

**Minutes of the Cemetery Committee meeting held on Thursday 22nd January 2015
in the Mechanics Institute, Percy Street, Alnwick at 7.00pm**

Present: Cllrs D Farrar (Chairman), K Moore, S Mavin, M Swinbank, A Symmonds and Cllr D Dargie (Denwick Parish Council).

In attendance: W Batey, Chief Officer and Town Clerk, J Pibworth, Administration Assistant

CEM 14/42 Apologies

Councillors S Allcroft, P Allcroft and J Humphries.

CEM 14/43 Declarations of Interest

None.

CEM 14/44 Cemetery Activity, 2014/15 budget update

The Clerk circulated the Cemetery year to date activity data as at January 22nd 2015. So far in 2014/15 there have been 37 burials and 9 ashes interred. Out of the 37 burials, 21 had resulted in new plots being purchased whilst 6 new plots had been purchased without burial (3 in the old part of the cemetery, 1 in the new part and 1 in the ashes area). The Chapel had been used on 10 occasions and 10 burials had an out of parish surcharge. There had also been 3 burials for children.

These figures compare with the 2013/14 outturn figures of 42 burials and 6 ashes interred. The expected outturn figures for 2014/15 are predicted to be higher than last year.

The Town Clerk circulated the 2014/15 Cemetery Income, Expenditure and Estimates sheet as at January 22nd 2015 which showed expenditure at £40,137.76 and income at £26,135. He commented on certain items:

Expenditure: Wages - slight increase due to the pay award in January 2015; Machine Repairs - the figure is higher than budgeted due to a couple of large bills for repairs on cutter and tractor; Building repairs - paid for fencing and alarm maintenance in the period; Grounds - currently well below the budgeted figure but will increase once the trees survey is received; New Area - currently down on budget but costs will increase significantly once the paths are done. Any budget not spent this year in this area will be carried forward into 2015/16.

Income: Will increase as there had been one funeral already during that week and two booked in for the following week so income by end of next week will be in the region of £28,500.

The Town Clerk advised that the year-end expenditure will be roughly in line with the budget whilst income should be slightly higher than budgeted.

RESOLVED: To receive the budget figures and update.

CEM 14/45 New Cemetery Area (Ground water audit, design update & delivery plan)

Ground water audit - The Town Clerk gave an update. He issued the latest monitoring data and reminded councillors of the colour coding:

White - suitable for double burials

Yellow - suitable for single burials

Green - unsuitable for any burials

The latest monitoring data from the test pits done on January 20th all showed Green. Councillor Moore asked how long the monitoring would be done. The Town Clerk advised that we needed to get a whole' year's data and that another monitoring would take the following week.

Councillor Farrar asked if the Town Clerk had feedback from BOLD Environmental about shallower burials. The Town Clerk confirmed that he did not have an update but would send BOLD the ICCM document about suitability of different soil types for shallower burials for their comments.

Councillor Moore asked if the interest in being able to do shallower burials was to do with digging the graves. Councillor Farrar advised that it was due to the fact that most of our burials are double burials so it would be useful if more of the new area could be used for double burials.

Councillor Symmonds felt that 2 foot plus the coffin was very shallow for any burials. He also felt he needed to raise the issue of fees as he thought it important to phase in increases in charges over a number of years bringing them in line with NCC charges to ensure the cemetery was self-financing. Councillor Farrar advised that the gap between income and expenditure was closing and should be close in 6-7 years time.

Councillor Symmonds confirmed that costs should be increased over a number of years.

Councillor S Mavin agreed with Councillor Symmonds and felt that the Town Council should have plans to bring fees in line with other cemeteries in the county with a view to not making any loss.

Councillor Farrar agreed with Councillor Symmonds and felt the Town Council should look to set a date by which the cemetery would break even.

Councillor Moore asked which cemeteries break even at the moment. The Town Clerk advised that he had all the costs including church cemeteries and some of the NCC cemeteries break even as do some cemeteries in the west of the county. Councillor Moore felt increasing fees would make sense.

Councillor Swinbank commented that some of the costs were only associated with the new area would not be every year. He wouldn't want the Town Council to increase cemetery fees when this was not needed.

Councillor Symmonds felt he needed to raise the issue of fees because the Town Council needed to maintain their cemetery as it was a widely used facility in Alnwick. Councillor Farrar felt that this should be discussed again during the year and suggested adding to the agenda in September.

