



Comhairle Cathrach
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City Council

Report to Arts, Culture, Leisure
and Recreation SPC

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Dublin City Council Burial Places Strategy - Synopsis



Photograph Credit: Conservation Architect; Fergal McNamara (St. James's Graveyard, James's Street)

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Executive Summary

This document highlights the importance of a Burial Places Strategy for all Dublin City Council sites and outlines key actions required. The strategy focuses on the burial places in which Parks, Biodiversity and Landscape Services have a significant management role.

This strategy builds on the recommendations of the 'Dublin City Parks Strategy 2019-2022', which lists two specific proposed actions in relation to burial places;

- *'To develop appropriate forms of interpretation to promote knowledge of historical graveyards and assist research of cemeteries'*
- *'To consider the provision of columbarium walls in burial grounds'*

In conjunction with the above, the additional objectives are to;

- **To carry out Community Engagement & Facilitate Volunteerism**
- **To facilitate respectful and appropriate public access to these contemplative spaces**
- **To conserve and enhance burial grounds as reserves for biodiversity at local and City level**

In order to achieve these specific objectives, it is vital to;

- **Safeguard and conserve the sites**
- **Define sustainable uses, such as continue the practice of interment (where appropriate)**
- **Raise profile, understanding and appropriate use of burial places**
- **Ensure best practice maintenance of the sites (for biodiversity and built heritage)**
- **Foster long-term self-funding of burial places**

In order to progress these objectives, the key actions to safeguard and also respectfully optimise the potential of these special city assets are;

- Commission Conservation Management Plans
- Progress Donnybrook Cemetery Pilot Project for Columbarium Wall provision
- Develop site specific plans for each site
- Produce site specific maintenance plans, with clear actions
- Prioritise key heritage projects, for example, the conservation High Cross, St. Canice's Graveyard
- Monitor biodiversity and archaeological changes over time
- Assess species assemblages and monitor biodiversity changes over time

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- Les Moore, City Parks Superintendent
- Bernard Brady, Project Manager, Parks, Biodiversity and Landscape Services
- Maryann Harris, Senior Executive Parks and Landscape Officer
- Ruth Johnson, City Archaeologist & Charles Duggan, Heritage Officer

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Subject Sites

This strategy focuses on key sites, in which Dublin City Council Parks, Biodiversity and Landscape Services has a (significant) management role. Only 3 of the subject sites; St. John the Baptist in Clontarf, Drimnagh (Bluebell) and St. Canice's in Finglas accept interments (in pre-existing family plots), but no new plots are available. In recent years, there are approximately a total of 7 burials annually, in old burial plots.

The Parks, Biodiversity and Landscape Services Division also carry out management/maintenance works on the following sites:

Raheny (St. Assam's), Killester, Donnybrook Graveyard, Merrion (Bellevue), St. James's Graveyard, The Jewish Cemetery (Ballybough), the Burial plots in Civic Office Grounds, St. Kevin's Park, Huguenot Cemetery (Merrion Row), St. Luke's Graveyard (Coombe) and Cabbage Garden Park. Several burial places are not maintained primarily as burial places. For example, the Cabbage Garden is managed as a park and the former Wolfe Tone site is now public realm. These burial places are located in the location plans.

Four of these sites were investigated by the 'Columbarium Walls Feasibility Study for Dublin City Council Parks and Landscape Services' by 7L Architects (September 2019);

- I. Donnybrook Graveyard,
- II. Clontarf,
- III. Bluebell,
- IV. Merrion (Bellevue).

The study demonstrated that these four sites could provide interment options for their local communities.

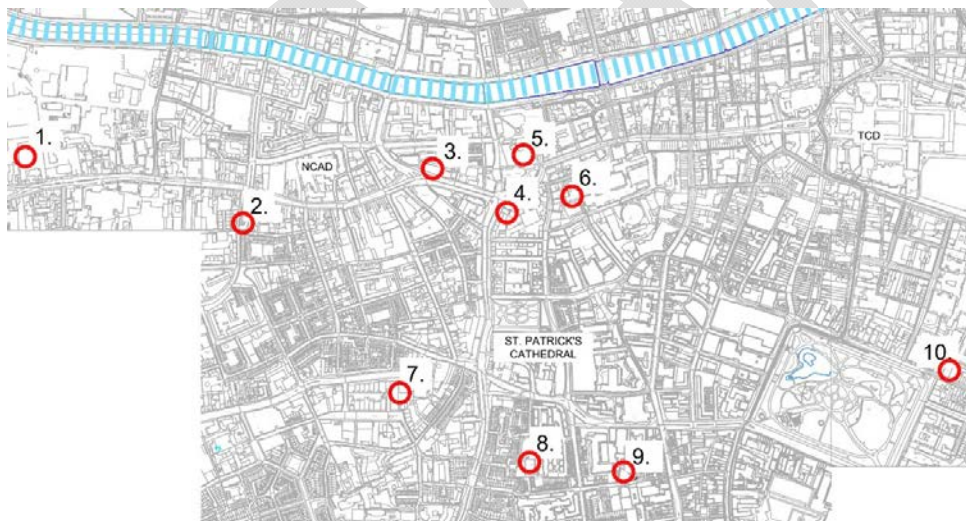
For context, the 'Dublin City Graveyard's Study' (2004) surveyed sixty-four sites and notes that 'the information collected may be considered to be statistically significant'. The study included disused graveyards 'where it was clear that they had been graveyards – such as those converted to other uses, but where headstones remained on site.' Therefore, in addition to the actions included in this strategy (synopsis), there is opportunity to address more Dublin City burial places in the future.

