

## **Cemeteries and churchyards**

### **Definition**

- 11.1 Churchyards are encompassed within the walled boundary of a church and cemeteries are burial grounds outside the confines of a church. These include private burial grounds, local authority burial grounds and disused churchyards. The primary purpose of this type of open space is for burial of the dead and quiet contemplation but also for the promotion of wildlife conservation and biodiversity.

**Figure 11.1 - Brigstock Cemetery**



### **Strategic context and consultation**

- 11.2 Cemeteries and churchyards can be a significant open space provider in some areas particularly in rural areas. In other areas they can represent a relatively minor resource in terms of the land, but are able to provide areas of nature conservation importance.
- 11.3 Some churchyards retain areas of unimproved grasslands and other various habitats. They can make a significant contribution to the provision of urban green space sometimes providing a sanctuary for wildlife in the urban settlements and often providing some historic value to the more rural landscapes.
- 11.4 Cemeteries and churchyards need to be considered as an important asset, including the value to the families of the deceased, peaceful areas for contemplation, a 'peace of history' and a sanctuary for wildlife. The majority of churchyards in East Northamptonshire are located in the rural villages in the rural area.
- 11.5 71% of people from the household survey thought that this type of open space was important and 50% of people stated they use churchyards and cemeteries. This

suggests that this type of open space is well valued by the residents of East Northamptonshire and there is a recognition of the benefits offered.

### Setting provision standards

#### Quantity

- 11.6 No Quantity Standards are to be set for Cemeteries and Churchyards. PPG 17 Annex states "many historic churchyards provide important places for quiet contemplation, especially in busy urban areas, and often support biodiversity and interesting geological features. As such many can also be viewed as amenity greenspaces. Unfortunately, many are also run-down and therefore it may be desirable to enhance them. As churchyards can only exist where there is a church, the only form of provision standard which will be required is a qualitative one."

#### **RECOMMENDED LOCAL STANDARD**

***No Local Standard to be set***

- 11.7 For Cemeteries, PPG 17 Annex states "every individual cemetery has a finite capacity and therefore there is steady need for more of them. Indeed, many areas face a shortage of ground for burials. The need for graves, for all religious faiths, can be calculated from population estimates, coupled with details of the average proportion of deaths which result in a burial, and converted into a quantitative population-based provision standard." This does not relate to a quantitative hectare per 1,000 population requirement.

#### Quality

- 11.8 There are no definitive national or local standards for the quality of cemeteries and churchyards.
- 11.9 The quality of cemeteries within East Northamptonshire is good overall, although in a similar manner to other typologies quality ratings vary considerably. There were very few ratings of poor, and indeed no sites received a below average rating in terms of cleanliness and maintenance, suggesting that cemeteries and churchyards are in good condition.
- 11.10 Although cemeteries suffer from some vandalism the overall public perception is that quality is high, and a number of residents highlighted good practice cemetery sites, including Higham Ferrers Cemetery and Oundle Cemetery and pointed to the provision of seats as being a key element of good practice cemetery provision. There are also a number of sites considered to be of high wildlife value. The public perception of vandalism was not reinforced through site visit inspections.
- 11.11 This high ecological value of cemeteries was also recognised during site visits, with many sites offering important opportunities for wildlife in addition to providing an amenity / sense of place benefit.
- 11.12 Irthingborough Cemetery (Site ID 2021) was the highest scoring site, attaining a score of 92%. At the other end of the spectrum, All Saints Churchyard, Barnwell (Site ID 653) scored only 46%.

#### **QUALITY VISION**

***"A well-maintained, clean site with long-term burial capacity, trees, flowers and shrubs and the provision of seats and clear pathways. Sites should provide a sanctuary for wildlife in areas devoid of greenspace and should encourage a tranquil environment. The site must have a well defined boundary to discourage misuse."***

