



COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL

Council name	COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	CABINET - 2 NOVEMBER 2020
Report Number	AGENDA ITEM 11
Subject	SAFETY IMPROVEMENTS TO MEMORIALS AT COUNCIL CEMETERIES
Wards affected	Chesterton, Stratton, Watermoor
Accountable member	Cllr Andrew Doherty - Cabinet Member for: Health, well-being & public safety Email: andrew.doherty@cotswold.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Claire Locke - Group Manager - Commissioning Tel: 01285 623427 Email: claire.locke@cotswold.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To allocate funding, and agree actions to be taken to improve urgent memorial safety in the Council's Cemeteries.
Annexes	Annex A - Memorial testing report summary Annex B - Cost for repairs
Recommendation/s	<i>a) To note the report on Memorial safety included at Annex A; b) That the original allocation of £20,000 is utilised for repair works and supplemented with £35,000 from the Building Maintenance budget to undertake all Priority 1 repair works to memorials at Chesterton, Stratton and Watermoor Cemeteries; c) That a waiver of Contract Rules is agreed to enable this work to be undertaken by 'Memsafe' an ICCM affiliated contractor, as additional quotations could not be obtained;</i>
Corporate priorities	Ensure that all services delivered by the Council are delivered to the highest standard.
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Officers, Consultant, (reference) Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management, Ministry of Justice Managing the safety of Burial Ground Memorials.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. Prior to 2019, no formal recorded inspection or specific repair works have been carried out to the three cemetery sites within Council ownership. Upon a review of the sites it became apparent there was a requirement for maintenance works to a high proportion of gravestones and burial plot areas so they do not present a risk to visitors or workers entering the cemeteries.
- 1.2. In January 2019 Cabinet agreed to appoint specialist contractors to assess grave safety and agreed a one off allocation of £20,000 to fund any priority repairs.
- 1.3. Memsafe were then appointed to carry out memorial testing to the three Council cemeteries, all memorials were tested and a full list was provided complete with photos.
- 1.4. It had initially been anticipated that £20,000 would be sufficient to cover the cost of repairs or measures to reduce risk. Unfortunately a higher number of gravestones and memorials than anticipated were found to be in a very poor condition and pose a risk. In addition very few can just be laid down next to graves as there is insufficient space between them. Having explored various options it has been concluded the cost to carry out minimal repairs to render memorials safe is £55,000. The additional £35,000 of funding will be found from the building maintenance revenue budget.

2. MAIN POINTS

- 2.1. The Council owns Chesterton and Stratton cemeteries and manages a small closed cemetery at Watermoor. Chesterton has approx. 3150 plots, Stratton has approx. 600 plots and Watermoor cemetery has 42 plots.
- 2.2. A risk assessment was carried out and highlighted that there are a large number of memorials at Chesterton (around 1500), a low proportion at Stratton (41) and a small number that exist at Watermoor (3) that are large and potentially unstable. An inspection has been carried out using specialists in memorial safety to undertake a visual and physical inspection of each memorial, which was photographed for a report.
- 2.3. A temporary sign is currently positioned at each site, stating that testing works have been carried out and inviting related families to contact the Council and discuss the work required.
- 2.4. Any family members who make contact with the Council will then be involved in the decision on what alterations are made to the memorial. They could choose to undertake full repairs or replacement of stonework but would need to undertake this at their own cost.
- 2.5. If family members do not make contact or fail to carry out repairs within a reasonable period (to be specified depending on risk), the Council will need to make a decision to proceed with making the memorial safe. To date no families have made contact with the Council, with signage having been in place for over six months.

