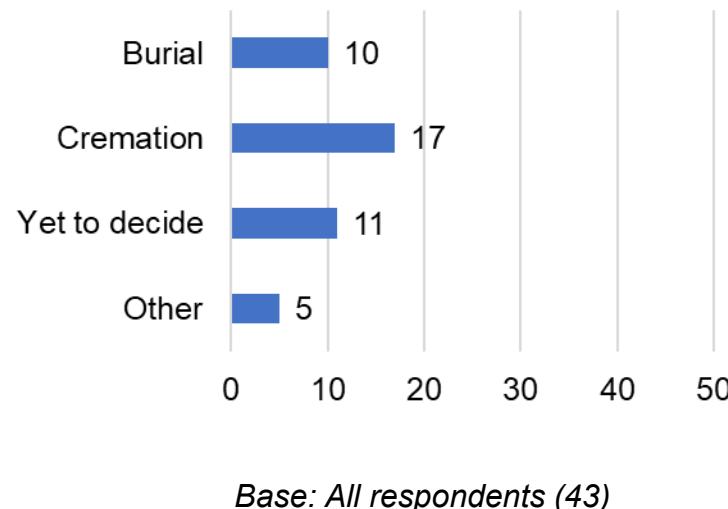
Five respondents made 'other' comments, some examples can be seen here, with all comments in the appendices.

"Interred in a forest, wicker basket, back to the Earth"

"Give to medical science"

"Both of the above - cremation, followed by burial of the ashes"

Have you thought about burial, cremation or another form of final rest?



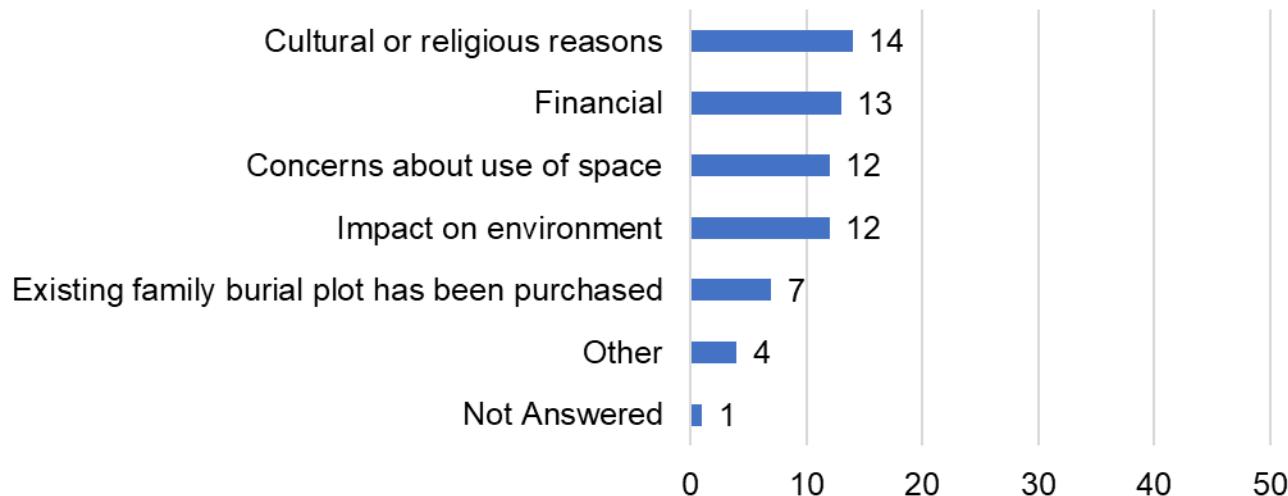
Forms of final rest

Respondents were asked what influenced their decision when thinking about a form of final rest. Respondents could select more than one option and make open comments.

- **About a third of respondents (14)** opted for **cultural or religious reasons** and **financial (13)**
- **Seven** respondents selected **existing family burial plot has been purchased**
- Just **over a quarter** of respondents (12) stated **concerns about use of space** and **impact on environment (12)**

Nine open comments were received to this question and were themed. Four did **not agree with re-use or are plot owners**, four opted for **cremation** and one stated it was a '**green**' reason

What has influenced your decision?



Base: All respondents (43)



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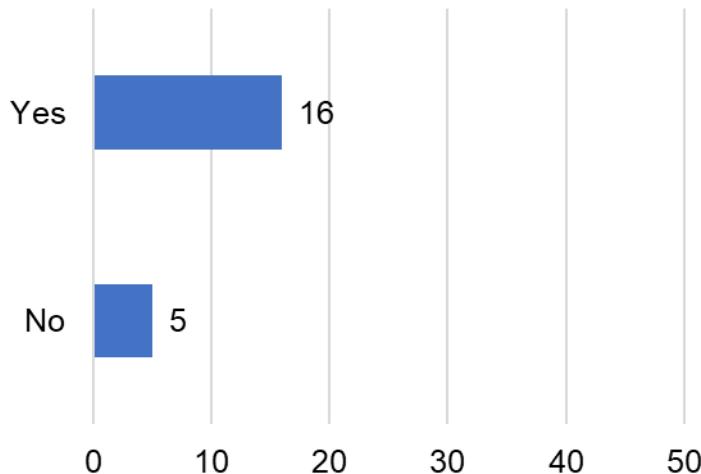
Cemetery consideration

Those who answered that they have thought about burial or are yet to decide about form of final rest (21), were asked if they would consider burial in Gunnersbury Cemetery or Hanwell Cemetery.

