

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 23 May 2022

Title: Tower Hill New Family Ashes Section

Contact Officer: Maintenance & Environmental Services Officer - Angus Whitburn

Background

It is well known that Tower Hill cemetery is close to capacity and has been for the last few years, available for pre-purchased burials only. The cemetery has a small number of remaining family ashes plots left to but all full interment grave spaces have been purchased. Apart from the possibility of removing paths and finding small spaces for additional graves the final section of Tower Hill cemetery is now ready to mark out and sell for burial, Section 3.

Current Situation

Section info

Section 3 is located below section 9 above the scattering beds in the north end of the upper cemetery. Due to the high level of the bedrock encounter near the bottom of section 9 and parallel in section 8, this section has been designated for family ashes plots only.

Plot Sizes

All current burial plot sizes in Tower hill are set at 2.75m x 1.20m, this is standard across the upper sections of the cemetery. The same plot size is used both for full burial plots and family ashes plots. One problem this does present in not a single family ashes plot has reached capacity since around 1952 when they were first created. The average amount of ashes interments into each plot is around 2, and the capacity of each plot is 8.

It is proposed that a new smaller sized plot of 1.8m x 1.2m be created for section 3 to increase the total amount of grave plots available for purchase in the cemetery. By reducing the plot size it increases the number of plots available in the section and still offers a capacity for ashes interments that is acceptable to purchasers and has never been utilised in the past. The reduced plot size would reduce the maximum capacity from 8 to 6.

Exclusive Rights of Burial

Simply put, the exclusive rights of burial gives a person the right to say who can be buried in a grave. The current exclusive rights of burial for Tower hill cemetery are 75 years. Once expired an owner can repurchase extending the rights for further burials. If they chose not to

extend the rights and there are remaining plots within the grave space the space can be reutilised for burials by the council.

It is proposed that the exclusive right of burial for Tower Hill's family ashes plots be reduced to a period of 30 years. This will open availability to future ashes interments at Tower Hill at an earlier date but still offer an exclusive right of burial period which is acceptable to mourners. This will help reduce the pressure on Windrush cemetery to accommodate all burials in the future and bring forward and extend the useable lifespan of Tower Hill cemetery.

This move would only affect ashes interments as full burials at tower hill are only dug to a single depth so it's not possible to inter any more full burials. It would also not affect anyone's current exclusive rights of burials only those purchasing in the new section and the few last remaining ashes plots. Any future renewal of exclusive rights of burial to extend burial rights would also be set at 30 years.

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.

Although it is a distant future, decisions made now would help to reduce the need to look for more burial grounds. This could be ground that vital green space in the future.

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.

Although from research into surrounding burial grounds, the reduction to 30 years seems fair it could of course receive criticism. For example, although not exclusively applicable those buried at a younger age would natural be mourned for a longer period. But the decision is still with the exclusive right of burial holder to extend those rights again.

Within recommendations made in this report, the council has the opportunity to increase the lifespan of Tower Hill cemetery and make available more burial plots at the present time. And also more plots within an approximate 30-year period. The detriment of not making adjustments at Tower Hill would increase the reliance on Windrush and speed up its usable lifespan.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- By reducing the plot size, it is increasing the total amount of family ashes plots, thus the sale of more exclusive rights of burial. This will increase the income from burials to the council from tower hill cemetery. This may be useful income to the council as the

operational life of tower hill is reduced year by year but still requires the same level of maintenance and relative expenditure.

- The reduced plot size accompanied by the reduced exclusive rights of burial would also ensure a quicker turnaround of plots, income from burials and further sale of exclusive rights of burial.

Recommendations

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

1. Choose to remain with the current plot size of 2.75m x 1.20m or reduce it to 1.8m x 1.2m for section 3.
2. Set the new period of exclusive rights of burial at Tower Hill to 30 years to help extend the useability of the cemetery or alternatively keep in place the current 75-year period.
3. Consider delegating officers to research if similar alterations at Windrush cemetery are needed and report back to Councillors.