

WICKHAM MARKET CEMETERY

Cemetery Management Plan

1. BACKGROUND

1.1. Wickham Market Cemetery is an operational cemetery owned and managed by Wickham Market Parish Council. The cemetery is open for burials and ashes internments for both residents and non-residents of the Parish. There is currently sufficient room for burials for the foreseeable future, but a third garden of remembrance for ashes internment will soon need to be considered.

1.2. Cemetery Operations

1.2.1. Cemetery operations are managed principally by the Parish Council Deputy Clerk (Cemetery Clerk), reporting to the Clerk, who is ultimately the responsible officer. This is a legislative process regarding the management of internments and must be carefully followed to avoid any mistakes. The costs of these operations are borne by the Parish Council as part of the precept charge.

1.3. Cemetery Maintenance

1.3.1. The Parish Council are responsible for the safe maintenance of the cemetery grounds and have chosen to operate the cemetery as a Lawn Cemetery. This means that the whole area is regularly mowed to create an attractive and peaceful place for visitors to spend time. There are a number of seats around the cemetery to support visitors, some of which have been renovated by the Men's Shed at no cost. All other maintenance costs are borne by the Parish Council as part of the precept charge.

1.4. Cemetery costs

1.4.1. In recent years cemetery cost has been greater than income creating a deficit of around £2k per year on average. This is a cost to the residents of Wickham Market. The Clerk has been tasked by the Parish Council with making the cemetery cost neutral. To this end, in 2025 an exercise to level off some of the raised or sunken graves was carried out which has reduced mowing costs by about £3.5k per year.

2. CREATING A SUSTAINABLE CEMETERY FOR THE FUTURE

2.1. Wickham Market cemetery is important to the people of the village and is a haven for wildlife. The Parish Council feel a responsibility to maintain this asset for the community long into the future. However, the Council agree that this should not be a drain on council funds supported by the precept tax on residents. This is principally because there are a number of non resident users who do not contribute to the maintenance. This proposal sets out some of the challenges and suggestions to be considered to achieve this vision.

2.2. Responsibilities

2.2.1. The Parish Council has a responsibility to ensure the cemetery is a safe place to visit. This includes regular safety inspection records for monuments and trees. The safety of fences should also be considered, particularly the barbed wire around the cemetery extension.

2.3. Grounds Maintenance Issues

2.3.1. There are some grounds maintenance issues that drive costs up. These should be resolved in order to support a financially sustainable asset for the future for all to enjoy. A review of cost drivers was carried out with our grounds maintenance contractor to identify the primary cost drivers and what could be done to manage these. This is attached in Annex 1.

2.4. Tree Planting:

2.4.1. There are some magnificent and historical trees within the cemetery. The locations of new trees should take into account the ability to freely mow the grassed areas as well as avoiding proximity to graves. Whilst there are no intentions to remove or relocate any recently planted trees some of their locations affect cemetery use as described below.

2.4.2. Planted in between graves: (see picture to the right – this tree uses at least two grave spaces)

- Restricts the usage of space for burials
- Tree roots encroach into grave areas where there are double depth graves which will eventually need to be reopened for a second burial.
- Tree roots will need to be cut and the grave sides may become unstable and dangerous for the mourners.



- 2.4.3. In the middle of the grave length
 - Restricts the ability to mow the area in an economical and tidy fashion
- 2.4.4. In the extension area (see picture to the right. This row of trees may obstruct a whole row of graves)
 - Restricts future grave space and the ability to mow the area in an economical and tidy fashion



2.5. Bulb Planting

- 2.5.1. Spring bulbs planted along hedgerows, boundaries and close around trees look nice in the spring and as they die back grass and other plants take over until it is time to mow the area in early summer. However, where they are planted in regularly mowed areas used for visitor access they may look good for a few weeks then look untidy for a couple of months and create extra cost in mowing round them for this period.



3. CURRENT MANAGEMENT

- 3.1. While the Parish Council is ultimately responsible for the management of the cemetery, it has overlooked its duties in recent years and relied on volunteer working parties to keep the cemetery in good order. It is proposed that a better, co-ordinated and joined up approach between the Parish Council, its working parties and its contractors, will ensure maintenance and improvement works are planned, agreed and carried out with reference to the council's responsibilities and with regards to minimising costs.

4. EXAMPLES OF SUSTAINABLE TREE PLANTING

- 4.1. Some trees are planted along headstone rows allowing mowers a straight run. (See right Pic)
- 4.2. Others are planted near hedgerows where they form part of the wildlife corridors.
- 4.3. This allows for easy mowing between rows of headstones (see below pic)



5. PROPOSAL

- 5.1. It is therefore proposed that the Parish Council instructs the Clerk to be responsible for all matters relating to cemetery operations and grounds management. Operations such as internments will be delegated to the Deputy Clerk and grounds maintenance will be carried out by a contractor on behalf of the Council. In return the Council will assist volunteers with the carrying out of risk assessments and tool-box talks and provide the volunteers with personal and third party insurance for their cemetery work as well as holding regular co-ordination meetings.
- 5.2. The council will continue to support wildlife habitat including hedge rows, bird nesting boxes, bat boxes and is open to considering other ideas that do not restrict future cemetery operations.

