Dublin City Council Burial Places Strategy - Synopsis

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

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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

Acknowledgements; This strategy was reviewed by the Parks, Biodiversity and Landscape Services team and other relevant DCC departments. Specific feedback, advice and input was received from;

- 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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Burial Place</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bluebell Graveyard &amp; Cemetery, Drimnagh</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>St. Canice’s Graveyard, Finglas</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Donnybrook Graveyard, Donnybrook Road</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Killester Graveyard, Killester Avenue</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>St. John the Baptist, Clontarf</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bellevue, off Merrion Road</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>St. Assam’s, Raheny</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>The Jewish Cemetery, Ballybough</td>
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City Centre Burial Places - Location Plan

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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Burial Place’s Strategy Table of Proposed Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Provide Columbarium Walls - Donnybrook Graveyard Pilot Project</td>
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<td>2. Conservation of High Cross, St. Canice’s Church Graveyard Note: Ministerial Consent required – input of City Archaeologist required</td>
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<td>3. Prepare Conservation Management Plans</td>
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<td>4. Devise a volunteer and community engagement programme</td>
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<td>5. Heritage Interpretation &amp; Wayfinding plans</td>
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<td>6. Resources Dedicated admin. Resource &amp; bespoke technology</td>
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<td>7. Baseline ecological surveys</td>
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<td>8. Management &amp; Maintenance</td>
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surveys and conservation management plan. Refer to international best practice guidance. Potentially tie into the Four Year Landscape Maintenance Framework potentially require specific maintenance relating to the guidelines on acceptable mementos permissible at niches.
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.

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.