



West Rainton & Leamside Parish Council

Report of Parish Clerk – 15/01/2021

Grave Adornment Policy

Background

At its meeting in December 2018 Parish Council approved the implementation of the new grave adornment policy with a view to improving the visual appearance of the cemetery as well as improving Health and Safety.

The Policy addressed two key areas; Memorials and Kerb Surrounds and Tributes.

Detail

The Parish Council commissioned Cemetery Development Services to review the operation of the Cemetery in 2016. This culminated in a report which was published August 2016. The report identified a number of actions and provided a maintenance specification which had not previously been available.

The report stated “If the bereaved have booked a plot on a lawn cemetery section, then they will not be permitted to place any edging stones gravel or anything else in front of the grave.”

Parish Council went on to develop and approve a policy which included a new lawned burial area to the rear of the Cemetery and a decision regarding kerb sets which states: Kerb sets are not permitted at new graves in the designated lawn section of the cemetery nor older parts of the cemetery where existing graves currently have no memorial or kerb set.

Whilst the new burial area to the rear of the cemetery would become a lawned area the existing burial sites within the cemetery are unable to be ‘lawned’ burial areas due to the historical arrangements regarding kerb sets being permitted. There are graves with kerb sets of varying quality and appearance as well as those without kerb sets within these older burial areas.

Issue

Whilst the policy of no kerb sets to the rear of the cemetery allows a more unified appearance, with easier access for grass cutting and maintenance, applying the policy to the other existing burial areas does not have the same effect due to the variety of kerb sets that are already in situ.

It should also be noted that any enquiries regarding burials in the new lawned area are informed of the ruling of no kerb sets, but for those purchasing Exclusive Rights of Burial pre-March 2019, they were not informed because the policy was not in existence when the Exclusive Rights Of Burial were purchased.

The refusal to permit kerb sets has proved to be an emotive subject in both the new and existing burial areas with a number of discussions with cemetery users taking place as well as those interested in burying their family in West Rainton cemetery. A particular concern has arisen whereby a family who had purchased a double plot and intended to install a kerb set once both parents were buried. This is now the case but in line with the current Policy the application for a kerb set was refused. The initial burial was in 2017, in the non lawned area, long before the Policy was implemented.

This challenge to the Policy is still outstanding and has prompted this wider review of the Policy.

It should be noted that in relation to other aspects of the Policy there has been no feedback apart from some feedback from cemetery users that the overall appearance has improved.

Options

1. Policy remains unchanged:

This would mean the current situation would remain. Those with burials pre April 2019 are unable to install kerb sets.

2. Policy in the new burial area remains unchanged however burials pre-April 2019, in the older parts of the cemetery where kerbs sets already exist, grave owners would be permitted to have a kerb set installed.(Subject to approval by the Parish Clerk to ensure professional quality standards and payment of the appropriate fee).

This would appear to be a compromise. The new lawned area would remain as identified by CDS improving the visual appearance and also allowing easier maintenance. However it would allow those with burials pre-decision to install kerb sets in keeping with the general appearance of those areas.

3. Revise the Policy completely to allow kerb sets in all areas of the cemetery.

This would remove the ability to produce a lawned area to the rear of the cemetery.

Conclusion

In reviewing the current approach Parish Council are requested to review and approve an option.

M.Ramshaw

Parish Clerk