

ABINGDON-ON-THAMES TOWN COUNCIL

Amenities and Recreation Committee

20th January 2021

Item 12: Request for allocated burial space for Muslims in South Oxfordshire

The Town Council has received the request below for a dedicated Muslim burial area. Members are asked to consider this request.

There are three Important considerations :

1. Impact of Cemetery Space : As members know burial space in Spring Gardens Cemetery is running out . Whilst we are working to secure a site for a new cemetery, to date we have not managed to. In order to maximise the available space we now longer permit residents to “reserve” plots. The orientation of traditional Muslim graves (facing Mecca) would mean a new section within the cemetery would run across the mapped lines and therefore require more space per burial, leading to the remaining space running out more quickly.
2. Creation of a dedicated area for a specific faith: Abingdon cemetery is a municipal facility without specified areas, apart from the children’s burial area and an ashes section. Until 2012 Catholic burials took place in a designated Catholic section but when that section was filled discussions were held with the local Roman Catholic church and it was agreed by both the church and the council that any future catholic burials would be included within the cemetery as & when they took place (as it was considered this reflects how we are in life where all faiths and cultures live together in our community), and each grave blessed.
3. Charging Policy: As members know we charge different rates for residents and non-residents. It appears that the Muslim community are seeking a burial area which could be used by Southern Oxfordshire Muslims without premium rates being charged. To accommodate this request would mean altering our charging policy, which in turn may lead to requests from Southern Oxfordshire non-Muslims for burial at the residential rate.

To my knowledge we have not previously received a request or enquiry for a Muslim burial. It would appear that what is being requested is something for the wider Vale and South Oxfordshire districts and so perhaps should be considered by the District councils rather than the individual parishes.

However, this does highlight a growing concern by the local Muslim community which perhaps we should consider when planning the new cemetery, where it may be possible to designate a dedicated Muslim section (for use by Abingdon residents) within the wider cemetery. Should this happen, new burial procedures would need to be agreed,

Members are requested to consider this matter and make a recommendation.

Tim Badcock
Outdoor Services Manager
15 January 2021

APPENDIX

5 January 2021

Abingdon Town Council
Cemetery Services
Abingdon

Dear Sirs

Firstly, I would like to thank members of the Abingdon Town Council to proactively coping with Covid Crises and the persistent efforts for the safeguarding of the local community. In wake of number of deaths, designated places for Muslims for Burial and limited plots available for locals (with non premium rates), please refer to the attached proposal and concerns raised on behalf of Muslim community living across SOXON (South Oxfordshire) area.

This issue is being raised with all concerned SOXON district and town councils namely Oxford City Council (OCC), Vale of White Horse (VoWH), South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC), Didcot Town Council (DTC), Abingdon Town Council (ABT), and Wantage Town Council (WTC).

We believe a group comprising of representatives from these councils and various Muslim community groups are already been facilitated by Oxford City Council's Cemeteries Department and a zoom meeting of this group was arranged in November 2020.

As the SOXON community predominantly is running out of burial space across different cemeteries managed by Oxford City Council this wider group is considering future options for all communities including the Muslim community. We have joined up in this wider SOXON group and will be representing our community's concerns.

Kind regards

Burial Area for Muslims of South Oxfordshire (SOXON)

Importance of burial in Muslims community is very important specially when it comes to the procedures of quick burial after one dies. At that stage of mourning, last thing one's loved ones would worry is the scarcity or expensive places to bury.

Muslim Community living in SOXON area would like to raise the issue that we do not have a dedicated burial space in or around our main towns of Didcot and Abingdon. This has been a matter of great concern but has become even more serious and needs to be addressed as a matter of significant importance.

- We do not have an allocated Muslim Burial Area in our towns or county. The only nearest availability is in Botley Cemetery that is managed by Oxford City Council (OCC). This dedicated area and the cemetery at large has almost run out of available spaces.

- As compared to Muslims living within the boundaries of OCC those living outside have to pay three times the cost just for the burial ground. This is in addition to other funeral related costs.
- We ask for a suitable land, an area or a section that is to be allocated to us either as a whole or agreed to be shared with the larger Muslim Community of Oxfordshire county with “equal rights” and on “fair terms” by paying the same levies as the local residents of OCC.