

## **West Rainton Parish Council - 21 September 2017**

### **Item 18: Cemetery update**

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

##### **Memorial headstone safety**

Members will recall that memorial safety testing was undertaken in April 2017. That exercise identified 38 memorials as potentially unsafe.

Parish Council agreed at its' meeting held on 18 May 2017 that safety warning notices be displayed on the cemetery gates and on individual headstones, and these included a request that owners instigate appropriate repairs with a suitable contractor.

Parish Council further agreed that those memorials not repaired by 31 August 2017 would be laid flat to meet health and safety requirements.

Project Officer visited the cemetery on 6 September and identified 28 memorials which had not been repaired.

These are located mainly, but not exclusively in the older areas of the cemetery. It is suspected that these grave plot owners may themselves now be deceased or are no longer resident in the area. There is little likelihood that repairs will be undertaken.

A request has recently been received from a local resident suggesting that Parish Council applies for a grant from the Area Action Partnership (AAP) for improved cemetery signage to include the requirement for making safe the affected headstones.

Project Officer has established that the AAP grant funding stream is currently closed for new bids and there is no anticipated timescale for it to re-open.

The need for better signage has previously been identified and remains on the list of cemetery improvements to be actioned in due course.

Details of the Parish Council's intentions in relation to memorial safety testing and proposed action were widely publicised. The 31 August 2017 deadline for repairs exceeded the guidelines from Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management.

Pending the longer term provision of improved signage, Project Officer is reticent to suggest extending the 31 August deadline - which may have little effect in repairs being expedited to the remaining 28 potentially unsafe headstones.

## **Item 18: Cemetery update cont ...**

### **Memorial headstone safety cont ...**

Should Parish Council determine to proceed, the process for laying flat would, for safety reasons involve two people, and to ensure that the headstones could be carefully manoeuvred to prevent damage.

It would also be recommended that a third person be present (Councillor or Officer) and photos taken to show the condition of each headstone upon completion of the exercise. If they are damaged at a later date, (eg. through vandalism) this will help mitigate any claim against the Parish Council.

Parish Council is asked to consider its' position relating to the timescale for laying flat of memorial headstones and the practical arrangements for undertaking this work.

### **Cemetery maintenance**

Grass cutting has continued across the summer months.

The contractor has recently advised Project Officer that remedial work to the trees growing through the A690 boundary fence will start within the next few weeks.

Methodology will be discussed with Project Officer in advance.