

APPENDIX 8

FACILITIES AND EVENTS – 1ST SEPTEMBER 2021

BURIALS AND RECORD KEEPING

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This report sets out the burials record keeping system and makes recommendation for upgrading to a cloud based provision whilst potentially enabling community access.

2.0 CURRENT BURIAL/INTERMENT SYSTEM

The Parish Council owns St Peters Burial Ground that it now operates as an interment of ashes provision in a lawn format. This means that plots can only be purchased for such interments however the Council still facilitates burials in existing double burial plots that have one person laid to rest. The Council does not permit reservations of interment plots and operates a maximum of 2 open interment rows.

The church facilitates double burials in the closed churchyards however as councillors are aware, the Parish Council is responsible for the maintenance of the closed churchyards and the health and safety of the site, and that of memorials where no existing family can be located.

It is recognised that a considerable number of burial records were missing when they were handed to the Parish Council from the Church. Although the ground is owned by the Parish Council it was operated by the Church until 2016 whereupon the Parish Council resolved to manage the burial ground itself.

The Parish Council has made many representations to the Diocese to request that they supply the missing documentation but, to date, no further documents have been supplied. Since 2016 all records relating to burials in the burial ground have been handled by the Parish Council. Councillors will be concerned to hear that the lack of records causes additional distress to families at a difficult time; these historical issues can be dealt with but take time and resource.

3.0 CURRENT RECORD KEEPING SYSTEM

The church holds all records relating to the closed churchyards and the Parish Council is reliant on the church to investigate those records and endeavour to trace existing family members.

The Parish Council holds the records in two formats:

- 3.1 All records provided to us relating to St Peters Burial Ground pre the handover to the Parish Council have been scanned and were held on a USB stick. That content has now been downloaded to the Parish Council server. The records are also held in paper format in the fire safe. They are substantially incomplete. The scanned records need further work to catalogue the relevant documents to the relevant grave space and this will require additional software.

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- 3.2 All subsequent records are held in paper format, and in various electronic folders. They are not ordered and cannot be searched using electronic search functions.

4.0 RECORD KEEPING WORK CURRENTLY BEING UNDERTAKEN

The following is being undertaken by the Clerk:

- 4.1 The records from the USB stick are being combined with the existing identifiable folders on the electronic records system to provide one source of data labelled to enable electronic searches
- 4.2 The 'unfolded' records are being individually examined to be allocated to the appropriate grave reference and labelled to enable electronic searches
- 4.3 All applicants for work to existing graves are being assisted to complete missing documentation. Most important is the exclusive right of burial which enables additions to be made to the existing grave and any memorial
- 4.4 Forms are being updated as they are required

The following work can be undertaken following the completion of the Health and Safety Assessment of the memorials:

- 4.5 All photographs and records can be loaded to both the existing St Peters Burial Ground folders and to new folders set up for the individual graves in the Closed Churchyard. These folders can then be used to manage the remedial works to those memorials

5.0 RISKS AND ISSUES IDENTIFIED

The Council has a considerable volume of work to undertake to combine the records it currently holds into an ordered format that can be searched electronically; it is estimated that this work will require 2 weeks of a FTE post to complete this work. It has already received communications from existing grave owners who are very distressed by the lack of records and the additional actions that this requires from them.

With the provision of the new fire safe all paper records are now preserved and electronic records are backed up. This safeguards all the records that the council is responsible for.

Once the Health and Safety inspection report is completed it is anticipated that there will be a considerable number of memorials requiring remedial work for which the council has no records; this will increase the financial risk to the council. There is also an added risk in that the Parish Council is dependant on the work of the church to trace the living relatives. As the numbers are expected to be substantial this is likely to overwhelm their resource.

There is an increased number of queries to the office of persons researching their family trees. Without a public portal to the records this research must be completed by the staff; and without the data being labelled to a searchable standard this proves difficult.

The full record of burials since 1988 (St Peters Burial Ground) is contained on an excel spreadsheet that is giving cause for concern regarding its functionality and sustainability. It also contains macros that don't always work and appears to contain incomplete data. This spreadsheet can be provided to councillors to examine.

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It is understood that these issues were previously identified by the Council that resolved to implement a cloud based records system however it is now apparent that this was not delivered.

6.0 PROPOSED ACTIONS

6.1 Records on Council server

To examine these records and file in an appropriate manner will require resource. It is proposed to recruit a temporary member of staff for 2 weeks to undertake this work.

6.2 Excel spreadsheet

The excel spreadsheet needs to be updated to an appropriate format for the records and then examined to ensure no data has been lost. It is not proposed to undertake this currently however secure copies have been made and backed up and a printed copy has been taken.

6.3 Updating of forms, new records and website information

It is proposed that this is the work that is focussed on by the office staff and will input records into a structure that the Clerk has set up for 6.1. New forms and website information can be delivered by the clerk and the new administration assistant. It is anticipated that this will be completed by 2022.

6.4 Cloud based records system, GIS mapping and public portal

Initial enquiries to an international company who currently deliver this service indicated a cost of £20K for set up and £5K annual licence fee. It is proposed to offer a 'tender' to companies who currently provide such services to examine whether the Parish Council could move its record keeping to such a system. It is anticipated that this would require volunteer assistance to map the grave positions.

If this can be delivered it could be offered to the church as a partnership project and this would enable the Parish Council access to the records relating to the closed churchyards.

7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

- 7.1 The Committee request suitable additional budget from the Council salary underspend in order to commission a 4 week temporary post to undertake the filing of the records as set out in 6.1
- 7.2 The staff continue the work as per 6.3
- 7.3 The Clerk undertake a tendering exercise for a burials record management system with GIS mapping and a public portal provision with a report prepared for Committee on the outcome
- 7.4 Adobe writer be added to the software accessible by 2 employees

For further information, contact:

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