

NORTH WALSHAM TOWN COUNCIL 22nd November 2017

Minutes of the Extraordinary General Meeting of the Town Council held on 22nd November 2017

Chair:	Cllr S Stuckey
Town Councillors Present:	
Cllr J Melville	Cllr R Murphy
Cllr E Wheeler	Cllr B Hester
Cllr G Bull	Cllr R Harris
Cllr P Edge	Cllr R Sims
Cllr E Addison	Cllr R Mooney
Cllr A Fryer	

32 Members of the Public who signed a register of attendance

The meeting opened at 19:00

1. Administrative Matters

(a) Election of a Proper Officer for the EGM.

As the Town Clerk was not present at the meeting a Proper Officer needed to be appointed. It was proposed by Cllr B Hester and seconded by Cllr R Mooney that Cllr Bull fulfil the role of Proper Officer. Agreed unanimously by all Councillor's present.

(b) Declarations of Interest

None were declared.

(c) Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received and accepted from Cllr M Seward and Witte No apologies were received from Cllrs Turner and Choudry.

2. Items for decision/discussion by the Town Council

Mayor Sallie Stucky opened the meeting and thanked all members of the public for coming along to express their concerns and views in addition she explained to members of the public how the meeting would be conducted, this included a statement that no abuse intimidation or threats would be tolerated and how long public participation would last including the time limitation of 15 minutes as per standing orders which applied to the public participation section of the meeting.

3. To adjourn the meeting for Public Participation

It was proposed by Cllr B Hester and seconded by Cllr E Addison that the meeting be adjourned for public participation. Agreed unanimously by all Councillor's present.

Jane Scott who was clearly in a distraught state informed the Council that she had received letters from the Town Clerk after the plants that were at her family plot had already been removed and placed in a sack, in addition she asked why after having been given a letter authorising her in January 2016 to place the plants in the plot only to receive another letter dated 18/11/17 saying that they had been removed. **The council agreed that this was totally unacceptable.**

Anita Fulcher addressed the Council and asked as to why her sons grave had been stripped bare and wanted to know who was behind the decision, when was this decided and was this authorised by the Council.

Helen Gotts informed the Council that their family had 3 graves at the cemetery Baby / Nephew / Mum and that for 14 years equipment was allowed and had now been removed. Whilst she fully understood that the regulations and rules were now being enforced she asked as to why they had not been informed prior to this happening as they have lived at the same address for over 16 years and that this was not acceptable. **The Council agreed and confirmed they would be investigating as to why this totally unacceptable situation had occurred.**

Sarah Barkey. Read out a very moving statement about the effect this had had on her and her family and questioned as to whether the Council really understood the severity of the actions that had been carried out. Furthermore, she informed the council that some of the removed items have not been found.

Graham Jones stated to the Council he believed that we were in breach of our own rules and that the Councils application of the Regulations and Rules were out of date and did not comply with current legislation. In addition, he felt that the whole Council was a shambles and should resign immediately. **The Council stated that a review of the Regulations and Rules would be carried out.**

Ben Fulcher asked the Council as to why if a plot is paid for surely you should be able to put what you want on there, why wasn't the family informed prior to items being removed, what is deemed as being inappropriate, and when were the rules enforced as there was no date on the letter when eventually received.

Angela Starman asked if the all of the graves were going to be subjected to this as there were numerous graves that are in a severe state of decay and dangerous.

Cllr Bull informed the meeting that this is currently being addressed and that every effort is being made to contact the owners etc in addition a comprehensive review of the graves that have fallen into disrepair is being undertaken with a view to addressing this issue but asked for patience as many of these graves no longer have any living contactable relatives.

Alex Howell Stated that the graves looked lovely with the additional items on them and asked why they were removed, we maintain our graves and why are the council so against the decorations on the plots.

Jaqueline Belson informed the Council that the memorial garden plots that hold the ashes had been totally cleared and asked why as even the current regulations state 2 per plot are allowed, in addition she stated that she had made a complaint online about this and has had no acknowledgement or response of any kind. Furthermore, she stated that the cemetery now looks awful and bare devoid of feeling and compassion and requested that at least 2 pots be allowed back on the plots.

Tony Isherwood enquired as to whom they needed to approach with regards to getting permission to place additional items when it was an anniversary or special occasion such as Christmas or when relatives from afar.

