

**LEDBURY TOWN COUNCIL
MINUTES OF A PARISH MEETING HELD ON
15 FEBRUARY 2024**

PRESENT: Councillors l'Anson (Chair) and Chowns

ALSO PRESENT: Angela Price – Town Clerk
Julia Lawrence – Deputy Town Clerk (Minute Taker)
17 Ledbury Residents

13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

14 TO CONFIRM THE ACCURACY OF THE MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL TOWN MEETING HELD ON 27 APRIL 2023

It was noted that Mr Wolfe's surname had been incorrectly spelt in these minutes, noting that the "e" had been missed off.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the Annual Town Meeting held on 27 April 2023 be confirmed as accurate and signed as a correct record, subject to the above amendment. There were 14 in favour and 2 abstentions. The motion was carried.

15 FUTURE PROVISION OF BURIAL GROUND, LEDBURY

The Chair noted that emotions are running high due to the nature of the discussions but wanted to give some facts and answer any questions.

The current status of the Cemetery is that the current cemetery size is circa 7 acres; the number of full burial plots used to date are 2,950 and 246 cremated remains plots (Garden of Remembrance).

There are just two methods of burial available in Ledbury Cemetery. Firstly, full interments which are generally for two depths, but which it is usually possible to inter at least six cremated remains caskets within. Secondly, the Garden of Remembrance where cremated remains caskets can be interred.

Since 1968 when the number of cremations exceeded burials for the first time, cremation has increased considerably. Current figures suggest that around 75.1% of all funerals in the country are cremations. However, figures below indicate that the trend in Ledbury is 54/46% ratio in favour of full burials.



In the past three years there have been 42 full burials in new plots and 35 interments in cremated remains plots. This equates to an average of approximately 14 full burials and 12 cremated remains per year, which if this trend continues, the life space of the cemetery is approximately 7½ years.

Currently there are 106 full burial plots remaining and capacity for circa 24 cremated remains plots.

Approximately 96% of full burial plots and 91% of cremated remains plots within the cemetery have been utilised to date.

In the past there has been the opportunity to pre-purchase plots, however this is no longer available. This is standard in most cemeteries across the UK, and it has been recognised that land for cemeteries is getting harder to secure and our remaining burial space needs to be guaranteed to be available for interments now.

Funding has been allocated in the 2024/25 budget for the introduction of a Scatter Garden as an alternative to the Garden of Remembrance.

If further provision of burial land is to be provided, then now is the time to start looking for potential land and to ensure that a new area is available in good time.

If Ledbury Town Council were minded investigating the possibility of additional land for a new cemetery, they would need to consider how they would finance it. It should be borne in mind that whilst there is a cost to residents at the time of burial, cemeteries owned and managed by Parish and Town Councils are not self-funding and any monies spent on the new cemetery would not be earned back through the cost of burial services. It is more about providing a service to the local community.

The Chair opened the meeting to members of the public for questions and any comments.

Mrs Hill stated that she had been a member of the Friends of Ledbury Cemetery since 2019. She advised that there had been three meetings of the Friends of the Cemetery, that she could recall, and she provided information on the discussions held. She advised that she recalled that Lyn Loader (Co-op funeral care) had suggested having a Scatter Garden at the far end of the corner because it had been cleared but was not suitable for interments. We discussed the type of scatter garden and suggested that it be a wall built up so that the ashes could be scattered on the earth and then we could scatter wild flowers, for example, poppy seeds and forget-me-not. Also on the front of the brick surrounding we could have a small plaque with their name on it.

Mrs Hill advised that they had had a meeting in 2023 at Ledbury Town Council offices, but that she did not recall anything being mentioned about the cemetery

filling up. Therefore, when she read on social media that there was only 15 years left in the cemetery, she was shocked.

Mrs Hill stated that she had heard that a Scatter Garden is to be put in the new area in the corner on the right-hand side. She also stated that she had visited the cemetery last Tuesday on 2 February and noticed that the Garden of Remembrance only has two more spaces left.

Another member of the public stated that she was under the impression that this had been known for quite a long time that this was to come about, noting that a lot of land in and around Ledbury had been sold for housing developments, and why had the Council not, during that time, considered acquiring some of this land for a cemetery.

