

Notes from the Friends of the Cemeteries Meeting

Held on Tuesday 29 August 2023

In the Gallery Room, Corn Exchange

At 11am

Present: Cllr Ruth Smith
Cllr Duncan Enright
2 x members of the public (including Chair, Mel Jones)

Adam Clapton	Witney Town Council, Deputy Town Clerk
Angus Whitburn	Witney Town Council, Operations Manager
Zoe Henstridge	Witney Town Council, Admin Support Assistant – Halls & Green Spaces

1. Windrush Cemetery – Waterlogged Routes (raised by member)

A regular visitor to the cemetery had advised that when wet, the ground at the cemetery was waterlogged and walking to graves was slippery and dangerous as there were no proper pathways.

Officers advised that by its nature as a lawn cemetery, the cemetery would be slippery when wet and there was little which could be done other than erecting signage. There was a long-term plan to install paths to sections F,G & H but there were currently no funds for this and the EMR the Council held was to facilitate future internal road improvements, not pathways.

It was agreed it be entered into these notes as a continuing issue which would be presented to the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee. Officers would also enquire as to whether there was any Section 106 developer funding available for cemetery enhancements.

2. Windrush Cemetery – Children’s Memorial Garden (raised by member)

Officers advised the project had been delayed due to the lead officer leaving the Council. There was still work to do and this would be reviewed by the Operations office.

3. Windrush Cemetery – Nationality Funerals (raised by a member)

Officers advised the current regulations did not allow 24-hour burials for religious denominations as it would be impossible to turn the graves around in that time with too many variables which could go wrong, i.e., weather etc. The terms did allow requests to be made for weekend interments and most requests could be met within 3 days. If 24 hours was a requirement, enquiries were directed to Oxford City who were able to facilitate. Only one request had been received in the current year and officers were keeping the number received under review.

4. Tower Hill Cemetery - Pedestrian Gate (raised by a member)

A request was made for a self-closing hinge on the gate to ensure it was closed as it was often left open by those using it.

Officers agreed to consider the request and raised that there had been several instances of ASB in the area. It had considerably increased foot traffic in the cemetery and was seen as a space to

gather – several benches had historically been removed in the cemetery due to this. It was queried whether there was a community order in place which officers advised they would investigate further.

5. Tower Hill Cemetery - Memorial Wall Clearing (raised by a member)

Officers advised this had gone well and it was looking much better. There had been clear communications and the Council had received no complaints. The Friends had received some queries and advised items had only been relocated, not taken away completely.

6. Tower Hill Cemetery – Map & Information Board (raised by officers)

Officers advised a map showing cemetery sections, points of interest and DDI issues was being created to go in the car park area of the cemetery. It was an action arising from the 2021 DDI audit of the site. It would also contain a short history of the cemetery.

7. Both Cemeteries – Noticeboards & Communications (raised by officers)

Officers advised an audit of the information on the noticeboards had been carried out. The information was being reviewed and condensed and new information would be more welcoming and contain information highlighting to visitors what can/can't be put on graves, when grave topping occurs, and other items regularly queried or complained about. The Friends of the Cemeteries poster was also being refreshed.

In response to the last query, members asked if officers looked at what was permitted in other cemeteries, and it was confirmed they did.

8. Grief Café (raised by member)

The café was seeking help to advertise its services more. Small cards had already been put out in the Council's premises and if further assistance was wanted from the Council it would need a written request outlining how.

It was agreed that the Chair contacts local undertakers to also advertise the service with bereaved relatives.

9. Post boxes to Heaven (raised by member)

Everyone agreed this had been a successful, positively received Town Council project which would make a real difference to grieving families. The second box had been installed in Tower Hill Cemetery and it was confirmed they were checked and emptied regularly, and the contents shredded to ensure confidentiality.

Overall, Members were happy with the way things were proceeding. It had been an exceptionally wet summer and weeds vegetation had been problematic at the start of the summer, but this was now under control- it was worth noting that one whole grass cut at Tower Hill takes 4 days. The Council were hopeful of beginning an audit of incorrect graves/items on them at the cemeteries which did not confirm to the rules so this might generate queries ahead of the next Friends meeting. Officers agreed to keep members up to date with any further planned work.

The meeting closed at 12pm.