

**Minutes of the Cemetery Committee meeting held on Thursday 17th September 2015
in the Mechanics Institute, Percy Street, Alnwick at 7.00pm**

Present: Cllrs D Farrar (Chairman), P Allcroft, S Allcroft, S Mavin, K Moore,
M Swinbank and A Symmonds.

In attendance: W Batey, Chief Officer and Town Clerk, J Pibworth, Assistant to the Town
Clerk.

CEM 15/25 Apologies

Cllr John Humphries.

CEM 15/26 Declarations of Interest

None.

CEM 15/27 Questions from the public

None.

CEM 15/28 Cemetery Activity, 2015/16 budget update

ACTIVITY

BURIALS: Town Clerk circulated the Cemetery year to date activity data as at September 17th. So far in 2015/16 there have been 25 burials and 4 ashes interments. Out of these 15 had resulted in new plots being purchased (13 in the new part, one in the ashes area and one in the children's area). 7 new plots have been purchased without burial, 5 in the new part and 2 on the old part. The Chapel had been used on 3 occasions and 3 burials had an out of parish surcharge. The cemetery has seen a quiet two months.

BUDGET

The Town Clerk circulated the 2015/16 Cemetery Income and Expenditure sheet as at September 17th 2015 which showed expenditure at £32,817.49 and income at £22,450.

Expenditure:

Wages – slightly above budget.

Machine repairs - over budget due to repairs on the broken drive shafts on both tractors.

Grounds - slightly up due to extra skips, wire baskets and sweeping of the drive for Alnwick in bloom.

Income is above the expected income at this point.

RESOLVED: To receive the budget figures and update.

CEM 15/29 Consideration of future charges policy

The Assistant to the Town Clerk distributed a sheet to show the breakeven point based on a flat increase of around 10%.

Councillor Symmonds felt that the sheets were helpful. He also felt that in due course all burials should pay for themselves and not be funded by Alnwick residents.

Councillor S Allcroft wondered at what point people say it is too expensive. The Town Clerk advised that Alnwick fees were generally below the level of other cemeteries in the county.

Councillor Swinbank asked what % increase had been used for expenditure. The Assistant to the Town Clerk advised that 2.5% had been used for all costs.

Councillor Symmonds said that he would like to see the figures for cremation across the county. The Town Clerk advised that he will find out.

Councillor S Mavin asked if there had ever had burials for people who have no relatives. The Town Clerk advised that Alnwick Cemetery has a paupers' area.

Councillor S Allcroft asked if the plan was to review the figures year on year. Councillor Farrar replied these would be used as a guideline each year to come up with a recommendation for full council.

RESOLVED: To agree, in principle, that there should be a move to make burials self-financing, taking into account the costs of burials across the county, and to reflect this in the annual recommendation to Full Council regarding fees.

CEM 15/30 New Cemetery Area (Ground water audit, design update, gate provision and delivery plan)

Ground water audit - The Town Clerk gave an update. He advised that there had been a similar trend across the summer. The area around TP04 will be used first and is suitable for double burials

Design update and delivery plan

New area – the Town Clerk reported that the next burial area has been levelled, seeded and grass is coming through. The Town Clerk also confirmed that new burial area will need consecrating by the Bishop of Newcastle.

Hedging - the Town Clerk confirmed that the beech hedge will be moved across towards Willowburn in November. He also reported that three of the trees in front of the hedge don't line up with headstones.

Councillor Farrar felt that the trees were not an issue and that they are screening buildings.

Councillor S Allcroft asked if it was possible to work around the trees. The Town Clerk replied that it was.

Councillor Swinbank reported that he had looked at the trees and that it would be possible to remove the ones most out of line.

Councillor Mavin asked if taking the trees out might cause more problems with the water levels. Councillor Farrar replied that it might. The Town Clerk advised that it might be possible to remove a couple of trees and then replant.

Councillor Farrar advised that a decision be made in November.