- 2.6. Laying the memorial flat is the cheapest option but this is not advised as it will be difficult in these cemeteries, as a large number of memorials are close together and it would affect the appearance of the cemetery. There is also a risk the memorial stones become a trip hazard and affect the ability to carry out grounds maintenance works, such as grass cutting.
- 2.7. There are also options to repair the memorials using a stainless steel dowelling system or via socketing (although this is not suitable for all memorials). These are more expensive options, the costs of which are set out in the appendix.
- 2.8. There will be a need for a rolling inspection programme for some of the older memorials each year and further safety improvements as conditions deteriorate. An annual revenue sum of £2,000 is therefore sought to support this rolling programme.
- 2.9. Whilst Memsafe undertook the survey and provided a price for repairs, the following additional contractors were contacted to provide a comparative specification and cost based upon the survey carried out. None were able to offer the service due to resources and nature of work required, with two of the companies providing details of Memsafe, as a contractor they recommended:
 - FJ Cambridge Stonemasons
 - CDS Group
 - Cleevely memorials
 - James long masons

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1. To carry out the recommended works to all level 1 priorities at all three cemeteries the cost is quoted as £53,839.
- 3.2. A sum of £2,000 is then required per annum to support a rolling program of inspections. This will be funded from the existing building maintenance budget.
- 3.3. Indicative costs for the alternative option of re-siting memorials are in the region of £39,000 - £57,000. There is potential for some grounds maintenance savings to offset this but as plots are scattered through each cemetery, there would not be the same savings that would occur if all plots were in one area which would then simply be laid to grass.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1. When a plot is purchased for burial it is effectively leased for a set period. In some cases the contact details of the family who purchased the plot will be held on record but as most of the graves that will require safety improvements are very old it is highly likely the Council will not hold up-to-date contact details for the family and will have no practical affordable way of tracing them.
- 4.2. Whilst it must be recognised that the owner of a memorial is liable for maintaining the memorial, under the Health & Safety at work act 1974, the Council is responsible for health and safety in the cemeteries which are under their ownership or management. The Council must therefore ensure the cemeteries remain a safe environment for visitors, staff and contractors.

5. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 5.1. If the Council fails to take action to make safe any dangerous memorials and set in place a rolling testing plan, there is a risk of serious injury to both public and contractors if a memorial was to fall on them. To mitigate this risk, signage was erected in the cemeteries.
- 5.2. If the Council lays flat or repairs a memorial, there is a risk the surviving family could complain that they are not happy that repairs have been carried out. A press statement was issued and attempts have been made to contact families using last known contact details held for each plot to mitigate this risk.
- 5.3. Reallocating £35,000 of the property maintenance budget to fund this work may result in a shortfall in funding available for other essential property maintenance.
- 5.4. Alternative options to memorial repair have been considered in section 8 below, however both options are likely to receive significant public objections.

6. EQUALITIES IMPACT (IF REQUIRED)

- 6.1. None.

7. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS (IF REQUIRED)

- 7.1. None.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 8.1. The Council could do nothing and accept the risk that someone is injured by a falling memorial. This could result in injury or death and significant financial, legal and reputational issues for the Council.

Relocation of Memorial stones

- 8.2. One alternative to repairing memorial stones is their removal to the periphery of each cemetery site. Memorial stones would need to be lifted and moved using specialist equipment and then moved to the edge of the site where they would be held in place using rails. Both sites have very little solid boundary walls against which memorials may be leant, which means posts would be needed with rails behind and in front of each row of memorials to prevent them from falling forwards or backwards. Memorials would stand shoulder to shoulder effectively supporting each other. They would not be repaired but would deteriorate naturally in-situ.
- 8.3. The grave plot itself would need to be levelled and grassed over and then either a flat memorial plaque fixed into the ground, which mowing equipment could pass over, or small grave markers could be positioned which could be lifted out during grounds maintenance. Records are held which state who is buried in each plot, however grave markers would assist any person wishing to locate plots of their ancestors. Once memorial relocation was complete grounds maintenance costs should reduce although rails would need to be maintained and replaced and it may render hedge cutting and other grounds maintenance around the edge of each site, more time consuming.

Provisional estimated costs to undertake this work are:

Post and rail system	£9,000 - £12,000
Re-siting with machinery hire)	£20,000 - £30,000
Ground works and making good grave plots	£2,000 - £4,000
Grave marker plates	£8,000 - £11,000
Total	£39,000 - £57,000

8.4 Should members wish to explore this option in detail fully costed estimates will be obtained and designs drawn up to indicate where memorial stones would be re-sited.

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS

9.1. None.

(END)