- The **majority** of respondents (**16**) said **yes**.
- **Almost a quarter (five)** said **no**.

Respondents who said no were asked to explain why. There were **three** open comments all stating as **having burial plots elsewhere**.

Would you consider burial in Gunnersbury Cemetery or Hanwell Cemetery?



Base: Respondents who chose 'burial' or 'yet to decide' to: Have you thought about burial, cremation or any form of final rest? (21)

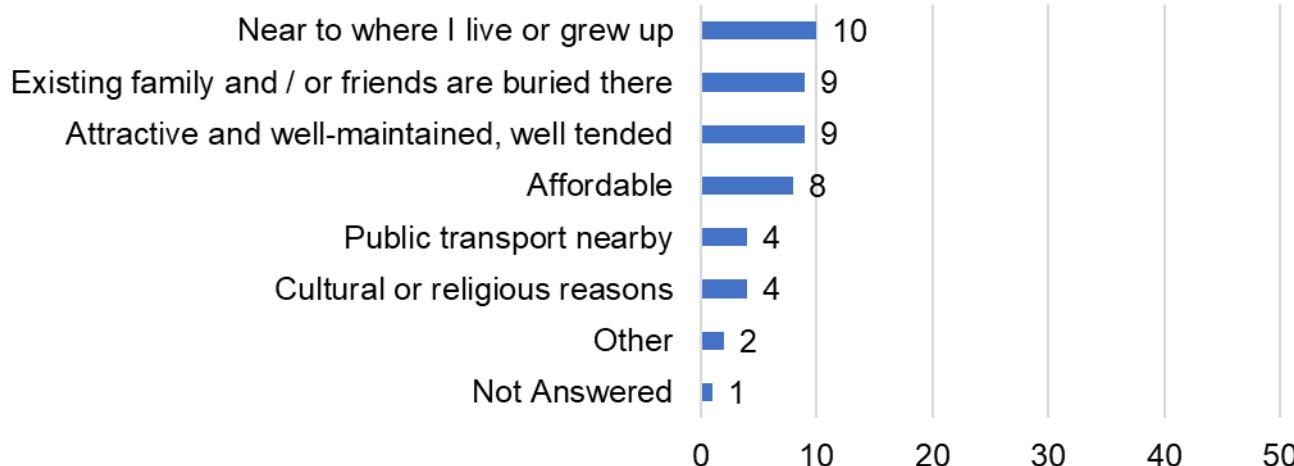


Factors influencing cemetery choice

Respondents were asked what factors would influence their choice of cemetery. Respondents could select more than one option.

- **Near half** of respondents (**10**) chose **near to where I live and grew up** and just under that figure (**nine**) opted for **existing family and/or friends are buried there** and **attractive and well maintained, well tended**.
- **Under a third** (**eight**) indicated **affordable**.
- **Almost a fifth** of respondents (**four**) stated **public transport nearby** and **cultural or religious reasons** (**four**).

What factors would influence which cemetery you choose?



Base: Respondents who chose 'burial' or 'yet to decide' to: Have you thought about burial, cremation or any form of final rest? (21)

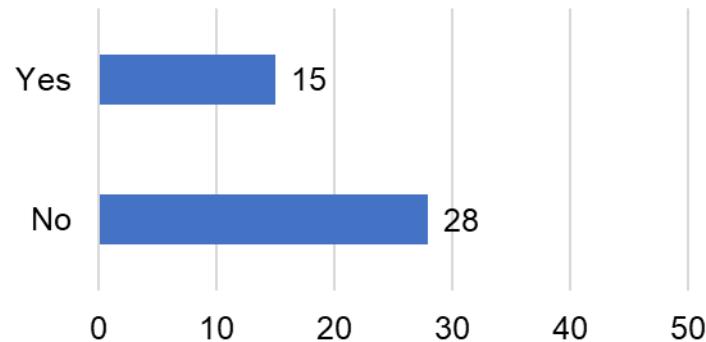


The future of the Cemeteries

Respondents were asked if they thought the cemeteries should stop accepting new burials when full and therefore not reuse or 'mound' over older graves.

- Almost **two-thirds** of respondents (**28**) said **no**.
- **Just over a third** of respondents (**15**) said **yes**.

Do you think our cemeteries should stop accepting new burials when full and therefore we should not reuse or 'mound' over older graves?