Maureen Tatham informed the Council that everything had been removed from the grave and that instead of the cemetery being a pretty place of memorial it now looked like a dump, we have paid good money why should have to ask what we can place on graves, like others she had the letter instructing removal but the items had already been removed.

Cllr R Murphy proposed and seconded by Cllr R Mooney that the meeting was then taken out of public participation, Unanimous

The Mayor Cllr Stuckey then attempted to address the public to explain the statement that was issued to the Press, despite asking several times the Mayor who was being constantly being interrupted and talked over stated that the meeting would be closed. After a very brief interruption the meeting was resumed and a statement from the Town Clerk was read out. The Mayor then asked about any additional permissions that had been granted and reiterated that 2 items were allowed at the head of the grave but no glass is permitted as is clearly stated in the Rules and regulations, the issue of access to the garden of remembrance was cited as one of Health and Safety as ornaments and pots were blocking access.

The Mayor informed the meeting that the Regulations are the National Legal Framework 1977 updated in 2003 and the council reviewed these in December 2016. In addition, the existing framework allowed for careful removal, storage and held safely for collection if deemed hazardous, inappropriate or preventing maintenance being carried out and that notification be sent to the relevant grave rights holder. The fact that some of the addresses of rights holders have not been updated had not helped in keeping people informed.

Various members of the public expressed their dissatisfaction at the proceedings and left the meeting, in addition members of the public demanded to know as to why the Town Clerk was not present and as to what action would be taken to bring any shortcomings or failings he may have made.

All of the town Councillor's expressed their sincere apologies to the public as to what had happened and assured the meeting they would investigate.

Due to the severity of the issue the Mayor agreed to accept a question and answer session in an attempt to address the issues raised. The Mayor and Cllr Hester then stated that they were appalled that the Town Clerk had not attended the meeting and that until recently the Council were not aware of the extent of the action that had been taken with regards to the cemeteries.

Lyndsay Stenforth asked the Council if a meeting had been held to decide on this course of action and if not who made the decision and what authority did they have to do so.

Sarah Barkey stated that she understood the reason for the regulations but what Risk Assessment had been carried out and by whom and how could someone's vase etc contribute to a risk

Hayley Wright asked the Council whom should she contact to remove her son from the graveyard as she did not want him buried there anymore

Bob White made a statement to the Council about law with regards to the Local Authority Cemetery Act 1977 and the MOJ Cemetery Act

Keith Wharton questioned about the individual discussion that had led to this and also raised the issue about the rules and regulation, he also asked that sinage be displayed as soon as possible. It was also requested that when the rules and regulations are revisited that some additional leeway be given for the graves of children with regards to additional items of remembrance.

Cllr R Mooney proposed and Cllr B Hester seconded that a full investigation be carried out as to under what authority the actions had been taken in the cemeteries and that a full review of the Regulations, Procedures and Rules be carried out within 4 weeks and the findings published.

Unanimous

It was agreed by all that a copy of the updated Regulations and Rules would be provided when a plot was purchased and made available at the cemeteries

That any further removal of items is halted immediately and that the 2 items permitted under the current regulations be applied with additional items such as Christmas Wreaths allowed.

In addition, it was agreed that in the meantime until the updated regulations are issued that the Astro turf would be allowed back on the grave of Preston Fulcher and that Jane Scott be allowed to replace the plants removed as per her original letter of consent.

4. To adjourn the meeting and exclude the public and Enter Part 2

It was proposed by Cllr B Hester and seconded by Cllr E Addison that the meeting be adjourned for Part 2 discussion regarding the Cemetery lodge. Agreed unanimously by all Councillor's present.

Cllrs G Bull and R Murphy gave an overview of the recent inspection and condition of the Cemetery Lodge.

Cllr E Addison proposed and Cllr G Bull seconded that a professional surveyor carry out a complete survey as to the condition of the property with a view to ensuring that the Council is acting in an appropriate and legal manner with regards to the habitability of the property.

Unanimous

Cllr S Stuckey proposed and Cllr R Harris seconded that we check the listed status of the lodge and cemetery chapels and that in addition we get these buildings surveyed at the same time.

Unanimous

Being no further business, the meeting was closed at 21:20