



HOUSE OF COMMONS

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ORAL EVIDENCE

Taken before the

UNOPPOSED BILL COMMITTEE

on the

BISHOP'S STORTFORD CEMETERY BILL [*LORDS*]

Tuesday 20 February 2024

Before:

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Dame Rosie Winterton) (Chair)

Paul Blomfield MP

Steve Double MP

Will Quince MP

MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH, of BDB Pitmans LLP, appeared as Parliamentary Agent.

VICTORIA WILDERS, of East Hertfordshire District Council, appeared on behalf of the promoter.

JAMES PARKER, of Bishop's Stortford Town Council, appeared on behalf of the promoter.

JUSTIN LESLIE, Counsel for Domestic Legislation, was in attendance.



Ordered at 4.10 pm: that Counsel and Parties be called in.

1 **CHAIR:** Good afternoon. I am Dame Rosie Winterton, the First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means, and I am very pleased to be chairing today's Unopposed Bill Committee. My colleagues this afternoon are Mr Steve Double, Mr Paul Blomfield and Mr Will Quince. We have apologies from one other Committee member, Mary Kelly Foy.

2 We will begin with a presentation from Mr Latif-Aramesh before moving on to questions from the Committee. We will then deliberate in private to decide whether or not the Bill should proceed, and if the Committee are not satisfied with the assurances given, we may adjourn to another day.

3 Mr Latif-Aramesh, I would just like to remind you that due to pressures on the availability of Committee members, we have less than one hour for deliberations, so we hope that brevity will be the order of the day. It may be that we have to adjourn for a vote as well, but we will know that when the bell starts ringing. Could I invite you to introduce your colleagues and then address the Committee?

4 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** Good afternoon. By way of introduction, I am Mustafa Latif-Aramesh, the parliamentary Agent acting on behalf of East Hertfordshire District Council. I am joined today by Ms Victoria Wilders, the legal services manager and deputy monitoring officer at the district council, and Mr James Parker, the former chief executive and now consultant for Bishop's Stortford Town Council. Given the importance of the Bill to both the district council and the town council, I should also note that Mr Huw Jones, the chief executive of the town council, is here, but only in an observing capacity.

5 I will keep these opening remarks as concise as possible. I would like to cover two things in particular. Before I get started, can I check that you have hard-copy bundles available to you should you need them?

6 **CHAIR:** We do.

7 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** Thank you. The two things that I would like to cover are how the existing situation is not sustainable, and how the Bill remedies this in a careful and considered manner.

8 First, just by background on the status of the Promoters, as I mentioned, the Bill is being promoted by East Hertfordshire District Council and relates to two cemeteries in Bishop's Stortford, the old cemetery and the new cemetery. The cemeteries are located in the Bishop's Stortford parish, and they are the only local authority-run cemeteries in that area. Bishop's Stortford Town Council, which is the local parish council, owns and operates the cemeteries. For clarity, even though there are two cemeteries, I will be referring to "the cemetery". That is how the Bill is drafted and I do that for consistency.

9 The Bill proposes to confer powers on Bishop's Stortford Town Council, as the burial authority for the cemeteries, to reclaim and reuse graves in the cemetery. The Bill is being promoted for the benefit of local inhabitants. The town council, as the local authority, makes no commercial gain from the cemetery, and it will make no commercial gain from the powers that are sought through the Bill. The



district council is asking for the town council, as the burial authority, to be put in exactly the same position as exists for local authority-run cemeteries in London and other private cemeteries in London. I will come on to that in a bit more detail.

10 So why is the Bill needed? Approximately 40,000 people currently live in Bishop's Stortford, and it is expected to grow to approximately 50,000 by 2030. There is therefore an acute concern that the current availability of grave space will not be sufficient or sustainable for Bishop's Stortford, meaning that locals will not have the opportunity to bury their loved ones in the local area. At the current rate of purchase, the supply of grave space at the cemetery is expected to run out in just over a decade, well within a generation. This is not a situation that the district council or the parish council wish to countenance.

11 Burial spaces and cemeteries more generally provide a public good in allowing people to pay their respects and lay tribute to their loved ones. The district council and town council take that very seriously, but we must acknowledge that there is a balance between the need for burial capacity, on the one hand, and the wishes and desires of those who have their loved ones buried. I would like to explain how that balance has been struck in the case of this Bill.

