

**CEMETERIES AND CLOSED CHURCHYARDS SUB-COMMITTEE**

Report of the Meeting held on Monday 26 October 2015 at 6pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall.

Present:

Councillors:        Dr S E Bartingdon        Mrs B J Churchill  
                             H W Chirgwin                P J Dorward

Officers:            Facilities Manager                Democratic Services Officer

3 Members of the Public

**CC500. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE CHAIRMAN**

Councillor Mrs B J Churchill was elected as Chairman of the Sub- Committee and Dr S E Bartingdon was elected as Vice Chairman.

**CC501. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for their absence were received from Cllrs J S King and D Temple.

**CC502. DECLARATION OF INTEREST**

Cllr H W Chirgwin declared an interest as he was a Churchwarden of a church in a neighbouring parish and was therefore known to St. Mary's Church staff.

**CC503. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Melanie Jones

Melanie Jones wished to address the Committee on behalf of various member of the public who had contacted her about Tower Hill Cemetery. The first issue raised was that of dog fouling in the cemetery and dog not on leads, which was very disrespectful. There were notices up in the cemetery concerning this but the problems were still happening.

Ms Jones also requested clarification on what was allowed on graves as items had been removed. She suggested that dogs should be banned from the cemetery.

Ms Jones raised concerns about alcohol being drunk in the cemetery and children using the area as a playground. The grass at the top end of the cemetery was very long and people found it hard to walk through.

She commented that although the Council had agreed that the cemetery would be open on Saturdays until 1.30pm, she had found this was not always the case and

that visitors had to telephone the Council to ask for the gates to be opened. She also said that it had not been open until 1.30pm on Mother's day and other special days as agreed by the Council.

She complained about the grass cutting machine being parked on graves, which she had contacted the Facilities Manager about.

Ms Jones asked for a notice to be erected advertising the Christmas period opening hours.

She informed the Committee that the watering cans had also been lost again.

She said that people had contacted her and asked for the mesh at the top end of the cemetery to be removed and the path to be reinstalled as it was slippery to walk on.

Ms Jones asked for the Council to consider another 3 month trial of removing the bollards in the cemetery.

**CC504. ST. MARY'S CHURCH BELL TOWER – REQUEST FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Manager. She explained that the Town Council repaired the clock itself but that there was no responsibility for the tower itself, which had become damaged due to pigeon excrement.

A member asked if the Facilities Manager knew when the last Quinquennial inspection had taken place. She replied that she was not sure but during a previous inspection the issue with pigeon excrement had been highlighted as something that was likely to cause long term damage to the bell tower. The member thought that this was something that the Church should have kept on top of. The Facilities Manager reiterated that the Council had no responsibility for the upkeep of the tower.

Another member asked if the quotation for the work included future proofing the tower against pigeon excrement. The Facilities manager replied that she thought it unlikely. In the past she had offered advice on pest control.

The Chairman asked if there were any other charities that the Church might approach for funding. The Facilities Manager suggested the Town Hall Charity, although it had just given a grant for the Town Hall roof work.

A member asked if the pigeon problem would affect the functioning of the clock. The Facilities Manager said that potentially it could and if this was the case the Council would seek reimbursement for the work from the Church. She reminded members that there was no budget for funding work to the bell tower.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the report be noted and no grant was offered to the Church.

CC505. **CEMETERIES INFORMATION LEAFLET**

The Chairman commented that the leaflet which had been previously circulated to the Committee was very good. The Facilities Manager explained that it illustrated exactly what each type of grave looked like and explained the choices available. There had been a few problems in the past when people had chosen, for example, a meadow grave and had not understood that they were not able to have a memorial erected.

A member asked if the colours on the map showing the different areas at the Windrush cemetery could be differentiated a little more.

Another member asked if any other religions except for Islam required separate areas for burial. The Facilities Manager replied that they did not.

A member asked if the full terms and conditions would still be available. The Facilities Manager highlighted that there was a link to these on the information leaflet and that they were also on display at the cemeteries. The full terms could be sent to the public if required at a more appropriate time than when they were recently bereaved. It would also be distributed to funeral directors at the earliest opportunity.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the report be noted.

CC506. **MAINTAINING CLOSED CHURCHYARDS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Manager. She thought it was of interest and note that other Councils were experiencing difficulties with being expected to take on closed churchyards and maintain them at a time when local authorities are under increasing financial pressures.

All members agreed that they were happy for the Town Council to send a letter of support to Doncaster Council, which wanted to “lobby” for a petition to potentially change the law and remove the responsibility for maintaining closed churchyards, or at least have a review to consider the appropriateness given the current financial climate. The Facilities Manager had spoken to Doncaster Council and a large number of Councils had already written to express their support.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the report be noted and a letter of support be sent to Doncaster Council.

CC507. **MEMORIAL STABILITY UPDATE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Facilities Manager which updated members on the progress regarding the memorial stability testing and the ongoing financial implications of this.

The work had been agreed by Full Council in the previous Council year as a matter of health and safety; however, there was no budget for it, and the Council had no income from St. Mary's Cemetery which had the most problems. The Town Council was responsible for health and safety – St. Mary's Churchyard – in an area that the Church was holding events such as weddings, funerals and food festivals.

A member asked how much this would cost the Town Council and the Facilities Manager replied that the graveyard was deteriorating all the time. The most urgent repairs had cost £13,500 and this was likely to be the largest bill. The memorial stability testing was to be spread across 5 years. The member thought that the Committee should ask the Council to put money in the budget for this for the next 5 years.

The Chairman reminded members that the Council had asked the Church to contact families who still lived in the town whose ancestors had graves in the churchyard as they were financially responsible for the upkeep.

A member said that she had believed that events were no longer being held in the Churchyard. The Chairman replied that the Church was supposed to ask the Council before holding events but this did not appear to be happening.

The Facilities Manager added that the Church had had a copy of the risk assessment relating to memorial safety but they had not contacted families or stopped holding events. A member asked if the Church had the information about families whose ancestors were buried at St Mary's. It was confirmed that the Church held all such records for the churchyard. The Chairman said that the Council could ask the Church to contact families once again.

The Facilities Manager explained that she had been very clear that the Town Council was interested in health and safety and that it could not enter into the conservation of graves.

A member wondered if churchgoers were aware of the memorial safety issues. It was thought that this was unlikely.

The Facilities Manager suggested that the Town Council should write to the Church highlighting the issues raised by members and pointing out that the Town Council was making a large financial contribution to the project.

A member asked if the current police operation at the Windrush cemetery could be extended to cover the other cemeteries but the Facilities manager explained that it had only come about as a result of the large number of 101 calls from the public and was exclusive to the Windrush Cemetery.

**RECOMMENDED:** That the report be noted and a request was made through the Amenities and Policy and Finance Committees for a long term budget to be set for the memorial stability project.

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The meeting closed at 6.35pm.

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Chairman.