ELLESMERE TOWN COUNCIL CEMETERY WORKING GROUP
MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 19th June 2023
AT Swan Hill Cemetery, Ellesmere.

Members Present:

Chair: P Goulbourne (Chair)

Councillors: Graham Dyke (Vice-Chair) John Baker, Kay Egerton, Paul Goulbourne, Graham Hutchinson, John Howard, Geoff Elner, Tony Richardson and Anne Wignall, Cllr N Proffitt (non-voting).

Officers: Jo Butterworth, Town Clerk (TC) & Andy Chatting, CCO.

Public Participation Session.

No members of the public were present.

CWG 06/23/01 To receive apologies and reasons for absence.

No apologies were received.

CWG 06/23/02 Disclosure of Personal and Prejudicial Interests.

No disclosures were made.

CWG 06/23/03 Grant Dispensations.

None requested.

CWG 06/23/04 Minutes.

To read and confirm the minutes of the Cemetery Working Group Meeting held on Thursday 1st June 2023.

1) Moved by Cllr G Hutchinson, seconded by Cllr A Wignall and **RESOLVED**: that the minutes of the meeting held on the 1st of June be signed as a true and accurate record.

2) Moved by Cllr G Elner, seconded by Cllr D Baker and **RESOLVED**: that the confidential minutes of the meeting held on the 1st of June be signed as a true and accurate record.

CWG 06/23/05 <u>Additional cemetery grave spaces at Swan Hill.</u>

Part 5 of the agenda was ***"To discuss and approve the possible use of additional grave space within the cemetery as identified".***

This related to two areas identified as being suitable for new graves and one area being suitable for exploration in the longer term as a site for expansion.

<u>Area 1.</u>

In relation to 'new doubles' the Cllrs convened at the 'top 'of the cemetery close to the access gate, the newly planted commemorative oak tree and the area currently occupied by a bench and an arbour. It was explained to the CWG that following on from a meeting that the CCO had had with gravediggers it was estimated that this piece of land could accommodate between 16 and 18 fresh double plots. It appears that this land has not been used in the past for interments and that there being **no** legal restrictions relating to the distance between burial plots and any existing boundaries; the gravediggers believed that they could use their equipment as appropriate in that area without impinging on the boundary wall or hedge whilst still allowing for grounds maintenance to take place as appropriate. The only changes that would be required to utilise this land would therefore be:

- Relocation of the small oak tree at a suitable time of year.
- Relocation of the existing arbour.
- Relocation of the existing bench.
- Re-siting of two wheelie bins, mainly for aesthetic reasons.

Co-incidentally, the family who originally installed the bench (Blaney family) had written to the council in the past week to say that they no longer intended to maintain it and that they would either have it removed or offer it to the council for free. Either way any sensitivity about its situation now seems to have been overcome.

<u>Area 2.</u>

In relation to 'new singles' the Cllrs moved to the 'M' Section close to the Mere and the bottom pedestrian gate. It was explained to the CWG that following on from a meeting that the CCO had had with the gravediggers it was estimated that this piece of land could accommodate around 8 new plots (5 in line with the current run and 3 at 90 degrees). The only changes that would be required to utilise this land would therefore be:

- Re-siting of two wheelie bins to increase the width of the lawned path at its narrowest point and for aesthetic reasons.

<u>Area 3.</u>

Historically, Swan Hill Cemetery has incorporated a large section of apparently unused land seemingly suitable for extending into. This is to be found in what the original architects of the cemetery has designated as 'H' and 'E' sections.

'H' section (shifted at some point into what had originally been designated as Section 'G') has for many years been deemed to be off-limits over fears of contamination from old tanning activity.

’E’ section is believed to have been used in the past and pre the1930’s, as a ‘pauper’s grave’ containing the remains of people who died whilst resident at the Ellesmere Workhouse.

In relation to the possible utilization of this area on 19th June 2023 the CCO, The Town Clerk and the Chair of the CWG had taken part on a Zoom Meeting with CDS; the company that undertook the original 2005 survey in and around Ellesmere looking at potential new cemetery sites. In essence the result of that meeting was that CDS suggested that they commonly come across stories about land in cemeteries that cannot be used for all manner of reasons but that it is more often and not the case that the land (or part of the land) in question ***is*** suitable for use after the appropriate investigations have been undertaken.

It was explained to the Cllrs that that CDS were recommending a 3-stage approach to determine whether this large piece of unutilised land could be considered for new burials.

Their step-by step suggestion was as follows:

1. Conduct a ‘desk-top’ exercise involving historic mapping and records to ascertain what was known about the space.

2. Carry out a GPR (Ground Penetrating Radar) survey to look for sub-surface evidence. The company had been at pains to explain that this tactic was not full-proof and that in the case of ‘pauper’s graves’ there could be little to find but they were confident that they may be able to differentiate between the ‘pauper’s section’ and the remainder.

3. Intrusive testing. This would entail boring 10mm tubes into the soil to a depth of 5 to 6 metres to test for contaminants, levels of calcium etc and the extracted soils would be subject of laboratory analysis with a view to resolving the alleged issue of contamination one and for all.

Following this investigation CDS suggested sinking ‘window’ trenches to make doubly sure that no burials existed.

They also suggested sinking boreholes to allow for water monitoring to take place at the same time as their soil-sampling because this would fulfil the requirements of *due diligence* in relation to how the company and the Council conducted the survey.

Thereafter the ‘extension’, if practicable, was unlikely to require planning consent it being within the curtilage of the existing cemetery and not involving any form of construction.

Theoretically, if it was found that the ground was uncontaminated and free from burials or other hazards then the identified land could be used for new graves.

The issue for the high-water table was discussed and CDS recommended that if it was an issue then the Council could consider ‘ground-raising’ involving the construction of a retaining wall to whatever size the Council felt necessary and to a height of 1 metre to give a clear space between the existing surface level and anything beneath it and any water.

Ground raising **would likely** require a permit from The Environment Agency as well as planning permission.

In relation to these three areas that we discussed:

Moved by Cllr G Hutchinson, seconded by Cllr G Dyke and

RESOLVED: to recommend to the Town Council use the 2 new sections identified and recommended for double and single burials.

FURTHER RESOLVED: to relocate the bins at the top and bottom of the site, the Arbor, the Oak tree and bench in order for the 2 new burial sites to used.

Moved by Cllr D Baker, seconded by Cllr P Goulbourne and **RESOLVED**: to recommend to Ellesmere Town Council to approve a desktop survey to be undertake by CDS, on the bottom section of the Cemetery at a cost of £300.

Moved by Cllr G Hutchinson, seconded by Cllr T Robinson and **RESOLVED**: to recommend to Ellesmere Town Council to approve for the Cemetery Co-Ordinator to go ahead and instruct a GPR Survey to be carried out by CDS up to the value of £1,000.

CWG 06/23/06 Next Meeting. Thursday 20th July 2023 at 7pm.

CWG 06/23/07 Exclusion of Press and Public. To resolve "That by the Public Bodies (Admission to Meetings) Act 1960 and under Section 100 (A) of the Local Government Act 1992, the public and press be excluded for the remainder of the meeting for the following item of business on the grounds it involves the likely disclosure of confidential information as defined in the Acts".

Not Required.

Meeting Closed at 7.50pm.

The next meeting was scheduled for 20th July 2023.

Chair……

Date……