

# **West Rainton and Leamside Parish Council - 19 April 2019**

## **Item 14: Cemetery issues**

### **Report of G Keedy, Project Officer**

#### **1) Cemetery spoil**

One aspect of cemetery operations which proves unsightly is the accumulation of cemetery spoil - excess soil arising from the digging of graves.

This is inevitable, but its' current location in the cemetery grounds, in open view, detracts from the appearance of the site - which Parish Council is keen to improve.

Following enquiries with other Parish Council's in the County Durham area which provide municipal burial grounds, it has been established that some do dispose of spoil via skip or wagon (especially at larger sites where there are a significant volume of burials), but it is generally the case that spoil is stored on site, for the purpose of "topping up" graves which show signs of sinking / subsidence.

At West Rainton Cemetery, the volume of spoil has been assessed at around 15 -20 barrow loads.

Ideally this should be located in a designated area and fenced off for aesthetic purposes.

\*Parish Council is asked to consider an area of the cemetery for this purpose and seek quotations to provide fencing / screening, and the relocation of spoil from it's current site.

#### **2) Neglected graves**

At its' meeting held in September 2018, Parish Council considered a Cemetery Update report which highlighted 139 graves requiring attention due to neglect.

Notices and associated publicity requesting grave owners to take remedial action has been largely unsuccessful.

A recent site visit shows most of the affected graves displaying early signs of regrowth of bushes and shrubs. Left unattended, these will again look unsightly and unkempt. Without attention, the problem will perpetuate.

It is likely that most of these graves are now abandoned.

#### **Item 14: cemetery issues cont ...**

The Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 contains provisions for a burial authority (the Parish Council) to:

Do all such things as they consider necessary or desirable for the proper management, regulation and control of a cemetery and, put and keep in order any grave.

These enable the Parish Council to take action to improve the appearance of the graves affected.

\*Parish Council is asked to consider if it wishes to fund the ongoing maintenance of the individual sites or seek instead to have bushes / shrubs removed or destroyed to prevent recurrence of the problem.

A related issue which can affect graves of any age is that of subsidence, requiring "topping up". This is currently undertaken on an informal, ad hoc basis by the freelance gravedigger at no cost.

\* Parish Council is asked to consider if wishes to formalise the routine "topping up" of sunken graves through an addition to the contract specification of the grounds maintenance contractor.

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