

BRACKLEY TOWN COUNCIL

20 High Street, Brackley, Northants, NN13 7DS

Telephone: (01280) 702441

www.brackleynorthants-tc.gov.uk

town.clerk@brackleynorthants-tc.gov.uk

Public meeting about the operation of Halse Road Cemetery Thursday 13 March 2025 at Egerton Hall

Present: Town Mayor, Cllr E Wiltshire

Cllrs Kew, King, Langford, Manley, Tiller, Watt, Weaver, P Wiltshire and Young

Officers: Deputy Town Clerk, Operations Manager, Facilities Manager

1. Welcome and introduction from Town Mayor, Cllr E Wiltshire

Brackley Town Council manages Halse Road Cemetery, a lawn cemetery established in 1963, ensuring it remains a peaceful and respectful space. The council is in direct contact with the affected family and is reviewing cemetery regulations in response to community concerns. The cemetery's design allows only headstones as ornamentation to maintain uniformity and tranquillity. Recognising the emotional importance of memorials, the council is assessing both the specific case and broader policies to ensure clarity and sensitivity. The meeting aimed to engage with residents to find a balanced approach that respects both personal tributes and the dignity of the shared space.

2. Rules of Engagement for the meeting

- The meeting was recorded for reporting purposes and this recording has now been deleted.
- The purpose of the meeting was to listen to residents' views on cemetery operations, though individual concerns could not be addressed.
- While regulations are under review, no changes to plots are required.
- No decisions or actions could be made during the meeting, but residents' input will help shape the review through a dedicated task and finish group. This group will also hold a focus workshop for families connected to the cemetery, and those interested were encouraged to inform staff after the meeting.

3. Public Participation

Fifteen residents spoke at the meeting, raising concerns about outdated cemetery policies and their emotional impact on grieving families. Key issues included restrictions on grave decorations and size limitations for child graves, which many found insensitive. Residents shared personal grief experiences, criticising the council's lack of empathy, particularly in its communication of regulations. There was a strong call for modernising cemetery rules to allow personalisation of graves, recognising the emotional aspects of grief, especially for children. The community urged the council to adopt a more compassionate approach, improve communication, and revise policies to better support mourning families.

Tensions rose as residents expressed frustration over the council's lack of direct responses to their concerns about cemetery regulations. Many criticised the officials for reading from a script rather than engaging in a compassionate dialogue. Residents demanded clear answers, a timeline for the review process, and questioned the motivations behind existing regulations. The mayor reiterated that this was a listening process and that a task group would be formed to address the issues, but the response was met with dissatisfaction. Emotions ran high as residents emphasised the personal impact of cemetery policies, accusing the council of being detached and unempathetic.

4. Next Steps

The council will take several steps to address residents' concerns about cemetery regulations.

- A task & finish group will be formed to review the rules, considering community feedback. They will also establish a timeline.
- A focus workshop will be held to gather residents' experiences and suggestions.
- Insights will be collected to find compromises between personal memorialisation and regulations.
- Brackley's policies will be compared with best practices from other cemeteries, and possible amendments will be explored while maintaining cemetery upkeep.
- Findings will be presented to the Town Council, with regular updates provided to residents.
- Additionally, the council will review how sensitive regulations are communicated to families.