



# BOUGHTON-UNDER-BLEAN PARISH COUNCIL

**Minutes of the Extra Ordinary meeting of the Parish Council held at St Barnabas Parish Centre on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2023 from 7:33pm to 9:10pm.**

**Present:**

Cllr C. Clayson, Cllr T. Covell, Cllr E. Green, Cllr C. Goatham, Cllr J. Martin, Cllr J. Muteham,

**Also present:**

Mrs S. Muteham (Clerk) and 11 members of the public

**017. Apologies**

Cllr P. Ray, Cllr D. Clayson

**018. Declaration of Interests**

None

**019. Public Participation**

Attending members of the public thanked the working party and noted that they hoped the council would approve the recommendations as made. It was also noted that there was a request for a smaller mower to be used around the headstones at the cemetery and also a request that the council consider formalising the size of headstones allowed.

**020. To receive reports from the Clerk (Appendix A) and Working Group (Appendix B).** Resolved: reports from the Clerk and Working Group were taken as received and read.

**021. Terms & Conditions**

- A. Divide the Burial Ground and Garden of Remembrance Regulations - Those present discussed splitting out the regulations into two documents, one for each area of the cemetery. Resolved: to update the regulations so that the regulations for each area of the cemetery can be identified easily and independently of one another.
- B. Confirmation of regulations - Those present discussed requesting that new plot holders sign a document to confirm receipt of the regulations in force at the time of purchase. Resolved: to create a form which all new plot holders would be required to sign, confirming receipt of the regulations.
- C. Glass Vases - Those present discussed the banning of glass vases. Resolved: to ban all glass vases within the civic cemetery.
- D. Headstones - Those present discussed increasing the approved types of materials for headstones/tablets and to review the size of such memorials. It was agreed that councillors would meet with Mr C. Sherwood (Stonemason) to discuss the matter before further consideration.
- E. Fencing/Kerbing/Chippings - Those present discussed whether to amend the regulations and give permission for fencing, kerbing and chippings. It was agreed that the Public Amenities Committee would look into the issue and the Clerk was requested to set up a meeting with the mowing contractors to discuss further.
- F. Statuary - Those present discussed amending the regulations to permit statuary within the cemetery. Resolved: to permit statuary with a maximum height of 30cm.
- G. Shrubs and bushes - Those present discussed the planting of shrubs and bushes within the cemetery. It was agreed that the Public Amenities Committee would discuss the further planting of vegetation within the grounds. Resolved: to continue to plant roses within the rose garden on request, the cost being borne by the Parish Council.

*Chairman's Initial*.....

## 021. Environmental Matters

- A. Rubbish Bins - Those present discussed whether to purchase an additional bin for the burial ground. The Clerk informed attending members that the existing bin was not used, waste was regularly deposited near the cemetery tap and subsequently removed by the Clerk. It was agreed that the Public Amenities Committee would consider the matter further.
- B. Spoil pile - Those present discussed the large spoil pile in the far corner of the Burial Ground. It was agreed that the Clerk should obtain quotes for removal of the pile and fencing off the area before the matter be considered further.
- C. Tree branches - Those present discussed the broken tree branches in the Burial Ground and agreed that the Clerk should obtain quotes for their removal.
- D. Footpaths - Those present discussed the condition of the footpaths and requested that the Clerk obtain quotes for the removal of moss on the footpaths.
- E. Benches - Those present discussed the condition of the benches. It was noted that one bench was being provided via a legacy agreement and agreed that an old bench would be repurposed. Resolved: to repurpose the metal bench from Bull Lane recreation ground to replace a broken bench in the Garden of Remembrance.

## 022. Contractors

- A. Quality of workmanship - Those present discussed matters relating to the workmanship of the current contractors and agreed that in conjunction with minute 020.E the Clerk would arrange a meeting with the contractor where concerns could be addressed further.

