
Agenda Item: Burial Fees

Meeting Date: 20th January 2025

Contact Officer: Operations Manager

Background

It was proposed to the council at the Halls, Cemeteries and Allotments meeting on the 11th November 2024 that a more considerable rise in burial charges should be considered above the proposed 2% increase to ensure the Council was covering its burial costs. Councillors wanted to ensure these rises in burial charges were comparable to similar-sized town councils.

Current Situation

There are two areas to understand why it is important to ensure the council is covering its cost incurred from burials. There is the initial financial impact of the burial, but sometimes overlooked is the ongoing maintenance of that grave and the cemetery. There is a justifiable financial impact from this ongoing maintenance of the cemeteries as it falls under the general upkeep of Witney Town Council grounds and the cemeteries do act as recreation grounds. However, interment cost is directly linked to an individual who has made a decision to procure a parcel of land and has an expectation of service standards.

The Councils' current costs to excavate a double-depth grave at Windrush are estimated at around £1500 These costs are calculated from labour hours, fuel, materials and administration. The figure is a lower estimate of the true cost as most graves require additional labour, officer time and administration. The figures also do not equate to the deterioration, replacement and general maintenance of machinery and tools or the ongoing maintenance of a grave for a year after interment.

Witney Town Council's current charge for a double-depth grave with exclusive rights of burial is £1436, £791.50 for the interment costs and £644.50 for the EROB. Although not common there is no requirement to purchase the EROB, so an applicant can inter someone for £791.50 representing £708.50 loss for the council.

From a review of surrounding council burial charges, it appears there is no set fee, but the average works out to be around £1500 to inter someone at double depth with the ERBO purchase. This is still above Witney Town Council's agreed 2% increase for the 2025-26 year bringing interment and EROB charge to a total of £1465.

	Double Depth	Purchase of Exclusive rights of burial
South Oxford district council	£684	£412
Oxford City Council	£640	£1050

Abingdon on Thames Town Council	£900	included
Cotswold District council	£920	£1200
Aylesbury Town Council	£600	£1096

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Equality – an increase in charges could disproportionately effect more disadvantaged parts of the community.
- b) Biodiversity – no direct impact from this report.
- c) Crime & Disorder – no direct impact from this report.
- d) Environment & Climate Emergency – no direct impact from this report.

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.

As outlined in the report, if Witney Town Council chooses to go ahead with its agreed 2% increase, each burial will represent a financial loss for the council. Although the proposed increased charge is minimal in relation to the total cost of a burial any larger increase above what is traditional could be viewed negatively.

Social Value

Social value is the positive change the Council creates in the local community within which it operates.

- Increased charges are a means of maintaining financial sustainability for cemetery and burial services.
- To sustain the long-term viability of the Council's burial services, ensuring they remain available and of high quality.
- Higher burial charges will help towards the funding of the ongoing maintenance and improvement of Witney's cemeteries, ensuring that they are well-maintained, accessible, and respectful places for families to visit.

Financial implications

- Increasing all interment charges by 6.3% would help to cover interment costs and help bring charges in line with the surrounding area.
- Committing to the agreed 2% increase for EROB purchases.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and

1. With the information provided in the report decide if a rise in burial charges for 2025-26 is required.