Location Plans (initial key burial places)



Burial Places (outside city centre) - Location Plan

1	Bluebell Graveyard & Cemetery, Drimnagh	5	St. John the Baptist, Clontarf
2	St. Canice's Graveyard, Finglas	6	Bellevue, off Merrion Road
3	Donnybrook Graveyard, Donnybrook Road	7	St. Assam's, Raheny
4	Killester Graveyard, Killester Avenue	8	The Jewish Cemetery, Ballybough



City Centre Burial Places - Location Plan

1	St. James's Graveyard, James's St. North	6	St. Werburgh's Graveyard, Werburgh St.
2	St. Catherine's Graveyard (to the rear of St. Catherine's Church on Thomas Street), is now a park	7	St. Luke's, The Coombe
3	St. Audeon's Churches Burial Places, Cornmarket/High Street	8	Cabbage Garden, Cathedral Lane
4	St. Nicholas Within, corner of Nicholas St. and Christchurch Place	9	St. Kevin's Park
5	Burial plots, DCC Civic Grounds	10	Huguenot Cemetery, Merrion Row

1.2 Explaining the need...changing and evolving scenarios

The need for the proposed Burial Places strategy is to ascertain the current site conditions, the relevant issues and also understand how best to sensitively optimise the sites. Burial places face a multitude of potential threats and it is vital to first safeguard these sites.

The overarching need for the strategy is compounded by the intense urban development pressure and the complex evolution of these historical urban burial places. Following, there are particular challenges which must be addressed.

The potential typical threats to burial places may be internal or external. Examples of internal threats which need to be addressed through the design and management include;

- Invasive alien species, over mature trees, storm fallen trees and overgrown vegetation which may cause structural damage
- Past inappropriate and too dense planting and self-seeded plants which do not contribute positively to the sites
- Subsidence, Drainage, Structural defects
- Inappropriate (historic) management practices
- Removal or alteration of habitats causing biodiversity loss
- Use of herbicides causing changes in flora
- Managing perceptions and issues of neglect/dereliction with minimising disturbance to biodiversity

External threats include;

- Lack of footfall and passive surveillance
- Potential Increased visitor footfall and access (over carrying capacity)
- Large/tall/dense/inappropriate neighbouring development - such as physical impacts (during construction – excavation for basements, vibrations for piling, scaffolding etc.), boundary wall stability, visual and landscape character impact of burial place's setting, inappropriate light spill from adjacent developments
- Vandalism and anti-social behaviour
- Loss of surrounding habitats and connectivity for wildlife

2.0 Vision & Objectives

2.1 Vision

The strategy's vision is to reveal the rich, often hidden, heritage of these burial places and celebrate the tangible and intangible heritage in a respectful, sustainable manner, with the aim of deepening civic pride and igniting interest in a wide range of heritage strands. This living heritage and should not be 'frozen in time', nor developed in a way that goes towards 'commodification of a site'. As per contemporary best practice, any proposed physical intervention should be sensitively designed, with a reversible light touch.

Any intervention must be an asset, facilitate an enhanced experience and not adversely impact on burial site. Well-planned site presentation should optimise the key site characteristics such as the built heritage, biodiversity and sense of tranquillity. Where feasible, the vision is to facilitate a continuity of interment for the local community, in their locality, thus continuing the sanctity of these burial places.

The proposals will comply with the principals of the ICOMOS Charter for the Interpretation and Presentation of Cultural Heritage Sites (2008) and the National Policy and Guidance; 'Care and Conservation of Graveyards'.

