

Weaverham, Cuddington and Acton Bridge Cemetery Committee SPECIAL Meeting

Date & time	24th February 2026 at 19.00	Location	Cuddington & Sandiway Village Hall
Attendees	Cllr J Freeman (WPC) (Chairperson), Cllr D Ruchat (CPC), Cllr S Brookes (CPC), Cllr A Crist (CPC), Cllr P Wilkinson (WPC), Cllr P Wakefield (WPC), Cllr C Fifield (ABPC), Cllr J McDonald (CPC), Cllr Gerrard (WPC), Cllr T Brocklebank (ABPC), Mr G Robinson (Cemetery Maintenance Manager), Mrs C Robinson (Clerk & RFO), Miss P Jackson (Temporary Ass. Clerk to the Committee)		
Apologies	Mr K Byrne		
Absent			
Minutes written by	Mrs C Robinson (Clerk & RFO)		
<i>The meeting commenced at 19:00</i>			

Agenda item	Notes & actions
82. Apologies	Apologies for Absence – as noted above.
83. Declarations of interest	There were no disclosable pecuniary interests declared.
84. Minutes of Committee meeting held on 24th January 2026	Cllr Wilkinson proposed and Cllr Brookes seconded and it was RESOLVED that, the minutes of the Cemetery Committee meeting held on 24 th January 2026 are accepted as a true and correct record.
85. Public Open Forum	No members of the general public were present, but two members of Northwich Town Council (NTC) were present to answer questions under agenda item 7: Chris Shaw (Chief Officer) and Stephanie Astbury.
86. Review of options and decision on process for replacing the Clerk and Maintenance Manager	<p>At the request of the members of NTC, item 7 replacing the Clerk and Maintenance Manager, was moved to item 5.</p> <p>The Clerk had circulated a summary of the 3 potential options of replacing the Clerk and Maintenance Manager, who had expressed their wishes to leave their roles at the end of April (contracts state they must give one month’s notice).</p> <p>The Clerk gave a high level overview of the options, and the 3rd option, which is to employ a Clerk and RFO, along with a contractor to do the cemetery admin and site management was discussed in more detail with the members of NTC who have experience of managing another Cemetery on behalf of the Parish Council, as well as managing Northwich’s cemeteries.</p> <p>The NTC members left at the end of the discussion (19:25) concerning option 3.</p> <p>After further discussion, the JCC agreed to form a sub-committee of Cllr Freeman, Cllr Crist and Cllr Fifield to review the options in more detail and prepare the documents for inviting tenders for the cemetery admin and site management contractor, as well as preparing Public Notices for the vacancies. Action Cllrs Freeman, Crist and Fifield and Mrs Robinson</p>
87. Review of Health and Safety documentation	<p>The Cemetery Maintenance Manager had circulated health and safety documentation prior to the meeting for review. Following extensive review, Cllr McDonald proposed and Cllr Crist seconded and it was RESOLVED to approve the General Health and Safety Policy with the amendments agreed at the meeting. After review, Cllr Brookes proposed and Cllr Ruchat seconded and it was RESOLVED the Topple test Policy was agreed with the clarifications made at the meeting. The Clerks Asst will check whether this is provision in on Epitaph to record topple tests.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Action Miss Jackson</p>

88. Review and decision on paying £100 stone mason costs	The owner of burial rights of the plot where the JCC had requested she agree to move the headstone, including base and foundation stone, following it being placed too far to the left of the plot (through no fault of her own), had asked for compensation for the cost of moving the base and foundation stone. After discussion, Cllr Freeman proposed and Cllr Ruchat seconded and it was RESOLVED to pay the £100 cost.
89. Exclusion of press and public	Cllr Ruchat proposed and Cllr Brookes seconded and it was RESOLVED to exclude the public and representatives of the press during consideration of the next agenda item on the grounds that matters contain sensitive information and by the reason of the confidential nature of the business being transacted
90. Update on agenda item 80 (January 2026)	As agreed at the January meeting, no further action has been taken, and no further communication has been received.
91. AOB	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Maintenance Manager expressed his thanks to Cllr Wakefield for the battery for the solar panels to charge • Cllr Brocklebank raised that the current cemetery Email addresses are not best practice as they are not gov.uk. The Clerk will look into. Action Mrs Robinson
92. Date of next meeting	The JCC agreed an extra meeting should be held on 25th March 2026 to review recruitment activity, as well as the planned April 15 th meeting.

