

REPORT TO COUNCIL ON THE UPDATE REGARDING AVAILABLE BURIAL SPACE IN LANGEBERG MUNICIPALITY, AND UPDATE ON EXPLORING FURTHER POSSIBLE ACTIONS TO DEAL WITH LIMITED BURIAL SPACE IN ROBERTSON (MANAGER: PARKS & AMENITIES)

PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to update the council on the current status of burial space in the Langeberg Municipality, particularly in Robertson, and to explore and propose actions or solutions to address the limited burial space in the area.

BACKGROUND

In June 2023, Pivotal Farming was contracted as per Q07/2023, to conduct further geotechnical surveys to suggest interim measures to enable the Municipality to use Portion G while the EIA process for the larger proposed expansion is completed. The survey has been completed and the report number 2023/09/28_088_A submitted. Please see attached.

“The lack of groundwater during the study by Geotechnics Africa in 2016 and during this investigation to the north of the existing cemetery (referred to as Area B in the Geotechnics Africa Report) show that the cutoff drains installed (in 2014) in that area have been successful.

Like any infrastructure, the drainage system will need to be maintained to remain effective. The following points need to be implemented:

- The manholes that have been blocked need to be reopened and cleaned to allow services of the cutoff drains.
- The outflow to the river needs to be kept open. During the time of the investigation, the openings could not be located due to significant bush encroachment and high river levels.
- It is expected that the Eucalyptus Forest on the western boundary of the proposed expansion will have a root system that will continually impact the subsurface drains negatively. Eucalyptus or Blue Gum trees are classed as a Category 1b invasive species by the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act (NEMBA) and must thus be removed from the riparian zone. This will greatly reduce the impact of roots damaging subsurface drains in the future and thus improve the effectiveness of the drainage system.
- The Willem Nels River into which the drainage pipes may be discharging may be subject to contamination from the seepage water emanating from the graveyard. The water should first be discharged into retention ponds before being released into the natural river system. A specialist should be consulted in this regard.
- As the groundwater flow will be towards the Willem Nels River, that is in towards the south west, cutoff drains should be installed upgradient of the cemetery (and any planned expansion), to prevent groundwater flowing through the cemetery and towards the drainage channel, potentially carrying contaminants with it.
- The depth of the cutoff drains must be well below that of the bottom of the coffins to avoid fluctuating water levels coming into contact with the coffins. The minimum depth of a single burial is 1.8m and 2.2 m for double burials.
- The groundwater quality and groundwater levels must be monitored bi-annually, and where possible, the water caught in cut-off drains must also be sampled for comparative purposes.
- Minimal accessories should be buried with bodies, and coffins should preferably comprise of as many natural material as possible, avoiding plastics and metals”.

CEMETERY SPACE AVAILABLE

1. Robertson White Street Cemetery: 100% full. Additional 27 grave spaces have been identified, available at first come first serve bases.
2. Robertson New White Street area: 100% full
3. **Robertson Northern Cemetery, Robertson: 99% full. Additional space has been created by felling avenues of Beefwoods and burying in some of the roads. 40 grave spaces available.**
4. **Robertson Nkqubela Cemetery: Available space for another 637 graves***
5. **McGregor Cemetery: Available space for another 227 graves***
6. Ashton Cogmanskloof: 100% full
7. Ashton Conradiedorp: 99% full
8. **Ashton Silo's: Available space for another 10 000 graves in new development***
9. Ashton Zolani Old: 100% full
10. **Ashton Zolani New: Available space for another 396 graves***
11. Montagu: Golf Course: 100% full
12. **Montagu Ashbury New: Available space for another 2822 graves***
13. Montagu Ashbury Old: 100% full
14. Bonnievale: Town old: 100% full
15. **Bonnievale Town New: Available space for another 486 graves***
16. Bonnievale Happy Valley Milner Street: 99% full
17. Bonnievale Happy Valley Newcross Street: 99% full (Some space still available for digging by hand)

*We had the remaining available space surveyed by a land surveyor in December 2018 who then drew plans for each cemetery according to the grave sizes stipulated in the LM cemeteries bylaw and calculated the amount of graves we could still create in each cemetery.

