

MEETING OF THE CEMETERIES AND CLOSED CHURCHYARDS SUB-COMMITTEE
Of the Amenities Committee

Held on Tuesday 11 October 2016
At 5.20pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall

Present: Councillor H W Chirgwin (Chairman)

Councillors:	D S T Enright C Holliday	D Temple
Officers:	Town Clerk Facilities Manager Works Contracts Supervisor	Cemeteries Officer Democratic Services Officer

CC574 **APOLOGIES FOR ABESENCE**

There were no apologies for absence. The Chairman apologised to the officers as the meeting had been delayed for 20 minutes until there were enough councillors for a quorum. He pointed out that the DSO had tried to arrange a date suitable for all members of the working party but only 2 members had responded.

CC575 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Cllr Chirgwin declared an interest in agenda item 7 as he was known to the staff of St. Mary's Church and was a churchwarden at South Leigh Church.

CC576 **MINUTES**

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2016 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

CC577 **MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

There were no matters arising from the minutes to be discussed at a meeting.

CC578 **WINDRUSH CEMETERY**

The Committee received and considered an officer report concerning a headstone that had been placed between two graves at the Windrush cemetery. This was the first time this had occurred. Graves were all double depth at Windrush Cemetery but the Council still allowed side by side graves to be purchased. Therefore on this occasion the stone mason had placed the stone between the side by side plots, rather than on one plot as had been marked out by ground staff. Within a short space of time the Town Council received a complaint from a regular visitor to the cemetery saying that it looked out of place and should be removed.

The Works Contracts Supervisor explained that headstones were allowed to be placed like this at Tower Hill Cemetery because all graves were single depth. He added that the Council had already received another request for a headstone to span two graves at Windrush Cemetery and that these headstones were also permitted to be bigger.

Members discussed the issues but did not feel that it looked too unsightly and the family concerned was happy with the headstone.

RECOMMENDED: that headstones be permitted to be sited between two single depth graves at the Windrush Cemetery.

C578 UPDATE ON MEMORIAL STABILITY TESTING AT TOWER HILL CEMETERY

The Works Contracts Supervisor explained that most of the repairs to be done by families were now complete or well underway. However, the Council was left with a large number of headstones where no family could be traced or no one wanted to take responsibility for them. Unfortunately the areas where the majority of the problems were, were those most regularly visited. He had concerns about the public reaction to laying stones flat. However, the average cost to repair the stones was £230 per headstone. There were 83 requiring the most urgent attention. If these were repaired, the Council would have to repair all those needing work.

The Town Clerk asked if it would make grass cutting more difficult. The Works Contracts Supervisor replied that it would but this could be discussed with the contractors, adding that a family could still take on a stone at any time if they wished to repair it.

A member asked how much it would cost to lay flat. The Works Contracts Supervisor replied that it was really a question of staff time and resources as it could be done in house.

The Committee felt that laying flat was the only option as the Council did not have the funds to repair all the memorials. However they wanted this to be discussed with the grounds maintenance contractors and suggested contacting the Witney Gazette to appeal for any families that may not have been contacted due to changes of address etc. A quote from the Chairman should be added.

RECOMMENDED: that memorials that were not repaired by families be laid back by Town Council staff, subject to a conversation being held with the grounds maintenance contractors and that the Witney Gazette be contacted as a last appeal to families who had not been able to be contacted with a quote from the Chairman.

C579 UPDATE ON ST. MARY'S CLOSED CHURCHYARD

The Chairman reported that he and the Town Clerk had had a very productive meeting with Rev'd Toby Wright. The Church was paying for the latest repair to the

pillars. Rev'd Wright had also agreed that the Council could put a bollard between the pillars on the Church side of the boundary – a faculty would be needed.

Rev'd Wright was happy so far with the Risk Assessment for the memorial repairs and the use of stakes and chicken wire to segregate those that were unsafe. He had said that he would be willing to try to trace families and for the church to do some research. The Chairman and the Town Clerk had reassured him that St. Mary's Churchyard would be treated the same as the other cemeteries.

Rev'd Wright reported that the church had had the drains cleared but they were still experiencing some run off from Church Green. The Chairman informed the committee that there had been an idea to round off the corner of Church Green to stop it being damaged by buses and he wondered if a drain could be put in at the same time.

There had also been a meeting at Holy Trinity Church. The Works Contracts Manager was meeting with the District Council Officers to discuss works to the railings the following week.

RECOMMENDED: that the verbal update from the Chairman be noted.

C580 FORMULATION OF THE FRIENDS OF THE CEMETERIES GROUP

Cllr Enright had initially done a little work on this a few years ago. He proposed that the following could be a starting point:-

Do you care about our cemeteries? Can you help decide how to honour our loved ones and keep our memorials tidy? Then join the Friends of Witney Cemeteries. Led by Councillor Duncan Enright, this group will meet from time to time to help Witney Town Council decide how to run our cemeteries.

This should be put into the newsletter and on the noticeboards at the cemeteries. The group once formed could take ownership of it and the Council would facilitate it by offering a place to meet. It would be helpful to contact Melanie Jones who had become an unofficial spokesperson. The group should receive this sub committees minutes.

RECOMMENDED: that the Council facilitates and publicises the formation of a Friends of the Cemeteries Group as detailed above.

C581 REVIEW OF THE RESTRICTION ON ERECTING WOODEN CROSSES IN CEMETERIES

The Committee received and considered a report on the restriction of erecting wooden crosses in the cemeteries. Current terms and conditions stated that these were only permitted for a three month period after burial. Council staff had removed them after this time period in line with terms and conditions but some people had been upset and complained about this.

Members discussed the issue and felt that three months was a very short amount of time for a grieving family and that a year would be a better length of time, after which a headstone could be erected. There should be a maximum size permitted – this being the “normal” size provided by undertakers. All other crosses should be removed.

RECOMMENDED: that wooden crosses be permitted for the period of one year at a maximum size of the “normal” size provided by undertakers. All other crosses would be removed.

C582 **FINANCE REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the RFO.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 6pm.

Chairman