The meeting closed at 21:00

Signed..... (Chairperson)

Date.....

Replacing the Cemetery Clerk and Cemetery Maintenance Manager

1. Overview

The Cemetery Clerk and Cemetery Maintenance Manager have expressed their wishes to resign from their roles, with effect from the end of April 2026 latest (their contracts state they need to give 1 months' notice). The Cemetery Clerk has been in role since 12th February 2018, the Maintenance Manager since 12th December 2020. This document sets out the options for their replacement and highlights the possible benefits and challenges for the Joint Cemetery Committee (JCC) to review, and decide on next steps.

Before the Maintenance Manager was employed, the Cemetery Clerk dealt with managing the cemetery grounds. It has become apparent that the Maintenance Managers current areas of responsibility are wider ranging than previously understood – including managing contractors and sub-contractors, (grounds maintenance, grave diggers, stone masons), and physical tasks, e.g. gritting the roads, pavements and car park in adverse weather, topple testing, as well as keeping the site tidy, for aesthetic and health and safety reasons. A review of health and safety requirements has identified the need to undertake on-site review of contractors and subcontractors and that will inevitably increase the hours required for the Maintenance Manager. This will need to be considered, along with the knowledge required to conduct these activities. The risk to the Parish Councils if these actions aren't undertaken also needs to be understood, as all 3 Parish Councils will be potentially liable if an accident were to happen. As Cuddington PC is the landowner – they may have increased liability, but this needs to be verified.

Management of the current maintenance contractor has included assisting them with tasks due to their age, physical abilities and weather conditions. The tasks currently completed by the maintenance manager could be reviewed in conjunction with a review of the maintenance contractors' tasks and all site tasks could potentially be done by a new contractor.

The Cemetery Clerks role requires knowledge of cemetery management and legislation e.g. issuing deeds for burial rights, transfers of ownership (which have increased in numbers significantly), as well as an understanding of parish clerk roles and responsibilities, e.g. writing agendas and minutes, financial regulations, completing financial year end for audit and inclusion in the 3 parish council figures. The JCC have also recently employed a temp clerk to assist with getting the new system, Epitaph, up to date and to scan documents to reduce the burden of storing paperwork.

The roles are diverse and require knowledge of several different areas. A large degree of flexibility is also required due to the roles being part-time and the different requirements of the JCC, cemetery users, contractors, sub-contractors and health and safety requirements, as well as the impact of seasons (weather and daylight hours).

There are additional challenges to be considered, as there is no office space. The current Clerk works from home. The Clerk and Maintenance Manager own most of the current office equipment (chairs, desks printer etc), apart from 2 laptops and a mobile phone. There are also large amounts of paperwork to store, and having a home address as the office address could present issues for potential candidates. Currently no provision is made by the JCC for working from home costs, e.g. electric & heating. The office space should also be subject to health and safety reviews, which aren't currently being undertaken.

The JCC is also aware they need to be building reserves for the time when the number of interments starts to reduce due to the lack of space for new plots (approx. 40 years time). The current year will probably be breakeven. As fees have already been agreed for the next financial year, it is likely expenditure will be greater than income.

2. Key measurements

a. Breakdown of the roles (*Note: Averages over a year*):

Maintenance Manager					
Type of work	Average weekly hours	% of time	Weekly cost	Annual cost	Key
Maintenance at the cemetery - Clearing floral tributes, filling, strimming	5.5	73%	£94.49	£4,913.48	A
Managing on site Contractors and Sub-Contractors	1	13%	£17.18	£893.36	B
Office/paperwork/meetings/reports	1	13%	£17.18	£893.36	C
Total	7.5		£128.85	£6,700.20	
Current hourly rate	17.18				
Clerk & RFO					
Type of work	Average weekly hours	% of time	Weekly cost	Annual cost	
RFO - Financial oversight, year end, reports, investments & banking	2	27%	£34.36	£1,786.72	D
Parish Council Clerk activities - meetings/minutes	1.5	20%	£25.77	£1,340.04	E
Cemetery Paperwork/Admin, queries, tf ownership	4	53%	£68.72	£3,573.44	F
Total	7.5		£128.85	£6,700.20	
Current hourly rate	17.18				
Total Salaries (excl. pension, NI, overtime)				£13,400.40	
Potentially the Precept should cover RFO & Parish Clerk Activities D&E				£3,126.76	

b. 2025/2026 Financial breakdown (YTD + estimated year-end)