- 11.13 The consultation and household questionnaires highlighted that the most desired features for churchyards and cemeteries are clean areas with flowers, footpaths and seating. It is important for the Council and the public to acknowledge the important open space function that churchyards and cemeteries provide. This function can be enhanced by the provision of seating and footpaths, which increase the amenity value and ease of access and safety for those who visit sites. It is essential that site maintenance continues to maintain the high quality spaces currently in East Northamptonshire and it is hoped that a defined boundary will limit the amount of vandalism and graffiti currently experienced.
- 11.14 The recommended local standard provides the vision for any new provision and also a benchmark for existing cemeteries and churchyards to achieve in terms of enhancement, reflecting the priorities of the local community.
- 11.15 Appendix N highlights the links between the quality vision and the site assessments, converting the key factors of the vision into an expected score against the site assessment matrix used and consequently providing a minimum quality benchmark. It is important to set a benchmark indicator against which the comparative quality of sites within East Northamptonshire can be assessed. This standard can also serve to guide improvement programmes by aiming to achieve quality threshold score at all sites.
- 11.16 The key points that link the quality vision and site assessments are a well maintained site with a defined boundary, clear pathways and varied vegetation and landscaping.
- 11.17 The quality site assessments are divided into sub categories and an expected score is assigned against each (shown in brackets). The full methodology is explained in appendix N:
- cleanliness and maintenance (4)
  - safety and security (4)
  - vegetation (4)
  - ancillary accommodation (3)
- 11.18 This provides a quality vision percentage of 76% which is intended as an aspirational benchmark for the provision of facilities for cemeteries and churchyards in East Northamptonshire.

### **Accessibility**

- 11.19 With regards to accessibility there are no definitive national or local standards for cemeteries and churchyards.
- 11.20 The average score was 56%, which suggests that accessibility is average although varied. Church Garden in Glapthorn (Site ID 545) and St Peters Churchyard in Oundle (Site ID 131) are the highest rated sites with scores of 73.3%. The lowest scoring sites were mainly in the rural areas, with the lowest scoring 30%, St. John's Churchyard in Slipton.
- 11.21 Information and signage and transport were the main areas of concern, with 48 sites rated poor or very poor for both access factors.

- 11.22 Through the consultation and household survey, access by wheelchairs and pushchairs is a concern for the majority of respondents (31%).
- 11.23 There is no realistic requirement to set catchments for such typologies as they cannot easily be influenced through planning policy and implementation.

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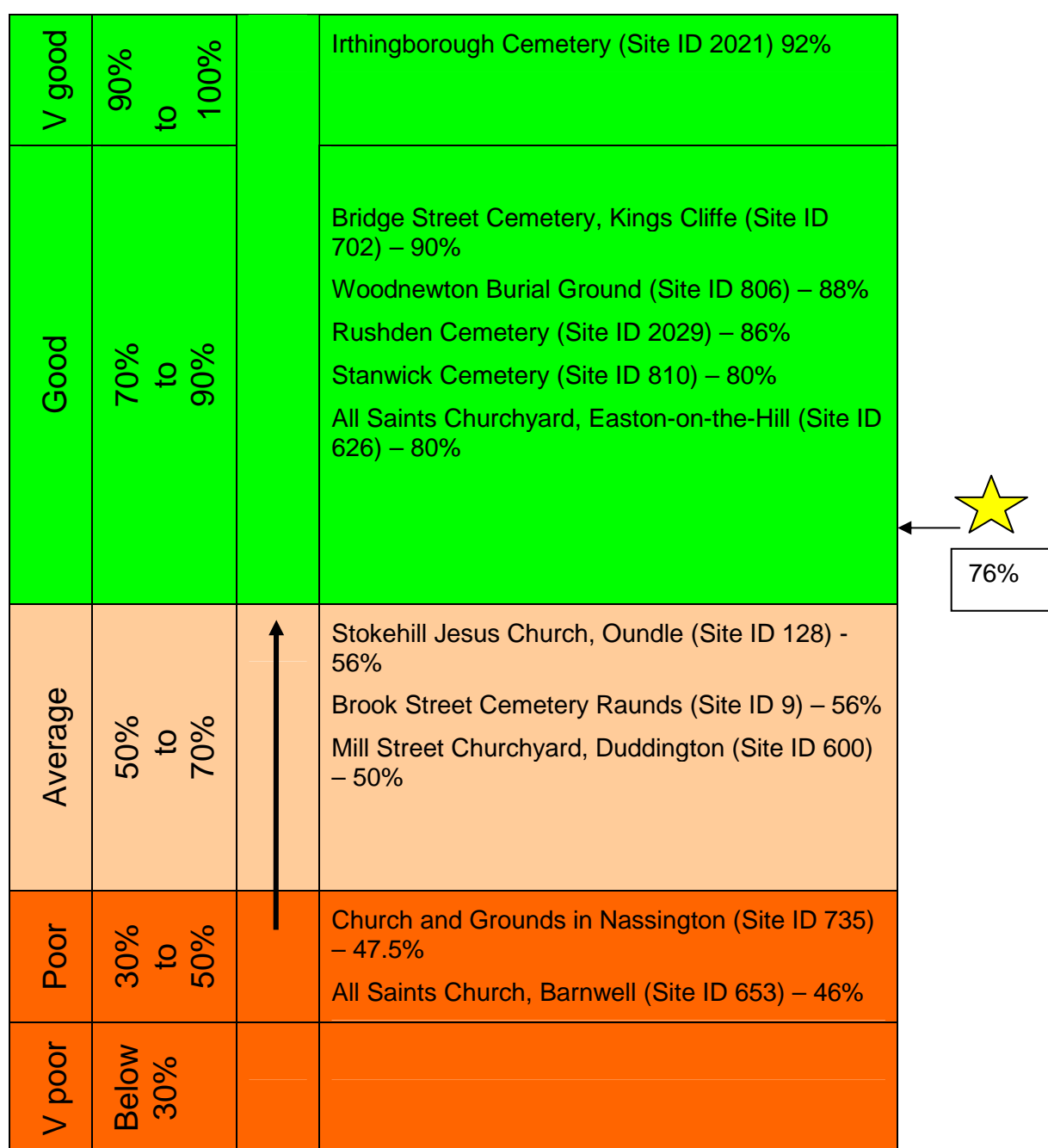
### **Applying provision standards – identifying geographical areas**