Design update and delivery plan

Trees - Councillor Farrar and the Admin Assistant had a meeting at the new area of the cemetery to confirm trees required. A list was issued showing the 64 trees and shrubs that were being ordered for the new area at a cost of £941. Trees will be delivered bare rooted so can be kept until the soil warms up, if needed. The plan is to place two separate tree orders with the first being delivered for planting by the end of March.

Paths - the Town Clerk confirmed that a meeting had taken place with Sanders of Pegswood who confirmed they offer an eco-friendly product called Green Pave. This is made from recycled tarmac and cost less than normal tarmac. They have submitted quotes for the 3 areas of paths required in the new area which total £7,717. He also confirmed that the Town Council only needed to give 2 weeks' notice to start the work.

Councillor Moore asked if we had a specification for the path. The Town Clerk confirmed that he had and that the new paths would be 150mm thick including 50mm of Greenpave.

The Town Clerk also confirmed that the Cemetery Superintendent was ready to move the hedge across to Willowburn and make the hole in the existing beech hedge into the new area.

Councillor Swinbank asked if the Town Clerk had resolved the issue of moving the bench. The Town Clerk advised that he had no contact information for the family concerned but that the bench would be moved to the top of the next path so would still be close to the grave.

Councillor Symmonds proposed that all the recommended works were carried out.

RESOLVED: i) To order trees; ii) To make a 2.4m wide opening in the beech hedge into new area; iii) To move the beech hedge 90 degrees towards Willowburn; iv) To advise Sanders to undertake Paths 1 and 2 (Path 3 at later date).

Arches - the Admin Assistant presented the information from the two companies who have sent in quotes. Both had recommended galvanised steel arches which need little maintenance. One was for a one off piece of sculpture quoted at £4,300 and the other was engineered steelwork to a standard design quoted at £2,610. It was suggested that budget provision be made in 2016/17 and that designs be produced for review by the committee.

Councillor Symmonds felt the arch needed to be appropriate for its setting and that a reasonable budget needed to be allocated.

Councillor Moore agreed with waiting until 2016/17 to allocate budget.

Councillor Farrar felt that the committee should definitely look at a one off piece of sculpture.

RESOLVED: i) To allocate £4,300 in 2016/17; ii) To produce three designs for the arch to be reviewed by end of 2015/16.

Grave spacing - The Admin Assistant advised the committee that she had done some work on the reduction in the amount of graves in the new area. If the space between graves was increased from 2.6 metres to 2.75m the number of graves available would reduce by around 28. This would mean a potential reduction in income of around £23,240 (based on 2015/16 fees for single burials). Over the life of the cemetery this equates to 4.36% of income or £1,990 per year based on 2015/16 fees.

Councillor Farrar asked the committee for their views on allowing kerbstones in the new area.

Councillor Moore asked if there was a maintenance issue with having them. The Town Clerk advised that currently cemetery rules say that kerbstones are allowed up to 18" beyond the front of the headstone but as all graves do not have them this does cause some practical issues with mowing. There is also the issue of people extending the kerbstone beyond the 18" limit which adds to the issue around ease of mowing. He explained that other cemeteries in the county do not allow kerbstones which gives the cemetery a more open look.

Councillor Moore felt that kerbstones should be allowed but within the parameters that were set and should not be allowed to go outside these. Councillor Symmonds thought that Morpeth cemetery looked bleak and agreed with Councillor Moore about allowing kerbstones.

Councillor Moore moved that the Town Council increase the size of each grave plot to 2.75m long. Councillor Symmonds agreed.

RESOLVED: To increase grave length to 2.75m in the new area.

CEM 14/46 Friends of the Cemetery (FOTC)

The Town Clerk confirmed that the next two meetings of the Friends of the Cemetery would be on the 3rd Saturday in February and March. Jobs are to include tree planting, hedging and general tidying. Ivy needs to be removed from walls but must be done carefully so as not to damage any stonework.

Councillor Swinbank asked if anything could be done about the litter at Willowburn. The Town Clerk confirmed that he would speak to Northumberland Estates (believed to be the landowners) in the first instance.

CEM 14/47 Update on Denwick Parish Council contribution

The Town Clerk reported that he and the Mayor had a meeting with Richard Green (Chairman) and Sue Haughie (Clerk) of Denwick Parish Council to talk about the amount of their contribution to Alnwick Cemetery.

