

West Rainton Parish Council - 18 May 2017

Item 17: Cemetery update

Report of: G Keedy, Project Officer

Safety testing of Memorial headstones:

The previously agreed safety testing exercise was undertaken by Sherburn Outdoor Services at the end of April 2017.

This identified 38 headstones which failed the stress test and now require remedial action to be initiated by the owners. Location details have been provided to Project Officer.

Members will recall that advance notification of the exercise was provided to cemetery users in February through notices affixed to the cemetery gates, a news item on the Parish Council's website and editorial coverage in the Village Newsletter. The publicity advised that warning tape would be used to highlight those memorials failing the test and that notices would be provided with information about required next steps for owners.

The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) have confirmed that the approach taken to date and intended action are in order.

It is recognised that identifying memorials as unstable can be distressing to families of the deceased and others tending graves.

Sherburn Outdoor Services have this week affixed warning tape, but the contractor has advised me that cemetery users were removing this from memorials as soon as he had done so. This undermines the actions of the Parish Council to fulfil its' responsibilities relating to Health & Safety and management of the site.

Project Officer has sought advice from ICCM on this aspect and they have advised that in response to the public actions, Parish Council should replace warning tape and notices in an effort to emphasise to owners the need for repair to avoid breakage and the potential for injury.

On a positive note, Durham Stonemasonry have been in touch to advise that they will be undertaking remedial work to two memorials (one under guarantee) this week (subject to favourable weather conditions).

Draft notices are appended for Parish Council consideration and these comprise an A3 poster for display on Cemetery gates and A4 notices for display on individual, failed memorials. There will be costs associated with enlargement and lamination.

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Parish Council is asked to:

Consider a deadline for completion of remedial works by contractors appointed by owners, prior to the lying flat of unstable memorial headstones;

Agree the suggested wording of notices and approach to their display;

Authorise expenditure by Project Officer of up to £80.00 for enlargement and lamination of notices.

Cemetery maintenance:

Following recent grass cutting, a complaint was received from a cemetery user about grass cuttings not being routinely cleared from headstones.

A site visit by Project Officer confirmed that this appeared to be the case throughout the site. This has been raised with the contractor who has been reminded of the contractual requirement to do so.

Feedback has been provided to the complainant.

A Parish Councillor has raised concerns that trees in the cemetery grounds adjacent to A690 are growing through the metal perimeter fence and potentially causing damage.

Photographs provided by the Parish Councillor illustrating the issue have been passed to the grounds maintenance contractor for an assessment of remedial works and any cost implications. Project Officer will report further at June meeting.