

CORPORATE SCRUTINY
REPORT OF THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL
18th JANUARY 2021
REVIEW OF CEMETERY REGULATIONS PERTAINING TO MEMORIAL
BENCHES

Purpose

To provide Corporate Scrutiny Committee information to support the recommendation made by full Council to refer the cemetery regulations to scrutiny for review.

Background

Tamworth's Cemeteries have been governed by Regulations as far back as 1908; and are periodically reviewed. The regulations have remained 'silent' on memorial benches and trees until 1998 as requests for either were not popular prior to this time.

In 1998 Section B8 was added to the regulations which is the first time either memorial benches or trees are specifically mentioned in the regulations. All enquiries for benches or trees were through the Cemeteries Administrator. See Appendix 1.

In 2007 all applications for memorial benches and trees were suspended pending a review as the Council had received so many requests that it was not possible to accommodate all of them. Graves are only 12 inches apart in most of the cemeteries and placing benches in this space is not possible. Allowing benches where there was more space penalised those families whose graves were in more central areas, so the proposal to Cabinet at that time was to not permit any further memorial benches or trees and to introduce a Memorial Bench Plaque Scheme.

The Council was to purchase granite benches for its cemeteries, sited in locations where burials would not take place, and the public could then purchase/lease a memorial plaque for their beloved relative.

The current Cemetery Regulations – see Appendix 2, were approved by Cabinet in 2010 and in Section B15 explain that the Council does not permit memorial benches or trees, but does have the Plaque Scheme available.

Since that time the Council has placed a limited number of non-dedicated benches for the public to rest on in locations where it does not intend to bury anyone, thus creating seating areas for reflection. Space is a premium and this is reflected in the number of such benches.

Please find attached in Appendix 3 current plan showing the location of benches within the Councils cemeteries and their designation. This plan details memorial benches and those which are not.

The Council has also undertaken a review into what other local authority cemeteries permit in terms of memorial benches/plaques; although this is very subjective as each authority will have their own regulations based on the individual circumstances of each burial ground under their control. See Appendix 4.

Financial Information

The Council has an annual revenue budget of £11,370 for maintenance within all its five cemeteries, for ongoing repairs to its benches, furniture, fences etc.

The cost of a standard Council bench with installation is in the region of £1000-£1500 each with an ongoing annual maintenance cost of £100 per bench.

Should Council benches be vandalised or damaged then the removal, replacement or repair is also met from this budget. The maintenance of private memorial benches is the responsibility of the owner of the bench, however should the bench become dangerous and the owner did not remedy the situation the Council will remove said bench and stand the cost of the removal on the grounds of public safety.

The cost of leasing a plaque on one of the Council granite benches is currently £290 renewable every 5 years. The uptake of this scheme has been very limited with only 1 of the available 18 bench plaques currently leased. There is little or no income from this scheme to offset any maintenance costs.

Appendix 1	Cemetery Regulations 1998
Appendix 2	Current Cemetery Regulations 2010
Appendix 3	Cemetery Bench Locations
Appendix 4	Surrounding Authorities Regulations

Background Papers

Cabinet report 20th October 2010