

**HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE MEETING OF THE
WITNEY TOWN COUNCIL**

Held on Monday, 8 March 2021

At 6.00 pm in the Virtual Meeting Room via Zoom

Present:

Councillor M Jones (Chair)

Councillors:	J Aitman	L Duncan
	L Ashbourne	V Gwatkin
	T Ashby	J King
	O Collins	
Officers:	Sharon Groth	Town Clerk
	John Hickman	Operations & Estates Advisor
Others:	None.	

H107 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence at the meeting.

H108 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no interests declared by members at the meeting.

H109 MINUTES - 18 JANUARY 2021

The Committee received and considered the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments meeting held on 18 January 2021.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 18 January 2021 were a true and correct of the meeting and should be signed by the Chair.

H110 MATTERS ARISING - 18 JANUARY 2021

There were no matters arising from the minutes of the Halls, Cemeteries & Allotments Committee meeting held on 18 January 2021.

H111 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no members of public present at the meeting.

H112 **CORN EXCHANGE WORKING PARTY MINUTES**

Members received and considered the minutes of the Corn Exchange Working Party held on 1 March 2021.

The Chair of the Working Party, Cllr Collins drew particular attention to its request for a supplementary budget of £2,000 towards consultancy fees, towards the construction supervision of the Corn Exchange Main Hall refurbishment.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Corn Exchange Working Party held on 1 March 2021 and the recommendations contained therein be approved.

H113 **OPERATIONAL REPORT**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations & Estates Advisor which offered updates on the progress of improvements and repairs since the last meeting.

Members heard that there was an additional update on the Town Hall building. Surveyors had asked to inspect the beams and walls to understand the extent of any beetle infestation.

The Chair asked that it be noted that the Cemetery was looking cleaner, tidier and safer following some remedial work to the hedges. It was agreed that thanks should be sent to the works team and the contractors, Continental Landscapes.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

H114 **CEMETERIES UPDATE**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations & Estates Advisor concerning closed churchyards at St Mary's and Holy Trinity churches and imminent stability testing of graves.

Stability testing would be taking place shortly so officers advised exclusive right of burial owners would be notified in ample time. Previously, several methods had been used including, social media, the newspaper and an open day where the testing was carried out in front of grave owners. The Friends of the Cemeteries Group would be asked to also advertise on its platforms.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

H115 **TOWER HILL CEMETERY ACCESS**

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations & Estates Advisor concerning pedestrian and vehicular access at Tower Hill Cemetery.

Members heard that a consultation on the proposed pedestrian access at the top end of the cemetery would be opening in the following week. Exclusive Right of Burial owners with graves

in the vicinity would be written to before fliers were delivered to residents on Smith's Estate the following week. There had been no response from the Diocese of Oxford as to whether permission would be needed to go through the wall but if these two items affirmed the project, it would be able to proceed quite quickly.

Members also received the external report on DDA compliance and access at the Cemetery. The report was welcomed by the committee and there were no urgent items. However, future changes would be required along with those pointed out in the Town Council's risk assessment.

There was hope that the cemetery could be open for access every day of the year from 9am to 4pm, except Christmas Day which would provide a wider spread of visiting times. The bollard would remain for the time being, and booked out during the week, while any changes were adjusted to and because of concerns regarding the top loop arrangements.

It was recommended that vehicle access remained the same until the needs were costed, prioritised and sent to the Open Spaces Strategy for review.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted: and,
2. That the vehicular access at Tower Hill remains as it is at present until the recommendations in the audit can be implemented; and,
3. That the recommendations of the audit are reviewed as part of the Open Spaces Strategy; and,
4. That Officers evaluate the requirements to budget and prioritise them ahead of the next meeting of this committee; and,
5. That Officers obtain quotes for these works.

RECOMMENDED:

6. That an underspend of the maintenance budget 4036/301 be rolled over towards these works in 2021/22.

H116 ALLOTMENTS UPDATE

The Committee received and considered the report of the Operations & Estates Advisor advising of updates on Windrush Place and Lakeside allotments. There were also requests for equipment and maintenance at the Windrush Place, Newland and Farmers Close sites.

Members heard that the Windrush Place allotments should be handed over to the Allotment Association at the end of April. 55 sheds, including two disabled units, at a cost of £22,000 for delivery and installation would be erected soon along with 55 rainwater butts and 6 standpipes. Water troughs would not be provided and although the water butt could be filled from the standpipes, allotments would not be permitted to be watered in that way. A small Community-use building on the site would cost approximately £3,000.

A member noted that allotments sheds should not be used for anything other than to store allotment equipment. Previously, some allotment holders had used them as storage extension to their homes. It was noted that this should form part of their terms and conditions and could be reviewed as part of lease negotiations.

The Committee was advised that Windrush Place and Lakeside representatives had requested communal compost areas. The Council had hoped to utilise compost bins already bought but had costed these larger communal 3-bay areas, made from oak sleepers at approximately £3,000 each. Members agreed that providing the funding was available these seemed a reasonable request to help meet the Council's green initiatives.

A new boundary fence had been requested at the Hailey Road/Farmers Close site and members were advised that the current one was reviewed in 2019 and was in poor condition. It was agreed that Officers should obtain quotes for a 6ft green paladin fence, to provide new vehicle and pedestrian entrances.

Representatives from the Newland site had approached the Council, requesting the provision of a secure metal shed to store equipment for boundary maintenance they were obliged to carry out at the site, costing approximately £1,200. Members agreed this was a sensible suggestion, providing a budget could be sought.

The Town Clerk confirmed there was an earmarked reserve for providing new and improving existing allotments where these requests could be funded from. It was noted there were currently 160-170 names on the waiting list for allotments so further land should be considered from this funding if it became available.

Members also heard that flooding at Lakeside allotments, already an annual issue, appeared to be getting worse year on year. It was agreed that professional advice would be required on how this could be rectified, with the Environment Agency also being contacted.

RESOLVED:

1. That the report be noted; and,
2. That the provision of sheds at Windrush Place allotments be noted; and
3. That the provision of 3 bay composting areas at both Lakeside and Windrush Place allotments be agreed; and,
4. That the request from Newland Allotments for a secure metal shed to store maintenance equipment be agreed; and,
5. That Officers present quotes for new boundary fencing at Farmer's Close allotments at the next meeting of the committee; and,
6. That Officers seek advice from professionals and the Environment Agency concerning flooding at Lakeside allotments.

H117 **LAKESIDE ALLOTMENTS ACCESS ROAD**

The Committee received correspondence from a resident concerning access to Lakeside allotments from Witney Road, Ducklington.

Members heard this had been an issue before and a sign was erected to avoid this happening many years ago. There were several historical points on the access made and it was noted that a number of those accessing the lake this way were residents of Ducklington coming to Witney, not just allotment holders. It was agreed that further investigation was needed before a final decision on actions could be made.

RESOLVED:

1. That the correspondence be noted; and,
2. That the matter be delegated to the Town Clerk to formulate a solution based on consultation with others, including Ducklington Parish Council.

The meeting closed at: 6.50 pm

Chair