

## HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

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**Date:** Monday, 23 May 2022

**Title:** Windrush Cemetery Archaeological Remains

**Contact Officer:** Operations & Estates Advisor - John Hickman

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### **Background**

Windrush Cemetery opened in 2004 and is approx. 3 hectares/7.7 acres in size approx. Just under 1/3, 2.1 acres of the site is not to be used for burials and is currently to remain open in character affording views of Witney, this is due to the archaeological remains in this area. An archaeological evaluation of the site was carried out in May 2000 and an archaeological watching brief in June 2003.

The cemetery when originally opened was thought to have sufficient space in the available burial space for an estimated 75 years of interments.

In recent years grave plot sizes at Windrush Cemetery have increased by 1/3 due to ground water issues and stability which has reduced the expected capacity of the available space in the cemetery by approx. 1/3. Interments numbers annually remain approximately the same as in 2004, therefore the burial numbers within this cemetery will have reduced the cemetery to an estimated 50 years of interments.

### **Current Situation**

Currently a small part of the area is maintained as part of the meadow area, with the majority of the area being maintain as monthly cut grass.

The Operations and Estates Advisor has contacted the County Archaeologist to ask if there is any possibility the area could be used for ashes interments, columbarium etc. or if there is anything that can be done to make the area usable for burials.

The County Archaeologist has said that there is the option to undertake a program of archaeological excavation across the area of this Roman settlement to mitigate these remains in advance of burials. Once this has been done there would be no further archaeological constraints to the use of the site as a cemetery, however these types of works can be expensive.

Given the difficulty and cost of finding and purchasing burial land currently the expectation that this will only get more difficult and expensive over time. The Operations and Estates Advisor has contacted several companies advised by the County Archaeologist that provide these types of services, including the company that carried out the original watching brief

regarding quotes to carry this excavation work out for councils' consideration. 4 companies have responded and requested further info which has been provided and will hopefully be providing quotes.

It should be noted that should the council decide, after receiving quotes for the archaeological excavation works, they would like to proceed with these works, then guidance should be sought first from WODC planning to ensure that planning would agree to a change of use for that area of the cemetery.

Two quotes have so far been received from the companies - both are substantial and have been provide as appendices to this report. It is hoped that the other two companies will provide their quotes in the near future.

Given what are liable to be substantial costs to mitigate these remains, the council may wish to look at research other possibilities as to what this area might be used for other than burial, ashes etc. However, given the items raised by the County Archaeologist regarding the depth of these remains etc. it may prove difficult to find many suitable uses.

### **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.

Extending the life expectancy of the existing cemetery would mitigate the risk of council's liability to find another burial ground for approx. 20 more years.

### **Financial implications**

- As highlighted within the report and appendices.
- There is no budget for archaeological works at Windrush Cemetery.
- The Council holds an EMR (327) for the future internal layout/access roads which currently stands at £93,000.

### **Recommendations**

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

1. Deferring any decisions until the reaming quotes are received.
2. If it wants Officers to continue looking at mitigating the archaeological remains to enable the area to be used for burial.
3. Researching other possible uses for the area.
4. Leaving are area as it is at present including the present maintenance regime.