

Southend Council Identifies New Site to Address Burial Space Shortage

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A new cemetery could be developed near Tesco Extra on the A127 in Westcliff, as Southend-on-Sea City Council moves to address a long-standing shortage of burial space. The proposal, detailed in the council's emerging local plan, comes after years of concern over limited capacity at Sutton Road Cemetery, the city's primary burial site.

For over a decade, Southend residents and local authorities have raised alarms about the dwindling availability of burial plots. By 2023, only 2,500 plots remained at Sutton Road Cemetery, prompting warnings that this space could be exhausted within seven years if no alternative is found. The new site being considered lies on Nestuda Way, directly opposite the Tesco Extra store, and is intended to secure long-term burial provision for the city's growing population.

According to the local plan, a previously favoured 30-acre site adjacent to the current cemetery was under consideration for acquisition by the council, but negotiations have since stalled. As a result, the focus has shifted to the Westcliff location, which is now being reviewed for viability and sustainability.

Matt Dent, Labour councillor for business, culture and tourism in Southend, emphasised the urgency of ensuring future provision. "The situation in Southend is running out of burial space in the existing cemetery," he said. "In the local plan, we need to look at the needs of the community into the future, and that includes burial space."

Cllr Dent acknowledged the complexity of planning new burial grounds but stressed the importance of community access and affordability. "I am aware of residents' concerns over the cost of burials in Southend," he said. "When a fully implemented plan is put into place, it should make burials more affordable for people in Southend, but it's a nuanced and complex subject."

Affordability remains a pressing issue. A 2023 study found Southend to be the eighth most expensive location in the United Kingdom for a direct burial, with funeral director fees averaging £1,400. The introduction of additional burial space could help alleviate financial pressures on grieving families by increasing availability and reducing costs.

The updated plan also mentions the potential for "green burials," environmentally sustainable interment options that avoid traditional methods, which require large and permanent burial plots. This aligns with broader efforts across the UK to introduce more eco-conscious alternatives within local authority planning.

The council has yet to confirm when a final decision will be made regarding the Nestuda Way site, but any development will be subject to planning procedures and community consultation. The aim is to ensure that burial arrangements in Southend are both respectful and future-proof, without placing undue cost burdens on residents.

