

WTF225  
FOR INFORMATION  
WARD(S): ALL

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM

23 September 2015

COUNCIL POLICY RELATING TO MEMORIAL TREES AND STREET FURNITURE

REPORT OF HEAD OF LANDSCAPE AND OPEN SPACES

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City Council currently has no official policy covering memorial trees and street furniture. Rather there are guidelines and principles which are referred to when a request for a memorial is received.

Three options have been identified for the future of this work:

1. Retain the current system;
2. Write and agree a Council Policy covering memorial trees and furniture; or
3. Undertake a strategic review of the current system.

Members are asked to advise which option they wish officers to pursue. (Officers' preferred option 3 - undertaking a strategic review). The view of Members is also sought on the level and type of involvement they wish to have.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Town Forum:

- a) Agree the option they wish officers to pursue with regard to considering the future of memorial trees and street furniture and clarify the level and type of involvement they wish to have.

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DETAIL:

1 Introduction

- 1.1 A request has been made by the Town Forum to report on the Council's Policy relating to memorial trees and street furniture.
- 1.2 This report summarises the current situation in relation to the way the Council deals with requests for memorial trees and street furniture, including a summary of the current benefits and drawbacks, and options for how we go forward.

2 Current Practice

- 2.1 There is no official Council policy covering memorial trees and street furniture. Rather there are guidelines and principles derived from providing this service for a number of years. These are referred to when a request for a memorial is received.
- 2.2 The guidelines/principles are as follows:
- (i) We offer residents and others the opportunity to erect a memorial tree or bench within our working cemetery and open spaces.
  - (ii) The City Council must consider there to be a need for the tree or bench at the proposed location in order to proceed.
  - (iii) The City Council will refuse requests where a need has not been identified and/or where an area may become cluttered.
  - (iv) Mourners are not able to place flowers or other items on the bench or tree, and if this happens, they will be removed by the City Council (although contact is often made with the mourner first).
  - (v) There is no choice given to the individual on the type of bench to be installed.
  - (vi) The tree officer will recommend tree species, which will be dependant on area, location, soil type, suitability, other trees in the area, water levels and other factors.
- 2.3 The charge for a memorial bench is £1,200 which includes the bench, plaque and installation, together with a maintenance charge.
- 2.4 The charge for a memorial tree is between £150 and £250, depending on the chosen tree and the cost of the plaque, planting and maintenance.

- 2.5 The Council receives approximately 12 requests for memorial benches and trees per year.
- 2.6 The advantages of the guidelines/principles are that:
- a) The City Council retains control over memorials whilst offering a flexible and individual service.
  - b) The current system responds to a clear need from the public.
  - c) The current system allows for new benches and trees to be installed at little cost to the City Council.
  - d) The current system works well and although the Council is not able to help everyone, it does assist where possible.
- 2.7 The disadvantages are that the Council does not have:
- a) A strategic overview of memorials, including how it fits with the aims of the Council.
  - b) A clear financial view on whether charges should simply cover direct costs or make a contribution to the overheads of the City Council.
- 2.8 There is also concern that overcrowding could occur and that formal gardens such as Abbey Gardens will have a high concentration of memorials, thereby changing the experience of visitors.

### 3 Options for the future

- 3.1 **Option 1: Retain the current system.** Whilst the current system has worked well, this is an ideal opportunity to review it, particularly as the cemetery extension at Magdalen Hill is due to come on line in the near future and memorial trees are proposed at this site.
- 3.2 **Option 2: Preparing and agreeing a formal Policy.** An agreed policy would provide details of what was/was not considered appropriate and would provide a clear explanation of the Council's position if a member of the public disagreed with a decision, including an appeals process if considered appropriate. However, there is a risk that it would restrict the Council in the service it provided and result in less flexibility and responsiveness to individual circumstances. In addition, the process of actually writing and agreeing a new policy would be likely to involve significant staff resources. If Members preferred this option, views are sought on the level and type of involvement Members wish to have.
- 3.3 **Option 3: To retain the current arrangement, which officers consider works effectively, but to undertake a strategic review of the current system (officer's preferred option).** This would allow the Council to retain the current arrangement whilst undertaking a review, looking for opportunities to enhance and improve the service; consider how memorials meet the

current aims of the Council and provide a clear financial view on whether charges should simply cover direct costs or make a contribution to the overheads of the City Council. If Members preferred this option, views are sought on the level and type of involvement Members wish to have.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

4 COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND PORTFOLIO PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

None

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

5.1 The review or policy production would have no impact on finances and could be met by existing resources.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None

APPENDICES:

None