

Review of Cemetery Space Arrangements

The parish council adopted revised Cemetery Regulations based on the proposals of the Estates Committee in November 2020 (Min. 20.11. refers). These made provision for:

1. Additional stone memorial types:
 - a new Flat Tablet that fits within an existing kerb set
 - a permanent cross on any grave space (within specified proportions)
 - a flat tablet memorial on a full grave space within specified proportions
2. marking of memorials with the grave space numbers
3. a change to the period for memorial consents (reduced to 25 years)

Maintaining the cemetery:

A burial authority may enclose, layout and embellish a cemetery as it thinks fit and improve it, and is obliged to keep it and its associated buildings, walls and fences in good repair¹.

Whilst the parish council can and currently does rely on funeral directors to arrange grave digging, they should check to ensure compliance with health and safety regulations and good grave digging practice e.g. shoring of graves. Burial authorities are responsible for both contractors and employees working in cemeteries they own as well as having a legal duty of care for all visitors.

At the last review of space completed for the purposes of NNDR (attached as Appendix A to this report), the following points were identified:

- Total Site Area of Cemetery – 0.7457 ha
- Av. No. interments per annum – 4
- Estimated area of land required for interments for next 10 years – 0.015 ha
- Area of land fully utilised for interments – 0.554 ha

The parish council has approached a local land-owner with a view to purchasing additional land to the rear of the cemetery for cemetery expansion or a natural burial ground, and is currently awaiting a decision from the landowner.

To ensure that the remaining space may be fully utilised, it may now be an appropriate time for the parish to move to engaging its own grave digger, recovering full costs as part of the burial fee. Advantages include:

- improved local knowledge of the cemetery and consistency in layout of grave spaces
- facilitating ease of mowing and weeding between spaces
- a more efficient use of the space available, increasing the number of grave spaces that could be used over time.

Two options are open to the parish council:

1. Contract with a company (or individual) to undertake all the gravedigging, ensuring one or two spare independent diggers cover sickness/holidays double booking etc) providing continuity for the preparation of graves and also a sense of ownership for the work to be done in the best possible way. The parish would need to:
 - a. Agree a price list with a grave digger and then further review fees and charges to include the grave preparation and backfilling as part of the interment fee (different depths and possible larger graves (where the coffin is oversized or a casket) would need to be considered

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- b. draw a service level agreement up with the grave digger which would state what was expected from each party. i.e. grave spacing, removal of spoil, presentation of backfilled grave etc; or
2. Bring the grave digging in house and have an operative on-site Monday-Friday, so again that connection with the cemetery is maintained (based on the number of interments per annum, it is unlikely that this option would be feasible; and
3. leave the digging of ashes plots to the funeral directors – they usually send their own staff to this, but also make clear to them what is expected.

Action:

The Committee is asked to consider whether to:

1. remain with the current arrangements (funeral directors make their own provision for the digging of graves);
2. Contract with a company or individual(s) to undertake all the gravedigging (allowing funeral directors to dig ashes plots); or
3. Bring gravedigging in-house.

Dependant on their choice of options, the clerk will then bring a further report back to a future meeting.

Recently Closed United Reform Church

The United Reform Church was closed earlier this year and has recently been purchased by Desmene Ltd.

As part of the re-development of the United Reform Church, Desmene Ltd have recently applied to the Ministry of Justice under the Disused Burial Grounds (Amendment) Act 1981 and served notice of their intention to remove tombstones. A copy of the notice, plan and list of graves is attached as Appendix A to this report.

The clerk has contacted:

- The cemeteries officer at West Suffolk (for Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill Cemeteries);
- An independent consultant; and
- The Institute of Cemeteries and Crematoria Management

and has established that the parish council needs to consider the following:

- Does the cemetery have adequate space to except these reburials ? At worst there could be in excess of 50 graves needed, this would probably all be dependent on the age of the burials and what remains are actually left. It may be that all the remains and the vessels (i.e. new coffins) they would be laid to rest in could be buried in a smaller number of graves.
- The purchaser of the church would need to pay the parish for the interment and ERB of all the remains just as the same as a new burial. All interments will need to be recorded in its registers and a good map of the plots used for this purpose. This will assist in any future enquires from descendants of the deceased. There would be a copy of the exhumation licence which the parish would need to keep.
- If no relatives come forward to make comment or claim the remains the purchaser would probably opt for cremation which may incur less expense to them. It may be mutually beneficial to the crematorium and the parish council to work together.
- The parish does not have to make the space available for the re-interments if it considers there is insufficient space available.

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- The purchaser (Desmene Ltd) have indicated that their preference is not to exhume any more remains than necessary, and that any re-development of the site is likely to be within the existing footprint of the property.

Action:

The committee is asked to consider how much space (if any) could be set aside for re-interment of remains from the former United Reform Church, if approached; and how it might work with the purchaser to ensure that the information recorded on the tombstones and memorials is recorded for the parish and future family history enquiries.

ⁱ Arnold Baker on Local Council Administration – ref Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977, SI1977/204, art 4(1).

DISUSED BURIAL GROUNDS (AMENDMENT) ACT 1981

NOTICE OF INTENTION TO REMOVE TOMBSTONES, MONUMENTS, HUMAN REMAINS & MEMORIALS FROM THE WICKHAMBROOK UNITED REFORMED CHURCH BURIAL GROUND.