- 11.24 Given that it is not appropriate to set any local quantity or accessibility standards it is also not appropriate to state areas of deficiency or need.
- 11.25 Cemeteries and Churchyards although needed for the burial of the dead provide an open space to be used on an opportunity led basis, i.e. where there are churchyards and cemeteries there are opportunities for wildlife and use of the open space by the public for walking and relaxing.
- 11.26 It is however important to consider the quality of the provision of cemeteries and churchyards and the value of the current provision.

### **Quality benchmarking**

- 11.27 The application of the quality benchmarking standard (set at a score of 76% on the site assessment for cemeteries and churchyards) provides an indication of the desired level of quality at each sites and enables the comparison of sites across the authority. As described in appendix N, it highlights sites that currently meet the visionary standard, and those sites falling significantly below and consequently where improvement is required. A full list of site scores can be found in appendix N. The highest and lowest scoring sites are highlighted in figure 11.2 overleaf.

11.28 Figure 11.2 illustrates sites above and below the benchmark quality indicator



## Value assessment – identifying specific sites

11.29 Assessing quality and value is fundamental to effective planning. The wider benefits of churchyards are key and it is wrong to place a value on churchyards and cemeteries focusing solely on quality and accessibility. In addition to offering a functional value, many cemeteries and churchyards have wider benefits including heritage, cultural and landscape values.

11.30 As with many other types of open space there is no information on the usage of these sites, although Rushden Cemetery was highlighted in the household questionnaire as one of the sites most frequently visited by users of this typology.

11.31 Out of 79 churchyards and cemeteries in East Northamptonshire, 3 scored highly on both access and quality and should therefore be regarded as good practice. These include:

- Irthlingborough Cemetery (Site ID 2021)
- Bridge Street Cemetery in Kings Cliffe (Site ID 702)
- Rushden Cemetery (Site ID 2029).

11.32 A number of sites have scored low in terms of quality and accessibility, although the usage of these sites is unknown. Additionally the wildlife / habitat value of these sites should be considered. Sites include:

- All Saints Church, Barnwell (Site ID 653)
- Church and Grounds in Nassington (Site ID 735)

11.33 These sites also act as a valuable visual amenity in the rural and urban areas, especially where in some instances one of the only types of formal open space in the rural areas is a churchyard.

### Summary

11.34 Cemeteries and churchyards can be a significant open space provider in some areas particularly in rural areas. In other areas they can represent a relatively minor resource in terms of the land, but are able to provide areas of nature conservation importance and are often among the few areas of greenspace where the local community is able to have some contact with the natural world.

11.35 In general the quality of sites is good, although this does vary considerably. Whilst six sites meet the quality benchmark (set at 76%) there are five sites which are considered to be poor or very poor.

### Recommendations

CC1	Produce a cemeteries and churchyards action plan, accounting for all provision, not just that owned and managed by the Council
CC2	Work in partnership with other providers to improve the quality of cemeteries and churchyards in line with the quality vision and benchmark
CC3	Promote the nature conservation value of cemeteries and churchyards and begin to develop more awareness of ecological management of cemeteries and churchyards.