12 Before I do that, I will address how the Bill addresses the issue of burial capacity running out in Bishop's Stortford. It would do so by providing the same powers, as I mentioned, that local authorities in London have, that the New Southgate cemetery in north London has and that Highgate cemetery has, by giving the burial authority—the town council—powers to reuse graves and to reclaim existing rights over burial spaces.

13 The first method is known as creating extra space through a process of lifting and deepening in an existing grave space. Existing remains are carefully and respectfully removed. The grave is then excavated to a lower level. The remains are then placed at the bottom of the grave, and the space at the top is reused for further burials.

14 The second method I mentioned is reclaiming rights. Historically, there had been a practice of granting exclusive rights of burial in perpetuity. Not all of those rights of burial would have been exercised, but because they were granted in perpetuity, even where those spaces are not used, there is in effect an inability to use those spaces for the purpose of further burials.

15 The town council estimates that should the powers to reuse and reclaim rights over graves be granted, it would increase the number of graves that could be used to 1,800 immediately, and it would create a sustainable supply over the next century.

16 Why does this Bill need to be enacted specifically? There are two main reasons. The first is that there is an existing criminal offence in the Burial Act 1857, which makes it a criminal offence to disturb human remains. There is a method of seeking a licence to disturb human remains—you get permission from the Ministry of Justice. However, that process is not well suited to burial space reuse, as is the case here, because it deals with licences on a case-by-case basis. The second reason an Act of Parliament is required relates to the point I made about exclusive rights of burial. Even though you may be able to seek a licence or a faculty to disturb human remains, that does not deal with the



contractual position. As mentioned earlier, this is a power that is available to London local authorities, and the powers of reclamation are also available more widely than that.

17 I would like to return to the point I made about the balance that the Bill seeks to strike. As I run through these various protections, I should emphasise that they are all well precedented and that they have been drawn from, specifically, the London Local Authorities Act 2007, the New Southgate Cemetery Act 2017 and the Highgate Cemetery Act 2022.

18 The powers to reuse burial spaces cannot be exercised until 75 years after the last burial in a grave. The Bill would require the burial authority to give six months' notice. If the owner of the registered right of burial objects, neither the reclamation nor the extinguishment of burial rights can proceed. If any other person objects, then we can only proceed with the permission of the Secretary of State. If anybody objects to the disturbance of human remains, that requires a consent. Where a relative objects to a disturbance of human remains, we cannot exercise the powers for 25 years; even after that 25 years, we would have to go through the same notice process that I have set out, and again there would be an opportunity to object to the disturbance of human remains.

19 The Bill also contains protections for the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, so that where there is a Commonwealth war grave in the cemetery, we cannot exercise the powers in relation to that grave without the commission's permission. Specifically, there are provisions protecting the jurisdiction of the Church of England over the consecrated parts of the cemetery.

20 I also want to touch on what the Bill does not do. It does not in any way repeal or modify existing heritage, environmental or planning restrictions. That is important, because there are a number of restrictions in relation to memorials, which may have to be dealt with separately. This Bill does not affect those.

21 Together, these protections mean that the Promoter firmly believes there is an appropriate balance between ensuring a sustainable supply of burial space in Bishop's Stortford and protecting the interests of those who wish to pay their respects.

22 We are here today because other avenues have been exhausted. The council in particular has considered four alternatives. The first was expanding the cemetery. The town council has confirmed that the space available for additional burial space from the two plots of land that it has acquired has been factored into the calculations I mentioned at the start of my remarks. That is, we will run out of space in just over a decade.

23 The town council has also sought a faculty to disturb human remains in the consecrated part of the cemetery, but that provides at most only six to seven years of burial space capacity. It has exercised the powers that are available to all local authorities under the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977. However, there is an extremely limited scope for the exercise of those powers over the remaining parts of the cemetery. The town council has also sought to identify alternative sites outside of the existing cemetery: first in 2016, by putting out a call for sites, and then again in 2021. No suitable sites were forthcoming.

24 In terms of the detail of the Bill, clause 2 is the interpretation clause and



contains definitions. You will have before you a paper of amendments containing an amendment to the definition of “relative” so that lineal descendants of a person who has no other lineal descendants from other parts of the family tree are caught by the provisions of the Bill.

25 Just by way of background, this Bill is different only in one respect from the precedents that I have mentioned. All the precedents provide those protections only to lineal descendants. This Bill provides the protections to both lineal and collateral descendants. Should this wider class of person object to the disturbance of human remains, that would trigger the 25-year block on exercising the powers under the order.