Base: All respondents (43)

The future of the Cemeteries

Respondents were asked to explain their answer. Comments made have been themed and are summarised in the table below. Examples of comments can also be seen on the next page, with the full list of themes and comments found in the appendices.

Theme	Count
Agree with reuse	12
Let the buried rest in peace	8
Suggestion/comment about cemetery	6
Closing the cemeteries unsustainable	2
Cremation would save space	2
In favour of mounding	2



Comments – The future of the cemeteries

“I believe they should be reused.”

Agree with reuse



“Cemeteries are part of historical records - tracing families heritage.”

Suggestion/comment about the cemeteries

“The people who were buried there were buried at a different time and should be respected and also their graves have historical significance.

There is no need for new people to be put into the same land. It is offensive to those that came before. [...]”

Let the buried rest in peace

“I think it is reasonable that cemeteries should 'extend their lives' this way which will mean that they are easier to visit both for the initial burial ceremony and thereafter.”

Agree with reuse

“If it's full, it's full. We have no right to touch someone's else grave. It's beyond rude.”

Let the buried rest in peace

“It seems a sensible option to continue using these cemeteries.”

Agree with reuse

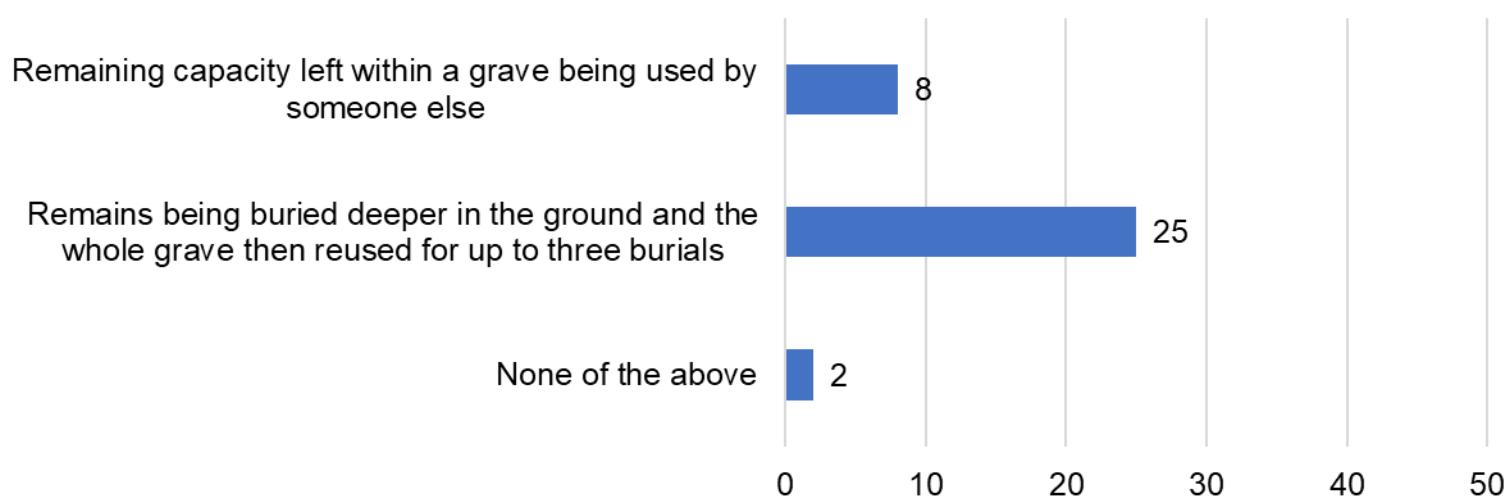


Reusing graves

Respondents who thought the Cemeteries shouldn't stop accepting new burials when full (28) were asked which options they would agree, in principle, to be in place for the cemeteries not to close to new burials. Respondents could select more than one option.

- The **majority** of respondents (25) opted for '**remains being buried deeper in the ground and the whole grave then reused for up to three burials**'.
- **Under a third** of respondents (**eight**) chose '**Remaining capacity left within a grave being used by someone else**'.

Which of the following options would you agree, in principle, to be in place for the cemeteries not to close to new burials?



Base: Respondents who answered No to cemeteries should stop accepting new burials when full and therefore not reuse or 'mound' over older graves. (28)

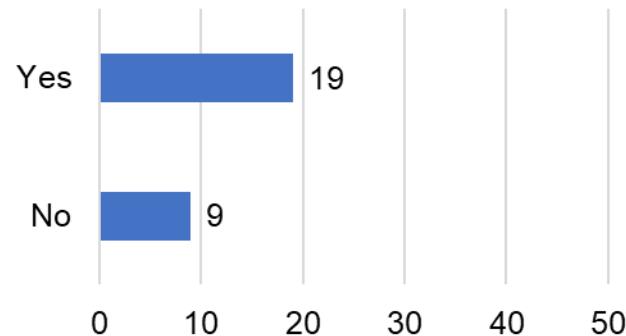


Reusing graves

Respondents were asked if they would consider using a grave plot previously used by someone else, where there is spare capacity, as a burial option for them or a family member.

