

ABINGDON TOWN COUNCIL

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| Report to | Environment and amenities |
| Meeting date | 5 October 2022 |
| Report author | Tim Badcock |
| Agenda item | 12b: Cemetery benches |

Cemetery & Works Managers Report **Cemetery Benches**

1. **Purpose of the Report**

To seek approval from members for cemetery bench replacements.

2. **Summary**

There are currently 32 benches in the Spring Gardens cemetery, the majority being around 20 years old. Many people wish to renew these benches like for like. The previous Amenities and Recreation Committee resolved not to replace these benches due to the number of them and their siting . Now that many of these benches are coming to the end of their life we are receiving more and more requests for replacement along with the regular requests for new benches. I propose a scheme whereby more requests can be met whilst benches serve their purpose both as places to rest and reflect and as prominent memorials.

3. **Action required and recommendations**

Members are requested to approve the recommendations in this report.

4. **Link to strategic plan and objectives**

KO3: To manage the Council's assets efficiently and effectively to meet for the needs of the community now and in the future.

5. **Background**

Spring Gardens Cemetery had a small number of green metal park benches which

Agenda item 12b: Cemetery benches

became beyond repair some 20 years ago at which point memorial benches were offered to families wishing to further memorialise loved ones buried within the cemetery. These benches were sold at the cost price of £120 for an untreated hand-crafted oak bench made by a carpenter in Marcham. The Town council would then collect them, purchase paving slabs for the base, install them and stain them and every two or three years until now, sand them down, re-stain and repair them. All at no extra cost. These benches would be sited at a location chosen by the family close to the grave of the dedicatee. Of course, these benches have to be either moved or strimmed around every time the grass is cut, hedges trimmed or access to graves is required. No agreements were in place for longer term arrangements and although the benches belong to the council many people now assume the right to a bench indefinitely.

The current resolved position of the council is that it is not installing new benches in the cemetery. Whilst there is a [policy](#) in place to consider the “ad hoc” requests for benches in our open spaces, I am proposing that for the cemetery, where there has been strong demand which is not met, the council consider a scheme whereby the council plan where the benches are, retain all ownership and responsibility but allow for benches to be dedicated to loved ones.

6. **Key information and options**

I propose a scheme whereby a smaller number of benches are sited in central locations that are likely to be a convenient place to sit and reflect looking over each section of the cemetery. Each bench could have up to 5 dedicates giving more people the option to further memorialise a loved one. The benches would be of the same design and material as those sited elsewhere around the town by the Town Council under its bench policy.

These would be owned and maintained by the council but funded via the scheme outlined below.

A memorial plaque could be installed for a determined amount of time in line with other cemetery memorials such as memorial trees that are available for a ten-year period for £450.

A fee of £450 would seem a fair price when other memorial options in nearby cemeteries and crematoria are considered.

Members may wish to consider whether the council would allow one person to purchase all five plaques to dedicate a bench exclusively to one person.

On open spaces in the town current charge for memorial benches dedicated to one person is £1,096 (inc. base).

7. **Climate change/green implications**

Replacement benches will be made of recycled plastic which requires no varnishing/staining and no ongoing maintenance. These benches will last many years.

8. **Financial/budget implications**

Income from dedication scheme

9. **HR implications**

A small amount of works team time to install and some admin to operate the dedication scheme

10. **Supporting papers and appendices**

None.