2.2 Key Specific Objectives

The key specific objectives are;

1. To rejuvenate use of burials grounds by considering provision of Columbarium walls
2. To celebrate local heritage by providing appropriate forms of interpretation
3. To facilitate respectful and appropriate public access to these contemplative spaces
4. To conserve and enhance burial grounds as reserves for biodiversity.
5. To support local community engagement and volunteering in delivering our objectives
6. To repair and maintain the archaeological and built heritage of burial grounds

3.0 Conclusions and Proposed Actions

3.1 Conclusion

This document highlights the importance of a Dublin City Burial Places Strategy and outlines key actions to achieve the objectives. The bespoke site specific requirements for maintenance and further research are evident. As a do-nothing scenario could result in the deterioration of these sites, loss of heritage and following likely increased risk of vandalism and anti-social behaviour. Unfortunately, (seemingly) abandoned burial place environs are more likely to be under pressure for ‘development’.

The proposed Columbarium Wall pilot project highlights how interment options may be once again provided for the local community, within their locality. In order to progress this project, the intention now is to submit a Part 8 application for the proposed Donnybrook Graveyard Columbarium Walls and then apply for the required archaeological licences. Prior to finalisation, this document was circulated internally to relevant consultees.

Therefore, it is clear that the twelve actions outlined below are the roadway to safeguarding and celebrating Dublin City Council’s burial places.

3.2 Proposed Actions

Burial Place’s Strategy Table of Proposed Actions			
Actions	Description	Time line	Output
1. Provide Columbarium Walls - Donnybrook Graveyard Pilot Project	Progress the proposals to detail design stage – fabricator’s shop drawings’ and structural engineering design solution	Q2 2021 - Q4 2022	-First columbarium wall constructed - Clontarf graveyard is second priority site for the provision of columbarium walls
2. Conservation of High Cross, St. Canice’s Church Graveyard <i>Note: Ministerial Consent required – input of City Archaeologist required</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Commission and implement a conservation management plan for St Canices’s Church & graveyard. -Carry out a feasibility study for relocating the Nethercross identifying potential locations for its long term display and interpretation. -Consult with the National Museum and the National Monuments Service. -This site will feature in the LAP for Finglas. 	Q2 2021 - Q1 2024	Conservation Project to ensure the safeguarding of the High Cross, while potentially retaining a visual presence of a replica cross on site . Improved access to site, Survey and repair of church, memorials and boundary. Improve public realm environs

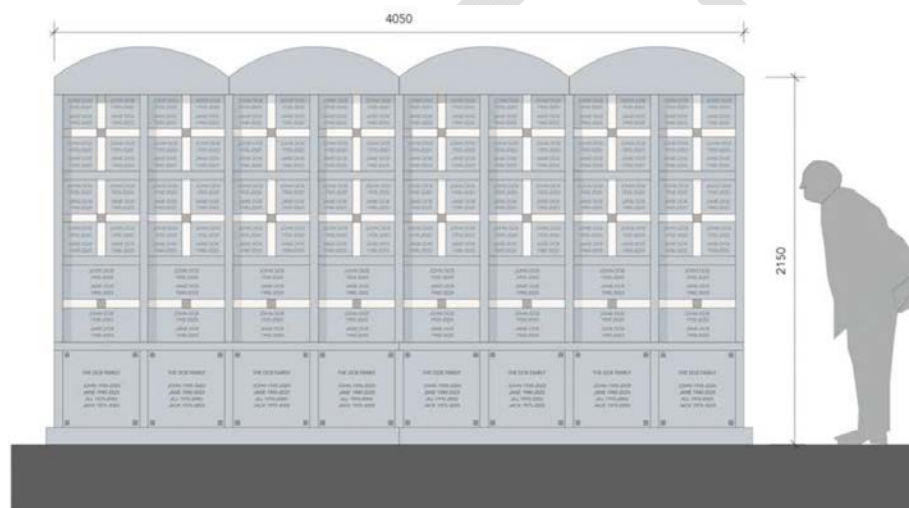
3. Prepare Conservation Management Plans	Understand the significance and outline a vision for the site. Reports will determine management and maintenance of natural and built heritage. Priorities are; Prepare Conservation Management Plans and site specific plans St. Canices, Clontarf, Bluebell, St. Kevin's and Merrion (Bellevue) sites	Q2 2021 - ongoing	Conservation Management Plans published and implemented for each site (long term strategy)
4. Devise a volunteer and community engagement programme	Carry out community consultation and engage with local historical groups and other relevant groups, such as biodiversity volunteers. Raise awareness using websites such as www.historicgraves.com and other resources Note success of the community engagement model, devised by City Archaeologist, Parks Area Office and archaeological consultants, in 2012, at Finglas. This model to be replicated or modified in future	Q2 2021 - Q4 2022	Best practice Community and Volunteer Engagement. Also undertake community consultation about the value of biodiversity and the appearance of valuable vegetation, which can be perceived as 'untidy'
5. Heritage Interpretation & Wayfinding plans	Parks and Landscape Services to commission specialist interpretation designers to undertake interpretation strategies (for built and natural heritage, as appropriate). All interpretation to be based on bespoke, specialist research and verified by heritage professionals, as appropriate	Q2 2021 - Q4 2022	Interpretation Plan On site, digital and online interpretation, as appropriate – for individual sites and the burial places as a collective. For example, provide interpretation for the Jewish Cemetery, Merrion Road and potentially for Cabbage Garden and St. Catherine's graveyard
6. Resources Dedicated admin. Resource & bespoke technology	Dedicated resources to manage sales of columbarium wall niches and customer relationships. A GIS system linked to specialist software and handheld devices for onsite record	Q2 2021 - ongoing	A well-managed, professional and empathic service with live digital database, linked to hand-held devices for onsite use. Bespoke technology such as Plotbox would be beneficial; https://www.plotbox.io/
7. Baseline ecological surveys	Devise methods, procure specialist scientific expertise and carry out initial baseline surveys. Collect and analyse data. Establish monitoring regime for future management	Q2-Q4 2021	Reports completed for baseline ecological surveys to inform next actions. Monitoring programmes in place prior to any works.
8. Management & Maintenance	Site specific maintenance action plans – seasonal and annual, referring to updated tree surveys, biodiversity	Q2 2021 -	Maintenance to retain and enhance biodiversity and also safeguard the built heritage.