26 Clause 3 contains the power to extinguish rights of burial, which I have discussed. Clause 4 provides the burial authority, should the procedures be followed, with the power to disturb human remains. Clause 5 contains the protections I mentioned for both the Church of England and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

27 Clause 6 details the notice provisions that I have gone through, which effectively require six months’ notice and thereafter, if there are objections, a stop on the exercise of the powers. Clause 7 contains provisions relating to removed memorials. Clause 8 requires a record to be maintained of disturbances, as well as the extinguishment of any rights. The very final provision of the Bill deals with the cost of the Act. In effect, all that does is permit the town council to expend funds for the promotion of this Bill.

28 That concludes my opening remarks. I hope that I have shown you the careful balance that we have tried to reach in ensuring that there are protections in place for both those who wish to be interred in the cemetery and those who wish to pay their respects to those interred in the cemetery. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you on behalf of both East Hertfordshire District Council and Bishop’s Stortford Town Council for considering the Bill.

29 **CHAIR:** Thank you very much. That was an extremely helpful presentation. Do any of the other witnesses wish to address the Committee? If not, we have just a few questions—you may feel that you have covered some of them, but perhaps you could expand on them a little.

30 I will start with clause 2. In the definition of “relevant memorial”, what is the definition of “grave space”?

31 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** The term “grave space” was defined in the London local authorities order, but the definition for “grave space” was the same as the definition for “grave”, which does exist in the Bill. Effectively, the grave space is the space in which a grave is laid. We did not think it was appropriate to specifically define “grave space” because it should be given its plain and ordinary meaning, in line with principles of statutory interpretation, and the fact that we have included a specific definition of “grave” assists with defining what a grave space is. It is effectively the plot of land in which a grave would sit.

32 **CHAIR:** Will it be the intention to include memorials adjacent to the grave space in the definition of “relevant memorial”? There is a similar consideration in clauses 3(3), 4(2) and 6(2)(d)(ii).

33 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** The definition of “relevant memorial” is



specifically a memorial in or on the grave space, which would exclude memorials that are adjacent to the relevant grave space. I should say that the definition of “relevant memorial” was put in there to make it abundantly clear that the memorial that would be removed and made subject to some of the protections that I have laid out is the one in respect of which the powers under the Bill are being exercised, so that it was clear that memorials being affected only by virtue of this Bill were caught by those same protections and safeguards.

34 **CHAIR:** I see. Mr Double.

35 **STEVE DOUBLE:** Thank you. My question is related to clause 3, which is to do with the power to extinguish rights of burial. How is extinguishment recorded?

36 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** I draw your attention to clause 6, which contains the notice provisions, and specifically to subsection (3), which says that notice must “contain full particulars of the burial authority’s proposals including the registered number or other description of all grave spaces in respect of which it is proposed that rights of burial should be extinguished”. The notice that will have to be published in the newspaper, sent to the registered owner and affixed in a conspicuous location near the grave space will have the details of the right of burial that is proposed to be extinguished.

37 **CHAIR:** Thank you. That probably leads quite nicely into Mr Blomfield’s question.

38 **PAUL BLOMFIELD:** My question is on clause 6, which is about notification and how people can raise objections. You talk about the primary notice being in a newspaper—local or national?

39 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** The newspaper that would be selected is likely to be a local newspaper. The language of clause 6(2), which is “publish notice in a newspaper,” is specifically chosen to allow the flexibility to choose either a national or a local newspaper. This specific point was considered in the context of the Highgate Cemetery Act. In that case, they asked for the reference to be changed from “local newspaper” to “newspaper”, to allow for the same flexibility. The reason for doing that is that in some cases, such as where you know that the registered person has moved from the locality or the family have since moved on, it may be more appropriate to select a different newspaper. That is really the intention behind it.

40 I should also say that the newspaper is one of many different safeguards. I mentioned that you also have a requirement to affix the notice at the cemetery itself and a requirement to send it on to the registered owner. We are trying to capture the people who are interested in these proposals as best we can.

41 On the reference in the Bill to the newspaper, in all likelihood it will be a local newspaper, but we wanted to preserve that flexibility because it may not be appropriate in all circumstances.

42 **PAUL BLOMFIELD:** On that point, we sadly live in a time of struggling local newspapers. Are you confident that it would be of sufficiently large circulation?