6. IDEAS TO CONSIDER FOR THE FUTURE

6.1. Parish Council Authorisation

6.1.1. Any proposals for expenditure or plans for the future will be brought before the full Council for authorisation.

6.2. Wildflower meadow

6.2.1. The currently unused paddock could be nurtured as a wildflower meadow until such time as it is needed for cemetery operations. Because this will be used for grave operations, no trees should be planted in this area. It would be good to remove the barbed wire and manage the front hedge and ditch more effectively. An updated proposal can be resubmitted to the Council.



6.3. Tree planting



6.3.1. The old area at the back of the cemetery (see right pic) could be used for tree planting. The council could operate a "sponsored tree memorial" scheme where a tree and a quality rabbit and deer protection is purchased by people who would like a lasting green memorial. There is already a memorial tree in this area (see left pic). A proposal to launch this scheme could be created and submitted to the Council for approval.



6.4. Third Memorial garden

6.4.1. There will be a need for another memorial garden within the next few years. There is a possibility that this could be located towards the back of the cemetery where there are no grave memorials. The lawful reuse of this area would need to be investigated. A more detailed proposal could be written with reference to legal conditions and grants sought.



6.5. Iron fencing along the drive

6.5.1. This is in poor condition and detracts from the cemetery entrance. There is a possibility that the probation service community payback scheme could be used to repair and repaint these railings at minimal cost. Clerk can investigate this possibility and submit a more detailed proposal to the full council.



Annex 1 Review of Cemetery cost drivers

Background

Cemetery maintenance costs are rising and there seems to be a general slowing of new internments as more people turn to the crematorium. This means that over time the cemetery maintenance is going to become more of a burden to Wickham Market residents.

Consequently, this brief explores the principal cost drivers for maintenance and suggests actions that could bring these costs down to a more manageable level together with improving the overall look of the area. This is likely to require some up front investment in work to achieve the savings.

Current costs

Activity	Frequency per year	Unit cost	Total cost
Paddock Grass cutting	3	28	63
Ditch maintenance - To clear leaf fall/brambles to ensure pipe under Road B1438 is clear to allow water to flow, Mini digger use to dredge area.	1		420
Remove excess clay soil from Compound when full. Mini to load on to Tippers to remove.	1		420
Aucuba bed and shrub maintenance in Cemetery main driveway.	Monthly		840
Pruning Lime trees in the avenue Driveway maintenance to maintain size and shape.	13	48	630
Grass cutting entire cemetery and extension /removal of grass.	17	336	5,712

Cost drivers

The key cost driver is labour hours, so anything that can be done to reduce time will save money. Activities that are labour intensive with suggested options for reduction identified with the help of Paul Tynan from ESSL include:

Strimming is very labour intensive and there are a number of areas where this could be reduced.

- Under some of the trees Crown lift some trees to c2.5m to allow mower to pass underneath
- Around misaligned tributes and memorials along graves. Where practical align memorials (e.g. stone vases) with the headstone row, allowing a 62" mulching mower deck to pass between headstones
- Around kerbs Some uninscribed grave length kerbs could be removed if this is allowed.
- Around fallen, flat or leaning stones Reset the stones so that the mower can cut closer
- Around graves that still have earth mounds In keeping with cemetery regulations, flatten these after 6 months which will allow mower access.
- Around tributes left along the length of the grave In keeping with cemetery regulations, move these to the headstone line after 6 months which will allow mower access.

In addition to strimming, picking up artificial floral tributes before mowing is labour intensive. Move forward with a ban on artificial tributes as soon as sensitively possible.

Other mowing obstacles such as tree stumps, random stones, logs, random clumps of spring bulbs
 Tree stumps – remove/grind out
 Stones – remove/realign
 Logs – remove
 Spring Bulbs – relocate

Improve speed of mowing
 Instigate a major exercise of grave levelling across the whole cemetery cutting out mounds and filling dips and holes and reseeding as required. This will need additional topsoil.
 Once finished this will create an even grass cut which will look much tidier and be much quicker to maintain.

Lime trees and Aucuba beds
 This is a significant labour intensive costs with no simple obvious reduction option. However Paul will consider this to see what may be possible.

Conclusion. This brief seeks:

1. Agreement to investigate in more detail the actions most likely to reduce costs and also the cost of carrying out these actions.
2. Agreement in principal to invest money in the cemetery upfront to reduce the regular funding deficits.