- The **majority** of respondents (**19**) stated they **would consider** it.
- **Nearly a third** of respondents (**nine**) **wouldn't consider** it.

Would you consider a grave plot previously used by someone else, where there is spare capacity, as a burial option for you or a family member?



Base: Respondents who answered No to should cemeteries stop accepting new burials when full and therefore not reuse or 'mound' over older graves. (28)



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Comments- Reusing graves

Respondents were invited to explain their answers after stating if they would consider a grave plot previously used. Comments made have been themed and are summarised in the table below. Examples of comments can also be seen on the next page, with the full list of themes and comments found in the appendices.

Theme	Count
Agrees with reuse	8
Prefers cremation/mounding	6
Financial concerns	2



Comments- Reusing graves

"It is an awkward thing to consider but we need to be pragmatic on the matter."

Agrees with reuse

"I prefer the option of cremation and scattering in a place important to me"

Prefers cremation/mounding

"Death is a very expensive business I'm a single mother with a single child struggling to make ends meet & therefore would like to avoid saddling her with unnecessary costs."

Financial concerns



"Good use of space and 75 years is a good period of time since last person was buried. There would be no surviving relatives that knew the individual in the grave."

Agrees with reuse

"It wouldn't bother me"

Agrees with reuse

"I prefer the idea of "mounding", so every additional burial is in a "new" grave."

Prefers cremation/mounding

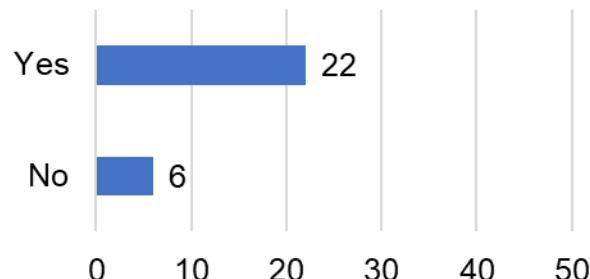


Reusing graves

Respondents were asked if they would consider a grave plot where the original remains have been buried deeper within the grave to allow up to three new burials, as a burial option for them or a family member.

- The **majority** of respondents (**22**) stated they **would consider** it.
- **Just over a fifth** of respondents (**six**) **wouldn't consider** it.

Would you consider a grave plot where the original remains have been buried deeper within the grave to allow up to three new burials, as a burial option for you or a family member?



Base: Respondents who answered No to: should cemeteries stop accepting new burials when full and therefore not reuse or 'mound' over older graves? (28)



Comments – Reusing graves

Respondents were invited to explain their answers after stating if they would consider a grave plot where the original remains have been buried deeper within the grave to allow up to three new burials.

Comments made have been themed and are summarised in the table below. Examples of comments can also be seen on the next page, with the full list of themes and comments found in the appendices.

Theme	Count
Agrees with reuse	7
Prefers cremation/mounding	4
Wouldn't consider	3
If time requirement applies	2



Comments – Reusing graves

“My husband and I both intend to be cremated so we won’t need a grave plot.”

Prefers cremation/mounding



“Sensible use of space.”

Agrees with reuse

“I, and, I believe, my family members propose to be cremated but I think deepening the graves is a good idea for those who want burials.”

Prefers cremation/mounding

“This sounds like a very reasonable option.”

Agrees with reuse

“I will be cremated.”

Prefers cremation/mounding

“I wouldn’t be happy with any remains being disturbed in order to accommodate new burials. It makes me feel very uncomfortable.”

Wouldn’t consider

“Not for me - but for a family member if they wished.”

Wouldn’t consider

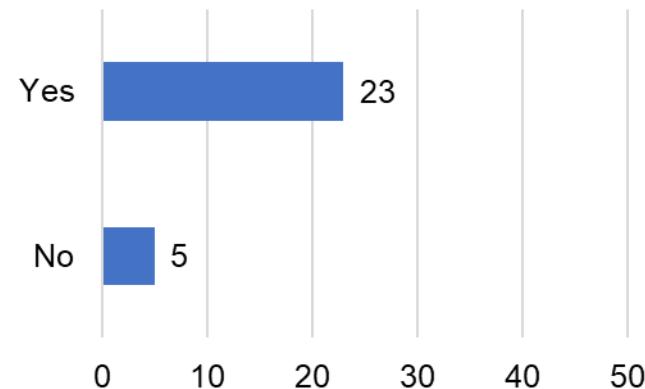


Mounding

Respondents were asked if they would support the principle of creating new burial space by putting more soil onto very old graves.

- **Most respondents (23) would support.**
- **Five respondents stated they wouldn't support.**

Would you support the principle of creating new burial space by putting more soil onto very old graves to increase their height (known as mounding?)



