

**Melksham Town Council and Melksham Without Parish Council**

**Minutes of the Cemeteries Task & Finish Group**

**on Tuesday 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2025**

**at Melksham Without Parish Council**

PRESENT: Councillor P Alford (MTC)  
Councillor A Griffin (MTC)  
Councillor M Blackham (MWPC)  
Councillor P Richardson (MWPC)  
Councillor M Harris (MWPC)

IN ATTENDANCE

OFFICERS Hayley Bell CEO/Town Clerk (MTC)  
Teresa Strange Clerk (MWPC)

**6/25 Chair**

Councillor Richardson was appointed Chair of the meeting.

**7/25 Apologies**

MWPC Councillor John Glover (with Councillor Richardson as substitute).

MTC Councillor Charlie Stokes had now been appointed to the working party but have given apologies for this meeting.

**8/25 Declaration of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

**9/25** The actions/next steps agreed at the last meeting were reviewed.

It was agreed to obtain definitive confirmation of Wiltshire Council's position.

It was agreed to explore the options for burials and ashes in the Town, the Greater Melksham Area and further afield.

Officers will:

- Contact Wiltshire Council about their future policy on burial provision and the possibility of land adjacent to the existing cemetery being used for internment of ashes. This is to include Wiltshire Councillor Cabinet members Cllr Adrian Foster (Strategic Planning re the CIL Infrastructure List funding), Cllr Martin Smith (Highways – as Cemetery under this remit) and Cllr Helen Belcher (Assets)

MWPC Clerk reported that she had followed up with this action on 12<sup>th</sup> September and was yet to receive a response. Councillor Griffin agreed to follow up with the Cabinet Members.

- To ascertain current costs of running/maintaining the Melksham facility.

#### **Outstanding**

- To check if cemetery is classed as “community use” for any land designated as such in planning permissions and s106 agreements.

MWPC Clerk had received a response from Kenny Green, Wiltshire Council Development Management Manager, that Cemeteries are treated as Suis Genesis planning land use and don't fall within the local community use list.

- Explore other options for burials and ashes in the area (including natural burials, differing religions and crematorium)

MTC CEO reported that she had visited and met with the owners of the West Wilts Crematorium at Semington owned and run by the Westerleigh Group. This only accepts ashes and not burials and has no foreseeable capacity issues.

[www.westwiltshirecrem.co.uk](http://www.westwiltshirecrem.co.uk)

- Contact other local persons and organisations involved in burials for their experience/future thoughts (Funeral Directors/Grave Diggers)

MWPC Clerk reported that she had met with Tony Jones on 5<sup>th</sup> September, the local groundwork contractor (J H Jones) used by both the parish and town council, who also undertook most of the local grave digging in West Wiltshire for councils and churches.

Feedback was that in Tony's experience:

- the split locally was 80/20 cremation/burial. With the natural burial site run at Leafy Lane in Corsham running at more like 67/33 cremation/burial.
- J H Jones dig about 2/3 per week, so 200/300 per year, with the split as above for internment of ashes rather than full burials
- [www.leafylanewoods.co.uk](http://www.leafylanewoods.co.uk) in Corsham is run by Aaron Bewley and a relatively new natural burial site that is proving popular. It essentially looks like a wildflower meadow with tree planting.
- Less gravedigging undertaken locally in recent months due to direct plan cremation schemes (prepaid funeral plans for a simple, unattended

cremation that includes bringing the deceased into care, a basic coffin, cremation without a service, and the return of ashes)

- Maintenance costs are high when there are headstones in place, as the grasscutting has to be done carefully around the headstones. In addition, for family/reserved plots the graves have to be dug by hand if there is already a previous burial, rather than machine. Natural burial sites, such as Leafy Lane, are cost effective from a maintenance point of view.
  - Other information is that potential sites must not be near a water course.
  - Muslim graves (as in Melksham Cemetery) are different only that they face Mecca, so on a different layout than the other graves. They also do not use coffins.
- Collate all relevant information for the next meeting including current and future mortality rates and any trends in burials/ashes.

**MTC CEO reported that the MTC Intern had researched and had a suite of information ready, it just needed to be put into a report to present at the next working party meeting.**

**10/25 Next Steps:** It was agreed that there were 3 options moving forward, and before the next meeting a “Pros and Cons” working document be drawn up and members of the working group could contribute to it.

Option 1 — Wiltshire Council (WC) continue running the cemetery/service

Option 2 — Transfer control to Melksham Town & Melksham Without Parish Councils (local authority takeover / partnership)

*(This could be a single authority taking full control or a joint arrangement between the two councils.)*

Option 3 — Encourage a private sector provider to take over

**11/25** The next meeting will be arranged when the Town Council have their research report ready. Next meeting to be hosted by MTC, and for MTC to Chair.

Signed .....

Dated .....