Gate from Cawledge View - The Town Clerk reported that this potential gate would be in the area between the unofficial path from Cawledge View and the new area. He reminded councillors that there was already a gate at the other end of Cawledge View into the cemetery.

Councillor Swinbank asked if the Town Council had heard if NCC were putting up a new fence. The Town Clerk replied he had not yet been notified.

Councillor Swinbank suggested that if a gate were put in without a fence it would not be used.

The Town Clerk suggested waiting until the hedge was better established. The area is looking quite good as the grass is being cut lower.

Path – the Town Clerk informed the committee that the path between the gap in the hedge and Cawledge View needed doing in October or after Christmas.

Councillor Swinbank felt that the trees around the 'green' burial area seemed mostly dead. The Town Clerk felt that they might be OK as they had been well watered.

Councillor Farrar reported that there would be some spare hedging when the main hedges are moved.

CEM 15/31 Green burial area

Green Burial Guide - a draft guide had been produced and circulated by Councillor Farrar.

Councillor Farrar felt that the name used for the 'green' burial area needed to be thought about.

Councillor S Allcroft suggested that 'natural' be used.

The Town Clerk suggested that involving families too much could have issues and that involvement could be limited to cutting the first turf.

Councillor Symmonds thought that they could be involved in covering the soil mound after the grave had been filled.

Councillor S Allcroft suggested that families could be given guidelines.

Councillor Symmonds thought that perhaps they could return to flatten the ground after a sufficient length of time.

Layout of green burial area - The Assistant to the Town Clerk issued a grid showing a layout for potential green burials.

Councillor Swinbank asked how often the grass would be cut. The Assistant to the Town Clerk suggested that a path only be kept mowed and that bulbs, chosen by the family, be planted.

Councillor S Allcroft thought they could be planted along the back wall along with the shrubs.

Memorial Stones - Councillor Moore asked if a standard stone could be used. Councillor Farrar said that it could but felt that it needed to a standard size and material.

Councillor Swinbank thought that the Town Council would need to decide on the rules before starting to use the area.

The Town Clerk suggested the Town Council could use plaques of a certain size etc.

Councillor Farrar felt that people should have a choice to some extent. He also felt that trees should not be used on every grave and that the area could be strimmed rather than mowed.

RESOLVED: To look again at the November meeting and obtain more information on memorial stones.

The Assistant to the Town Clerk informed the Committee that she had received an enquiry about green burials and had advised that she would send out further details as they became available. She suggested that the Town Council could ask the enquirer what they expect from a green burial area.

Councillor Moore thought consideration should be given to where people would bury ashes in the green burial area.

Councillor Symmonds felt that more information about products such as coffins should be obtained and that it could be given to people. The Assistant to the Town Clerk indicated that the information could be put onto the Town Council's website as a video link.

CEM 15/32 Replacement trees and new hedging

Councillor Moore advised there was no feedback from the Woodland Trust about the request for new hedging. Councillor Farrar reminded councillors that 105 small hedging plants had been requested. He asked for suggestions as to the location they would be needed. The Town Clerk advised that they could be used to replace any dead hedging.

CEM 15/33 Cemetery Superintendent Post

The Town Clerk distributed a draft job description and reminded councillors that the current Cemetery Superintendant would be in post until the end of March 2016. Councillors were asked to send comments to the Town Clerk.

Councillor Moore noted that there was no mention of hours for the post. The Town Clerk replied that it was 37 hours a week.

Councillor Moore asked when the advert would be in the paper. The Town Clerk replied that the advert could be placed in November.

Councillor Moore asked if the post would be advertised locally. The Town Clerk confirmed that the post would be advertised on the Town Council's website but that he wanted to advertise in Northumberland and the North East.

Councillor S Mavin asked what would happen if the post holder did not want the accommodation. The Town Clerk replied that this would be discussed.

Councillor Farrar felt that it added security to the cemetery. The Town Clerk agreed that it did.

