

CONSIDERATION OF THE PETITION RECEIVED - PROVIDE CCTV TO PROTECT GRAVES FROM PEOPLE STEALING AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR WITHIN THE CEMETERY.

Wards Affected: All wards in High Wycombe Town

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PROPOSED RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET

That:

- (i) *High Wycombe Town Committee acknowledges the distress caused under circumstances such as these; and*
- (ii) *the number of reported incidents is monitored alongside the new process for recording the removal of items from graves by Council officers.*

Reason for Decision

Cabinet has requested High Wycombe Town Committee consider the petition.

Corporate Implications

1. Under Standing Order 9 of the Council's Procedure Rules Standing Orders Cabinet is required to consider the petition under the Council's Petition Scheme. The petition raises a request for CCTV which would impact on the Special Expenses budget. This issue would need to be discussed by the High Wycombe Town Committee.

Executive Summary

2. A petition to provide CCTV to protect graves from theft of items and anti-social behaviour within High Wycombe Cemetery was presented to Council in October 2016; it contained 2,035 signatories. Cabinet considered the petition on 14 November 2016 and requested it be passed to High Wycombe Town Committee for consideration.

Background and Issues

3. The validation has taken place and as there are 2,035 signatures the Council's response to the petition was referred to Cabinet. The Cemetery is a High Wycombe Town Committee funded service and the cost of improving security would fall to Special Expenses. Therefore Cabinet has referred the item to the Committee for consideration.

Wording of the Petition

4. Petition to provide CCTV to protect graves from people stealing and Anti-social behaviour within the cemetery.

Petition signed by 2,035 people.

Response from the Cabinet Member for Community at Cabinet

5. I appreciate how distressing it is for friends and family when the grave of a loved one is damaged or vandalised.
6. Officers periodically remove items from graves as stated on the signs clearly displayed in the Cemetery. We believe but cannot definitively prove that this work is leading to the perception that there are incidents of theft from individual graves. We have reviewed our processes and I am able to confirm that we will make changes so that from now on officers will take a photograph of each grave before they remove items that are either detrimentally affecting nearby graves or have started to weather and deteriorate. This will enable us to establish whether future incidents relate to necessary maintenance work to ensure the Cemetery looks attractive and welcoming or are thefts.
7. We will continue to monitor reported incidents of vandalism and anti-social behaviour, which are currently very low. In the meantime, it is suggested that the issue is referred to the HWTC for consideration.

Options

High Wycombe Town Committee could consider the following options following receipt of this petition:

Option 1 – Support the adoption of the new monitoring and recording process outlined in paragraph 6 above

This option will allow officers to understand the scope of any problem and report back the findings to the Committee.

Option 2 – Commission feasibility work to establish the costs of installing CCTV across the Cemetery and undertake a public consultation.

This option has been considered in the past but has consistently been discounted for a number of reasons as follows.

- The cost is significant with each pan, tilt and zoom camera and pole costing c£20-25k. A number of cameras would be needed to view the entire Cemetery. The cost of installing an electricity supply to each camera may be considerable as services do not run throughout the Cemetery – this has not been costed.
- CCTV is not particularly useful at night. Infrared cameras can be bought but the images are often not useable in court.
- Alternatively the Cemetery could be lit at night, which would enable CCTV to be utilised effectively. However this is likely to cause light spill that could affect surrounding properties, which neighbours are unlikely to welcome.

Additionally lighting the Cemetery at night may encourage people to enter it and increase the risk of vandalism, ASB and other concerns.

- The Cemetery has a number of trees, which will reduce the utility of CCTV. These could be felled to improve sight lines but they are an attractive landscaping feature and the Cemetery may feel more barren as a result.
- People who are grieving may welcome the feeling of safety that CCTV could bring but equally they may prefer privacy at a time of loss, sadness and distress.

If this option was supported a public consultation exercise would be needed.

A budget of c£10-15k would be needed to appoint a specialist consultant to fully cost the CCTV option. Public consultation could be undertaken using the website at little cost. It is estimated that a fully costed report could be available by June 2017. This includes a two month lead in time to refer the Committee's decision to Cabinet for it to agree funding.

Background Papers

Link to the petition as featured on the Council website:

<https://councillors.wycombe.gov.uk/mgEPetitionDisplay.aspx?ID=88&RPID=31579215&HPID=31579215>

Link to the Cabinet report as featured on the Council website:

<https://councillors.wycombe.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=118&MId=5582&Ver=4>