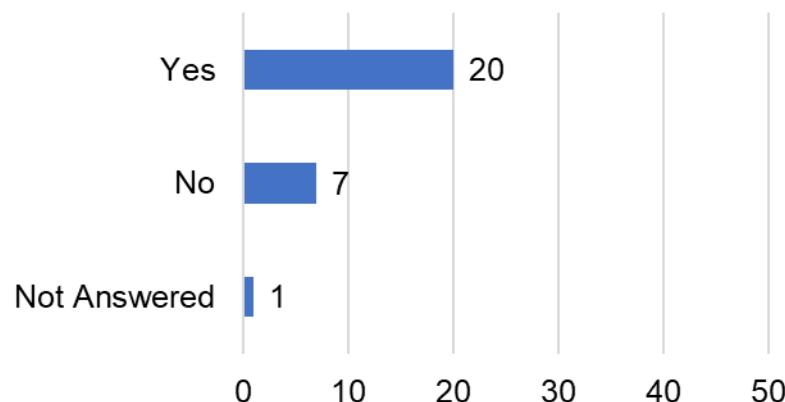
Base: Respondents who answered No to cemeteries should stop accepting new burials when full and therefore not reuse or 'mound' over older graves? (28)

Mounding

Respondents were asked if they would consider burial (for themselves or a family member) within a 'mounded' grave.

- **Most respondents (20) would consider.**
- **Seven** respondents stated they **wouldn't consider.**

Would you consider burial (for yourself or a family member) within a 'mounded' grave?



Base: Respondents who answered No to: should cemeteries stop accepting new burials when full and therefore not reuse or 'mound' over older graves? (28)



Comments – Mounding

Respondents were invited to explain their answers after stating if they would consider burial (for yourself or a family member) within a ‘mounded’ grave.

Comments made have been themed and are summarised in the table below. Examples of comments can also be seen on this page, with the full list of themes and comments found in the appendices.

Theme	Count
Agrees with this practice	11
Aesthetic reasons	2
Don't need burial	2

“Appearance.”

Aesthetic reasons

“My husband and I both intend to be cremated so we won't need a grave plot.”

“If it was an option, of course would need to consider it.”

Agrees with this practice

Don't need burial

“Again a good use of space.”

Agrees with this practice

“This practice maintains the custom of having a “new” grave for each person or family group.”

Agrees with this practice



Comments – any other comments

Respondents were invited to provide any other comments about the options being considered in the survey.

Comments made have been themed and are summarised in the table below. Examples of comments can also be seen on the next page, with the full list of themes and comments found in the appendices.

Theme	Count
Burial suggestion	6
Consider/give more options	4
Comment on reuse	2



Comments – any other comments

"New forests outside London could be created, by planting a tree for each person. This would be cost effective if it is paid by family members of the deceased and environmental and would also create a great legacy."

Consider/give more options



"I think you should really consider burying people in an upright position, I accept that it might be hard for people to break with tradition but it makes a lot of sense when it comes to the land!"

Burial suggestion

"Why don't you ask people whether there are any other options they would like pursued? In some continental countries bones are regularly dug up after a set period and reburied in a communal grave."

Consider/give more options

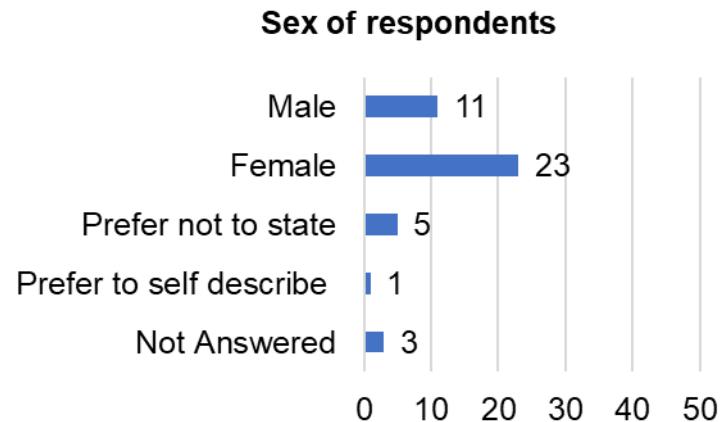
"I wonder if another approach to consider is also to have a sort of stacked tomb approach as they do in some other places where it is more not a crypt as such but where there is a different option to also consider. I would like to also see how a naturalistic graveyard would work as this may be something people consider - using existing but mounded older graves but having a bio diverse approach and naturalistic "woodland" but maintained section [...]"

Burial suggestion

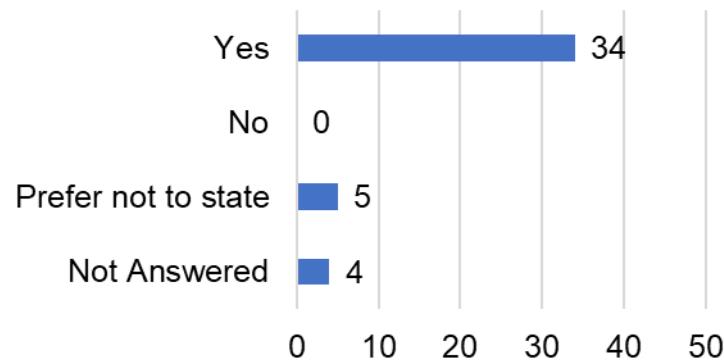


Profile of respondents

Respondents were asked a series of questions about themselves, to understand who had responded to the consultation.



Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?



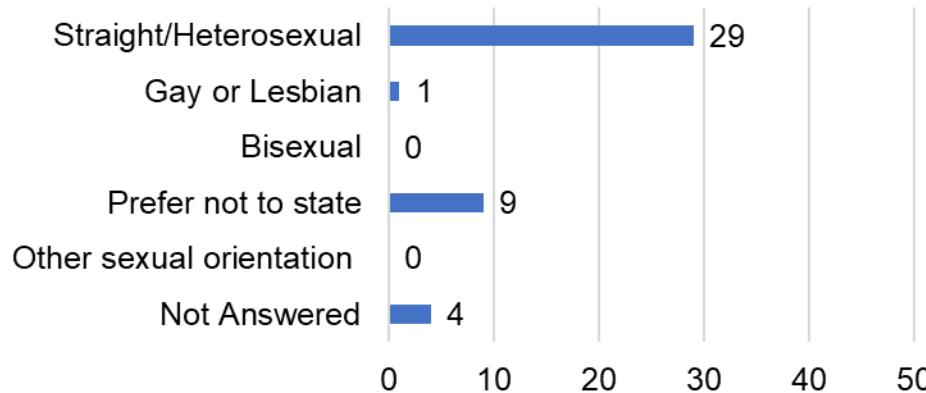
Base: All respondents (43)



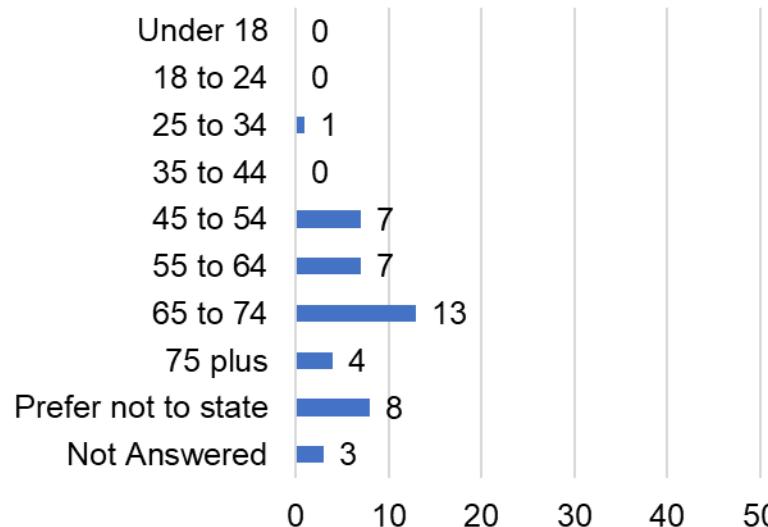
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Profile of respondents

Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?



Which age group do you belong to?



Base: All respondents
(43)

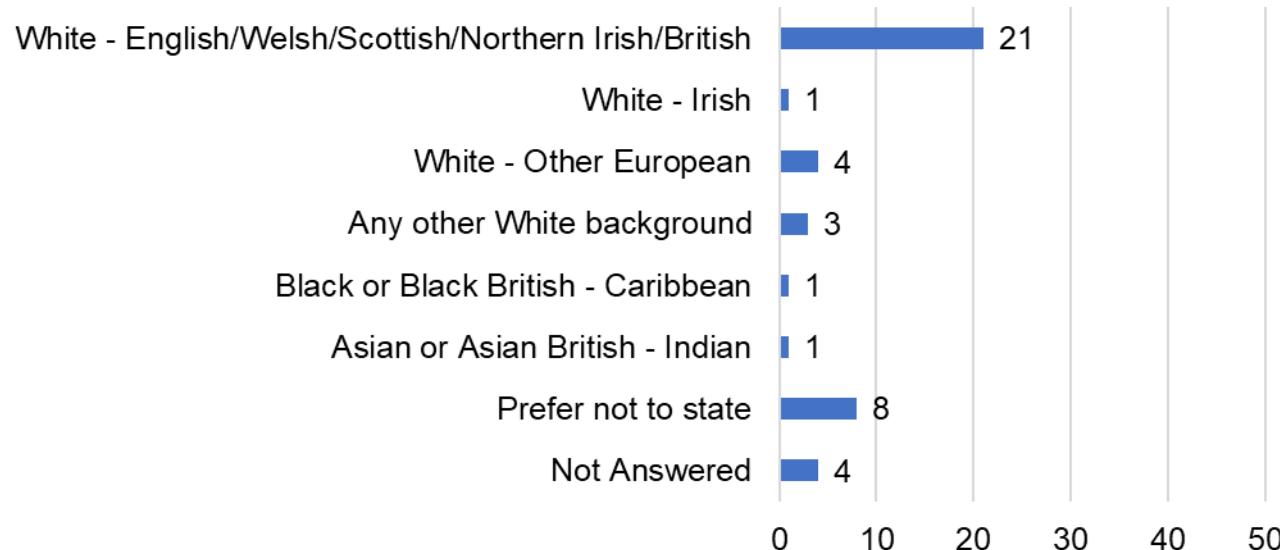


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Profile of respondents

Please note the graph below shows only ethnicities that were chosen by respondents.