Income

	Pre-purchase	Plot fee	Interment	Headstone fees	Admin/Tf Ownership	Reservations	Precept	Total
Income	£2,560.00	£7,660.00	£15,590.00	£4,995.00	£440.00	£270.00	£2,000.00	£33,515.00
Routine cemetery related	£21,025.00	Interments, headstones, TF ownership						
Non-routine related	£12,490.00	Purchase of burial rights, reservations, precept						
Total	£33,515.00							

The precept has not risen for many years (see constitution wording), currently set at £2,000 ('Such costs shall include remuneration paid to the Clerk')

Expenditure

Cost	Amount	
Cemetery Maintenance	£17,111.09	See separate breakdown
Salaries	£14,751.34	Includes overtime, and Temp Clerk
Employers NIC	£475.91	
Admin	£635.78	Postage, envelopes, printer ink
Insurance	£395.92	
Subscriptions	£197.00	ICO, SLCC
IT	£869.72	Edge subs, laptop
Training	£88.70	Temp Clerk
Total	£34,525.46	

Payee	Cemetery Maintenance	
Temp contractor	£2,600.73	Grave filling
Expenses	£2,585.55	Soil, grass seed, wild flower seed etc
Northwich Town Council	£165.00	Grit
TTC Maintenance	£9,049.00	Maintenance Contractor
SUEZ R&R UK LTD	£2,627.82	Refuse Collection
Water Plus	£83.00	Water
Total	£17,111.10	
Maintenance Manager	6,700.20	
Grand Total	£23,811.30	

NB Includes estimates to year end for expenditure

3. Possible Solutions

a. Option 1

Revert to just having a Cemetery Clerk who has oversight of the contractors and sub-contractors. Number hours required per week (on average) estimated as 10 (as per the Cemetery Clerk prior to Maintenance Manager being employed) but will probably need to be increased once the monitoring required for site health and safety management is better understood. This probably wouldn't include general tidying and making good at the cemetery (A) – this would need to be enforced with the Maintenance Contractor, most likely making the maintenance contract more expensive (suggest this part of the Maintenance Managers salary is added to the Maintenance Contractors estimated costs). Key: B, C, D & E in one role.

Benefits

- Cost effective – most likely the least expensive option
- One person to employ/manage
- The increased hours might attract more candidates
- Working from home is a more viable option

Challenges

- Finding someone with the appropriate skill set willing to work part-time, with knowledge of cemetery management, parish clerk duties, maintenance knowledge and health and safety knowledge
- Finding someone who knows or can be trained in toppling, health and safety regulations, grave digging
- Finding someone to be flexible with their working hours when they are required to be at the cemetery (to meet residents and contractors/subcontractors), pick up emails (esp. from funeral directors wanting to make bookings and bereaved family members with concerns) and to attend quarterly JCC evening meetings
- Finding a candidate who can be flexible with when the hours are required, as the figures are 'average per week' e.g. more clerking hours on weeks with meetings, and at year end, more maintenance when weather requires/allows
- Finding someone who is happy to work from home – and making sure they have the equipment and space for the role, or identifying an appropriate workspace
- Higher salary for 1 individual could attract higher NI contributions

b. Option 2

Replace the Cemetery Clerk and Maintenance Manager with like for like, e.g. 7.5 hours each per week with clear segregation of roles. Key: A, B, C in one role, D, E, F in the other role (the Maintenance Managers hours will most likely need to increase)

Benefits

- Similar to current costs, dependant on applicant expectations, and the potential increase on the Maintenance Managers hours
- Little change to current practices and procedures

- More likely to find candidates with the more specified skillsets e.g. Clerk/RFO and a Landscaper/Ground Maintenance person

Challenges

- Finding 2 separate candidates each with the required skillsets (see option 1 above)
- Finding 2 candidates able to work flexible hours within a working week
- Finding 2 candidates who can be flexible with when the hours are required, e.g. more clerking hours on weeks with meetings, at year end, and more landscaping hours in good weather
- No clearly defined office space (Weaverham Community Centre?)

