

CC419 **MINUTES**

a) **RESOLVED:** that the minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2015 be agreed and signed as a correct record with the amendment of “to” to “top” in minute no. CC504.

b) **MATTERS ARISING**

Minute no CC504 – A member asked if there had been progress in identifying the cycle of quinquennial inspections. The Facilities Manager replied that there had not.

CC420 **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The meeting adjourned at 11.13am for a period of public participation in line with Standing Order 42. Mrs Williams addressed the Committee in respect of an incident which occurred over Easter relating to her late mothers grave.

The meeting reconvened at 11.15am.

CC421 **WINDRUSH CEMETERY**

a) **Grave Issues**

The Chairman explained that he had been to the cemetery and understood the problems there. A member asked about regulations concerning plot sizes. The Works Contracts Supervisor advised that there were no actual regulations but most cemeteries worked to a 4ft 6” graves. In the latest section he had increased the grave centres to 6ft to cope with ground conditions but this could not be done where graves had been reserved in other sections.

The Chairman explained that having made a site visit and in this part of the cemetery there were issues that had been unknown such as springs. The Town Council did not want the issues that had arisen with Mrs Williams’ late mother’s grave to reoccur and there had been some ideas about how to ensure this.

The Works Contracts Supervisor commented that in this section of the cemetery, it was hard to know what to do. It was not possible to turn away a funeral due to ground conditions or to reject a reservation. The staff tried to dig graves as quickly as possible to minimize risk of collapse. If you asked grave owners either side of the one to be dug to remove their headstones, it would undoubtedly upset people and there was the question of who would pay for this.

A member asked what other incidents there had been. The Works Contracts Supervisor replied that ground collapses happened often but no other headstones had been affected. The last winter had been the worst ever in terms of weather conditions. It was difficult to pre-empt this.

The Chairman suggested that obtaining guidance from an outside professional would be beneficial.

A member commented that the Town Council was in an impossible situation. There would always be a risk. If people were asked to move headstones, this would be upsetting. However, it was not a regular occurrence. It was how the situation was handled afterwards that was important so that people were not surprised and upset when they visited.

The Works Contracts manager explained that in this particular situation the staff had tried to stabilize the headstone immediately and had tried to get in touch with the family concerned via the funeral director. The funeral director had not had any telephone contact details and so a letter had been written to the family straight away. When the stone had begun to move more it had been removed so that it wasn't damaged. The family's stone mason was no longer in operation and so the Council would use its stone mason to have the stone re installed when the ground was stable – after one year. The Works Contracts manager emphasised that the staff were always exceptionally careful.

A member suggested that a ward member should be informed if this type of thing happened so that they could go and speak to the family concerned. Another member agreed with this. She asked if the plot could be dressed differently so that it did not look so distressing. The Works Contracts Manager explained that this could be dangerous if dressed as there was literally no ground underneath which was why the collapsed grave had been boarded for safety.

The Chairman said that he hoped there would not be another collapse but at least members could be informed whilst the officers were working on the situation.

In order to reassure the member of the public the Town Clerk advised that hopefully a report by a professional consultant would give ideas on where the Council could improve and resolve issues going forward. She had already contacted some consultants and was awaiting fee proposals.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1. that if there was a problem with a grave in the future a local ward member be informed so that they could make contact with the family concerned and discuss a way forward.*
- 2. that the Town Clerk obtains fee proposals for a professional report, in which the issues identified at Windrush Cemetery, namely the ground conditions and impact on future grave digging, accessibility, further development and lay out of the site can be reviewed and addressed, and presented to the next Amenities Committee meeting.*

b) Crematorium

The Chairman explained to the Committee that Cogges Church had a vision. Their congregation had grown so much that they had an idea to build a church centre worship auditorium to hold 300 people. He had had an informal discussion with them and the land identified was adjacent to the cemetery, meaning that there would be another access into the cemetery. There was also the possibility of housing in that area. The Chairman wondered if the Council should be looking at building a crematorium. The Church could see advantages and disadvantages.

Another member commented that it was an ambitious plan. She had been contacted by the Director of Public Health about the possibility of a crematorium. She thought it would be sensible to consider it. The Facilities Manager added that the officers had debated the possibility of a crematorium as it would provide a good income.

RECOMMENDED: *that the idea to build a crematorium at the cemetery be considered at the next Amenities Committee and the options for future designs to be included in the professional report.*

c) Reservations

The Works Contracts Supervisor asked if the Council should stop taking reservations in the light of the ground conditions.

A member asked what position the Council was in in terms of capacity at the cemetery. The Works Contracts Supervisor commented that it originally had a 75 year life span but with wider grave spaces being required that would be reduced by one third. A member said that he would not be comfortable with stopping reservations.

The Chairman referred to the issues with memorial benches and trees and hoped that advice on these could be included in the professional report.

A member asked if memorial trees could be located in places other than the cemetery. In response the Facilities Manager said this was something that was encouraged, but most people were reluctant to do so. She suggested that this could be added to the Cemetery Leaflet and to also include that the Council was willing to consider locations other than the cemetery.