How do you describe your ethnic origin?



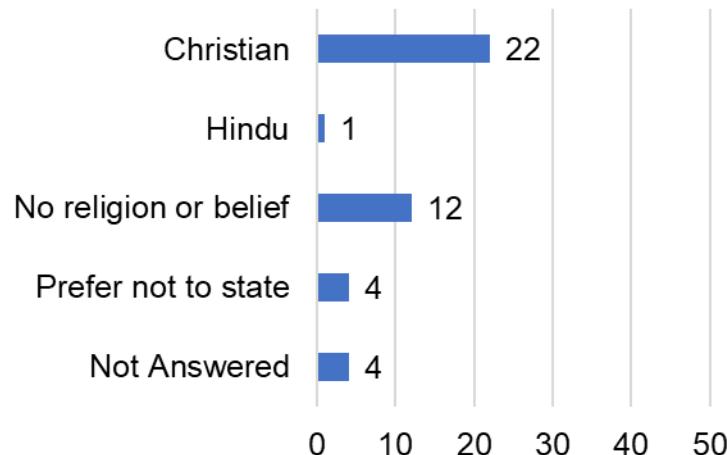
Base: All respondents (43)



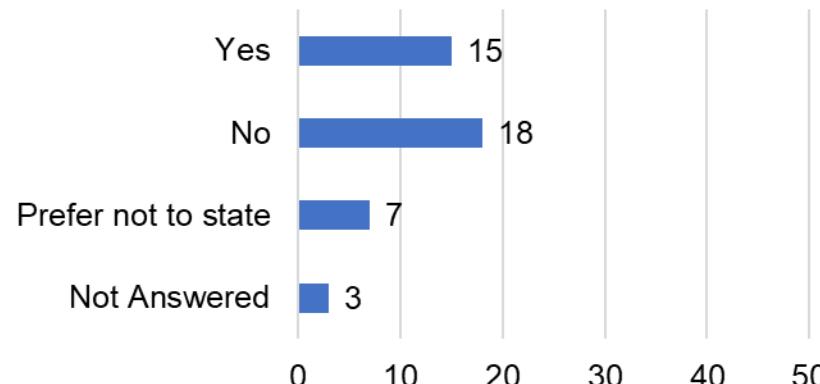
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Profile of respondents

What is your religion or belief?



Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more??



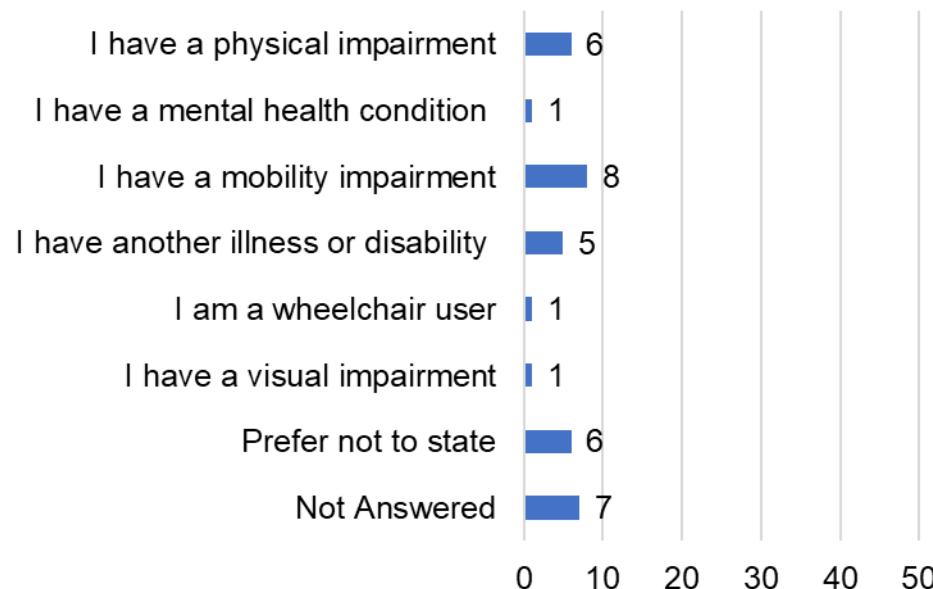
Base: All respondents (43)



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Profile of respondents

If yes, what is the nature of your physical or mental health condition or illness?