c. Option 3

Replace some elements of the roles with a 'management agent' (such as [REDACTED]) who manage several local cemeteries already (including [REDACTED]), (Key: A, B, C & F) and have a separate Cemetery Clerk employed by the JCC to manage meetings and Clerking activities for the JCC and Parish Councils. Key: D & E

Benefits

- Much increased knowledge of cemetery management and practices, better protection from potential issues and challenges for the Parish Councils
- Better availability of staff due to wider pool
- Better ability/resource to complete tasks such as gritting in adverse weather
- The cemetery management agent would provide office space for the admin for routine cemetery work
- Only need to recruit a Parish Council Clerk, with some training on cemetery management and legislation

Challenges

- Potential to be far more expensive – more analysis required (see initial figures below)
- Is [REDACTED] the only option? Are there other candidates? A process for selection might need to be put in place
- A significant change to current practices that will take time to identify and manage e.g. Grave digging isn't the responsibility of the Funeral Directors in [REDACTED]'s current practices and they always have someone attend interments – could this review be done by end April?
- The new JCC employee (Clerk) will need to manage the cemetery management agent and oversee their work
- The charges to the cemetery from the cemetery management agent will be the same whether resident of non-resident (see table below)
- Gorstage fees for 2026/2027 have already been agreed (can they be changed?)
- Taking soil away will most likely be an additional cost; this is currently done by the grave diggers
- Reliance on a 'management agent' – what if they decide not to renew or terminate the agreement
- Data input – Gorstage uses Epitaph system – what if the management agent doesn't?

Current [REDACTED] charges to existing cemetery they are managing:

Burial Interment £570.00 incl. grave digging (using a sub-contractor) estimated at £300

C/R interment £235.00 including grave digging (using in house staff)

Current Gorstage cemetery charges to Funeral Directors (not including grave digging fees)

Resident burial Interment £165 ([REDACTED] cemetery - £605)

Non-Resident burial interment £630 ([REDACTED] cemetery - £1210)

Resident C/R interment £115 ([REDACTED] cemetery £275)

Non-Resident C/R £300 ([REDACTED] cemetery £550)

Comparison of impact on Gorstage Cemetery Using 2025/26 as an example:

	Number interments	Gorstage Charge to FD	NTC charge to cemetery	Surplus/ shortfall
Burial Resident	26	£4,290.00	£7,020.00	-£2,730.00
Burial Non-resident	10	£6,300.00	£2,700.00	£3,600.00
C/R resident	20	£2,300.00	£4,700.00	-£2,400.00
C/R non resident	9	£2,700.00	£2,115.00	£585.00
Total	65	£15,590.00	£16,535.00	-£945.00

NB. Assumed £300 grave digger costs for burials, but £0 for C/R. There would only need to be £30 taken into account for each the 30 cremated remains interments for the cost to be neutral compared to the fees Gorstage charges the funeral Directors, as the grave digger costs are currently not included in the fees Gorstage charge the funeral directors, but they would need to be included.

This effectively means the funeral directors fees paid to Gorstage for interments would probably all go to pay ■■■, until fees could be adjusted, with no surplus to go towards the additional running costs of the cemetery.

The only costs Gorstage incurs currently that would be removed by this option are the Maintenance Managers role (A, B, C) and one element of the Cemetery Clerks role (Key: F), a current total of £10,273.64, giving an estimated cost to the cemetery of an extra £5,000 - £6,000 pa for interments, but the potential increase in the Maintenance Managers hours will not have happened – possibly needs to be factored in when understood.

In addition, ■■■ currently charge £45.00 for transfers of ownership, giving another a net loss to Gorstage of £720 (16 completed ytd) and memorial applications are all charged at £45 – Gorstage charge £45 for additional inscriptions but £135.00 for new memorials, but the charge paid to ■■■ would be approx. £2,070 (46 completed so far this year).

Overall, the net increase in expenditure for Gorstage is estimated to be in the region of **£8,000 - £9,000** pa based on 2025/26 accounts, for this option (around 25% - 30% increase).

4. Next steps

- JCC to review information and options and decide if any further investigation/information is required to make decisions on what options to pursue
- JCC to decide if they want a sub-committee to review and present findings/options
- JCC to decide if they want a meeting for review of options and when, next JCC meeting planned for mid April
- Does the JCC want to consider amalgamating the maintenance contract if they decide to pursue option 3? This could increase the costs by at least £1,000 based on previous tender submissions but will make the overall management of the cemetery much easier, or is this excluded from this review?