The Clerk advised that when she took up post at Ledbury Town Council in 2019, she had raised the issue with Council, however, planning applications had already been submitted for the majority of the housing developments, and she stated that she couldn't speak for what happened before 2019.

Mrs Crowe stated that people at the meeting just want to be consulted and they weren't consulted. She pointed out that this is a big thing for a certain generation of people within Ledbury who have family in the cemetery, this is a very emotive subject and before any further decisions are made then a full consultation with the public should be made. She recognised that land is very expensive around Ledbury and that the budget for the Council can't take it at the moment and if the Council did take out a loan, it would take decades to pay off, but she felt that the residents of Ledbury deserve to be considered, consulted every step of the way before any final decision is made.

Another member of the public agreed that members of the public should be consulted, noting that they should not have found out about these issues on social media. They raised concerns in respect of the number of housing developments in and around Ledbury and asked where this will end?

They noticed the information given by the Mayor at the beginning of the meeting in respect of the actual anticipated life span of the cemetery being 7.5 years rather than the reported 15 years and asked which was correct.

The Clerk advised that after having carried out some specific research into the space remaining the life span of the cemetery is circa 7.5/8 years.

A member of the public asked how this could not have been known 6 years previously, and why was it only now that residents were being made aware. Are you telling me that nobody knew this 6 years ago. Why are we waiting until now to be told that we have that amount of time left.

The Mayor stated that Ledbury Town Council are not unique in facing this problem. It is a problem that is throughout the UK.

Councillor Simmons provided an update on the current situation in relation to burial space in Herefordshire. She pointed out that Herefordshire Council, like parish and town councils, are under no obligation to provide cemeteries but do have a statutory duty to maintain existing cemeteries. There are currently cemeteries managed by Herefordshire Council in Hereford, Leominster, Kington and Wigmore. In 2016 a study was undertaken of provision and at that time there was circa 46.3 years capacity in these cemeteries. She advised that currently there are no plans to bring in any other methods of working to extend cemeteries, indeed the law does not allow these outside of London.

A member of the public asked for clarification on what alternative methods were being referred to and the Clerk advised that there is a system called "Lift and Deepen", however currently there are only three cemeteries in London who have been granted a licence to undertake this practice, and that it is unlikely this that will be an option to make more space in existing cemeteries.

Councillor Simmons advised that the Burial Team in Hereford had advised that the best option is to consider re-allocation of additional space through reconfiguration or through an extension of an existing cemetery is generally preferred due to supporting facilities being in place and generally lower costs.

Private companies (e.g. Plot Box) can be employed to conduct ground radar surveys to indicate areas/plots where no burials have taken place (which is really useful for historic cemeteries where records are incomplete, or headstones are missing) to provide additional capacity.

New land for burials has to be allocated and approved through the Planning process, in line with the NDP (Neighbourhood Development Plan). The three main developments on the by-pass were all on Appeal with Herefordshire Council but the Planning Inspector rejected on Appeal which meant that we had less ability to inform how we would like to see that development come forward and how we could potentially use the land.

Councillor Simmons added that whilst Councillors understood the boundaries for the by-pass they had no authority on how the land was to be used and prevent boundary creep. There is a plan which is now in place. When NDP's are produced, very few deal with burial, it focuses on "the living," in terms of providing other facilities, focusing on play pitches, doctors' surgeries, additional commercial facilities so cemeteries have not been focused in the NDP, which is a shame.

Members of the public were advised on process involved in identifying new land for burials, noting that new land would require a complete raft of environmental studies, looking at the water tables and depth, and generally are only valid for 2 years from when conducted, to support any change of use applications.

Councillor Simmons supported the Town Council in respect of S106 monies advising that there is no money allocated for cemeteries at this time. However, it

may be possible if there is a real strength of feeling to look at fund raising, ideas such as a benefactor or legacy.

Lyn Loader from Ledbury Funeral Care provided some background information in relation to the football club land.

Lyn advised that many cemeteries are looking at the fees that they charge for people who are non-residents. Ledbury does not charge near as much for a non-resident as other cemeteries. If you are a non-resident in London it would cost £15,000 to £20,000 to buy a burial plot. Maybe that is what we should be looking at as I do know there are some non-residential people with plots in Ledbury. Maybe the council should look at increasing the fees.

