

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

Held on Wednesday 1 March 2017
At 6pm in the Council Chamber, Town Hall

Present: Councillor H W Chirgwin (Chairman)

Councillors:	S E Bartington	B J Churchill
	D S T Enright	D Temple
Officers:	Town Clerk	Cemeteries Officer
	Operations Officer	Democratic Services Officer

CC077 APOLOGIES FOR ABESENCE

There were no apologies for absence

CC078 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. Cllr Bartington declared an interest in Agenda Items 5 and 6 as she had a reserved plot at Windrush Cemetery.

CC079 MINUTES

RESOLVED: that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 October 2016 be agreed and signed as a correct record.

CC080 MATTERS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

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

However the Chairman informed the Committee that he and the Mayor had met with the young person who had previously written to complain about Tower Hill Cemetery. She had a better understanding of how the cemetery worked now and they had invited her to join the Friends of the Cemeteries Group.

CC081 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of the public present.

CC082 WINDRUSH CEMETERY – REPORT ON PRACTICE AND POLICY BY PETER MITCHELL ASSOCIATES

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk and the report by Peter Mitchell Associates. Members agreed that a study into the surface water should be carried out as it was not a problem that would go away.

The Operations Officer asked if he could carry out further research into wooden shoring and bring back a report including costings to a future meeting. Members asked about sharing resources with neighbouring parishes but it was explained that this was not an option as the smaller parishes used contractors and larger parishes may have funerals on the same day as Witney.

A discussion was held about the suggestion of concrete beams and back to back burials. The Operations Officer pointed out this would mean some Muslim plots would face the wrong way. However, concrete beams would help to reduce the complaints received when the machinery drove over the grass in bad weather. The Operations Officer would obtain some costings. The Committee were very interested to know what the public would think of these ideas and the Town Clerk suggested that a survey could be carried out via Survey Monkey. This was thought to be a good idea and should include the possibility of a crematorium.

The Committee discussed the option of expanding the road to allow people to drive further into the cemetery for those with impaired mobility. Members did not like the idea of people driving around the cemetery and thought that the current access should remain as it was. A member who did have mobility issues said that she had not encountered any issues and that she could use her scooter or sticks to reach the grave she wanted to visit. It was suggested that she might be an appropriate person to speak to the lady who had originally made a complaint about disabled access, as she was now appealing the Council's decision. She said she would be very happy to do so. It was agreed this was something that could be considered in future if further residential building took place in that area as there may be scope for another entrance. The Committee asked the Town Clerk to write back to the original complainant explaining that the decision had not been changed and no special arrangements would be made for her to drive to the graveside but it may be considered in the future.

The Committee discussed the further development of the site and the possibility of using some of the land for ashes interments. It was agreed that the County Archaeologist should be consulted.

Members also discussed the idea of building a crematorium on site. This area of the report was not as strong as the other areas and members wanted to investigate the idea further by scoping out the basics for such a project, including talking to the Planning Authority and the funeral directors to ascertain if there would be demand. Advice should also be sought from the Institute of Cemetery and Crematoria Management.

The Operations Officer asked to raise an additional item concerning the Windrush Cemetery. This was a complaint from a funeral director about the manner in which he claimed Council staff had conducted themselves during a funeral. The Operations Officer assured members that staff always acted with the upmost respect for families and funeral processions. The Funeral Director had agreed to a meeting with Officers in a few weeks' time. The Committee asked that the Operations Officer and Town Clerk deal with this matter.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted;

2. that a study into the causes of excessive surface water and measures the Council can take to mitigate it be commissioned;
3. that the Operations Officer brings back a report on the practicalities and costs of using wooden shoring;
4. that a Survey Monkey survey be carried out on the suggested development of future burial areas using the 'back to back' layout with a concrete beam for memorials, and a reinforced central path, and also including the potential crematorium;
5. that with regard to the accessibility of the site for mobility impaired persons, no change is made but consideration may be given in future if further development of the area takes place
6. that with regard to the further development of the site – to include roads, burials etc that due to the archaeological remains at the site the County Archaeologist be consulted in order to ascertain what would be acceptable;
7. that a feasibility study on the potential development of a crematorium is carried out and the public and funeral directors be asked for their opinions.
8. that the Operations Officer and the Town Clerk deal with the complaint from a funeral director.

CC083 WINDRUSH CEMETERY – REVIEW OF THE CHARGES

Due to the previous report and uncertainty about future costs (e.g. shoring) that may impact on the charges, it was decided to defer this until the next meeting.

RECOMMENDED: that the review of burial charges is brought back to the next meeting.

CC084 UPDATE ON MEMORIAL STABILITY TESTING AT TOWER HILL

The Operations Officer gave a verbal update on the progress of the memorial testing at Tower Hill Cemetery. Lying flat of any dangerous stones would be starting soon. The stones needing to be laid flat would be marked on a plan for Ground Staff to follow. Once this was completed stability testing would begin at Windrush.

RECOMMENDED: that the verbal update be noted and a press release issued before Windrush testing began.

CC085 UPDATE ON CLOSED CHURCHYARDS: ST MARY'S AND HOLY TRINITY

The Committee received and considered the report of the Town Clerk as circulated prior to the meeting. There were issues with the railings and some yew trees at Holy Trinity Church. The Tree Officer at WODC had inspected the trees and was of the opinion that they should not be removed. The Chairman reported that the church was due for its quinquennial inspection next year and the church would come back to the Council after this had been done. The Town Clerk suggested that it would be helpful if the Council's tree inspection survey began with the relevant yew trees next financial year.

The insurance money had been received for the pillars at St, Mary's. The Area Dean had been given the details for a suitable bollards but nothing more had been heard.

RECOMMENDED:

1. that the report be noted;
2. that the Chairman and Town Clerk arranges a meeting with the Area Dean to discuss the bollard situation.

CC086 FORMULATION OF THE FRIENDS OF THE CEMETERIES GROUP

The Committee recognised that all available avenues had been tried to generate interest in this but no one had come forward. Members agreed that a final attempt should be tried at the Annual Town Meeting with some expression of interest forms for people to complete and some basic information. This could perhaps feed into the survey.

RECOMMENDED: that the update be noted and some forms be made available for expressions of interest at the Annual Town Meeting. This item should be included in the Survey.

CC087 FINANCIAL REPORT

The Committee received and considered the report of the RFO as circulated with the agenda.

RECOMMENDED: that the report be noted.

The meeting closed at 7.03pm.

Chairman