

**MINUTES AND REPORT OF THE MEETING OF THE GODALMING JOINT BURIAL COMMITTEE HELD ON 4 NOVEMBER 2021**

- \* Councillor Martin
- 0 Councillor Neill
- \* Councillor – Vice Chair
- \* Councillor PS Rivers
- 0 Councillor Steel – Chair
- \* Councillor Stubbs
- \* Councillor Bond (Busbridge Parish Council)
- \* Councillor Westwood (Busbridge Parish Council)

\* Present    # Absent & No Apology Received    0 Apology    L Late    ^ Council Duties

37. ELECTION OF CHAIR

Due to the absence of the Committee Chair, coupled with the current vacancy of the Vice Chair, the Clerk sought nominations from Members for the election of a Chair for this meeting.

On the proposal of Cllr Rivers, seconded by Cllr Bond and their being no other nominations, Cllr Martin was elected to Chair the meeting.

38. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 2 September 2021, having been previously circulated, were signed by the Chair as a true record.

39. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received and recorded as above.

40. DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS

Members made no declarations of interest in relation to any item on the agenda for this meeting, which is required to be disclosed by the Localism Act 2011 and the Godalming Members' Code of Conduct.

41. PETITIONS/STATEMENTS/QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

No questions from members of the public were submitted in accordance with GTC Standing Order 5

42. QUESTIONS BY MEMBERS

No questions from Councillors were submitted in accordance with GTC Standing Order 6.

43. ACCOUNTS PAID SINCE LAST MEETING

Godalming Joint Burial Committee	
Accounts paid since the 3 of September 2021	£89,354.44
Receipts received since the 3 of September 2021	£49,621.80
Balance held in the HSBC Current Account	
Balance at 4 November 2021	£15,791.56

Balance held in the HSBC Business Deposit Account  
Balance at 4 November 2021 £71,484.14

Balance held in the CCLA Deposit Account  
Balance at 4 November 2021 £150,000.00

A schedule of the accounts paid was tabled for the information of Members and a copy is attached to record minutes. The vouchers relating to these payments were also be tabled at the meeting for inspection. All payments made were in line with the agreed budget or other resolution of this Committee or Full Council.

Members agreed that the Chair should sign the schedule of accounts paid.

44. SIGNING OF BANK RECONCILIATIONS

The Committee considered the tabled monthly bank reconciliations since the last meeting of the Committee and authorised the Chair to sign them.

45. INTERNAL AUDITOR'S REPORT

Members considered the report from the Committee's Internal Auditor, Mulberry & Co, on an interim audit conducted on 7 September 2021 for the 2021/22 financial year and noted that no items were raised requiring attention

The Chair proposed a vote of thanks to the Finance Officer for the professional manner in which she maintains the Committee's accounts.

46. BUDGET MONITORING

Members considered the budget monitoring report to 30 September 2021 and noted a current variance of £9,835 overspend against budget.

Members further noted the following:

Equipment is over budget by £40,500. A four wheel coffin bier was purchased for £2,300 to assist in moving coffins from vehicles to gravesides. £10,000 spent on flail attachment for the tractor (Min No 20-21 refers). £27,200 spent on an electric van (Min No 33-21 refers).

As per Min No 45-20 the administration charge was increased to reflect the support required for AMA burials. As this was agreed after the budget was set for 2021/22, there is an overspend showing. This will be adjusted at Revised Estimates.

Professional Fees includes £7,700 commission paid for the NNDR review of Eashing Cemetery. This is offset by a refund of £26,900 in Eashing Cemetery Miscellaneous revenue for the refund of NNDR paid over the last five years.

A review of the Committee's insurance was conducted by Cllr Heagin as part of the renewal of the pre-existing Long Term Agreement. This resulted in savings of around £1,000 from last year and £1,200 against budget.

Nightingale Cemetery is not budgeted until Revised Estimates – there had been 9 interments and 11 grave purchases in the first four months.

47. REVISED ESTIMATES FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2022 AND THE BUDGET FOR 2022/23

Members considered the budget papers (attached to record minutes).

Members noted that the sum to be recharged to the constituent authorities is currently £37,690 to Godalming Town Council and £2,310 to Busbridge Parish Council but that these figures were provisional. The allocation to be confirmed once Waverley Borough Council releases the Band D equivalent figures for each parish.

Members resolved to agree the Revised Estimates for 2021/22 showing a deficit of £11,047 and the Budget for 2022/23 showing a surplus of £664. Both amounts to be charged to the Revenue reserve.

48. VICE CHAIR VACANCY

Members resolved to defer this item until the next meeting of the Committee.