The Clerk advised that Ledbury Town Council currently charge double fees for non-residents.

The following questions were asked:

Is there any way in which land owners around Ledbury could be consulted to see if they have any land available and that they would consider selling it to the Council for a cemetery.

Is there anything that the Government is being consulted about, can anything be pushed to the Government to alleviate the problem as this is definitely going to get worse, isn't it.

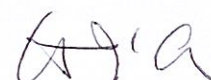
The Clerk advised that there had been a documentary on TV in September 2023 highlighting this problem, and she suggested that Local Authorities and members of the public lobby their local MP, but there is no certainty that this will result in any action or success.

The Mayor acknowledged the question in respect of asking landowners if they would be prepared put aside land for burials, suggesting this could be raised with them.

Mr Ellis thanked all those who had contributed to the meeting, noting that there had been lots of ideas put forward, some good ones but that they seem to come to a dead end. He pointed out that the meeting was about the Council, carrying on making provisions for future burials in Ledbury.

He accepted that a solution would not be found tonight, and pointed out that what the public want is for the Council to continue to make future provision for burials in Ledbury?

He referred to the motion that had been put forward by the E & L committee meeting on 25 January "that the Council would no longer make provision for



future burials in Ledbury, explaining that was why he put the post out on Voice of Ledbury to make other people aware.

The Mayor asked whether the question that was being asked was:

Do Ledbury residents want their Council to explore options to extend further the active use of the existing cemetery?

Mr Ellis asked that if this voted on and accepted at this meeting, when it comes to the vote at the next full council meeting of Ledbury Town Council, a recorded vote be taken.

The Clerk advised that Councillors have to ask for a named vote at the meeting but as there were councillors in the room, they had heard the request from Mr Ellis for the named vote.

Mrs Hill asked whether a Scatter Garden is to be considered? The Clerk advised that provision had been made in the 2024/25 budget for the introduction of a scatter garden. Mrs Hill asked for there to be some consultation around what style of scatter garden residents would like. This was agreed.

Following some further discussion the following questions were voted on:

1. **Do Ledbury residents want the Council to explore options to extend further the active use of the existing cemetery?**

14 in favour – 1 abstention – CARRIED

2. **Do Ledbury residents want the Council to invest time and money to explore the options to extend the current cemetery grounds?**

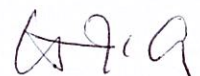
16 in favour – 1 abstention – CARRIED

3. **Do Ledbury residents want the Council to invest time and money to explore the options to provide new cemetery facilities. If so, it is important that new provision is located within the Parish boundary of Ledbury.**

10 in favour – 2 against – 1 abstention – CARRIED

The Mayor thanked all those who had attended the meeting and confirmed that these questions would be taken forward to the next Full Council meeting, scheduled for 28 March 2024.


Members of the public thanked Mr Ellis for highlighting this issue on social media.



Councillor Chowns, Chair of the Environment & Leisure Committee, stated that he felt he should make a comment about the minute of the E & L Committee. He felt that the committee had mis-phrased the report on the meeting of 6 January, but the character of our discussions was that the recommendation made ended with the words "at this stage", it was never the intention of the Environment & Leisure Committee or any member thereof to close down the whole question.

He added "that there is a tension, I think, and the two articles in the Ledbury Reporter illustrate those tensions in a way. There are some issues where necessary conversations have to take place before any discussion is even opened as we need to gather information and clearly tonight we opened up the discussions and there are all sorts of interesting enquiries and leads that we need to carry on and it was never our intention to close that down. It was felt by the Environment and Leisure that this was almost a question above us and not something because of the financial consequences that we were prepared to take action at this stage. We could have phrased that recommendation a bit better but if we gave anyone the impression that we were cutting off the discussion, then that was an error, and we apologise for that. There has to be informal discussions behind the scenes before bringing things out in the open and canvassing the public's opinion. Of course, we always want to do things with the informed consent of the population as a whole. We are your representatives, but we aren't dictators and tonight has been a refreshing event in that sense."

The meeting ended at 6.50pm.

Signed  Dated 26/04/24
(Chair)

