

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 12 July 2021

Title: Closed Church Yards - Grass cutting

Contact Officer: Operations & Estates Advisor - John Hickman

Background

Contact has recently been received from the Churches of the Witney Parish. They have recently set up a Benefice Environmental group covering the churches of St Mary the Virgin and Holy Trinity Churches that are maintained by Witney Town Council as closed churchyards.

Their aim is to work towards Eco Church Status and at St Mary's and Holy Trinity this would include some consideration of the ecological value and potential of the church yard.

Current Situation

The Operations and Estates Advisor and the Maintenance and Environmental Services Officer met on site with the representative from the Church regarding the maintenance to the churchyard carried out by Witney Town Council to look at what might be possible within the current churchyard maintenance carried out by Witney Town Council to assist in working towards Eco Church Status.

The church was asking what could be done to reduce the grass cutting within the churchyards to increase the ecological value of the areas. It was thought that the grass cutting to the rear area of St Mary's Churchyard and Holy Trinity could be reduced to twice yearly cuts spring and autumn and this would possibly provide a saving on the grounds contract to the Town Council whilst improving the ecological value of the areas. The areas to the front of both churches would remain on the same grass cutting specification.

It was thought that the outer areas abutting footpaths and boundary lines should also be cut approx. 1m wide monthly to show that the area was left intentionally uncut and to ensure long grass did not lay over onto boundary footpaths etc.

The Church would also make their parishioners etc. aware of the reasons for changing the cutting regimes for these areas.

The Operations and Estates Advisor has requested the grounds contractors provide the reduction in the costings to account for the changes to the contract specifications.

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. The reduced grass cutting in this area will have a positive impact on the biodiversity of the Churchyards.

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. There are no risks to the Council associated with this proposal.

Financial implications

There will be a possible reduction in cost from the grounds contractors.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider if this proposal may go ahead.