43 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** We are confident in that, for two reasons. First, that is why we have not specified a particular newspaper—to allow for

consideration of the most appropriate newspaper that would reach an appropriate circulation. Secondly, this is just one of the many safeguards we have in place to make sure that people are aware. You will notice that in clause 6(2)(b) there is also a requirement to publish the notice “on the burial authority’s website”. That is important because a lot of people who are interested in paying their respects will check opening hours, and we think the website is a good way of capturing those who are returning to pay their respects to their loved ones.

44 **CHAIR:** I think this relates to the question that Mr Quince would like to ask.

45 **WILL QUINCE:** Thank you, Dame Rosie. Further to that response and Mr Blomfield’s question, so focusing again on clause 6, I am interested in the minimum notice period of six months. As Mr Blomfield said, local newspapers are not particularly well read, especially by those who have moved out of the area. I used to live in East Herts many years ago, but I do not read the local paper, nor even look at it online. I am interested to know whether you think six months is sufficient, in the case of residents who do not live locally and do not read the local paper. We know that many relatives visit a grave once a year, perhaps at Christmas when they see family, or on a particularly special day such as a birthday. They could quite easily slip out of that six-month window.

46 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** The reason for selecting six months is that, in our view, it is an appropriate balance between needing to exercise these powers—because fundamentally we want to provide burial capacity—and providing a sufficiently long period of time that people can visit.

47 On your point that someone might miss the six-month window, if—as is often the case—there is a registered right of burial, that is passed down to your relatives. There is an obligation to write to the registered owner and deliver that notice via post. Again, we are trying to maximise as much as we can to ensure that the relevant people are captured. For example, if you do not visit the cemetery in that six-month window, one of the possibilities is that you would be the registered owner of the burial right. You would then be directly written to about the proposals, and you would have the same six months from that notice.

48 One of the other mechanisms we are using is not just relying on the notice that is provided in respect of an extinguishment of a burial right. Clause 6 actually applies to what are in effect two stages of the Bill. The powers could be exercised in a manner where you first set out a notice extinguishing the burial rights, and then you have to provide a separate notice for a disturbance of human remains. The Bill also includes the ability to do both in the same notice. But again, we would try to publish the notices in quite a comprehensive manner—the direct ones; the newspapers; the websites; the notices to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission; the notices to Historic England—in order to capture those people.

49 That six-month period is preceded not just in the London Local Authorities Act 2007 and the New Southgate and Highgate Cemetery Acts I mentioned, but going back to the general London council Acts of the ‘70s, as well as some of the notice periods that apply in respect of reclamation under the Local Authorities’ Cemeteries Order 1977. We think there is enough there to say that six months is the appropriate period of time.



50 **WILL QUINCE:** Noting what you said about registered owners, you can just see a scenario in which someone moves out of the area and has mail forwarding for three or six months, which is common—they would not necessarily think to notify the local authority of a change of address. I am interested to know what steps you will take, should this Bill pass into legislation, to inform families of those due to be interred that they should keep the local authority up to date with their contact details, and to make them aware of the 75-year rule.

51 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** The short answer is that when a right of burial is granted following the passing of this Act, consideration will be given to how any of the powers in the Act are explained. It is also worth noting that clause 3(2) explicitly removes the ability to exercise the powers in the Bill for a grave that has a period of greater than 75 years granted. In effect, that provision means, for both the burial authority and those buying rights of burial, that if it is below 75 years, it could be made subject to the provisions of the Act.

52 There are two other safeguards that it might be worth talking about. First, if I could draw your attention to clause 3(7), you will see that it is made up of two paragraphs. Compensation is payable for a right of burial that is extinguished. If a claim is made within six months, there are two avenues. The first is to pay the owner a sum that represents the value of the right of burial. The second paragraph says: “confirm in writing...that the right of burial extinguished is to be revived.” In effect, this process allows for correspondence between the burial authority and the person with the right of burial to put the person with the burial right back in the position as if the burial right had never been extinguished.

53 You are right that there may be a scenario where someone has not updated the details on the registered right of burial, so the auto-forwarding does not work. That is why we have incorporated so many different forms of notice. We will not just directly write to people; there are also the notices in the newspaper and on the burial authority’s website. It is a genuine attempt, heavily reliant on precedent, to make as many people informed as possible in a way that is not onerous for the function of the Bill, which is to provide burial capacity for the local area.

54 **CHAIR:** On clause 6(5), will details of the information contained in the notice under subsection (2)(b) be available in hard copy on request?

