

Memorial Management Policy

Background

Memorials are purchased by the bereaved. Ownership and responsibility for the memorial remains with the family at all times and the family is responsible for the upkeep of the memorial.

However, as a burial authority and as a parish council, we have responsibility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all those who visit or work in the cemetery. This responsibility comes under the Health and Safety at Work act 1972 and the Occupiers Liability act 1957. Additional duties are conferred on us with regard to maintenance and in regard of powers (what we may and may not do in the pursuit of our duties within the cemetery both to maintain the area generally and to ensure safety) by the Local Authorities Cemetery Order 1977. In recent years a number of individuals have been tragically killed by unstable memorials. In addition, there have serious injuries caused, usually by an unstable memorial falling onto someone.

We are required to look at the risk of harm and to make decisions and act to reduce that risk to the lowest practicable level under the acts mentioned above.

In regards of memorials, the risk of injury is quite low, considering the number of injuries and fatalities and the number of visits to cemeteries in the UK. However, where a risk exists we need to mitigate it. The ICCM have published a best practice guide to memorial management. The current accepted rules are that burial authorities should assess all memorials for stability at least once every 5 years, and that where a memorial is found to be unsafe it should be made safe immediately. The practicalities of this will be explained further below.

Waterbeach Parish Council will undertake the actions within this policy to ensure the safety of all in the cemetery, having due regard to the sensitive nature of the area and its value to the bereaved.

Publication

In addition to this policy, the council will give advance notice of 28 days before testing starts. The notice will detail what will happen and why and be disseminated via notice boards, Facebook and the PC website. Contacts will be provided for anyone who wants more information or is concerned about what will happen.

Risk Assessment

The first stage is to assess the risks to the public. Inspections will be conducted on a priority basis with the most visited plots that have the highest risk of someone being harmed being inspected first, and then the older less visited areas.

The activity of testing itself will also be risk assessed in line with health and safety requirements.

Testing

Prior to testing a memorial, a visual inspection will be made. This will look for evidence of failed joints, damage, or anything else that could render a memorial unsafe. A photograph of the memorial will be taken.

Testing will be carried out using the hand test method described by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematoria Managers in their publication on memorial management. Testing is not about attempting to push the stone over. It is simply a test applying firm hand pressure to detect any

movement in the stone. Testing will be carried out only by staff who have received ICCM training and at all times staff will accord the memorials of the deceased with the respect they are due.

Handling of Unsafe Memorials

Where a memorial is found to be unsafe, it must be made safe immediately and wherever possible the owner of the memorial or burial plot should be notified the stone needs remedial work by a qualified mason who is a member of BRAMM or NAMM.

There are several methods of making a memorial safe, selection of the method used may vary and will give regard to factors such as:

- Minimising distress to the bereaved and other visitors
- Age of the memorial and if there is any sign of recent visitation.
- Other factors such as access.

Where a memorial has failed, if it is being made safe temporarily a discrete warning notice will be affixed to the side or back of the memorial with the date and contacts for the parish council.

Stake and Bindings

In this method a large stake is driven in behind the stone and bindings are attached to secure it. This method is preferred as it eliminates the need to further disturb the memorial and reduces potential distress for relatives. As a temporary method a permanent repair or use of the other methods listed below must be carried out within 18 months.

Monolith Conversion

This method involves digging a hole of a third of the height of the stone and then placing the stone in the hole before filling it in. The lower part of the stone will be protected with a plastic wrap if this method is used. This method is considered to make the stone permanently safe.

Laying Flat

In this method the stone is laid flat, wherever possible this will be avoided as it is distressing for visitors and creates possible trip hazards and maintenance issues. It is best suited to kerbside graves where the memorial can be placed in the centre face up.

Cordons

In the case of very large graves over 1.5mtrs in height, a visual examination will take place. If the memorial is felt to pose a danger, a cordon of Heras fence or rope will be used to keep people away until a structural engineer can give a final assessment. Memorials that fail under a structural engineer must be repaired within 18 months, and be kept cordoned off.

Contact with Relatives

For graves less than 50 years old, every effort will be made to contact the grave owners to give them the options to make the memorial safe and ensure good communication to minimise distress. Memorials made safe in this way shall be checked every two weeks to ensure the bindings, etc are secure. If an older grave has evidence of recent visits the council will endeavour to contact the owner.

Record Keeping

The council will keep accurate and up to date records of all testing carried out. This will include the particulars of the memorial including the plot and name of the deceased, the date, the test outcome, operator, a condition rating (see below), and any notes of interest. Photos will be taken of each memorial so a record is available for future reference.

Condition Rating

Memorials will be graded 1-4:

- 1: Memorial has passed and has no issues
- 2: Memorial has passed but there are issues such as a loose join on a ground fixed memorial.
- 3: Memorial has passed but there is a concern and should be rechecked monthly in case of deterioration.
- 4: Memorial has failed and must be made safe.

Repairs

Repairs must be made by a suitably qualified and professional memorial mason, to BS8415. This requires the memorial to be refixed to an approved base and a ground anchor system to be fitted. DIY repairs are not permitted.

Review

The parish council shall review this policy from time to time to ensure best practice.