

HALLS AND GREEN SPACES COMMITTEE

Date: Monday 9th March 2020
Title: Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards Update
Contact Officer: Operations and Estates Officer – John Hickman

BACKGROUND

The purpose of this report is to update members on the current position within the cemeteries and closed church yards.

Tower Hill Cemetery

The family ashes section is almost full there are currently only 20 plots remaining. There are also 26 graves on section 8 that are not able to be dug due to the level of rock - these could also be used as family ashes graves.

The area below section 9 that was intended for burial, but again the rock levels are too high to be able to dig graves - this area could also be used as family ashes plots and would be known as section 3.

Currently the area that would be section 3 is used by the works team to store grave digging equipment and topsoil for topping graves up. The Operations and Estates Officer would ask that this area is now cleared over the coming months with alternative storage being found for the equipment and topsoil, and the area then prepared and allowed to establish in preparation for future use as a family ashes area.

Windrush Cemetery Wildflower Meadow Burial Area

Council has resolved previously on 11th November 19 minute no H445 b)

.... that the meadow burial area of the Windrush Cemetery be cultivated with yellow rattle and that the possibility of using seed bombs on individual graves is explored. Officers should make contact with Earthwatch to see if they could help in this respect.

There is a lot of work involved in removing approx. 50% of the grass from this area in preparation for the sowing of the yellow rattle seed. The Operations and Estates Officer has discussed the required preparation prior to seeding works with the Council's grounds contractors. The area is due for its bi-annual cut and collect at the end of March early April. During this process Continental Landscapes has agreed to reduce the height of cut in the area to be seeded as low as possible and remove approx. 50% off the grass cover with their equipment at the same time as carrying out the bi-annual grass cut. Continental Landscapes will make no additional charge for carrying this work out or disposing of the associated removed materials.

Enough yellow rattle seed will need to be purchased to cover this area approx. 200sqm in order to carry these works out. The cost for 1kg yellow rattle seed previously was £174 plus VAT, there is currently very little grounds maintenance budget 302/4037 remaining for this year with a budget of only £100 annually the Operations and Estates Officer asks that council agree to purchase the yellow rattle seed by agreeing a supplementary estimate (to be funded from the general reserve) in order to proceed with the works this spring.

As this is an existing burial area the operations and Estates Officer will request the Cemeteries Administrator contact grave owners to inform them of the intended works.

Signage will also be displayed on the notice board and the immediate area explaining the process being carried out and the intended outcome.

The Witney Land Army will also be contacted to see if they are able to assist with any remaining preparations of the area and to carry out the seeding process once the main preparation works are complete.

Windrush Cemetery New Burial Section.

The Operations and Estates Officer will be marking out the next two burial sections in the near future. There is no further space available after these two sections for future sections without affecting the possible future infrastructure. Therefore, the Operations and Estates Officer would advise councillors of the urgent need to develop a plan for future roads/services burial sections for this cemetery. Given the potential development in the area of Cogges and access/accessibility issues Officers suggest that professional advice is sort on the best layout for the future of the Cemetery – this was always the intention because of the impact the previous Cogges Link road development would have on the site.

St Mary's Churchyard Damaged Wall Pillars/Arch Current Position

Council are aware of the damages caused to St Mary's church entrance pillars/arch and also the wall by vehicles recently.

The wall area damaged by the drunk driver in a car is being dealt with by the police a quote for repair has been gained from OG Stonemasons for £3650 + VAT and £95 per sqm any additional stone rubble + £395 per LM + £261 + VAT for a faculty. This could become more expensive if the Diocese request changes in how the work is to be carried out or the specification.

The driver has been charged and the police have been requested to try to claim £4,000 from the driver for repairs.

The damage to the Arch and the Pillars, the Arch has been removed for Health and Safety reasons and also to aid access to the church for funeral processions.

The cost of the arch removal was £1,360 + VAT council has also had to pay an interim faculty fee of £261 + VAT

OG Stonemasons have provided a quote to carry out the re-instatement works of £3,260 + VAT + £200 for new stone if required and £200 for county council licenses if required. A full Faculty would also be required for these works of £261 + VAT as well. This quote does not include charge for fencing as required or tower scaffold WTC will provide both of these items.

The Insurance company have been told we have a reserve of £6,000 for these works.

Council will probably need to pay for both of these works and then try to claim the sums back from the respective insurance and compensation. Councils estimated sum that will be required for both these works is £9,000 – at the time of writing this report it does appear that this will be covered by the third-party insurances – however if they do dispute then the Council will have to fund the works accordingly.

St Mary's Church Yard Boundary Wall Current Position

The Survey of the wall was carried out just before Christmas. The Operations and Estates Officer has been in touch with the surveyor and they have stated that the report is in 3 sections one for each side wall and is currently being written up, if received prior to this meeting the Operations and Estates Officer will have copies available for councillors to view.

T583 Cedar of Lebanon St Mary's Churchyard

Members will recall from previous reports that the company commissioned to carry out the bat survey last year did not fulfil the order and therefore the Operations and Estates Officer has re-commissioned the survey which is to be carried out by Lockhart Garrot in May. The results of the survey will determine what action can be taken next regarding this tree.

The tree suffers from un-expected branch failures it has been fully inspected and reports provided previously. It had initially been the intention that the tree would be monolithed

however following conversation with the WODC Tree Conservation Officer he recommended WTC should cut the tree down and plant a replacement of the same type, because of the ongoing costs associated with maintaining what would be left if it was a monolith.

A quote to cut the tree down to 2m from ground was gained for approx. however this was some time ago so would no longer be valid and would need to be requested.

Once the results of the Bat survey are provided the Operations and Estates Officer will bring these to council with recommendations as to how WTC should proceed regards this tree going forward.

An additional budget amount of £8,000 was originally set the Operations and Estates Officer requests this remain in place, to fund works once final decisions as to how the tree will be dealt with are made.

A faculty will also be required for any works to be carried out on this tree cost currently for a faculty is £261 + VAT

Memorial Stability Testing St Mary's and Holy Trinity Churchyards

The Cemeteries Officer is in the process of applying for a faculty for these works.

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.

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.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is hoped that the associated costs to repair the pillars/steel arch and wall to the front of St Mary's church yard will be covered by the third-party insurance but Council should be mindful of the possibility of not being able to recover the full £9,000 and this would have to be met from reserves.

The associated cost of 1kg yellow rattle seed £180 via a supplementary estimate from the general reserve.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

- The preparation of Tower Hill section 3 for family ashes as detailed in the report.
- The purchase of 1kg yellow rattle seed for £180 in Windrush Cemetery.
- That Officers seek professional advice on the development of a plan for the future infrastructure and burials within Windrush Cemetery.
- Provision of a £9,000 in order for WTC to carry out the required repairs to St Marys churchyard pillars/arch and boundary wall from recent vehicular damage.