The current approximate monthly grave demands per town are as follows:

Robertson: **11**
Robertson Nkqubela: **4**
Ashton Silo's: **9**
Ashton Zolani: **4**
McGregor: **3**
Bonnievale: **6**
Montagu: **9**

Thus, the most pressing need for more cemetery space is in Robertson.

ALTERNATE BURIAL METHODS

We are continuously exploring alternative burial options in our municipality in response to various challenges and evolving community needs. One of the main considerations is the multi burial option. For multi-interment burials, Municipality must adhere to local regulations concerning burial depth and spacing, each site needs to be evaluated to ensure compliance with health codes and safety regulations. To accommodate multiple burials within the same plot, the initial burial must be excavated to a depth that allows for future interments. The required depth for burials is 1.8 meters for a single burial and 2.2 meters for a double burial. However, achieving these depths can be particularly difficult in certain areas due to environmental factors.

Areas near rivers like White Street Cemetery tend to have a high-water table and makes it challenging to dig graves deep enough, leading to potential concerns about water intrusion, grave stability, and contamination risks. This issue

is especially problematic for double burials where the required depth is 2.2 meters. In addition to this some regions in the municipality are characterized by rocky soil (North Cemetery), which complicates digging further and makes it more labour-intensive and costly to prepare burial sites.

Another concern is stormwater drainage. In some parts of the municipality, inadequate drainage systems contribute to the pooling of water, which not only increases the difficulty of digging but also poses risks to the structural integrity of burial plots over time. Excessive water can cause soil instability, potentially leading to grave subsidence or erosion.

Cemetery bylaw: 12.1, 14.

(c) for a preferred burial site with a soil of sand-clay mix of low porosity and a small and fine grain texture, the water table should be at least 2.5m deep to allow for traditional grave depth of six feet (1.8 meters);

(d) for areas with higher water tables, the local government may determine a reasonable depth with additional walling recommendations to protect underground water; and

(e) the covering soil shall not be less than 1 m, should two bodies be buried in the same grave, 300mm of soil shall be maintained between the coffins.

Given the challenges outlined above, the double burial option is not feasible in Langeberg Municipality.

FURTHER POSSIBLE ACTIONS

- **RECLAIMING / PURCHASING OF THE UNUSED AFM CEMETERY**

The Langeberg Municipality has purchased the unused land from the Robertson Apostolic Faith Mission Church. The property, erf 2161, lies directly adjacent to a current White Street cemetery section and a portion of land, marked "G" in the attached aerial photograph.

Area: 3625m² = approximately 550 single graves

- **INTERIM USE OF PORTION G, WHITE STREET CEMETERY, as per attached aerial photo**

Rezoning permission requested for approximately 2500m² of a portion of Erf 3, Robertson, to tide the Langeberg Municipality over until the Environmental Impact Assessment study has been done and approval for the larger extension of the cemetery has been obtained from the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries as per Tender 09/2016.

Area G as referred to in the report (a portion of Erf 3, Robertson), was rezoned in 2018 to Open Space II, with consent for a Cemetery. The rezoning was approved subject to the conditions in the geotechnical report of 2016 being implemented (letter of approval dated 22 June 2018 is attached). As the conditions of approval have not been met within the 5 year validity period of the rezoning and consent use approval (i.e. by 22 June 2023) the approval has lapsed.

Area G of Erf 3 is therefore still zoned Undetermined zone, with no development rights. This report, with the title of "Proposed expansion of the White Street cemetery on Portion of Erf 3, Robertson, number J729" advises that "before the cemetery may be used, the suggested storm water drainage and retention system to control storm water and prevent groundwater pollution must be (i) designed, (ii) approved by the Department of Water Affairs and (iii) constructed and implemented." **Mr. Dirk van Rooyen of Geotechnics Africa, and author of the report, is of the opinion that the same conditions would apply to the AFM cemetery (erf 2161).**

Area: 2500m² = approximately 350 single graves

- **PROPOSAL TO REDUCE HEROES' ACRE BURIAL SECTION FOR MORE BURIAL SPACES (map attached)**

Heroes Acre has historically been a significant site where local heroes have been honoured and remembered. The cemetery is deeply important to the community's collective memory and pride. However, due to growing demand for additional burial spaces in our community, we are facing the challenge of limited available land for regular burials in our existing cemeteries.

