

REPORT TO HOUSING AND NEIGHBOURHOODS OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

JANUARY 2021

HANDSWORTH CEMETERY- RESPONSE TO PETITIONS 2226 and 2238

EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

Introduction

Handsworth Cemetery is one of the key cemeteries located in the west of the City providing burial facilities for several thousand deceased.

Following incidents of flooding and waterlogging between June and October 2020, the City Council received two petitions at its meeting on 3 November 2020, presented by Councillor M. Mahmood and Councillor Z. Malik. Petitions are expected to be responded to within three months. The response to the petitions will be finalised after the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee so any comments of the Committee can be taken into account.

The Petitions

The two petitions submitted were similar in wording and had signatures from over 5,000 Birmingham City Council residents. The petitions were as follows:-

*“Birmingham City Council to protect graves of our loved ones
Over the last few months, we have started to see an increase in the number of occurrences where flooding is impacting the graves of loved ones resting at Handsworth Cemetery. This has been raised to the Cemetery Office, and Birmingham City Council, and has fallen on deaf ears. Assurances have previously been made, yet, again, over the weekend of 3rd and 4th October, multiple graves were flooded, leading to some subsiding, and the families being hurt.
This isn't a lot we're asking for- when families pay in excess of £3,000 for their loved ones to be laid to rest, the least we can expect the Council to do is to care for the graves, and to conduct preventative maintenance. Fobbing off isn't acceptable, **suitable action is.**
With the council's response being slow, and incompetent at best, families, and volunteers are taking the responsibility to fix these graves, but are only permitted to be there during the restricted visiting hours which just isn't enough”*

As well as these petitions several letters and emails have been received regarding the incidents, as well as several Freedom of Information Act enquiries.

Details of Incidents and Actions

Since June 2020 four incidents of flooding/ waterlogging have been reported in sections 26 and 68. These are both areas dedicated for Islamic burials. Works have been undertaken to construct a soakaway and an earth bund (carried out by cemetery operatives) which has ameliorated the issue in Section 26. However, in October during two periods of heavy rain additional flooding/ waterlogging was experienced, impacting on the graves in Section 68.

Works have been undertaken on the cemetery since August as follows:-

- Provision of a grassed bund above section 26;
- Provision of a soakaway above section 26;
- Clearance of all land drainage gulleys and pipework of silt;
- Clearance of roots ingressing the pipework;
- Weekly clearance of leaf fall;
- Laying turf over areas of ground being used for reserved graves in section 68, previously damaged by vehicles;
- Restricting vehicular access to the area reserved for graves in section 68; and
- Providing a temporary 'wall of sandbags' to prevent water flow across section 68.

In addition the flooding in August led to a stairway being no longer safe to use. This was completed in November.

Apart from the works outlined above, there is a need to undertake the following works:-

1. Renewal of kerbing on the driveway between sections 26 and 68;
2. Improvements to land drainage and the resurfacing of the roadway between section 26 and 68;
3. Creation of a small parking area adjacent to section 26, with the introduction of additional land drainage measures.

Capital expenditure approval was given and the works are set to commence imminently at the time of writing- the permanent works were delayed in order to comply with procurement rules in standing orders.

The work when completed will:-

- Reduce the risk of flooding and waterlogging at the site for several years;
- Provide safe and easy access for users of the cemetery;
- Provide better services for the public.

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