

**Wiltshire Council**

**Full Council**

**15 February 2022**

---

**Item 21 – Members’ Questions**

**From Cllr Edward Kirk, Trowbridge Adcroft**

**To Councillor Dr Mark McClelland, Cabinet Member for Transport, Waste,  
Street Scene and Flooding**

**Question (22-01)**

Stolen Bronze Doors

*Wiltshire Times 12<sup>th</sup> November 2021:* ‘Thieves have stolen a pair of solid bronze doors worth at least £10,000 from a chapel in a Trowbridge Cemetery where they were stored for safekeeping. There was no reported break-in, so somebody had the key. So far as I am aware, the only people who had the key were the contractors.’

Wiltshire Council removed these valuable historic doors from their original location and placed them in a building under the sole custody of their contractors. Wiltshire Council has dismissed any liability on the grounds it is not dealing with the responsible party and that it is not in the ‘public interest’ to replace these doors. The Friends of the Cemetery have only asked for some lower cost reproduction doors to be provided by Wiltshire Council.

It would appear from the above, that Wiltshire Council takes no responsibility for valuable historic items in its custody and can dismiss any claim or proposed remedy on the basis that anything that costs money is not in the public interest.

Please can the Cabinet Member explain how it is appropriate for Wiltshire Council to have removed and stored these doors without the owner’s permission, but now require the owner’s permission to replace them?

Please can the Cabinet Member explain how it is deemed to not be in the public interest to provide some lower cost reproduction replacement doors?

**Response**

Trowbridge cemetery is owned and operated by Wiltshire Council under the terms of the Local Authorities’ Cemeteries Order 1977. Memorials in the cemetery, including mausolea are private property; however, the council has power to act when safety is an issue.

In the 2010’s there was a series of metal thefts in the cemetery, some of which left graves and memorials damaged and unsafe. Among items stolen were bronze gates and bronze

lettering from the exterior of the Sir Roger Brown mausoleum. It was anticipated that thieves might return to steal the mausoleum's bronze doors.

This would pose a risk to public safety from criminals operating in the cemetery and from resulting access to the interior of a Victorian structure containing human remains.

In the absence of any known responsible party, the council removed the doors and securely boarded up the entrance to the mausoleum.

The doors were stored onsite, in a chapel building used by the cemetery contractor to store materials.

The doors were photographed in the chapel by a volunteer from 'The Friends of the Down Cemetery', which is a community group that does improvement works (with Council permission) in the cemetery. The photograph is believed to have been taken on 6<sup>th</sup> August 2018.

A later check of the doors found they were no longer in the chapel and there is no record of their removal.

Where there is an accusation that the council's actions have not been appropriate and that a party wishes to claim costs, the procedure is for the legally empowered responsible entity to make an insurance claim for any liability to be assessed.

The council recognises the excellent work of the Friends of the Down Cemetery, but it cannot be held responsible for the replacement of doors when the initial works were ten years ago and undertaken to address safety issues in the absence of a responsible party. The council does not have the duty or right of maintenance of memorials, only a responsibility for safety if and when owners default.