

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS



Agenda Item: New Ashes Section at Windrush Cemetery

Meeting Date: Monday, 8 September 2025

Contact Officer: Operations Manager

Background

The current ashes section at Windrush Cemetery is nearing capacity. The section comes in the form of a path with ashes burial plots on either side. Each plot can accommodate 2 ashes interments, can be memorialised with a sloping tablet, and accommodates a small stone garden for memorial items and flowers. There are 65 remaining plots in this section, with the current rate of interments, more capacity would be required by summer 2026.

Current Situation

When the first path was nearing capacity, a second adjoining path was added. A third cannot be added as it would enter the area designated with possible archaeological remains and the meadow burial section. Understanding this, officers instructed Cemetery Design Services (CDS) in 2024 to map all remaining burial plots and include a new ashes section. The area is located on the west side of the cemetery between the two right-of-way paths.



Officers have researched some options for this area, which involve trails where ashes could be interred into columns and above-ground vaults. But due to the location of the new section and capacity requirements, it's felt a lawned ashes section would be most in keeping and cost-effective.

Option 1

Plotted lawned ashes graves where Exclusive Right of Burial (EROB) owners can have a headstone and a small garden area. This is the option currently available in the Tower Hill “Family Ashes” section.

Option 2

Is an improved version of option one; instead of ashes caskets being directly interred into the ground and coming into contact with soil and decomposing, they will instead be interred into concrete vaults. Up to 4 sets of ashes can be interred in each Vault. The concrete vaults will ensure the ground doesn’t sink and provides additional protection to the ashes caskets.



Option 3

Is an enhancement on Option 2, preinstalled ashes vaults, with a memorial. It ensures uniformity as the memorial areas are clearly defined, and memorials are uniform. To ensure these are available for ashes interments, they would have to be preinstalled in blocks.



The Vaults in options 2 and 3 would need to be pre-installed so that they are ready for use. The installation would be carried out by the Operations Team and the supplier.

Access path

The area is located approximately 40m from any of the cemetery paths. CDS have laid out all the new paths and roadways in the new cemetery design. To ensure the area is accessible for those with mobility issues, a path is necessary, especially in the winter months when the cemetery can become waterlogged. The path would also benefit the new burial session that will start being used in 2026.

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 – the lawned graves can be hard to access for those with mobility issues.
- b) Biodiversity – the ashes path has been a challenge to keep weed-free, and the only viable method has been the use of herbicides.
- c) Crime & Disorder – There have been reports of items being stolen from the graves.

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.

The offer of multiple burial options is important for residents of Witney to ensure their burial wishes are honoured. If further burial plots are not added by summer 2026, this will be an option that Witney Town Council cannot offer.

Option 3 would not be the only option for grave purchasers, so individual headstone choice would still be available via other options.

Financial implications

- Option 2, The cost of 20 glass reinforced concrete vaults is £3,960.
- Option 3, Utilises a vault in Option 2 as well as an additional cost of £585 each for the above ground elements, it's recommended these are installed in blocks, Therefore the cost to the Council for the purchase of each block of 20 would be £15,660
- Due to the preinstallation both options 2 and 3, the interment fee could be reduced as the time spent by Town Council staff on the day of interment is less.
- Option 3 could also offer customers further savings as there would be no need for the purchase of a memorial stone or to pay the fee for the permission to erect a memorial.
- Officers are yet to obtain a quote for the path.

Recommendations

Member are invited to note the report and

1. Instruct officers to obtain quotes on the required path for the next Halls Cemeteries & Allotments committee meeting on the 10 November 2025;
2. Consider the options outlined in the report for the new ashes section at Windrush Cemetery and allocate an appropriate budget for the 2026-27 financial year (options 2 and 3 would require an outlay budget of up to approximately £15,660 but this would be recouped over time through the purchase of the graves).