Base: Respondents that indicated as having a disability in the previous question (15)

Drop in sessions feedback



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Drop ins

The Parks and Leisure Team offered four dates in the north, south and centre of the borough and Gunnersbury Cemetery, for residents to have an opportunity to feedback and ask questions. Eleven people in total attended, raising questions that helped to review and update the FAQs document that was live on the Council website. Below are the FAQs developed from the drop ins:

1. Can you give more details of site-specific consultation on grave reuse, should we move to this second stage?

Answer: The following consultation would take place: Notices published at the entrance to the cemetery identifying the graves suitable for reuse. Notices published at the grave side of each of the suitable graves. Notices sent to the registered grave owner, and registered owner of the memorial (if not the same person). The grave numbers proposed for reuse must also be published in a London newspaper for two consecutive weeks. Notices will be clear and outline the right to object. The current legislation (London Local Authorities Act 2007, Part 5, Section 74) requires these notices to be published for 6 months, but we are proposing to extend this to a year (plus a standstill period for late objections) and also to publish notices on our website. If objections are received, then the legislation dictates that we cannot ask about that grave again for a period of 25 years.

2. Can we expand the current cemeteries to create more space for burial?

Answer: We are currently looking at where existing space within the cemeteries can be used, such as filling in grass paths. However, expanding beyond the boundaries of the cemeteries at both Hanwell and Gunnersbury cemetery is not currently an option due to neighbouring land being used for other purposes and not being owned by Kensington and Chelsea Council.

3. Some graves have 'in perpetuity' rights to graves. Would these graves be considered for re-use?

Answer: Yes, but subject to the same grave consultation process being followed and no objections from family or next of kin.

4. Can unused but 'purchased graves' be sold back to the Council for reuse?

Answer: Yes, but the decision to sell the grave space back to the Council would be the decision of the person named on the deed of grant, who currently has the purchase right of burial for the grave space but does not own the land. Please contact the cemetery office directly if you are interested in selling back an unused grave space.



Drop ins

5. When does the 75 years grave reuse policy apply from - is it the date the original deed of grant was purchased or the date of the last burial?

Answer: The 75 years grave reuse starts from the date of the last burial (interment). For example, if the last burial in a grave was 1 May 2025, then we would not be able to ask about that grave for reuse until 30 April 2100.

6. Can the deed of grant (purchased right of burial) be extended, once the original 75 years expires.

Answer: This is something the Council is currently reviewing as we have not got to a stage where a 75-year deed of grant has yet expired, but it is likely that the option to extend will be possible subject to the relevant paperwork and fees.

7. If 'lift and deepen' burial of remains is taken forward, would any casket/coffin used be biodegradable?

Answer: Yes, any casket / coffin would be made from a biodegradable material.

Separately, the Parks Team received an email from a resident (a grave plot owner) that asked the questions and made the comments below. The email has been responded to directly.

Questions from resident

- **What would happen to a grave I attend regularly after the lease?**
- **If the owner has passed away what would happen to the grave ownership, would you use that plot for other burials?**
- **Would you keep a plaque or memorial tag for the people who are already buried? Does this also refer to cremation plots?**

Comments from resident

My suggestion would also be to stop non residents from buying burial plots. I'm aware you have offered this service for a long period of time, however, this seems like one of the most ideal options and I understand it may be too late. I myself attend the cemetery once a week to keep my all of my family members graves looking tidy.

Could you not potentially merge with another cemetery such as Kensal Green? They have a huge land where many of the graves have not been attended for many years. This would also be helpful to residents of Kensington and Chelsea as this cemetery is located closer to majority of residents and is easier to get to via public transport.



Feedback from faith groups



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Feedback from faith groups

The following feedback was received from faith groups that were written to as part of the consultation process. The names of those responding have been removed in line with data protection principles.

- Catholic Dean of North Kensington, commented “Option 1a seems feasible, as does option 2 (reuse options). Option 2b seems challenging and expensive (mounding). We believe that our congregations understand the need for extra capacity and that the proposals are sensitively suggested. Given the number of residents from countries such as Italy and Spain we wonder if their burial system - adapted for our cooler climate – might be of interest to some residents – it certainly would use land space better: [Gregor Graf · Campo Verano · Divisare](#)”
- “The Board of Trustees from the First Church of Christ Scientist London have no objections or concerns about the options.” (options for grave reuse or mounding)”
- On Behalf of the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion commented “At the moment our sisters are buried in St Marys Cemetery the RC Section of Kensal Green cemetery. I see you are referring to Hanwell Cemetery and Gunnersbury Cemetery and not the Kensal Green which you indicate is run by a private company. Thank you for contacting us on this sensitive subject , but at the moment it does not apply to us. I do hope you will have a positive response and it will become clear the way forward.”
- A Trustee of the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue - Holland Park commented that “...our rabbi advises ‘In Judaism, burial spaces are sacrosanct and should not be tampered with in any circumstance, even if this means people would need to bury further out.”