55 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** Subsection (5) refers to the website notice and says that that notice must include the name of the registered owner of any right of burial, or the name of any person whose remains are to be disturbed. The functions of the different notices are that the website notice will have full particulars—full names—and what subsection (5) does is to say that any notice other than a website notice has to cross-refer people to the notice that is on the website. The hard copies will be available at the cemetery under clause 6(2)(c).

56 **CHAIR:** Right, but if somebody who lived far away requested them, would they be sent them?

57 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** Yes, the burial authority would make them available. There is no objection to that.

58 **JAMES PARKER:** May I just say that there is absolutely no objection to



that? The town council has no desire to make people unhappy by extinguishing rights of burial or disturbing human remains that some living person actually cares about. What the council desires to do is to provide burial space by doing those things where there isn't someone that cares about it.

59 **CHAIR:** I am just thinking if somebody felt that they wanted a record—

60 **JAMES PARKER:** There would always be records, yes; the Bill makes extensive provision for that. It is not in the town council's interest to do that, not only because of the provisions in the Bill that provide for compensation, but because—frankly, why would it? There are sufficient graves available, should the Bill pass into law, that the town council does not need to extinguish rights of burial where people are actually still celebrating their loved ones.

61 There are extensive provisions in the Bill, as Mustafa has explained, but in fact there is also the fact that the town council just wouldn't need to do that or want to do that.

62 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** On the point about records and making sure that people can come and see them, the comprehensive records of disturbance of burials and memorials are regulated under clause 8. I specifically draw your attention to clause 8(5), which says that those records "must at all reasonable times be available for consultation by any person free of charge." Even after the powers have been exercised, people can come and see the comprehensive record and not just the notice, which gives people sight of what is being proposed.

63 **CHAIR:** Thank you.

64 **STEVE DOUBLE:** Moving on to clause 7, which deals with memorials, I note that it states that "the burial authority may put the memorial to such use as the burial authority considers appropriate" and that the burial authority must publish a policy stating how it will exercise these powers. Can you confirm whether there will be any circumstances in which memorials may be sold?

65 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** Clause 7(1) specifically states that the memorial may be put "to such use as the burial authority considers appropriate". I mentioned in my opening remarks that the cemetery is not operated for commercial gain.

66 There are a number of options that a burial authority has in respect of a memorial that is removed. One common practice is to put the memorials on the outside of the cemetery so that they are on display; you might have walked through a cemetery and seen removed memorials along the side of the cemetery. Another is to dispose of the memorial itself, and the other is to pass it to an institution that might have an interest in maintaining it.

67 There are circumstances where the destruction of the memorial is preferred because relatives do not want their loved one's memorial being placed on the outside. There are circumstances where they do not want it to be destroyed or put on display, which puts the burial authority in a position where it has to consider what to do with it. The burial authority does not have the intention of selling these for commercial gain. The intention is to dispose of them in the most respectful way possible.

68 The policy document that is mentioned in clause 7(2) will set out the



process that would be followed in respect of the removal of memorials. I should say that, as the cemetery is operated by the town council, it is subject to existing constraints on when it can charge for particular activities. Most local authorities do have constraints on what they can charge for. Where they can charge, it is at cost, not for profit. But what I can say is that there is no intention to sell them for commercial gain, and the purpose of that policy is to give people sight of what is intended to happen in a respectful and considerate manner.

69 **CHAIR:** That perhaps leads on to the question from Mr Blomfield. It slightly relates to that, doesn't it?

70 **PAUL BLOMFIELD:** It does indeed, Chair—it leads into it perfectly. You refer to clause 7(1), which talks about memorials that are removed and the council's ability to make use of them as they see fit or dispose of them. Have you considered whether that clause interferes with property rights of those who own memorials? I am advised that those rights are protected under article 1 of the first protocol of the European convention on human rights.

71 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** We have considered that, and I should say that as part of the parliamentary proceedings, we are required to prepare a statement of compatibility with the convention rights.

72 On the specific question of memorials being property that falls under the protection of article 1 of the first protocol, the process that is set out ensures that the convention rights are not being violated. That process, in particular, is a process for notification and the ability to object to the proposals. In the event that the proposals proceed, there is compensation payable, or the other alternative, which I briefly touched on, which is effectively to reverse the process as though it had never started.

73 In our view, and in the view of the Attorney General, who provided a statement to this effect, this Bill is compatible with the convention rights, and the process that is specifically laid out in relation to the memorials ensures that the convention rights are not infringed.