## 023. Plots

- A. Cost of Plots - Those present discussed the current cost of plots and the Chairman confirmed that the matter would be next reviewed in January 2024.
- B. Size of Plots - Those present discussed the size of plots after the Working Party had noted that in the Garden of Remembrance the plots were marked out at different sizes by individual plot holders. The Clerk reported that plots were all the same size, however individual plot holders were potentially incorrectly marking out an area with fencing. It was agreed that the Public Amenities Committee would review the matter of plot sizes.
- C. Tenure of Exclusive Right of Burial - Those present discussed the Exclusive Right of Burial (ERoB) in both the Burial Ground (50 years) and Garden of Remembrance (20 years) and agreed to leave them unchanged. It was also noted that plot holders were given the option to renew an ERoB upon expiry.
- D. Plot Ownership - Those present discussed ownership of plots. It was noted that plots were not owned by plot holders, but leased for the duration of the ERoB. Plot holders would be notified by the Funeral Directors of the location of the plot and the duration of the ERoB.

## 024. Communication

- A. Approach to communication - Those present discussed the need for an empathetic approach to communication with the bereaved. It was agreed that the Public Amenities Committee would look at how this could be improved.
- B. Complaints procedure - Those present discussed the requirement for a suitable complaints procedure and the Chairman noted that there was a Complaints Policy approved in April 2023.
- C. Removal of graveside decorations - Those present discussed the removal of graveside decorations and it was agreed that the Public Amenities Committee would look to implement a suitable process.
- D. Updates to Stonemasons and Funeral Parlours - Those present discussed updating local businesses with current regulations. The Clerk reported that this is already done as good practice.
- E. Updating plot holder details - Those present discussed how best to keep plot holder records up to date. Resolved: to advertise in the community magazine and via the Parish Council's publication scheme for plot holders to notify the Clerk of any amendments.

Chairman's Initial.....

**025. Other matters**

- A. Wildflower area - Those present discussed creating a wildflower area within the cemetery grounds, however it was agreed to revisit the matter in 6 months, since it was not urgent or within the capacity of the existing budget.

Signed by the CHAIRMAN of the meeting

*Chairman's Initial*.....

## **APPENDIX A**

### **Clerk's Report on Civic Cemetery**

#### **Statistical information as at 01 June 2023**

48	Plots in the Garden of Remembrance
113	Plots in the Burial Ground
27	Plots identified by members of Public Amenities committee in 2022 and letters sent to those plot owners
10	Plot holders agreed to be contacted by the Working Group (under GDPR regulations)
4	Complaints received by Clerk from plot holders who have conformed, expressing concern over those who had not conformed
1	Complaint received relating to ground condition of grave
3	Complaints received by Clerk from plot holders about stress/confusion caused by letter

#### **Summary timeline of council matters relating to the civic cemetery**

Apr 2015	Existing ploholders in GR contacted regarding reallocating rose bushes
May 2015	Council approved installation of rose garden.
May 2021	Members of the Public Amenities committee noted that some cemetery plots were not well maintained
May 2021	Council agreed to install noticeboard to display summary cemetery regulations
Oct 2021	Noticeboard installed with summary regulations
Oct 2021	Council approved revised cemetery regulations
Dec 2021	Council approved revised fees with effect from 01/01/2022
Jan 2022	New cemetery gardening contractor
Jan 2022	Council declined to purchase additional litter bin for cemetery
Oct 2022	Council approved renovating rose garden
Oct 2022	Members of the Public Amenities committee held site visit to identify plots not conforming to regulations
Nov 2022	Council requested Clerk contact the identified plot holders (letter reviewed by members of the Public Amenities committee before being sent)
Feb 2023	Council approved working party to address plot holder concerns.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **WORKING PARTY RECOMMENDATIONS:**

#### **Council Procedures**

**Questions Raised:** on the report there were questions raised – that answers are forthcoming to these questions and a formal discussion ensues.

**Communication:** A commitment to better/more empathetic/personal method of communication with the bereaved when dealing with enquiries, comments, compliments, or complaints. This needs to be a 2-way process. The working party are all happy to be involved, while they remain elected councillors.

**Process regarding future complaints:** Agree a process to take future formal complaints forward (councillors have not seen correspondence of complainants, although those complaints were sent to the Parish Clerk – adopted GDPR rules of the Parish Council should state that complaints sent to the Parish Clerk will be shared with the Parish Council, even if that information has to have personal details redacted).

**Maintenance and Inspection:** That the council maintain the Civic Cemetery in good order and inspect on at least a monthly basis: it was apparent that the Civic Cemetery had not been regularly inspected/maintained in a way which would be reasonable to expect.

