



Memorial Safety Policy

Introduction

This policy has been produced to set out Reepham Town Council's (the council) position with regard to memorial safety, the responsibilities of the Council, its contractors, memorial masons and Deed Holders. The policy provides an overview of the actions that will be taken to minimize risk to users of the cemeteries and churchyard in Reepham.

Reepham Town Council has responsibility for the management of two cemeteries and one closed churchyard:

- Norwich Road Cemetery
- Whitwell Road Cemetery
- St Mary's/St Michael's Churchyard

An important part of the Council's responsibility is to ensure that its cemeteries and closed churchyard are safe places for contractors to work and members of the public to visit.

Since Victorian times memorials have been erected at the head of graves as a permanent reminder of those buried within. It is often wrongly assumed that memorials are permanent structures, installed to the highest standards, and will last forever without need for repair.

There have been a number of deaths nationally in recent years and many serious injuries caused by unsafe memorials.

The memorials do not belong to the council; they remain the property and the responsibility of the Deed Holder to the Exclusive Rights of Burial. The responsibility for and the costs attached to the repair or re-fixing of a memorial rest with the deed holder or his or her descendants.

The Council is not responsible for any damage, theft or vandalism or any other circumstances beyond the control of the Council. The Council strongly recommends that all grave owners obtain an appropriate insurance to protect the memorial from unforeseen circumstances.

Responsibilities

The following parties have responsibility for memorial safety in Council cemeteries:

The Council has health and safety responsibilities to its employees, contractors and visitors to cemeteries. The council has a responsibility to staff (Section 2 Health and Safety at Work Act 1974) and a responsibility to visitors (Section 3 Health and Safety at Work Act 1974). The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 places a legal duty on the council to assess the risks from cemetery structures and work activities and ensure that the risks are controlled.

A monumental mason has the responsibility to work in accordance with the council's conditions and specifications for memorials as described in the Cemetery Rules. It is recommended that Reepham Town Council seeks to implement the National Association of Memorial Mason Standards for the fixing of memorials and any subsequent changes to these standards. This will be a rolling programme of testing and includes new memorials.

The Deed Holder or successor in title, of a memorial has the ultimate responsibility to maintain it so as not to present a hazard to themselves, members of the public or cemetery staff, and as such are therefore responsible and liable for all expenditure incurred to make safe their memorial in the event that their memorial is found to be unsafe or dangerous condition. **This is not the responsibility of the council.**

Setting up Memorials

The memorial application form requests that memorials are installed to meet the standard of BS8415 and the BRAMM Blue Book / NAMM Code of Practice (current versions) and incorporate a ground anchor system that conforms to BS8415. Memorial Masons are requested to forward a certificate of conformity to confirm that this standard has been met.

Memorial masons will use the latest national standards laid down by the National Association of Memorial Masons irrespective of whether works are being carried out on new or existing memorials.

Memorial Testing

Notice of intent

The Council is aware that memorial testing is a sensitive issue for those involved. Prior to any memorials being inspected, reasonable steps will be taken by the council

to inform Deed Holders or successors in title, and members of the public, of the intention to inspect memorials and reduce the risk posed by unsafe memorials.

This will involve:

- Giving advance formal notice in Reepham Life of any inspection regime commencing.
- Publishing details of the assessment and methodology on the council's website.
- Placing public notices on the cemetery gates and in prominent locations elsewhere in the cemetery affected by the testing regime, notice boards in Reepham and in the Bircham Centre.
- Please note that it is not practical to send individual letters to Deed Holders.

Testing Methodology

Any individuals carrying out memorial safety inspection must have had some form of training.

The person undertaking the testing will start by doing a visual inspection of the memorial, followed by a hand test. This will involve pressure being applied to the memorial to check for movement. If the memorial moves it will fail the test.

A record will be kept of the outcome of each test.

Memorial Repair

The Council will ensure that any memorials which do not pass the safety tests are made safe.

- Notify grave deed holder where possible.

The Council will endeavour to contact the last known Deed Holder. We will not write to anyone where the information is older than 25 years, because we have no way of knowing if the owner has since died themselves and would not wish to distress relatives in this respect. Most people do not think to advise the Town Council when they change address, or when they inherit the Deed to a grave. Deed Holders are urged to provide us with their details (see contact us). As some address details will be out of date, we will also place a notice near the memorial asking the Deed Holder to contact the Council.

- Cordoning off, for larger memorials that fail the visual test.

The cordon will need to cover the fall radius of the highest point of the memorial and not just the memorial itself.

- Making repairs

Making repairs is the responsibility of the Deed Holders. Deed Holders must not try to move or make repairs to the memorial themselves

Deed Holders are to ensure that repairs to any memorial are carried out by a memorial mason currently registered with the National Association of Memorial Masons or the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons. Any upright headstone to be re-fixed must now have a ground anchor system fitted to ensure its future safety.

- Making memorials safe

The council needs to ascertain the social, architectural and historic value of an unsafe memorial and the impact of making it safe on the character of the cemeteries.

The Council will not make repairs to memorials.

The Council will lay unsafe memorials flat when no other viable option is available.

Rolling programme of inspections

Memorials will be checked at least every five years. Memorials that have had repairs made will be re-inspected and if they pass the test will join the 5 year inspection cycle.

Memorials which fail the test will be inspected again one year later to ascertain whether they have been repaired.

Informal visual inspections will also be carried out by council staff and volunteers between inspections i.e. locally to where graves are being dug and grass cutting operations are taking place. The results of these visual tests will be recorded by the Town Council.

Contact us

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