74 **PAUL BLOMFIELD:** Thank you for that. I wonder if I could move on to a practical question. On what basis do you consider that a six-month period is a proportionate amount of time to give before memorials can be disposed of, given that we have talked about the difficulties of notification and people being aware of what is happening?

75 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** We consider the six-month period to be a proportionate period that responds to both the critical need for burial space, which has to be balanced against the relevant rights that exist in the memorial, and the fact that, as I mentioned, the notice provisions are comprehensive and in fact go beyond most of the precedents in ensuring that all of those people who are interested have the opportunity to provide an objection.

76 I should also say that the Church of England, under the ecclesiastical powers that it has, provides a shorter period. It engages in a policy of burial space reuse. There are two differences between what is proposed in the Bill and typical Church of England practice. The first is, as I mentioned, that the powers under this Bill can only be exercised after 75 years, while the Church of England's policy in a number of different areas is 50 years, so we are expanding that period. The other relates to the notice period for objections.



77 We consider that we have looked at how other burial authorities and established institutions are exercising these powers and come up with an appropriate balance between ensuring that those who wish to pay their respects have their interests protected, and the need to ensure burial capacity for Bishop's Stortford.

78 **CHAIR:** I am going to suggest that Mr Quince asks his question—it may be fairly easy to answer, this one—in case he has to go and vote.

79 **WILL QUINCE:** Thank you. I have a quick question on clause 8(2)(e). I am just conscious that there are lots of people now who are very interested in their ancestry. Say you have a relative and you want to go and visit their grave. You look up the records, you go to visit the cemetery in Bishop's Stortford, and you are only given an approximate location. I suspect that a lot of people would like to go to where their relative is actually buried. What is the reason for an approximate location? Why isn't it possible to give a specific location for where a relative is reinterred?

80 **JAMES PARKER:** I can answer that one. There are quite a large number of graves in the old cemetery, and not so many in the new cemetery—well, none at all the new cemetery—that are unmarked. Because there are quite extensive expanses of unmarked graves, and because we cannot be certain that the graves were dug on a precise, regular grid, we cannot be exactly certain where each grave is.

81 We had a team of archaeologists in, and they did some trial digs to see whether, by digging a trench, you could work out where the grid of graves was, and they came to the conclusion that the answer is no. So in areas of the old cemetery where there is an extensive expanse of unmarked graves, we can only know where any given grave is to within perhaps 3 metres to 5 metres, or thereabouts. It is just because it is not physically known. Obviously, back in the 1850s, they didn't have GPS. These days we do, so we can tell where graves are to within 10 cm. Back in the 1850s, that obviously wasn't the case. We can see from the memorials that the grid is not precise. We just have no way of knowing where they are—it is as simple as that. That is the reason. It is just the fact that, with old graves that are 150 years old, we do not necessarily know exactly where they are.

82 **CHAIR:** If colleagues have no further questions, I will say thank you very much. That was extremely helpful. Thanks for the responses. I wonder if you could leave the Committee Room while we come to our decision.

The Committee deliberated in private from 4.53 pm to 4.55 pm.

83 **CHAIR:** Mr Latif-Aramesh, we are very pleased to tell you that we are content that the Bill should proceed. We are very satisfied with what we have heard. Thank you for the depth of your responses to the questions. We are happy for the Bill to proceed to the next stage and for the amendment that you have proposed to be made.

84 Before we conclude proceedings, could Ms Victoria Wilders please prove



HOUSE OF COMMONS

the preamble?

VICTORIA WILDERS, Sworn previously

Examined by MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH

85 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** Are you Victoria Patricia Wilders?

(Victoria Wilders): I am.

86 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** Are you the legal services manager and deputy monitoring officer for East Hertfordshire District Council?

(Victoria Wilders): I am.

87 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** Do you hold responsibility for the promotion of the Bill on behalf of East Hertfordshire District Council?

(Victoria Wilders): I do.

88 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** Have you read the preamble to the Bill?

(Victoria Wilders): I have.

89 **MUSTAFA LATIF-ARAMESH:** Is it true?

(Victoria Wilders): It is true.

The witness withdrew.

90 **CHAIR:** Thank you. Thank you to everybody for your attendance today and, as I say, for answering our questions in such depth. I think we all have a much fuller picture now of what is involved in the Bill, and we will watch its progress with interest. Thank you very much.

The Committee adjourned at 4.56 pm.