49. SOUTH & SOUTH EAST IN BLOOM

Members were informed that although there had been an earlier press release, the current meeting was the first opportunity to formally report on the South & South East in Bloom competition. South & South East in Bloom is part of Britain in Bloom and runs annual competitions across the counties of Kent, Surrey, East & West Sussex, Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, East & North Dorset and East Wiltshire. The award system recognises entrants' efforts in improving their local environment and awards are based on the standard achieved.

Members noted that following the 2019 success for Nightingale Cemetery in receiving a Gold award, both Nightingale and Eashing Cemeteries were entered into the 2021 competition (the competition was not held in 2020).

The Committee was delighted to be informed, that as a first time entrant, Eashing Cemetery was awarded a Gold award in the Large Cemetery category (over 10 acres). This in itself would have been a superb achievement, so it was especially pleasing to also receive, not only a Gold award for Nightingale Cemetery in the Small Cemetery category (up to 5 acres) but to be judged as the overall winner of the Small Cemetery category for the whole of the South & South East region.

Members wished to record their formal vote of thanks to all those involved in ensuring that the cemeteries are maintained to such a high standard, but they especially wished to record their appreciation of the work of the Council's grounds staff, not only for the winning of these awards, but for the hard work and professionalism they demonstrate all year round.

50. ENVIRONMENTAL WORKS

Members noted the report from the Clerk on environmental improvement works being carried out within the cemeteries, including:

- hedge laying at Eashing Cemetery which has not only opened up the vista of the cemetery, but will also improve the wildlife habitat;
- continuing work on the wildflower areas with additional areas being prepared and seeded;
- the tree work required from the earlier safety surveys has been completed at Eashing Cemetery, however, further tree work will be required each year for a number of years as the over dominance of yews within Nightingale Cemetery is addressed; and
- following the agreement between JBC and WBC, the community benefit programme will be starting on 20 November when the first 12 trees of the planned 60-tree orchard will be planted.

Members agreed that Godalming Town Council ground staff and JBC contractors continue to maintain the cemeteries to a very high standard that not only continues to provide peace

and tranquillity in their main function as operational burial grounds, but also improved biodiversity.

### **Environment Permitting (England and Wales) Regulations 2016**

Members were made aware that the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has launched a consultation into amending the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) 2016 Regulations. The consultation affects those local parishes and towns which are burial authorities and has specific regard to amending the regulations around activities which affect groundwater.

Members were informed that in essence this consultation will affect all burial authorities and existing cemeteries/burial grounds. Most significantly, if the current proposals are implemented it could reduce the remaining burial capacity of Godalming cemeteries by over 33% and potential for some cemeteries up to 50%.

The Clerk informed members that having read through the proposals, whilst some are entirely sensible, such as 'a burial within a cemetery must not cause pollution of surface water or groundwater' or that 'a burial must not be undertaken directly into groundwater' the consequences of two proposals are clearly ill-thought through with the potential of reducing the burial capacity throughout England and Wales. These are the proposals that state:

- A grave must be deep enough so at least 1 meter of soil will cover any part of the coffin or body.
- A grave must be not less than 5m<sup>2</sup> in area.

The Clerk provided Members with a range of examples of how these two conditions would affect the operation of a cemetery. The outcome of which would be to reduce the number of unused burial plots with the cemeteries and threaten the financial viability of the cemetery sector.

Members noted that reduced capacity would inevitably result in higher fees for burial plots. Members felt this would adversely impact upon those faith groups for whom burial is a significant tenet of their belief.

Members resolved that the Clerk should, in consultation with Cllr Steel and Cllr Martin draft a robust response to the consultation. In agreement with Cllr Steel and Cllr Martin the Clerk should copy the response to the consultation and raise the importance of this matter with the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Local Communities & Housing, Jeremy Hunt MP, Surrey County Council, Surrey Association of Local Councils, The Diocese of Guildford, the Institute of Cemetery & Crematoria Managers and the National Association of Funeral Directors.

#### 51. CEMETERY VEHICLE

Members noted that the purchase of a Volkswagen ABT eTransporter LWB 87KW 37.7KWh Van (Min No 33-21 refers) for use in support of cemetery operations has been completed and that a saving of £8,523 from the previously stated on-the-road price had been achieved.

#### 52. BURIAL STATISTICS

The Committee noted the burial statistics for the previous quarter and for the previous twelve months ended the 30 October 2021, which had previously been circulated (copy attached to record minutes).

53. COMMUNICATIONS ARISING FROM THIS MEETING

Members identified the Environmental Permitting (England and Wales) 2016 Regulations to be subject to the communications stated above.

54. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Godalming Joint Burial Committee is scheduled to take place in the Council Chamber on Thursday, 24 February 2022 at 5.30pm.

55. ANNOUNCEMENTS

Members were informed of a planting day at Eashing Cemetery on 20 November.

TO: ALL MEMBERS OF THE GODALMING JOINT BURIAL COMMITTEE