1. For the purpose of a change to residential use, it is necessary to remove tombstones, monuments, human remains and memorials.
2. In accordance with the provision of the Disused Burial Grounds (Amendment) Act 1981, notice is hereby given that Demesne Limited, intend 2 months after the date of the first publication of this notice to remove tombstones, monuments or other memorials of deceased persons whose names, so far as they can be ascertained, are stated on the Record of Gravestones list and the Burial Ground Plan.
3. The Record of Gravestones and the Burial Ground Plan of the present place of burial showing the positions of the tombstones, monuments or other memorials, are now displayed on the Wickhambrook United Reformed Church notice board.
4. Any person who is an heir, executor, administrator or relative of any deceased person whose grave, monument, tombstone or other memorial is to be removed, or in case of a Commonwealth war burial, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, may give written notice to the undersigned within two months of the date of this notice of intention to undertake the removal of such remains, tombstone monument or other memorial commemorating the deceased person and thereupon he will be at liberty, provided he applies for the Secretary of State's directions for the removal of human remains as soon as possible after giving such notice and that such directions are issued, to cause such remains to be removed and reinterred in any churchyard, burial ground or cemetery in which interments may legally take place or, if desired, cremated. Application for the Secretary of State's directions should be made to the Secretary of State.
5. If the notice in paragraph 4 above has been given within the prescribed time or if after such notice has been given, the person given notice have not removed the remains etc Demesne Limited may carry out the removal and reinterment or cremation or disposal, or work may be undertaken which will render the grave inaccessible as the case may be. After removal the remains may be reinterred in such cemetery or burial ground or cremated in a crematorium as follows:
 - 1 The removal shall be effected with due care and attention to decency.
 - 2 The ground in which the remains are interred shall be screened from the public gaze while the work of removal is in progress.
 - 3 Freshly made ground lime shall be freely sprinkled over the coffins, the soil and, if it should be found necessary, elsewhere.
 - 4 The removal shall be carried out to the satisfaction of the Director of Environmental Services for West Suffolk, and shall be in accordance with any additional conditions he may impose.
 - 5 The remains shall be placed in fresh shells or other such containers as meet the requirements of the said Director of Environmental Services.
 - 6 The remains shall be forthwith conveyed to Wickhambrook Cemetery or burial ground or West Suffolk Crematorium and cremated in accordance with the Cremation Acts 1902 and 1952.
6. Any persons entitled to burial rights at the date of this notice may claim compensation in respect of loss of such rights by writing to the undersigned.

Dated 20.09.2021.

Mark Wightman, On Behalf of Demesne Limited, the former Wickhambrook United Reformed Church.
Meeting Green, Wickhambrook, Suffolk CB8 8XS

WICKHAMBROOK CHAPEL RECORD OF GRAVESTONES

These records are stated as seen directly on the gravestones. The discolouration and patina caused by the presence of microbiological growth such as bacteria, moulds, algae and lichens often add to the mellow and aged appearance of burial sites. Excessive colonisation can obscure inscriptions and some growths secrete acidic deposits, which, in the long term, may lead to deterioration of the stone surface. Some individual species are protected by law and many burial grounds are also valued wildlife habitats and may be designated. Removal of biological growth such as lichens, using even gentle means, may be well intentioned but is often damaging and should generally be avoided. Aggressive cleaning methods should always be avoided as they can cause the etching, roughening and discolouration of stone and metal surfaces, which will in turn lead to accelerated decay. Therefore, if information is suspect, or difficult to read then that fact is recorded with a question mark or comment in italics:

1	ANN HANDS	16	WILLIAM FINCH
2	SAMUEL PETTITT	17	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>
3	ALFRED ?	18	JOSEPH WOOLLARD
4	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>	19	ELLE WOOLLARD
5	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>	20	? WOOLLARD
6	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>	21	MARY COOK
7	SARAH HURST	22	JER BOWERS
8	JOSEPH FOREMAN	23	MARY BOWERS
9	ANN CORNWELL	24	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>
10	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>	25	WILLIAM FULLER
11	JOSEPH WILLIS	26	JOHN FROST
12	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>	27	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>
13	THOMAS PARKER	28	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>
14	JAMES HIND	29	SARA & JAMES PASK
15	WILLIAM HOCKLEY	30	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>

31	WILLIAM ?	42	WILLIAM CROSS
32	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>	43	JOHN HEMPSTEAD
33	GEROGE PETTITT	44	JOHNSON & BROMLEY
34	HARRIET FOREMAN	45	WILLIAM CATER
35	JOHN PARKER	46	ANN MARIA ?
36	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>	47	STEPHEN ROWLING
37	JOSEPH ?	48	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>
38	ABRAHAM ASHMAN	49	ILLEGIBLE
39	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>	50	JOSEPH WILLIS
40	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>	51	<i>ILLEGIBLE</i>
41	JOHN WOOLARD	52	FROST FAMILLY

NOTICE TO ALL PERSONS ENTERING THIS BURIAL GROUND

Unfortunately, due to the closure of the Wickhambrook United Reformed Church, the burial ground is now closed until further notice. Any unauthorised access will be at your own risk and the freeholder, his representatives or agents will not accept any responsibility or be liable for any accidents, loss or damage to any persons as a result of unauthorised entry.

If authorised, please take care when entering the burial ground, the surface may be uneven or slippery and there may be trip hazards. Please do not touch the gravestones or monuments and please be respectful of the memorials to the people buried here.

Thank you for your understanding, if you require any further information, please do not hesitate to email Mark on markwightman@hotmail.com

