

**Minutes of the Cemetery Committee meeting held on Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> January 2016  
in the Mechanics Institute, Percy Street, Alnwick at 7.00pm**

**Present:** Cllrs D Farrar (Chairman), P Allcroft, S Allcroft, J Humphries, 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 15/53 Apologies**

None.

**CEM 15/54 Declarations of Interest**

None.

**CEM 15/55 Questions from the public**

None.

**CEM 15/56 Cemetery Activity, 2015/16 budget update**

ACTIVITY

The Town Clerk circulated the Cemetery year to date activity data as at January 20th. He reported that cemetery activity had been very quiet at the end of December and early January. So far in 2015/16 there have been 44 burials. Out of these 22 had resulted in new plots being purchased (18 in the new part, 3 in the ashes area and 1 in the children's area). 8 new plots have been purchased without burial (5 in the new part and 3 on the old part). The Chapel had been used on 5 occasions and 3 burials had an out of parish surcharge.

He advised that the year-end figure should be around 50-55 burials.

BUDGET

The Town Clerk circulated the 2015/16 Cemetery Income and Expenditure sheet as at January 20th 2016 which showed expenditure at £48,777 and income at £30,929.

Expenditure:

Wages - slightly over budget.

Stationery / Phone – includes 9 months phone bills.

Machine repairs – well over budget due to repairs to drive shafts on tractors.

Building repairs - will be about £1,000 under budget.

Grounds – some additional tree work added as trees / branches came down in the high winds.

New area – no expenditure to date but new path included in this budget year.

Income:

Expected to reach the budgeted figure by the end of January 2016. End of figure anticipated to be around £37,000.

**RESOLVED: To receive the budget figures and update.**

**CEM 15/57 Cemetery Superintendent and Cemetery Lodge Update**

The Town Clerk confirmed that a new Cemetery Superintendent had been appointed. He reported that they had a very good set of applications and had shortlisted five people for interview. The interview panel had appointed Ian Hopper who had started in post on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2016. Rob had retired on December 31<sup>st</sup> and had moved out of the Lodge which Ian had moved into. Rob has helped with the last five burials and has agreed to help when needed.

Ian has undertaken JCB digger training and will be formally assessed, by an external assessor, after he has carried out seven burials. Ian has also done the relevant spraying qualifications.

The Lodge – some decorating has been done and the wood burning stove chimney will be swept. Some roof slates also need replacing at the back of the property.

The Town Clerk also advised that a new computer was needed for the Cemetery office which would have email put on it. He also advised that some decoration was also needed in the office.

Councillor Humphries asked about WiFi. The Town Clerk advised that the office did not yet have any internet connection but this would be arranged.

He also confirmed that the phone line in the house had been transferred back to a residential line so that the Cemetery Superintendent could make his own arrangements.

The Town Clerk advised that the water bills are presently paid by the Town Council. Councillor Farrar thought that as the bill covered the cemetery and the Cemetery Lodge it might be appropriate to ask the Cemetery Superintendent to pay 50% of this cost.

**Handyperson / Cemetery Operative**

The Town Clerk advised that the vacancy had been placed on the Town Council website and also with Johnston Press. The closing date is February 8<sup>th</sup> 2016. He felt it was desirable to have digger / spraying qualifications or be prepared to undertake them.

Councillor Swinbank asked if chainsaw training would be useful. The Town Clerk confirmed it would be added to the training plan.

**RESOLVED: To note the update and approve £1.5k to be spent on decorating and equipment for the Cemetery Office.**

**CEM 15/58 New Cemetery Area (Ground water audit, design update, gate provision and delivery plan)**

**Consecration** – The Assistant to the Town Clerk advised that the Bishop’s office had given her the contact details for the Diocesan contact. She had spoken to them and they will email details and costs.

Councillor Farrar asked if she could check that they wanted to consecrate the Natural Burial area. He also asked that the area beyond the hedge towards Willowburn be included in the consecration as this would be needed first.

**Ground water audit** - The Town Clerk advised that one test had been done but due to the very wet weather the measurements for all areas were red.

**Design update**

Path – the Town Clerk informed the committee that work on the path will be carried out in February / early March.

Councillor Farrar said that February would allow time for the trees to be put in afterwards.

Arch - The Assistant to the Town Clerk reported that she had spoken to the man who would do the arch and he will be preparing a couple of possible designs for consideration. Councillor Moore suggested recording the progress of the new area in pictures.

Councillor Symmonds advised checking the size of the new tractor to ensure enough headroom under the arch was left.

