

## **Memorial Safety Guidance**

Frequently asked Questions and Answers

### ***Why are we testing memorials?***

The Council has a duty of care to take practicable and reasonable steps to ensure burial grounds are safe places for visitors and staff.

Memorials require periodic inspection to ensure their safety and identify maintenance requirements.

### ***Are these inspections a “one-off” exercise?***

Each memorial will be categorised when it is inspected. It may require immediate action to make it safe, it may give some cause for concern but not be an immediate danger in which case it will be inspected in one year's time, or it may be secure and will be re-inspected in five year's time. Ongoing inspections will now be a regular part of our work.

### ***What is the Council doing to ensure memorials are safe in the future?***

Inspections will be ongoing, in line with our inspections programme. All new memorials must now be fitted with a ground anchor system so they will not cause a danger at some point in the future.

### ***Are some memorials more dangerous than others?***

The larger and heavier upright headstones can cause the greatest damage and injury if they fall. However, the smaller headstones on newer graves are still of sufficient weight to injure anyone they fall on.

The degree of danger also relates to the method of fixing as traditional cement and dowels is subject to deterioration over the years. Some of the large headstones can be seen to be leaning but, when tested, are found to be secure.

Other headstones, which appear on visual inspection to be upright and safe, can be found to be loose on their base or the base loose on the foundation, and are therefore unsafe. It is only by controlled testing that we can establish the degree of danger of an individual memorial.

***What will happen when you identify an unsafe memorial?***

Depending on size, type and ground conditions, we will make it safe by either:

- Providing a wooden stake and banding to support it
- Lowering the memorial into the ground by a third of its height
- Laying the memorial down on the grave, with the inscription uppermost or remove and place into storage
- Cordoning off very large memorials and seeking the opinion of a structural engineer

Some of the smaller memorials may be left insitu, for a short term only, to allow a repair by the grave owner since they pose a lower risk than larger memorials.

Should the headstone not be repaired during a specified period, then the Council reserves the right to implement the most suitable measure to make the memorial safe.

***What have you done to inform people of the inspection programme?***

Notices are on display throughout the cemeteries and closed churchyards and the local clergy will have been informed so that they may pass on the information to parishioners.

***Will you inform me if my memorial fails?***

The Council will endeavor to contact the last known grave owner. In the event these details are not known we will post a notice on the grave to inform any relatives or visitors in this respect.

Most people do not think to advise the cemetery office when they change address, or when they inherit the rights to a grave from a relative's estate. We can only contact you if we know who and where you are.

### ***Who is responsible for the cost of the repair?***

The responsibility for and the costs to the repair or re-fixing of a memorial rest with the grave owner or their descendants. The work must be carried out by a memorial mason who undertakes the work to NAMM (National Association of Memorial Masons) approved standards. This includes the installation of ground anchor pins to secure the base of the memorial and stainless steel dowels to secure bases of the memorials to headstone sections. This method of memorial installation is to ensure all memorials are safe and secure.

### ***How will we test memorials?***

The Council will risk assess and test memorials in accordance with our Memorial Management in burial grounds procedure. Visual inspections will be undertaken in assessing the stability of a memorial and to identify:

- Damaged or eroded bonding.
- Movement of parts of a memorial from its original position.
- Kerb stones breaking apart.
- Undermined or unstable foundations.
- Leaning memorials – particularly if there is evidence of recent movement.
- Evidence of structural damage or disturbance (e.g. cracks).
- The presence of vegetation, which may cause cracks etc to widen.

Where a memorial shows visible signs of damage or defects, such as joint or component failure, a hand test should be used to determine stability of the memorial.

The Council will **not** undertake a mechanical test. Should the inspector be unsure of the memorial stability then the inspector may need to consult a specialist engineer or memorial mason for advice.

All testing will be carried out by trained staff and the memorials will be subject to re-inspection as part of a 5 year rolling programme.

***How can I ensure that hand tests are applied consistently?***

The purpose of the hand test is to ascertain whether there is any movement in a memorial which otherwise seems to be secure, not whether the memorial, or its fixings, can withstand any particular level of pressure. Where movement is detected, sufficient pressure may, with care, be applied to ascertain whether the memorial locks on any ground anchor. The hand test should only be used as part of the overall assessment of risk.

***Can I test my own memorial?***

The Council strongly advise that under no circumstances should families test their own memorials as they may injure themselves or other members of the public. The Council will arrange to meet with memorial owners to enable them to witness the test taking place or note the defects which have been identified.

*NEDDC cannot accept liability for anyone who injures themselves whilst attempting to inspect or test any memorial stone.*

***Will I still be able to visit my grave?***

Yes, although there will be safety notices posted throughout the cemeteries, they will remain open during normal opening times.

***Do I need to take any special care?***

We would like to advise visitors to take extra care, particularly until all the inspections have been completed and defective memorials rectified.

### ***Why are memorials failing?***

The majority of older memorials are constructed from a single piece of stone, whereas more modern memorials are constructed from several sections that are joined together. The main reason for memorials becoming unstable is the failure of these joints.

### ***Can I repair the memorial myself?***

No. You must contact the memorial mason that supplied the memorial as soon as possible to arrange for it to be fixed and made safe. An accredited stonemason will ensure that work carried out on the memorial is done to the proper professional standards issued by the National Association of Memorial Masons.

### ***Where do we have cemeteries/churchyards?***

#### **Cemeteries**

Danesmoor Cemetery  
Hasland Cemetery  
Killamarsh Cemetery  
Temple Normanton Cemetery

#### **Closed churchyards**

St. