

Kidlington Parish Council

Chair's report

November 2019

Readers may have seen the Meridian News item at the end of October on problems at the new Bicester Road cemetery, where the recent heavy rainfall left the ground sodden in the lowest-lying part of the site. We very much regret the distress caused to some bereaved families. Since we are working constantly to improve the cemetery, this is an opportunity to try and explain the situation.

The Bicester Road cemetery was opened in 2012, when the St Mary's cemetery was full. Before then the Council investigated several potential sites but no other one was suitable. While the Bicester Road site had suffered from localised flooding, we were advised this could be resolved; the alternative would have been to have no new cemetery within the village. Steps were taken when the cemetery was first created to alleviate the flooding problem, particularly through the construction of a large soakaway at the edge. Since then further steps have been taken through the creation of a second soakaway and the insertion of four drainage channels. We are in the process of clearing the ditch around the site.

We have also changed from double- to single-depth graves and have introduced a new method for topping them up when they subside, as in any cemetery they inevitably do. A key factor is that below a thin layer of topsoil, the ground in the site is all clay. This means that while water is more likely to collect on the surface, the graves are protected because the water does not penetrate to the layers beneath.

Over the years the situation has been much improved, though it is still unsatisfactory. The greater part of the site has not been affected by the recent rains, and for at least the preceding year there was no water problem. It is possible that if other steps had been taken when the cemetery was first created the problem could have been reduced, but drainage is unfortunately not an exact science, and the Council must rely on outside experts. We have been following the best advice we have been given, which is to proceed step by step, introducing additional solutions where they are indicated. Cost is not a consideration, but there is no single and immediate solution that we can adopt at the present time.

The Council will continue to work on the problem with our advisors, and we are confident that the steady improvements that have been and will be made will eventually deal with it satisfactorily. As an added precaution, we will not place any new graves in the lowest-lying section. We also continue to work on the overall appearance of the cemetery, and will shortly be planting more trees. We hope that residents now feel that, despite the occasional water problem, the cemetery is an attractive and peaceful place. We also hope that families with concerns about the graves of their loved ones will speak to the Council immediately.

DAVID ROBEY