

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 12 July 2021

Title: Tower Hill Cemetery - DDI Audit Access Requirements

Contact Officer: Maintenance & Environmental Services Officer - Angus Whitburn

Background

On the request of the council, a disability access audit was conducted at Tower Hill Cemetery. This was to better understand the requirements for better disability access to the cemetery. This was due to the council discussions of vehicular access and the installation of an additional pedestrian gate.

The audit was conducted on the 25th of January 2021. The current situation around vehicular access and the new pedestrian route was explained to the auditor. Numerous recommendations have been highlighted by the report. Some of these recommendations are simple improvements such as better mapping, others are more drastic and possibly not feasible.

The audit was only an investigation into Tower Hill's disability access compliance. And although it does note health and safety risk's it was not a full review.

Current Situation

The report flagged multiple signage issues around vehicular access and parking. These have been brought to the attention of the council by the Operations and Estates Advisor. Signage for blue badges holders, parking and parking bays will be ordered and scheduled for installation before the end of summer.

The audit has raised recommendations around improvements to the steep paths in the cemetery. In particular, the path leading from the kissing gate near the unconsecrated chapel to the top of the cemetery is an incline of 1:7. Paths should have gradients no steeper than 1:12 and handrails should be provided for any slopes more than 1:20.

The slope bears a high health and safety risk to all users of the cemetery. During icy weather, the slope is extremely difficult to traverse and it's often easier to climb the grass bank. For elderly visitors and those with mobility issues, the bank presents a high risk from associated injuries received from a fall.

Improving the accessibility from the Tower Hill Road side of the cemetery would benefit a large user group. Also for those that currently use this entrance, it would help keep the

cemetery feasible for them into the future. The current issue around pedestrian access does seem to have stemmed from cemetery users that traditionally used this entrance. And due to the accessibility issues around the gradient of the slope have ceased to use it.

The feedback from the consultation process was generally not in favour of a new pedestrian entrance. Improving the accessibility from the Tower Hill Road entrance would be less impactful and it wouldn't be expected any objection would be received.

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.

Improving pedestrian access to the cemetery will hopefully encourage more to walk to the cemetery. For those that use enter the cemetery from the Tower Hill Road Side and now perhaps drive this entrance is now more viable for them reducing short journeys in cars.

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.

Witney Town Council is aware of the risk associated with the steep slope and should take action to limit its liability if an accident was to happen.

The slope is traversable with buggies and wheelchairs. Visitors to the cemetery and those that use it as a public footpath may miss the slope if removed and the council could come under criticism for its removal.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- The council have already agreed to roll the maintenance budget from 2020-21 into the budget for 2021-22 for the purchase of signage.
- Officers are seeking quotes from Hard Landscapers to install steps and will update councillors if provided before the Halls, Cemeteries and Allotments meeting.

Recommendations

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

1. It is recommended that officers and councillors consult with only those that have requested pedestrian access from Smiths Estate. The goal of this would be to understand that if improvements to the Tower Hill Road entrance would be more beneficial than an additional entrance.

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2. If an agreement is reached to install a new pedestrian entrance then officers are to research and complete remedial work to make the area safer but not more accessible through the use of steps.