

Memorial Testing Procedure

Introduction

The following document sets out Hackleton Parish Council's (the Council) policy for the management of memorial safety in its burial grounds.

The Council currently has responsibility for Piddington Cemetery and St John the Baptist Piddington closed Churchyard.

This policy does not include the War Memorial situated in Hackleton.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Regulations for Piddington Cemetery.

Responsibility and liability

The Council has primary responsibility for Health and Safety under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Occupiers Liability Act 1957 to ensure that, as far as reasonably practicable Piddington Cemetery which it owns and St John the Baptist closed Churchyard are maintained in a safe condition.

In order to comply with the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, the Council has a systematic programme of memorial inspections ensuring that any memorials that pose a risk to Health and Safety are made safe.

The strategic aim of this policy is to ensure that the open or closed burial grounds which are under the responsibility of the Council, are safe places for staff, visitors and all others who may visit or work in them.

Whilst the Council has overall responsibility for the safety in the burial grounds, it does not own the memorials. The owners of memorials are the grave owners and they are responsible for maintaining the memorial in a good condition.

Memorial Stonemasons must ensure memorials are erected safely and in accordance with current standards available within the industry – British Standard 8415, the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) code of working practice and the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons Blue Book.

The Council has powers under the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO) to make safe any headstones or kerbs.

Publicity for safety testing

The Council recognises that the inspection programme has the potential to cause distress, particularly where action is required, and will aim to communicate the inspection and

assessment programme as widely as possible. This will be achieved through prominent site notices in the cemetery, churchyard, and on the Parish Council notice board together with a notice on the Parish Council website and in the Parish Mag' a minimum of two weeks prior to the assessment.

Where a memorial has been deemed at immediate risk and work needs to be undertaken, clear information will be posted in the burial ground. A notice will be placed on or near the memorial, giving contact details and the period in which the contact should be made. Where the grave owner is known, the Council will contact them by letter to give them the opportunity to repair the memorial.

Type & Frequency of checks

The Council will carry out safety inspections on all memorials as part of a rolling programme on annual and five yearly cycles depending on the condition and risk assessment for each memorial.

The management of memorial safety is based on a risk assessment approach and as a priority; this will involve identifying those memorials, which present an immediate and significant hazard, and making them safe.

In cases of immediate danger, the Council is empowered under the provision of the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 Article 6(1) to take immediate action to make safe dangerous memorials.

The Council will undertake visual inspections and hand tests. The Council will not utilise a mechanical method of testing (topple test) as these instruments are liable to overestimate the actual risk.

Inspection process

All memorials will be subject to a thorough visual inspection looking for signs of decay, e.g. loose or cracked cement, and degree of any lean that may occur and other issues. Where a visual check reveals defects outside the experience and knowledge of the person carrying out the inspection, specialist assistance will be sought.

All memorials will be given a hand test where it is deemed safe to do so following the visual inspection. The Council will not employ mechanical testing, 'topple testing'.

The temporary method used to make the memorial safe in the short term will be proportionate to the risk of people suffering harm.

It is Council policy to consider a range of alternatives for temporary measures. These include:

- Placing a warning notice near or on the memorial alerting visitors to the potential danger. Cordoning the area and placing a warning notice.

- Make it a monolith by sinking it by one third (pocketing) and making sure the inscription remains visible wherever possible.
- Installing a temporary support i.e. wooden stake and fixings together with a warning notice.
- Laying down the memorial where there is a genuine hazard to health and safety that cannot be remedied by a temporary support.

Notification to the Grave Owner

Where a memorial has been deemed at immediate risk and the grave owner is not known, clear information will be posted on or near the memorial, giving contact details and the period within which contact can be made. In addition notices will be placed on the Council website, on the Council notice board and in the Parish Mag' requesting that the Grave owner contacts the Council.

Where the grave owner is known they will be notified by letter.

Repairs to memorials

It is Council policy that all repairs should be carried out by an approved memorial mason in accordance with NAMM (National Association of Memorial Masons) approved methods or the British Standard 8415 current at the time of works.

It is the responsibility of grave owners to instruct a suitably qualified mason to carry out the repairs. The Council must be informed as to which mason has been instructed to carry out repairs to ensure the correct standards are adhered to.

Prior approval must be obtained from the Council before any work is undertaken. Approval is subject to the methods to be employed to make the memorial safe and subject to adequate insurance cover being verified.

Where the grave owner cannot be traced, the Council will consider what action to take after an appropriate period.

It is not Council policy for the Council to undertake permanent repairs.

If the owner does not make the repairs within six months after the issue of a notice, the Council may pocket the memorial or make it safe. The Council may also pocket (where possible) unsafe memorials in instances where no relatives can be traced or the family are unwilling to fund full reinstatement.

Urgent action between inspections

In the event that urgent action is needed in the interests of health and safety on one or more specific memorials, the council reserves the right not to give prior notice of testing, but notices will be displayed at the time of testing and every effort will be made to contact the grave owner to explain the situation.

Records

All inspection data will be retained in the Council records.

The Council will keep a photographic record of the action taken on headstones that are classified as unsafe.

Policy review

This policy will be reviewed every two years or more frequently where new regulations or guidance necessitate a review.