**KIDLINGTON PARISH COUNCIL**

## Statement on the Bicester Road Cemetery

The following is an accurate and detailed account, to the best of our knowledge, of work done by the Council to acquire and prepare the cemetery site, and to improve and upgrade it since opening, together with plans for the immediate future.

While the cemetery has generally been in good condition since opening, heavy rainfall, particularly in the last few months, has from time to time left much of the ground waterlogged. Other cemeteries in the region have had a similar problem. The Council regrets the distress that this can cause bereaved families, and has been working over the years, and will continue to work, to alleviate the waterlogging. Unfortunately, the only feasible way to do so is to proceed step by step, so progress will necessarily be gradual. Cost is not, and has not been, a factor.

It needs to be stressed that while the site may not be ideal, it has been approved as suitable by the relevant experts and authorities. It was also the only suitable site available at the time; the alternative would have been to have no new cemetery within the village and therefore no burials as St Mary's Burial Ground is full except for reservations previously made.

## Background information regarding the Cemetery

### 2002/3

In December 2002 Cluttons were commissioned to search for a suitable burial site for a new cemetery. They looked at 10 sites in Kidlington and Gosford. After much research they concluded in their report of May 2003 that only two sites were viable, land North of the Moors and the current site at Bicester Road. Neither of these sites were in the ownership of the Parish Council at the time.

### 2006

The Council employed Bruton Knowles to carry out work to stage 1 (feasibility) of the project following a procurement process.

### 2007

Cotswold Getotech were commissioned by Bruton Knowles to carry out a geological survey and assessment of the two sites considered viable. Boreholes were made to investigate the feasibility of the Bicester Road site for interments. The boreholes were made at the NW corner of the cemetery, the NE corner of the allotments, the SW and SE corners of the field to the South of the cemetery, and at the central point of all four corners. They concluded that the site is underlain by weathered Oxford Clays but that this should not present any significant constraints on its proposed use for burial purposes. The Environment Agency concluded that 'water moves through Oxford Clay at extremely slow rates and inhibits the flow of contaminants related to burials making this a suitable site for this use'.

**2008**
Bruton Knowles' report to the Council concluded that the site on land North of The Moors (extension to the existing burial ground) was: "the most convenient site in geographical terms however the Cotswold Geotech report concluded that the site was not suitable for interments. The investigations confirmed the concerns of the Environment Agency who themselves concluded that it was not an ideal site because of the possibility of shallow ground water and the number of drains and watercourses surrounding the site".

As regards the Bicester Road site, "The Environment Agency suggested that this site may be suitable for a burial ground and this was indeed confirmed by the investigations carried out by Cotswold Geotech. In their report dated 14th March 2007 they concluded that the soil composition should not present any significant constraints on its proposed use as a burial site".

Bruton Knowles were then instructed to commence negotiations with the owner's agents regarding the acquisition of the land. It was agreed that the council would secure an acquisition subject to planning consent being granted. Bruton Knowles indicated that although the valuation of the land would normally have been based on agricultural value (between £2.0K and 2.5K per acre) they indicated that the owner would not sell for less than paddock prices (between £10K and £15K per acre). Bruton Knowles recommended the council make an offer of £60K but not to exceed £75K.

**2010**
A civil engineer was employed directly by the Council to prepare the planning application and the design for the site. The planning application was widely publicised at the time in the Kidlington News and the Oxford Mail. Gosford and Water Eaton PC were informed of the proposals in March 2010. Planning permission was granted in September 2010

**2011**
Construction and laying out of the cemetery: total cost of land acquisition and construction work approximately £200K. Part was funded by the council reserves and part by a loan from the Public Works Loans Board.

The system of drainage provided in the design relied on the use of swales to dispose of ground water (sustainable drainage system (SUDS)). A 4m deep swale was dug at the NW corner of the site to take water run-off from the hard standing car park. Two drains (pipes topped by gravel) were laid S to N in the car-park area, connecting with the swale. A further swale was dug at the SE corner of the allotments connected to a blind rubble drain along the E side of the site, in order to serve as a long-term soakaway for the site.

To prepare the site, the topsoil was removed and the land was rotavated before replacing the topsoil to create a more level surface. Whilst it was acknowledged that the underlying clay would mean water would drain slowly from the surface, no additional drainage was installed in the burial area prior to its opening

because it was believed that for most of the year drainage would not be a problem and there was a requirement to keep the water on the site.

**2012**
Burials commenced.

**2015**
The Council was concerned that the drainage was not working well at times of intense, prolonged rainfall and the absorption rate of surface water was slower than anticipated. The council engaged Peter Brett Associates consulting engineers with experience in land drainage. As a result of this three land drains were installed in the burial ground running from W to E to disperse the water from the wettest areas. An additional line of trees was planted across the site to assist with the water absorption. These measures had a significant effect and were helped by a few years of reasonably dry conditions.

**2018**
During periods of prolonged wet weather problems with drainage around the graves were beginning to arise, so the new Clerk engaged a specialist cemetery design consultant Cemetery Development Services. The company carried out further trial holes to confirm the nature of the geology and confirmed the ground was as per the original site investigation in 2008

Following a number of site meetings, Cemetery Development Services submitted a report to the council. The report proposed a solution requiring the construction of an enormous swale on third party land over which the council had no control so this proposal was not taken forward

In addition, to ensure there were no contamination issues the consultants carried out inspection of a dug grave and made a further submission to the Environment Agency to ensure they were satisfied about the containment of any potential pollution from the site. This was done in 2018 and there has been no adverse comment by Environment Agency.

**2019**
The Council met with Cemetery Development Services and White Horse contractors. It was agreed that the emerging proposals for housing around the site would give an opportunity for a strategic solution to the site. However, there was no certainty about the timescales for these proposals. The Local Plan being prepared by Cherwell DC allocated additional land in the development for an extension to the cemetery.

Nevertheless, it was agreed that an interim solution was required to relieve the surface water on the site. It was agreed to regrade the ditch down towards Water Eaton Lane and agreement was secured to undertake this work, partly on third party land in Oct/November 2019. This timescale was dictated by the need to remove some hedging to access the ditch. This could only be done when there was no disturbance to wildlife.

Discussion recently with a CDC engineer indicated that there may be no need to apply the sustainable drainage solution for this site – this is the concept of retaining the water within the site by the use of swales (large soakaways and allowing for natural drainage or a controlled flow that does not exceed the original run-off from the site), as apart from the small tarmac entrance the run off from the site is essentially the same as when it was a field. We shall be considering this further.

**2020 onwards**
Actions now being pursued

- Taking further advice about back filling of graves to help prevent pooling around the edges during the 12-month settling period.
- Not currently digging double depth graves.
- Using the land at the higher end of the burial ground.
- Considering the use of false graves and/or ground spiking.
- Identifying the practicality for further land drainage following the clearance of the ditch.
- Examining the alternative outfall across third party land to Water Eaton Lane.
- Identifying the capacity of the existing outfall in Water Eaton Lane to establish if the ditch on the northern side can be used to directly drain the ground water via land drains at shallow depth.
- Examining other options to drain the southern side of the site.
- Looking at a comprehensive landscaping scheme with a view to introducing planting that will encourage the absorption of the ground water.
- In discussion with any future developer, agreeing a strategic drainage solution for any potential development and the cemetery site including the potential extension.
- Allocating appropriate funding to meet the cost of further works.

10 February 2020