	surveys and conservation management plan. Refer to international best practice guidance. Potentially tie into the Four Year Landscape Maintenance Framework	ongoing	Columbarium wall environs will also require specific maintenance relating to the guidelines on acceptable mementos permissible at niches
9. Jewish Cemetery (Ballybough) Conservation	Implementation Phase: Landscaping & access works to provide contemplative space and improve maintenance; refurbishment of mortuary house interior; interpretation display to graveyard.	Q2 2021 - ongoing	A sustainable, secure site with visitor interpretation and capacity to facilitate visitor bookings. A small on site residence for caretaker/ keyholder (part-time).
10. Implement a landscape scheme for St. James's Graveyard	Improve accessibility and presentation of this historic graveyard as a contemplative space and also complementing the visitor experience of adjacent Pearse Lyon Distillery.	<i>When funding becomes available</i>	Facilitate safer access to the site, including interpretation to enrich the visitor experience. <i>Note that Ministerial Approval has been granted for these landscape works proposals.</i>
11. Apply for grants	As listed in the appendix (F), there is a suite of grants for repair to protected structures and monuments.	Q2 2021 - ongoing	Achieve (partial) grant funding for the implementation of recommendations at each site
12. BPS Delivery Mechanism – Archaeology	DCC archaeology professionals will have oversight, monitoring and review of projects, ideally through a steering group and/or liaison as part of the design team meetings	Q2 2021 - ongoing	To ensure high quality project outcomes and allows for additional burial places to be included in the strategy, once initial actions are achieved. Archaeology is an important factor in delivery of the BPS as most of the sites have national monuments and development plan protection

3.3 Pilot Project - Proposed Columbarium Walls

A current pilot project is under design development, at Donnybrook graveyard (one of the four sites selected from the 2019 feasibility report). This site was selected first, due to the landscape character of the site. This site is considered to have the best visual and landscape character 'capacity' for an initial single stand-alone columbarium wall. In contrast, a single wall would likely not work in Bluebell Cemetery, as the open nature of the site would likely require a designed arrangement of several walls or cluster of walls, to compliment it's landscape character.

As the design process continues, it may be appropriate to consider additional options such as plaques for cremation burials, cremated ash scatterings or remembrance garden spaces. As per best practice; a conservation management plan and an archaeological assessment were commissioned first to better understand Donnybrook graveyard and consider detail design issues such as specific wall positions.



Proposed Columbarium Wall Elevation (7LArchitect's work in progress – July 2020)

The provision of Columbarium wall projects, should also allow for the facilitation of small ceremonies and access for the bereaved. This is a particularly sensitive requirement, in these historic deathscapes. This may comprise a limited number of seating for the bereaved and space for a small gathering, if feasible. There needs to be a balance between the private sphere, of visitors in various stages of mourning and general public access. Where space allows, this could be designed as a remembrance garden. It is envisioned that the columbarium wall sites or portions of the site would be deemed secular in nature, to respectfully facilitate and include those of all and no religious beliefs and also facilitate passive amenity, if appropriate.