

West Rainton Parish Council - 20 September 2018

Item 12 a: Cemetery update

Report of: G Keedy, Project Officer

Appearance of Cemetery

Parish Council recognises and shares the concerns of cemetery users about the overall unkempt appearance of the cemetery grounds.

A first step in trying to introduce improvements was the letting of a comprehensive environmental maintenance contract for 2017-2018, with a permitted contract extension to the existing contractor for 2018-2019.

This contract continues to be monitored and will be re-let through a competitive tendering process for 2019-2020. Ad hoc works have been authorised from time to time.

Poor condition of graves

A significant contributory factor affecting the appearance of the cemetery is the number of graves which are un-tended and neglected. These are predominantly, but not exclusively located in older parts of the cemetery.

Project Officer has undertaken a detailed survey of burial plots requiring remedial works - in most cases attention to overgrown bushes and shrubs. In addition to neglect, the survey has also identified a small number of damaged or makeshift grave surrounds, some of which are potentially unsafe.

All sites affected have been photographed and details of memorial inscriptions identifying the deceased then cross-referenced with burial records to confirm plot numbers wherever possible.

Responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of burial plots rests with the individual plot owner.

The exercise has identified 139 grave plots requiring action by the current owner to improve appearance.

However, the likelihood is that many grave plot owners have themselves now died, without passing on ownership rights, or that families of the deceased have long since moved away from the area.

Due principally to the passage of time and lack of readily available and up to date records, it is not feasible to easily identify ownership of the majority of the affected sites.

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As a first step in managing these sites, it is suggested that a plan identifying affected sites be prepared, published on-line and displayed on Cemetery gates requesting burial plot owners to arrange remedial works. After a period to be agreed, Parish Council should receive a further assessment and then consider any appropriate intervention.

Proposed demolition of Brick building

This brick built structure has been in disuse for many years - its' original purpose is unclear, but it serves no current purpose.

A recommendation from Cemetery Development Services is that the building be demolished. Demolition of the building and levelling and tidying of the surrounding land will provide improved visual amenity and be a clear demonstration of the Parish Council's intent to enhance the site.

At the July 2018 meeting, Parish Council were advised of a funding opportunity relating to S106 funding relating to the Ramside development that was available to both Sherburn and Belmont electoral divisions. A balance of £5,000 is currently available for environmental projects. Details of projects requiring external funding identified through the parish plan, as well as an outline project for cemetery improvements were considered at the last meeting to help determine priorities for submitting grant applications to this fund.

Due to the urgency to develop and submit an application(s) Parish Council resolved to delegate authority to Cllr Haddick and Cllr Wallage to develop projects and submit grant applications.

An application for £5000.00 has now been submitted for the demolition of the building, supported by quotations received from suitable contractors and estimates for improving the landscape of external land either side of the entrance as discussed with DCC.

Quotations received for demolition are based on the assumption that there is no asbestos in the building. An asbestos survey is required to confirm this before definite quotations for the demolition can be obtained for consideration by the Parish Council.

Two quotations have been obtained from specialist companies for such a survey and Parish Council is asked to consider and approve one of the following:

Company A - £150.00 plus VAT

Company B - £220.00 plus VAT

Following a suggestion made by CDS, work is in progress to determine the implications and cost of installing a memorial wall at this site, should Parish Council agree to award a contract for the demolition when the outcome of the above is known.

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Ad hoc works

There are two trees within the cemetery grounds causing some concerns.

Tree A adjacent to perimeter fence bordering a residential property in Lea Rigg - this was affected by wind damage earlier in 2018 and is overrun with Ivy. This is a large tree to be considered for removal.

Tree B is significant growth from a dead tree stem.

Quotations have been received from our contractor for the removal of both during the winter months.

Tree A - £450.00 plus VAT @ 4% (£468.00)

Tree B - £250.00 plus VAT @ 4% (£260.00)

There are no Tree Preservation Orders affecting West Rainton Cemetery.

Any decision to remove Tree A will require liaison with local residents and potential signing of a disclaimer.

Parish Council is asked to consider a course of action.

New burial areas

In 2016, Cemetery Development Services undertook a comprehensive assessment of West Rainton cemetery to identify capacity for new burial areas.

Their report identified circa 470 potential new burial sites in various sectors of the cemetery. Due to space pressure on the most recently utilised burial area, new burials are being made in the north east sector of the cemetery where circa 80 plots are available.

Moving to this new location prompts a need for the Parish Council to review its' policy relating to memorials.

Difficulties in maintaining the overall site, especially grass cutting are in part attributable to difficult and restricted access due to the location of kerb surrounds.

To prevent creating circumstances which would lead to similar difficulties in the future, Parish Council is requested to consider designating all new burial areas as what is known as lawn cemetery.

This would restrict the installation of memorials to a single headstone and would also exclude the planting of flowers, bushes and shrubs on the grave space.

The overall effect would be to provide a more uniform appearance across the new burial areas, facilitating easier maintenance.