**Renovation:** A timely program of renovation be agreed: benches to be fixed/maintained, paths to be cleared of moss and kept clear, another rubbish bin to be provided and situated in the Burial Ground.

**Equal access:** That work be considered to improve the accessibility of the Burial Ground, i.e., a new path to be installed.

**Contractor:** That the Parish Council regularly inspect and monitor the gardening contractor's work, and their employee's behaviour be quiet and respectful in a place where people come to mourn. Additionally, that accidents/incidents, such as running over the hose from the tap, are reported promptly and that they are made good at the expense of the contractor. Contractors to receive feedback and that the Parish Council are provided with their response to the recommendations affecting them. Can the Parish Council be provided with a copy of their contract for review?

**Damage to grave items:** If items on graves are damaged by the contractors - that the council agree on a formal process on how to inform people responsible for the grave.

**Review cost of plot:** (burial V ashes plot in the Garden of Remembrance) –

**Review the length of time for exclusive right of burial:** currently there is a minimum 50-year Exclusive Right of Burial for burial plots and only a 20-year Exclusive Right of Burial for ashes plots. Alter time scales to ensure consistency across the two halves of the Civic Cemetery. Advise plot holders what ramifications this may have on their perceived 'ownership' of the plot.

#### **Revision of the Terms and Conditions/Rules and Regulations:**

**Dividing the rules:** for the Burial Ground and the Garden of Remembrance. Currently they are too confusing. They are in one long document and the rules vary for burial and for ashes plots. The rules given at a time of intense mourning should be succinct and easy to understand.

**New Document:** when people purchase a plot they date a document and sign to say they have read and understand the rules.

**No glass vases:** The rule that there are no glass flower vases allowed anywhere in the Civic Cemetery should be enforced, as broken glass is a health & safety hazard.

**Rules tightened up on plastic flowers/tributes:** The Working Party would like to recommend that no plastic flowers should be allowed at all (as they deteriorate and when dumped within the compost heap they cannot biodegrade). Some flowers had sharp staples which were strewn across a large area of the garden of remembrance. This is a health and safety hazard. Alternatively and bearing in mind that plot

holders have good reasons for using plastic flowers we would suggest that plastic tributes not be allowed to deteriorate and be disposed of appropriately.

**Choices of headstone:** Types of stone allowed for memorials and headstones to be reviewed and the selection allowed could be expanded upon. As advised by a local stonemason, only 3 stone types are now available, out of the four which we currently allow. Of these 3, one is very hard to source as the quarry has closed and the other 2 stone types currently allowed are both extremely porous & result in poor wear and tear over a short period of time. They require extra cleaning to maintain their appearance. Also, they are more expensive to purchase, than granite for instance, which is available in a variety of colours and is very hard wearing. The rule has already been breached, and not enforced, as there are already granite headstones in place, and have been for over a decade. A local stone mason identified this and complained historically to the parish council, but no enforcement action was taken.

**Headstone sizes:** For the burial ground. There is a maximum size of headstone, which has been breached in a few cases, already. There should be a minimum size of headstone also to ensure clarity, just as there is in the Churchyard adjacent. Maximum/minimum sizes should be specified as being measured from ground level with a drawing of the dimensions to be provided by the funeral director/stone mason. All headstones should comply with these sizes from the accepted date of any revision of these rules as adopted and agreed by the council.

**Fencing of plots:** That the council consider allowing the fencing of plots, both in the garden of remembrance and in the burial ground. This is an emotive issue. All participating in the working party meetings viewed this as a way to ensure that tributes to their loved ones are undisturbed from animals (eating plants/flowers) and that the graves/ashes plots are undisturbed by other people (walking on or encroaching on the grave). The view that people should not walk on other people's graves is widely held and strongly felt to be disrespectful.

**Statuary/tributes:** Council to consider altering the rules relating to statuary not being allowed on graves, as many people find personal items a meaningful way to express their remembrances/feelings about a loved one.

**Stone Chippings/kerbs:** Council to consider the use of stone chippings – these are not currently allowed, however at Love Lane Cemetery they are often used in conjunction with stone borders or edging, which are not currently allowed either at the Civic Cemetery.