

CABINET - 9 SEPTEMBER 2015

WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM - 23 SEPTEMBER 2015

MAGDALEN HILL CEMETERY EXTENSION

REPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (POLICY & PROJECTS)

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RECENT REFERENCES:

WTF222 – Magdalen Hill Cemetery Extension - 28 July 2015

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

An extension to Magdalen Hill Cemetery received planning consent in April 2015 and it is hoped to start construction on site during the Autumn.

The extension is urgently required in order to provide new burial plots.

The scheme has recently been subject to a tendering exercise which has shown that the cost for the construction works and associated landscaping is in excess of the capital budget which was set several years ago.

This report sets out the additional funding which is likely to be required to enable the scheme to proceed. The Town Forum considered this matter in July and agreed in principle to support the scheme and associated additional costs. At that stage it was envisaged that the budget requirement was estimated at £175,000, subject to tendering. However, the tendering process has demonstrated that additional budget provision is required.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To Cabinet:

That subject to any comments from the Town Forum:

1. That Cabinet considers the form of boundary treatment to be used for the scheme along its east boundary (as set out in Section 3 of the report) which will in turn help to define the overall character of the cemetery extension.
2. Subject to 1 above, that approval be given under Financial Procedure Rule 7.2 for a capital budget supplementary estimate of £85,000 in 2015/16 in addition to the current Capital Budget of £135,000 to enable the Extension to be constructed.
3. That approval under Financial Procedure Rule 6.4 be given to release the total scheme funding (£220,000) to enable the scheme as shown in Appendix 1 to the report to be constructed during the autumn.
4. That the Assistant Director (Policy and Planning) be authorised to let a contract for the project in accordance with the Council's Contracts Procedure Rules, and in consultation with the Leader, to take into account any points raised by the Town Forum within the budget made available in 2 and 3 above.

To Winchester Town Forum:

5. That the Magdalen Hill Cemetery Extension Scheme be proceeded with, subject to any comments that the Forum wishes to raise.
6. That Forum considers whether, when fees and charges are reviewed in the 2016/17 budget process, options to increase charges should be considered to address the impact of the scheme on the Town Account budget.

CABINET - 9 SEPTEMBER 2015WINCHESTER TOWN FORUM - 23 SEPTEMBER 2015MAGDALEN HILL CEMETERY EXTENSIONREPORT OF ASSISTANT DIRECTOR (POLICY AND PROJECTS)1 Introduction

1.1 In view of the limited available grave space remaining at the Magdalen Hill Cemetery, officers have been preparing proposals to extend the Cemetery onto adjacent Council-owned land, which has always be reserved for this use. Proposals have been drawn up (as set out on the drawings attached as Appendix 1 to this report) which were granted full planning permission in April 2015. The extension will allow the use of the Cemetery for a further 30-40 years. Extending the existing cemetery into land the Council already owns is the most cost effective and efficient way to provide grave spaces in the future.

1.2 Cabinet is asked to increase the overall allocated capital budget allocation by £85,000 and to release the total scheme budget in order to begin work on the site. There is a pressing need to bring the cemetery extension into use as soon as possible due to a dwindling supply of burial plots in the City. It is hoped to carry out building works over the autumn. The current budget for the project of £135,000 was set some years ago and costs have since increased. The recent tendering exercise has shown that scheme costs including associated landscaping needs to be increased by up to £85,000. The difficult and constrained site access requirements are a major factor in the increased costs. It may however be possible to reduce the scheme costs by around £20,000 depending upon the type of boundary treatment which is used as discussed further in section 2 below. Members' views on this are requested.

1.3 Plans of the site are included in Appendix 1.

2 Discussion

2.1 The extension has been designed to be in keeping with the style of the existing Cemetery, which is nationally listed as a Grade II Registered Park and Garden (List Entry Number: 1000310, see Appendix 1) for its special character and historical interest. Its mature planting and iron railings are noted as key features.

2.2 One of the key components of the design of the extension is the use of metal railings as boundary treatments. This fencing is required as it will:

- Provide a clear boundary for the cemetery, particularly for those using the site in the early years.
- Clearly indicate a change of use.

- Allow the City Council greater control over unauthorised access. Currently people access the field from either a footpath along the southern boundary or from Intec along the eastern boundary
- Provide some protection for the properties along the eastern boundary from the risk of providing vehicular access almost to the back of these properties.

In the long term, a newly planted hedge along part of this boundary will be allowed to grow up. However, it has been agreed with the residents of the homes along the eastern boundary, that this hedge will remain at no more than 5ft in height and width for the foreseeable future. However, as the cemetery gradually becomes occupied, it is likely this requirement will disappear.