Given the historical and cultural importance of Heroes Acre, it is essential that we strike a balance between preserving its sacred role as a memorial site while responding to the current need for additional burial plots. There has been only one grave in that plot since the establishment of it many years ago.

Area: 946m² = approximately 50 single graves

Comments: Manager Town Planning

The areas mentioned in the Council report are indicated below for ease of reference. The red outline shows the current boundary of the area which is zoned for cemetery purposes.

Erf 2161 Robertson is zoned Open Space II with consent for Cemetery. The future use of this land for burials is supported subject to the preparation of a layout plan showing the positioning and dimensions of graves and related access-ways, and compliance with the recommendations in the specialist geotechnical reports, and ongoing maintenance of the implemented drainage system.

Area G is part of Re/3 Robertson. The approved zoning of this portion for cemetery purpose has lapsed and the zoning is currently "Undetermined". Expansion of the cemetery in this area is supported in terms of the LSDF 2024 but will require the prior approval of a rezoning application in terms of the Langeberg Land Use Planning Bylaw, 2015 and compliance with the recommendations in the specialist geotechnical reports.

Note: The 2023 Pivotal Farming geotechnical report referred to in the first paragraph of the Council report under the heading "Background" was not attached to the report.



Comments: Director Corporate Services

The contents of the report are noted.

Comments: Director Economic, Social and Integrated Development Services

The content of the report is noted and supported

Comments: Director Engineering Services

The report is noted and supported.

Comments: Chief Financial Officer

The report is noted and supported.

Comments: Municipal Manager

The extensive and well researched content of the item is sincerely appreciated and noted, and the resulting recommendation to Council supported.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

It is recommended that the council:

1. To consider exploring the option of reducing the size of the current burial space in Heroes Acre area to allow for the establishment of regular burial plots within the remaining available land.
2. To proactively engage with the communities to prepare them for the possibility of using alternative cemeteries (Silos cemetery), that would help mitigate the emotional and logistical stress that families may experience in the future due to a shortage of burial plots.

This item served before a Community Services Portfolio Committee on 09 April 2025

Hierdie verslag het voor die Gemeenskapsdienste Portefeulje Komitee gedien op 09 April 2025

Aanbeveling / Recommendation

It is recommended that the council:

1. To consider exploring the option of reducing the size of the current burial space in Heroes Acre area to allow for the establishment of regular burial plots within the remaining available land.
2. Department to undertake public participation process for comments/inputs and report be resubmitted for final approval.
3. To proactively engage with the communities to prepare them for the possibility of using alternative cemeteries (Silos cemetery), that would help mitigate the emotional and logistical stress that families may experience in the future due to a shortage of burial plots.

This item served before the Executive Mayoral Committee on 23 April 2025

Hierdie item het voor die Uitvoerende Burgemeesterskomitee gedien op 23 April 2025

Aanbeveling / Recommendation

1. That Council consider exploring the option of reducing the size of the current burial space in Heroes Acre area to allow for the establishment of regular burial plots within the remaining available land.
2. That the Department to undertake public participation process for comments/inputs and report be resubmitted for final approval.
3. To proactively engage with the communities to prepare them for the possibility of using alternative cemeteries (Silos cemetery), that would help mitigate the emotional and logistical stress that families may experience in the future due to a shortage of burial plots.

This item served before an Ordinary Meeting of Council on 29 April 2025

Hierdie item het gedien voor 'n Gewone Vergadering van die Raad op 29 April 2025

Eenparig Besluit / Unanimously Resolved

1. That Council consider exploring the option of reducing the size of the current burial space in Heroes Acre area to allow for the establishment of regular burial plots within the remaining available land.
2. That the Department undertake a public participation process to invite comments/inputs whereafter the report be resubmitted for final approval.
3. To proactive engagements with the communities be held to prepare them for the possibility of using alternative cemeteries (Silos cemetery), that would help mitigate the emotional and logistical stress that families may experience in the future due to a shortage of burial plots.
4. That the possibility of cremation also be discussed when engaging with the different communities.