**CEM 15/59 Natural burial area update**

Councillor Farrar informed the committee that he had spoken to the Co-op Funeralcare and Alistair Turner Funeral Directors about the Natural Burial Area. He confirmed that both were fine with not embalming bodies.

The Assistant to the Town Clerk gave an overview on information collected about other natural / woodland burial sites across the county.

**PLOT SIZE** - Woodland burial plots are single depth to keep disturbance in the area to a minimum and will accommodate one burial. Graves dug standard size or slightly smaller (Hexham - 1.2m x 2.4m).

Hexham does not allow the plot to be purchased. This is vital as it stops anyone erecting a headstone etc. Families are very keen to ‘add’ things onto plots but if the plot is not theirs and the Council owns it, Council can do what it pleases with it.

**IDENTIFYING PLOTS** – Various methods: i) chips, with serial number which is kept as part of the cemetery records, put into each plot to identify each burial. ii) plots marked on a map kept in admin office.

**GAPS BETWEEN PLOTS** - Same as standard burials, but some do have an additional small space between each plot.

**MARKING PLOTS** - Hexham – used to plant a tree on each plot but this is

NOT recommended where area is small. Some trees could be planted each year but only where the town council decide and tree planting is not part of the burial charge. Hexham provide a 9" x 9" stone with plot number on it which people can inscribe or leave just with number on it. Stone laid just below grass level to allow for mowing. Provided as part of cost of burial.

Morpeth - Memorials or other markings are not allowed on individual burial plots which includes floral tributes or other arrangements after funeral flowers have wilted and no paths will be constructed in the woodland area. Once the ground has settled following a burial, a small tree can be planted at the head of the grave if requested.

**COFFINS** - Hexham used bio degradable caskets in bamboo but have used cardboard and pine. However any material has to be degradable and while alternate caskets are allowed [if Council approved], as the Council supplies a casket as part of the fee no one normally uses their own casket. Morpeth do not offer coffins.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION** - Morpeth (Fairmoor) – opened in 2003 and have had 43 woodland burials in that time. Woodland burials account for less than 1 in 100 burials.

Councillor Symmonds felt that the Hexham model was his preferred one.

Councillor Moore agreed but did not feel that Alnwick should offer coffins.

Councillor Farrar said that Alistair Turner felt the Hexham was a good model.

**RESOLVED: To note the information in the update and update the Natural Burial document where appropriate.**

#### **CEM 15/60 Tree Works Update**

The Town Clerk confirmed that he had been out for quotes for the alternative pollarding works to 11 trees, with traffic management, but had as yet only received one quote. He confirmed that he would chase for another quote.

**RESOLVED: To accept the quote received if not other quote can be obtained.**

#### **CEM 15/61 Wildlife Policy**

Councillor Farrar said that, further to the wildlife policy he had circulated before the last meeting he felt that a budget of £120 should be set aside to purchase two owl boxes for the cemetery. Councillor Swinbank offered to look for the best sites for the boxes.

Councillors discussed the issue of moles in the cemetery and it was agreed to purchase humane mole traps. It was also agreed that these would be used for a period of six months after which their use would be reviewed and alternative methods used if deemed necessary.

**RESOLVED: i) To purchase two owl boxes; ii) To invest in humane mole traps for a 6 month trial.**

### **CEM 15/62 Grave Decoration Policy**

Councillor Farrar issued a draft Grave Decoration Policy for discussion.

Councillor Moore felt that a limit could be put on the area of the grave people were allowed to use. He felt it was important to set a standard now.

Councillor Swinbank felt that they could limit the spread of the items away from the immediate grave area. The Town Clerk advised that in the main cemetery this was limited to the area immediately in front of the headstone.

Councillor Moore felt that families should be written to.

Councillor Humphries felt families could be given a timescale from the burial.

Councillor Swinbank suggested setting a given size for each plot which could be used for decorations.

Councillor S Allcroft suggested that the grave could be marked with stones.

**RESOLVED: To review the policy at the next meeting.**

### **CEM 15/63 Building Works (path, fencing, soakaway, replacement bins)**

Soakaway – this is planned to be done shortly.

Pointing – a contractor will undertake a further £2,000 of work this year.

**RESOLVED: To note the update.**

### **CEM 15/64 Any Other Business**

Councillor Moore reported on the Article which had appeared in the Gazette about potential contamination of land from the cemetery in Amble being used as an objection to a planning application.

The Town Clerk advised that the box used when digging graves needed to be replaced and asked for approval to spend £100 on a replacement which the committee agreed to.

Meeting closed at 9.00pm