

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 8 July 2024

Title: Relocation of the memorial tree in Windrush Cemetery

Contact Officer: Operations Manager

Background

For those wishing to install a memorial plaque at Windrush Cemetery, Witney Town Council offers the fixing of engraved metal plaques to a tree guard around a mature oak tree. This tree is located on the west side of the cemetery bordering the woodland burials section. It offers an affordable method of memorialising a passed one. Applicants just need to pay the cost of the memorial plaque and a small fee for admin and fixing it to the tree guard.

Current Situation

The requirements for an area to install memorial plaques is required at Windrush however, the current location isn't suitable and has generated multiple complaints for the council. Due to the tree being located downhill in the cemetery, the area is hard to access in the cold wet months, the ground is so saturated it can easily pass over ankle height. The area is also heavily shaded and has poor grass coverage, so it always looks poorly maintained.

Currently, memorial plaques are fitted to a tree guard (See Appendix A) which isn't designed for this purpose so look disorganised and messy. It also offers limited front-facing space as the rear of the tree guard is close to the hedgerow.

To help solve this problem and offer a better area to memorialise loved ones, the best solution is to move it up the cemetery to what will become one of two new burial sections. There is a small grove of trees (see Appendix B), that could be utilised to become a new memorial area. The trees are being retained as part of the new cemetery plan so it would not sacrifice any burial space.

To help improve the appearance of this new area and make it more attractive to those wishing to install a plaque a new fixing method could be explored by officers. Officers could research installing plaques on a sandstone monolith stone, brick wall or copper slab.

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.

Due to the location of the memorial tree and the strength of the species, the tree doesn't present any danger, so there is no current requirement to fell the tree.

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.

Those who have paid for plaque installation on the current memorial tree have complained about the area and it may raise criticism if the area is moved and they are required to pay for a new plaque.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- Windrush Cemetary Property maintenance budget 302/4036: £2000.00. Which could be used for a new memorial fixing solution.
- Windrush Memorial Maintenance budget 302/4355: £2000.00, which could be used to cover the cost of plaques needing to be relocated.
- The cost to install a memorial plaque is £60.00

Recommendations

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

1. Relocation of the memorial plaque locations.
2. Delegate to officers to explore an alternative fixing method for memorial plaques and report back to the next Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee.
3. Cover the cost of anyone wishing to move their plaque to the new memorial section and communicate this change sympathetically in advance, if agreed.