Councillor Moore asked if we had given them a figure. The Town Clerk said a figure had been worked out on the population of Denwick as a % of the combined population of Alnwick and Denwick. Denwick's population is 3.2% of total population so the figure (based on 2013/14 losses) would be £437. The figure could be worked out on Band D properties but this would be 4.6% for Denwick. He informed the committee that he had been invited to attend the next Denwick Parish Council meeting the following week to address

councillors regarding their level of contribution.

RESOLVED: To note the update.

CEM 14/48 Update on possible rebate from NCC

Councillor Farrar reminded the committee that it had been identified that Alnwick and Denwick were paying twice for cemetery services. The Town Clerk added that both the town council and NCC elements of the council tax both charge for cemetery costs. He advised councillors that NCC had proposed a rebate and that their calculations indicate that Alnwick would get £605 and Denwick £26.50 per annum. This would be backdated to 2009 (5 years) and would mean that Alnwick would get a rebate of around £3,025.

The Town Clerk reported that at an NCC meeting attended by the Mayor he was advised that this would be approved under delegated authority. The Town Clerk also informed councillors that the annual rebate for the next two years would be based on the same calculations, but these did not take into account any capital work at the cemetery.

RESOLVED: To accept the update.

CEM 14/49 Tree Survey

The Town Clerk issued sample pages from the Tree Survey Report which will be completed in the next few days. The company carrying out the survey will give the Town Council a full list of all the trees on a spreadsheet plus a map showing all the trees in addition to the report itself. The report will give recommendations identifying trees which need removing or need work.

Councillor Moore asked how much the survey had cost? The Town Clerk advised that it had cost £800 which was more than last time but this company were doing a more comprehensive job and had all the necessary liability insurance cover.

Councillor Symmonds felt it was a very good survey which would be very useful in the future.

RESOLVED: To note the update on the tree survey.

CEM 14/50 Woodland Burial Area

The Town Clerk informed the committee that the proposed area for the 'green' burial area is the triangular area at the right hand side at top of the main avenue. To give some privacy we would suggest using the remainder of the beech hedging, which isn't used to fill the gap towards Willowburn, to line either side of the path leading from the small gate from Cawledge View.

There are four cherry trees in the suggested green burial area one of which is decaying and the others are beyond their normal life expectancy. To maximise use of this area for burials the suggestion was to remove all four trees and the roots cleared. New cherry trees could then be planted alongside burials to replace the ones removed.

There could be a maximum of 63 burial spaces based on 2.60m spacing.

RESOLVED: i) To use the area at the top of the main avenue as a green burial area ii) To remove the four cherry trees

and clear the roots.

CEM 14/51 Building Works (path, fencing, soakaway, replacement bins)

Path - The Town Clerk reported that the path by the Chapel was likely to be done in the Spring.

Fencing - The Town Clerk reported that this has been completed.

Replacement bins - The contractor has sent in example and price for bin covers but these were felt not to be very practical. The Town Clerk explained that two new bins were needed on the main avenue and issued sheets showing alternative bins. Councillor Swinbank thought that the longer would be better for wreaths. Councillor Moore thought that a fence around the existing could be a solution. The Town Clerk confirmed he would ask the fencing contractor for a price.

RESOLVED: To accept the updates.

CEM 14/52 Fees and Charges for burials of children under 12, living outside the parish

The Town Clerk reported that they had been an out of parish burial of a child under 12. Charges were currently Nil for burial of children under 12 so the out of parish surcharge is also Nil. Councillors felt that it was not unreasonable to reinstate charges for out of parish burials for children under 12 to the level they were at previously. The fee for the burial of a child under 12 (out of parish) would be £160 and the burial rights £250 (2014/15). The charge for burying still born up to one month would remain Nil.

RESOLVED: To revise the out of parish fee for the burial of children under 12 to £250 (burial right) and £160 (burial).

CEM 14/53 Waste Contract

The Town Clerk explained that the Town Council are looking at reducing the number of 1100L bins from two to one for the next financial year. He had enquired at NCC about large compost bins which NCC do not provide but they would provide normal sized bins for green waste at a cost of £130 for 5 bins. Councillor Farrar felt that the Town Council should order 2 bins then review later in the year if more were required.

RESOLVED: To order 2 green bins for 2015/16 and reduce the number of 1100L bins from two to one in 2015/16

CEM 14/54 Any Other Business

None.

Meeting closed at 9.21pm