Councillor Symmonds felt that the accommodation was not very big and so may

put some people off. The building could also be used for Council Offices. He also felt that potential applicants should be sent a commentary about Alnwick, the Town Council and the job.

RESOLVED: Comments to the Town Clerk by September 30th 2015. More information to be obtained from other councils about similar job.

Councillor Symmonds thought that other items needed adding to item 11. on the job description. The Town Clerk replied that these were covered in item 15 but that he could strengthen the wording.

Councillor Symmonds also felt that basic maintenance of equipment needed to be added. Councillor Farrar advised that it needed specifying in the job description and job specification. Councillor Moore thought that there was a need to include any certificates required in the person specification.

CEM 15/34 Update on Tree Works

The Town Clerk reported that he had been advised by Terry Garnick (NCC) not to pollard the trees as it would leave the cemetery too stark. A few could be done if needed but he would crown lift and trim the ones overhanging the road.

Councillor S Allcroft asked what pollarding was. The Town Clerk replied that it was to reduce the tree height by 2/3rds.

Councillor S Allcroft felt that this was too harsh.

The Town Clerk reported that more information needed to be obtained from other companies on the need for tree pollarding.

Councillor Symmonds thought that pollarding looked awful.

The Town Clerk advised that a decision would need to be made soon.

Councillor Swinbank asked if the conversation had been had with the company that recommended the pollarding. The Town Clerk replied that it had.

Councillor Farrar asked if crown lifting would need road closure. The Town Clerk replied that it would.

Councillor Swinbank asked what NCC do with their trees. The Town Clerk replied that NCC do not pollard any of their trees.

Councillor S Mavin thought that NCC had their own team.

Councillor Symmonds felt that there was an issue as one expert says to pollard, the other says not. He suggested that the Town Council talk to their insurance company to see if they could recommend someone to speak to.

CEM 15/35 Building Works (path, fencing, soakaway, replacement bins)

Soakaway – still to be done.

Bins - the Town Clerk confirmed that the new wire baskets were in place. The wheelie bin in the new area is being replaced with one made of a wire with wooden surround.

Pointing – the Town Clerk reported that he had received two quotes for pointing. Both were similar and he suggested that the Town Council split the work between the two contractors.

RESOLVED: To split the pointing work between the two contractors.

CEM 15/36 Friends of the Cemetery (FOTC)

The Town Clerk informed the committee that FOTC will be working in the cemetery on September 25th and on the 3rd Saturdays in October and November. They will be tidying up hedging, tidying graves in the current burial area, weeding graves and planting replacement trees.

CEM 15/37 Update on children's area, Glyphosate trial and rabbits in the cemetery

Children's Area – the Town Clerk informed the committee that he had received two complaints about the amount of items in the area such as stars in trees, windmills, butterflies and balloons.

Councillor S Allcroft felt that conversations with parents would not be easy. Would it be possible to start tidying some things away when they start to break.

Councillor Farrar reported that the newest graves have no headstones on them and may be tidied in time.

Councillor Moore asked if the Town Council could limit the time items were kept on graves. The Town Clerk advised that information could be given out when deeds were sent out.

Councillor Moore suggested that parents be allowed to plant bulbs.

Councillor Swinbank thought that it was ok to have items on graves if no complaints were received and this could be for a period of one year.

Glyphosate - The Town Clerk reported to the committee that the Glyphosate trial was being conducted and that strimming had taken place 11 times and grass cutting about 20, with strimming taking 5 hours each time. Costs will be issued at the end of the trial and feedback given in November.

Rabbits – the Town Clerk informed councillors that they had not received any complaints. He reported that Amble have a rabbit problem and that NCC have no issues with rabbits in their cemeteries but do at Carlisle Park in Morpeth.

Councillor Swinbank informed the committee that there was a group at Wooler that does carpentry and makes owl boxes. He suggested the Town Council ask for one for the cemetery and it was agreed to investigate and pursue this.

RESOLVED: To accept the update.

CEM 15/38 Any Other Business

No other business.

Meeting closed at 9.05pm