RECOMMENDED:

1. *that the Council continues to take reservations at Windrush Cemetery.*
2. *that 'the Council was willing to consider memorial trees and benches in locations other than the cemetery' be added to the cemetery leaflet.*

d) Disabled Access

The cemetery was accessible for the disabled by radar key at the Windrush and by appointment at Tower Hill.

The Chairman reported that he and another member had been contacted by a disabled member of the public who wanted to be able to drive to her late mother's graveside at Windrush Cemetery, and gave further details of the current situation. Contact had been made to Volunteer Link Up who it was understood had assisted the lady with her shopping.

Another member commented that the cemeteries were accessible and the Town Council needed to be consistent. He was in favour of maintaining the status quo. A member added that one of the issues was that the lady in question said she was unable to get her wheelchair to the grave on her own, although she was able to do so with some assistance.

A discussion followed and it was felt that it was inappropriate for officers to have to judge the severity of an individual's disability. It was felt that there were volunteer groups who might be able to assist the lady in question and even the Friends of the Cemetery. A member expressed an interest in setting up Friends of the Cemetery and officers explained that Cllr Enright had taken a lead on this although they were unsure as to how much progress he had made. It was suggested that the consultant could include recommendations on disabled access in his report.

RECOMMENDED:

1. *that the current policy on disabled access be maintained;*
2. *that it is suggested to the lady in question she speaks to volunteer organisations and meets them at the cemetery;*
3. *that the Communications Officer prepares a press statement in the event that the situation is escalated;*
4. *that the professional report to be commissioned covers accessibility to the Windrush Cemetery to look at possible options or adaptations;*
5. *that Cllr Enright updates the Committee on the formation of the Friends of the Cemetery group and to reinvigorate this.*

e) Mementoes on Graves

A member of the public had complained that items she had left on a grave had been broken by contractors. The Works Contracts Supervisor explained that under the Council's Cemetery Rules and Regulations such items (solar lights, ornaments etc.) were not permitted to be left on graves and anything that was there was left at the

owner's risk. Such items caused problems for the contractors when they were cutting and strimming grass.

The Facilities Manager added that usually items placed on the graves were treated more leniently until the headstone went in. Members thought that a sympathetically worded letter to the grave owner should be composed explaining the rules and regulations.

The Works Contracts Manager also highlighted the fact that artificial grass was being out on traveller graves. Recently one family appeared to have used weed killer to remove the grass on a grave so that it could be replaced with artificial grass. A member suggested writing to the family concerned and informing them that the grave had been vandalised. Members agreed that there should be a ban on use of weed killer in the cemetery.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1. that a letter be sent to the grave owner in question explaining the Council's policy on personal items left on the grave;*
- 2. that a letter be sent to the owner of the grave that has had weed killer applied to it explaining that the grave has been vandalised.*

CC423 UPDATE ON MEMORIAL STABILITY TESTING AT TOWER HILL CEMETERY AND ST. MARY'S CLOSED CHURCHYARD

The Committee received and considered the report of the Cemeteries Officer on the administration of the memorial stability process. Members were very concerned to hear that the officer had been threatened on several occasions. The Facilities Manager said that it had been reported as a near miss in line with the Council's Health & Safety. A member suggested that a sign be put in reception saying that Officers would report any abuse to the police. Another member asked if the telephone system could record calls. The Town Clerk replied that it was possible and had been looked into but that it was very expensive. Members requested that a report go to the next Policy and Resources Committee on Officer safety.

The Committee received and considered correspondence from a resident regarding Tower Hill Stability Testing. It was suggested that as the resident was a young person it might be appropriate to invite her to meet with the Mayor and the Chairman to discuss the matter further.

There was no update from officers on memorials at St. Mary's Closed Churchyard.

RECOMMENDED:

- 1. that the report of the Cemeteries Officer on the administration of the memorial stability process be noted;*

2. *that a report on Officer/Staff safety be taken to the next Policy and Resources Committee;*
3. *that the resident who had written in about the stability testing process be invited to meet with the Mayor and the Chairman of this Committee.*

CC424 **UPDATE ON ST. MARY'S CLOSED CHURCHYARD MAINTENENACE**

The Committee was informed that the church was paying for repairs to the pillars on this occasion. Officers had suggested the installation of a bollard to prevent this happening again with the Town Council and the Church each having a key. A member said that he had spoken to Rev'd Wright about this and he was not against the idea – the church may help to fund it if they could have input into the final design.

A member asked what had happened regarding contacting families whose headstone in St. Mary's had failed the stability testing. The Works Contracts Supervisor said that he believed the Church had undertaken to do this. The Town Council had obtained a CD with some records on it from the County Archives Office in Cowley. The Town Clerk and Chairman would meet with Rev'd Wright and find out where things stood.

RECOMMENDED:

1. *that the installation of a bollard at the entrance to St Mary's Churchyard be progressed in consultation with the Church, and they be asked to apply for the required faculty;*
2. *that the Chairman and the Town Clerk meets with the Rev'd Toby Wright in order to discuss the bollard and the memorial stability.*

CC425 **FINANCIAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the RFO.

RECOMMENDED: *that the report be noted.*

The meeting closed at 12.52pm.

Chairman