
Agenda Item: Cemetery & Burial Regulations Review

Meeting Date: Monday 8 June 2026

Contact Officer: Committee Clerk

Background

The cemetery regulations outline the processes and rules Witney Town Council follow as the Burial authority in Witney. These regulations are written in accordance with rules, acts and legislations for the management of burial grounds and guidance from The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management. These regulations are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure they remain current and in line with changes in legislation.

Current Situation

Officers are currently carrying out a review which will include rewording and reformatting sections of the document following feedback from Funeral Directors, Memorial Mason's, Friends of the Cemeteries and users of the cemeteries in order that they are understood and interpreted correctly.

A copy of the Current Regulations is attached as Appendix A.

Scattering of Ashes

The Council is receiving an increasing number of requests for the scattering of ashes within existing grave plots where interments have already taken place, including plots located along the Windrush Cemetery Ashes Path.

While such requests provide families with an additional means of respectfully laying loved ones to rest, they also raise important considerations that must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. These include the current use of the grave, ownership rights, and any potential future use of the plot.

It is important to emphasise that cemeteries are regulated spaces and are therefore subject to specific rules designed to preserve dignity, order, and the interests of all users. The scattering of ashes is not an automatic right; as the land is not privately owned by the individual making the request, permission must always be sought from the burial authority. Such controls ensure that appropriate records are maintained, environmental considerations are managed, and the sanctity of the site is respected.

Practices vary some neighbouring burial authorities, such as Didcot, Abingdon and Oxford City, prohibit the scattering of ashes within their cemeteries. In contrast, Witney Town Council has historically adopted a less restrictive approach, recognising the importance of providing flexible and affordable options to bereaved families, whilst ensuring full legal compliance.

Given the increasing frequency of such requests, and the need for consistency and clarity in decision-making, it is proposed that the relevant section of the cemetery regulations be reviewed and updated. This will ensure that applicants understand the requirement to seek permission, the criteria that will be applied, and any conditions attached to approval.

Members are therefore invited to consider this matter and indicate whether they support the strengthening and clarification of the Council's regulatory framework.

Officers will present revised regulations to the Committee at its meeting on 14 September 2026.

Corporate Strategy

The Council's Strategic Plan 2025–29 sets out the Council's long-term priorities and direction, supporting its mission to 'make Witney a great place to live, work and visit.' This report contributes to the delivery of the following strategic pillar of the plan:

4. A Respectful Community

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 Cemeteries offer options to religious beliefs and burial practices found in Witney.
- b) Biodiversity – There is a wildflower meadow at Windrush Cemetery, and the middle section of Tower Hill is part of a rewilding maintenance programme.
- c) Crime & Disorder – Rules are in place at cemeteries and supported by signage. Any antisocial behaviour or acts are encouraged by council staff to be reported to the police directly so that they may build up a record of occurrences.

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.

Social Value

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

Financial implications

There are no additional financial implications to the council from the review of the Cemetery regulations.

Recommendations

1. Members are invited to note the report and
2. Consider supporting the officer-led review and subsequent revision of the cemetery regulations relating to the scattering of ashes, in order to provide greater clarity, consistency, and appropriate control over such requests and,
3. Provide any further recommendations to be considered by Officers during the review.