

University of Exeter Policy on Scattering Ashes on Campus

1. Background

The University of Exeter grounds play a significant role in the life of a large number of our students, staff, alumni and visitors.

For a number of years requests have been made for people from these groups to scatter ashes in or around areas of the campus which may hold significance to their life, work or enjoyment. Requests have typically been made in an ad hoc way, via the Chaplaincy Team, Alumni Office or Campus Services. There have, to date, been relatively poor records kept of where or when remains have been scattered. Clearly the process is an emotional one but it does potentially put the University at risk if we have no record or policy regarding where, when and how ashes can be spread on campus.

We do currently encourage donations, particularly in the form of seats, trees and shrubs to commemorate students, staff, alumni and visitors. It is proposed these established methods remain the principle way of commemorating either living benefactors or those who have passed away.

2. The Law Relating to Scattering Ashes

The law in the UK is currently fairly relaxed in relation to human ashes, with no specific piece of legislation restricting people in disposal of cremated ashes. There is a requirement to get the permission of the landowner to scatter ashes on their land and permission can be refused. There is an expectation that the area used will not be disturbed, but this is not an explicit requirement of the landowner. It can, potentially, put the landowner at risk, reputation wise, if no records are kept or if a known scattering site is disturbed. In this respect a policy and record keeping system represents a way of managing the risk.

The Church of England follows Canon Law stipulating only ground consecrated and sanctioned by the Bishop should be used for scattering ashes, but this is not always followed.

The position taken by landowners varies e.g. The Woodland Trust supports the practice on their land, but the Forestry Commission does not. National parks and local authority parks consider applications on an individual basis, depending on the size and position (urban/rural) of the open space. The principle behind this is the privacy that can be afforded to individuals or families/friends if they also wish to carry out a ceremony.

3. Environmental Issues

Human remains, in the form of cremated ashes, are rich in minerals such as calcium and phosphorous, which can impact on soil alkalinity. Other minerals and elements are also present with potential to sterilise soil and leak into watercourses etc.

There is also a potential for ashes to spread onto surfaces, leaves etc; in both these respects the policy must permit discretion to be used regarding where and when permission can be granted to spread cremated remains.

4. Policy

Based on points 1-3 above, the University is mindful to adopt the following policy:

4.i All requests to spread cremated human remains on the grounds are made, in writing, to the Director of Estates, University of Exeter, Streatham Farm, Prince of Wales Road, Exeter, EX4 4PX.

4.ii Each application will be considered on an individual basis, based on the relevance and an agreement regarding a suitable location for the activity.

4.iii If permission is to be granted, the family or friends will be given a specific contact point in the Grounds Team, who will agree a location and date when the cremated ashes can be spread. Whilst every reasonable precaution will be taken to avoid disturbing sites used for cremation, no guarantees will be provided. Discretion however will be used to select sites excluded from the current 25 year development plan.

4.iv The Director of Grounds will record, on behalf of the Director of Estates:

- The location of where the ashes are scattered
- The date of when the ashes were scattered
- The details of the deceased
- A contact point confirming who made the original request to scatter the ashes

4.v The agreed location will be chosen to be discreet, in order to ensure the privacy for family/friends and out of courtesy for other campus users.

5. Records

The record of where and when any scattering of human remains took place will be held by the Director of Grounds. A copy will also be provided to Estate Patrol as friends and family may visit for future anniversaries or significant dates. Records will also be consulted when campus developments are being proposed.