- 2.3 The existing iron railings which form the current eastern boundary of the cemetery will be retained and two new openings formed for the new access road to pass through.
- 2.4 In addition, as the planning application for the extension was submitted with new metal railings shown, a new southern boundary adjacent to the footpath will be secured by new metal railings of a similar design to the original ones along the western boundary.
- 2.5 However, the planning application failed to include metal fencing along the eastern boundary adjacent to Wykeham Park, due to an oversight. This is not an issue from the planning perspective, but does give Members an opportunity to decide what type of fencing they wish to see along this boundary.
- 2.6 A number of options for securing this boundary have been considered by officers, with the preferred option being metal railings to match those in the rest of the Cemetery and the proposed new railings to the southern boundary.
- 2.7 However as the project costs have increased, an alternative option is to use standard agricultural post and rail fencing with metal mesh along the bottom edge ('stock-proof' fencing) for the Eastern boundary.
- 2.8 Substituting the metal railings for stock-proof fencing could reduce costs by up to £20,000. However, this will change the character of the extension from a formal appearance in line with the existing cemetery, to an informal appearance of a more rural setting, particularly as the extension area is fairly flat, unlike the existing cemetery. This open field character is likely to dominate until the other landscaping works (tree planting) mature, which is likely to take 20 to 30 years.
- 2.9 Views are therefore sought on whether the character of the extension should be of similar character to the existing cemetery, or whether this should change to a less formal, open field cemetery, thereby reducing costs.
- 2.10 A more formal character will:
- Provide continuity between the old and new burial areas.
 - Provide a more formal setting for burials which has been the City Councils approach for the past 100 years.

- Extend the qualities of the existing burial area, thereby supporting its Grade II listed characters.
- Allow the City Council to retain the current pricing policy and income stream. A change in the setting may impact on the number of people who wish to be buried on the site and/or the City Council may need to reduce its charges if the burial experience is seen to have diminished.

2.11 The less formal character will:

- Provide savings of c£20k whilst creating a semi secure boundary (although the height [1.2m] and design of the stock-proof fencing may not prevent access to the site by dog walkers nor secure the rear boundaries of residents of Wykeham Park, who could be more vulnerable to intrusion, given the new road that will be built here;

2.12 For your information, the supplementary estimate request in this Report includes for the metal railing option.

2.13 The remaining parts of the boundaries are secured through use of existing dense planting.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

3 COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND PORTFOLIO PLANS (RELEVANCE TO):

3.1 Extending the Magdalen Hill Cemetery has been a priority in the Portfolio Plans for a number of years. Successful completion of the project is needed to meet the needs of the community, as well as ensuring a high quality environment.

4 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

4.1 The capital budget for this scheme is currently £135,000. Current scheme costs including associated landscaping works will be in the order of £220,000. A supplementary estimate is therefore required for £85,000 in order for the scheme to proceed.

4.2 The current capital budget of £135,000 is funded initially by the General Fund and repaid by the Winchester Town Account on an annual basis over the life of the asset. It is proposed that any additional budget requirement would be funded on the same basis.

4.3 We have considered the impact on prudential indicators of increasing the budget to £220,000. The incremental impact on Council Tax is detailed in the table below. The increase primarily reflects the higher maintenance costs of the extension. The incremental impact is the difference between the revenue budget requirement of the current approved budget and the new budget and so does not take account of the loss of income were the scheme not to proceed. There is no impact on the Capital Financing Requirement (and therefore the Operational Boundary/Authorised Limit) as the project is to be financed from existing resources.

Incremental Impact of Capital Investment Decisions	2015/16 Estimate £	2016/17 Estimate £	2017/18 Estimate £
General Fund - increase in annual band D Council Tax	0.01	0.50	0.51

- 4.4 The 2015/16 income budget for Magdalen Hill Cemetery is £105,000. If works were not to proceed then the majority of this income would be at risk. Any additional capital costs will need to be analysed in the next review of fees & charges to ensure that the total income collected ensures the net cost of Cemeteries is minimised per the Town strategy.
- 4.5 The impact on the Winchester Town Account is forecast to be an increase in the net cost of Cemeteries totalling c£31,000 per annum. The majority of this increase (£22,000) is due to an increase in the annual grounds maintenance costs. Should the extension not take place then the additional costs are estimated to be £80,000 per annum, due to the loss of the majority of the annual income.
- 5 **RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES:**
- 5.1 The budget estimates include a contingency for unforeseen site conditions.
- 5.2 There is a risk of a shortage of burial plots within a short period of time, should the proposed extension not be implemented.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

Plans as set out in Appendix 1.

(Tenders received include Exempt Information and are not therefore disclosable background documents).

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Site and Layout Plans and Designation details