

Hartley Parish Council

Memorial Safety Programme & Testing Policy

The memorial safety programme and testing policy approved and adopted by Hartley Parish Council on 11th May 2009, follows guidance issued by the Ministry of Justice in January 2009 entitled, "Managing the Safety of Burial Ground Memorials : Practical advice for dealing with unstable memorials".

The Council has adopted a risk based approach to its policy, proportionate to the management of risks associated with memorials in burial grounds.

Risk Assessment

The Council will undertake an assessment of the risks associated with the memorials in Hartley Burial Ground to assist prioritisation of the more detailed inspections. The risk assessment will take account of the different types of memorials, their surrounding environment and the likelihood of members of the public visiting or walking past particular memorials. The risk assessment will establish a profile of the memorial types and classify them as being either a low, medium or high risk.

Communications

The Council will ensure arrangements for the inspection and, where appropriate, the testing of memorials are widely understood and properly communicated.

Hartley Parish Council will ensure that,

- the range of precautions likely to be necessary to manage the risks are clearly identified,
- records are maintained of the inspection and results, noting in particular those memorials where action is necessary or likely to be necessary in future,
- an effective system is in place for securing specialist assistance on remedial action when a visual check reveals a defect outside the experience and knowledge of the person carrying out the check,
- an effective system is in place to enable people to report damage to memorials and to trigger checks following potentially damaging activities,
- procedures and timescales are established for contacting relatives or other memorial owners.

The Council will advise all existing memorial owner/s of its safety and inspection regime on memorials in Hartley Burial Ground as set out in this adopted policy and on any implications that may arise subsequently. This will be carried out by writing to each memorial owner/s at the last known address recorded in the Register of Purchased Graves in advance of any formal inspection.

Early consultation with the local media will be carried out to develop a positive publicity campaign to fully inform the public on the actions being undertaken by the Council. Notices will be published for 2 successive weeks in a local newspaper which the Council considers will provide the best publicity in the area serving Hartley Burial Ground.

Notices will be placed at the entrance to Hartley Burial Ground, in the Council's newsletter and on the Council's website, informing the public of works that are to be undertaken and advising on contact details for anyone seeking further advice.

A permanent notice displaying the Council's contact details will be placed at the entrance to Hartley Burial Ground so that visitor/s may notify the Council of any problems in the Burial Ground.

The Council will consider arranging a public 'open morning' to demonstrate how the memorial safety tests will be carried out in advance of the formal inspection.

The relevant Church Authorities will be informed of the Council's memorial safety programme and testing policy at least 3 months in advance of any formal inspection and the Council will consider any representations.

Inspection of memorials

A memorial will only be considered unsafe if it moves and will continue to move until it falls to the floor under an initial firm, but reasonable force to approximately 35 kg.

The first stage of the inspection process shall involve a visual assessment of each memorial. The visual inspection will focus on:

- damaged or eroded bonding,
- movement of parts of a memorial from its original position,
- kerbstones breaking apart,
- undermined or unstable foundations,
- leaning memorials,
- evidence of structural damage or disturbance,
- presence of vegetation which may destabilise the memorials or cause cracks to widen.

The profile of the memorial types as determined by the risk assessment, together with the visual inspection, will help to assess which memorials require a hand test and how these hand tests should be prioritised.

Low risk: Memorials located in an area of the burial ground determined as a low risk and being tested for the first time will have a visual and hand test on every memorial undertaken by experienced/training staff. For subsequent inspections consideration will be given to a visual inspection only.

Medium risk: Memorials located in an area of the burial ground determined as medium risk will have a visual and hand test on every memorial undertaken by experienced/trained staff.

High risk: Memorials located in an area of the burial ground determined as a high risk will have a visual and hand test on every memorial by experienced/trained staff and may require specialist inspections. If a specialist inspection is required it will not normally be appropriate to use a hand test to confirm stability.

Where memorials, (that do not require a specialist assessment), have visible signs of damage or defects, a hand test will be used to determine the stability of the memorial. The hand check will be carried out by standing to one side of the memorial and applying a firm, but steady pressure in different directions to determine to what degree the memorial is loose. If some instability is detected following the hand test, a judgement will be made as to whether the movement is limited, or whether there is sufficient movement for the memorial to present a high risk to people's health and safety.

Where memorials, (that do not require a specialist assessment), have no signs of defects, a hand test may not be necessary, but may still be used to confirm that the memorial is stable.

Visual and hand checks will be carried out by person/s with a working knowledge of memorials and their defects.

Memorials will be fully inspected on a minimum frequency of 5 years. Memorials showing early signs of instability will be monitored every 12 months. Memorials found to be unstable will have notices placed on or near them, and cordoned off or laid down immediately, as deemed necessary.

Precautions

Following inspection and/or testing any precautions taken by the Council to memorials found to be unstable will be proportionate to the risk of people suffering injury or harm.

In most cases where a memorial is found to be unstable, the Council will place a warning sign near to or on the unstable memorial, until such time as the repair may be

arranged. In some situations it may be more appropriate to cordon off the area until the memorial has been made safe.

Immediate action will only be taken if any memorial is found to be so unstable that there is an imminent risk of it toppling. This action may include restricting access or laying the memorial flat, whichever is deemed most appropriate. Routine staking will not be carried to temporarily stabilise an unsafe memorial.

In all cases where a memorial is found to be unstable, the Council will effect permanent repairs as soon as practicably possible to minimise upset and distress amongst the bereaved, and any detrimental effect on the appearance of the burial ground.

Following the identification of any unstable memorials and in addition to placing a warning notice near or on the memorial, the Council will, where possible, notify in writing the last known memorial owner/s at the address recorded in the Register of Purchased Graves, giving the memorial owner/s 10 weeks to inform the Council how and when the defect is to be rectified. If no response is received or a negative response is received from the memorial owner/s, the Council will determine how the memorial will be permanently made safe.

Memorial owners will be required to ensure all repairs are carried out by memorial masons registered with BRAMM, (British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons) and in accordance with the National Association of Memorial Masons Code of Practice and British Standard BS 8415.

Keeping records

The Council will keep records of:

- risk assessment,
- inspection undertaken to each memorial,
- results of the inspection, and what action will be necessary or likely to be necessary in the future.

The records will show that:

- proper checks have been made,
- those who might be affected are identified,
- significant risks will be dealt with, taking account of the number people who may be exposed and the likelihood of the risk,
- any precautions are reasonable and the remaining risk is acceptable.

Memorial owner/s may be provided with a copy of the relevant records, if so requested.