

Friends of The Cemeteries Meeting

05/03/2025

Cemetery Regulations

The Operations Manager gave a brief verbal update on his review of the Cemetery Regulations. He noted that the main changes were:

1. WTC would now build vaults if they were requested.
2. Ashes can now be scattered into a plot at The Windrush cemetery before it has been fully buried. This will involve peeling back the turf, scattering the ashes – not burying an urn, and replacing the turf and soil immediately.
3. Rewording to clarify points to avoid misinterpretation.

He further explained that the document would be presented to the HCA Committee on 17 March for adoption. FoTC welcomed the review and raised no concerns.

Hug In a Book

The Cemeteries Administrator asked FoTC for any feedback on the Cemetery Guide. FoTC reported that it was exactly what they had in mind when WTC were tasked with creating a guide for cemetery users. FoTC thanked the Cemeteries Administrator for her work.

Ashes Scattering Bed Planting (Tower Hill)

The Cemeteries Administrator gave a verbal update on the refurbishment of the scattering bed as the plants had come to the end of their life.

She had designed a new garden which would be more user friendly. The new garden has been stripped in readiness for the new planting scheme which will contain plants that reflect a variety of woodland space including Ferns, Foxgloves, Lily of the Valley and more.

The planting will be broken up with patches of stones. This will allow families to find a space to scatter their ashes without disturbing the plants. FoTC was presented with a boarder design and pictures of the plants. FoTC approved of the plants and colour scheme. FoTC also praised the Operations Manager and the works team for their hard work maintaining the cemetery and on how beautiful the cemetery was looking.

Dog Fouling (Tower Hill)

Following sporadic reports of dog fouling on the graves and around Tower Hill Cemetery. Operations Manager reported that we have now installed better signage throughout the cemetery. There have been less reports into the office regarding dog fouling, but WTC will continue to monitor this. FoTC addressed the group on other antisocial matters that had been reported to them such as bike riding, children 'hanging out' and drug taking.

FoTC were advised that when these reports come into the office we try to encourage people to report to 101. This puts the cemetery on the police radar for patrols. If the police are unaware, they won't increase patrols in the area. FoTC agreed they would encourage others to report in this way.

Memorial Monolith (Windrush)

The Operations Manager updated FoTC on the new monolith to be installed replacing the existing Tree Guard and hold memorial plaques.

It was explained that the new memorial would resolve the access issues caused by the tree guards siting in the woodland area therefore addressing anyone with mobility issues as the memorial will be installed next to the path.

It was confirmed that WTC will offer to move the Tree Guard plaques to the Monolith at no cost to families who wish to relocate. Any families who wish to keep their plaques on the Tree Guard are welcome to. No new plaques will be installed on the Tree Guard.

Wildflower Planting (Windrush)

The wildflower planting on the meadow is underway. The team have laid a large sheet of plastic to kill of the grass and hardy weeds to try and create an area that can be planted. FoTC were in approval and thanked the team for their hard work.

Muslim Burials (Windrush)

The Operations Manager advised that following a meeting with members of the Muslim community he had explained WTC's process and timescales for burials. This being approx. 3 days or less and not the 3 weeks as falsely reported to them.

It was agreed that any burial requirements will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and that WTC would take steps to assist as much as possible as they do with any burial. FoTC was very pleased to receive the update.

2025 Admin Changes

The Cemeteries Administrator presented FoTC with copies of the newly designed cemetery forms and explained that this should lead to better collection of information. The new forms were simpler, and the information collected was specific to its purpose and now contained a privacy statement and a tick box to consent to relevant information being passed to a third party if applicable, therefore meeting GDPR regulations.

FoTC were impressed with the forms redesign and agreed that they were much clearer

The Senior Admin Officer reported that WTC would also be taking a stricter approach to the acceptance of documents submission which would bring about a smoother running of both the interment and memorial installation processes.

FoTC received a copy of the 2025/26 cemetery fees as agreed by Council. They raised no concerns of the increases.

Closed Cemeteries Maintenance Update

Operations Manager reported the following works had been carried out:

- Repairs at Holy Trinity archway were currently underway.
- The lights at St Marys Church were now fully operational and the issues with timing of these that had been reported by the residents of the Almshouses resolved.
- That discussions were underway regarding the wildflower area at the rear of St Mary's churchyard.

FoTC thanked Operations Manager for repairing the lights as residents had raised how dark it had been without them. They offered their thoughts on the grass cutting regime of the

churchyard and how it had been reported as looking unkempt and neglected. They asked that the area be maintained with a prestige cut and that their comments be included in the discussions with the church.

Memorial Testing

The Operations Manager advised that he and the works team are now fully qualified to carry out the necessary testing. It was agreed that when previously carried out by an external contractor it was done in such a way to cause stress to families and negative press coverage.

It was agreed that future testing would be far less intrusive and could be carried out with limited communications in order to reduce the risk of bad social media or press coverage. FoTC were in favour of this approach.

Invitation to Funeral Directors to attend future meetings

It was agreed that FoTC would invite representatives from local Funeral Directors to attend future FoTC meetings as their feedback could be invaluable to progressing improvements in the Cemeteries. WTC would continue to provide support and encourage feedback also however it was felt this approach may be more productive.

Feedback from FoTC

FoTC updated the meeting on feedback they had received regarding plots. FoTC passed on that some families had noticed there was no consistency with the plot garden policy. Some families had been asked to remove items where other families had not. The example given was a plot that had its entire boarder marked with stones. The Operations Manager spoke on this subject to update that he and the Cemeteries Administrator had started assessing both cemeteries more regularly and will continue this work to bring both cemeteries in line with our policies. Operations Manager agreed that some older plots were not in line with the garden policy, and he was working to address this, so it was fair for all families.

FoTC asked the group what progress had been made with the children's memorial garden. The Operations Manager reported that due to ground conditions, climbing plants had failed to grow around the arch way that had been installed. FoTC asked that the archway be removed, and that the area be kept tidy and accessible. The Operations Manager advised that the 'Pebble Pond' was complete, and a bench installed. The Cemeteries Administrator will confirm a company that could supply and engrave stones to remember a child. WTC will then issues comms on the garden to raise awareness to users and residents.

Lastly, it was requested that the soft close mechanism be placed on the pedestrian gate at Tower Hill to ensure that it does not remain open when not in use. (HCA 13.03.2023 H139 Refers)