

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 6 November 2023

Title: Town Council Burials Service

Contact Officer: Senior Administrative Officer & Committee Clerk

Background

The purpose of this report is to advise Members of the burial services provided by Witney Town Council. The Council operates two Cemeteries in Witney; Windrush Cemetery and Tower Hill Cemetery. Windrush Cemetery opened in 2004 and offers lawn, Meadow and Woodland burials along with an Ashes Path. Tower Hill has operated since 1857 and has approximately 9,500 plots which are mainly Lawn Burials with some Family Ashes plots.

Current Situation

The Council usually takes initial instruction from a Funeral Director; the administration team will liaise with them to book a suitable time in the cemetery diary and obtain the relevant paperwork to ensure that that burial takes place lawfully. The importance of this work cannot be underestimated, as it is imperative that our records are held accurately.

The team may at times deal directly with a bereaved family to take them through the process without the use of a Funeral Director, usually to avoid the additional cost. This however does lead to great time commitment from the administration team.

Once a burial booking is in place, the Councils Work's team will prepare the grave and attend the ceremony to again ensure that the burial is lawful.

Windrush

There are a number of Coffin burials options. It is important to note that the majority of burials are in the lawned area, and the initial burial is at Double Depth to maximise the use of the land. Windrush Cemetery also offers the interment of cremated remains on an Ashes Path.

Tower Hill

All Burial plots are reserved. However, a small number of new reservations can be made for the interment of Ashes.

Recent Activity – Please see the attached table.

Over the past 12 months the council has carried out a total of 94 interments, 40 were Coffin burials and 54 the burial of Cremated Remains. These were roughly evenly split across the two cemeteries.

It is difficult to predict the number of burials however it is important to note that the Council does see additional pressures on the Councils works teams during summer months due to grounds maintenance duties. Burials are the primary duty for the team and therefore it is important to be mindful when conversing with residents regarding such complaints as the length of grass on recreational areas. Likewise, February and March usually see the highest number of interments in the winter months.

During the same period the council sold 73 Exclusive Rights of Burial (EROB) – this is a lawful document which dictates who owns the right to be buried in a grave. 48 of the 73 were used for immediate Burial. The remaining being sold as reservations for a future burial usually so that family members can be laid to rest together or because individuals are making arrangements for their future demise. Again, the process is handled by the Administration Team who are more than happy to discuss the options available with residents.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

The maximising of the use of land, such as the decision to bury at Double Depth in Windrush Cemetery supports the councils aims.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

Financial implications

➤ None resulting from this report.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

	2022		2023										
Column1	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Total
Windrush													
Single Depth Burial	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	5
Double Depth Burial	2	2	1	2	1	0	1	1	1	4	1	2	18
Ashes	1	1	1	3	5	3	2	2	3	2	3	0	26
Tower Hill													
Burials	2	1	3	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	17
Ashes	1	2	2	3	3	6	2	0	3	3	2	1	28
EROB's	10	1	7	6	9	9	5	3	5	6	2	8	71