

## **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, an issue.

It needs to be stressed that while the site may not be ideal for this reason, 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 at all within the village.

### **Background information regarding the Cemetery**

#### **May 2003**

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 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.

#### **May 2006**

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

#### **2007**

Cotswold Geotech 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'.

### **November 2008**

Bruton Knowles submitted a report to the Council. It 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 14<sup>th</sup> March 2007 they concluded that the soil composition should not present any significant constraints on its proposed use as a burial ground”.

Bruton Knowles were then instructed to commence negotiations with the owner’s agents regarding the acquisition of the land at the end of 2008. 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.

### **September 2010**

Planning application was made. 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.

### **Early 2011**

Planning permission was granted.

### **During 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 French 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.

### **During 2012**

Burials commenced.

### **During 2015**

The council were 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 to assist with the water absorption.

### **January 2018**

There remained problems with drainage during periods of prolonged wet weather, 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.

### **June 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. This work is now completed

## **2020 onwards**

Now that the effects of regrading the ditch are clear, the Council has been able to make plans for an extensive new network of drains and paths in the burial area. These have been agreed and have been submitted for planning approval. Covid permitting, the work will be carried out before the winter.

The Council has allocated substantial sums of money for improvements to the cemetery. Once the drainage works have been carried out, we will also introduce new landscaping features. Other actions currently in hand include continuing not to dig double-depth graves, and using the land at the higher rather than the lower end of the burial ground. In discussions with future developers of the sites adjacent to the cemetery, we will also seek to agree a strategic drainage solution for the cemetery site as well as any development, including a potential extension of the burial ground.

In all of this we have had to follow a step-by-step process. The present plan of work was initiated shortly after the election of the new Council last May, building on the drainage works that the previous Council had undertaken. We have proceeded, and will continue to proceed, as fast as is reasonably practicable.

5 May 2020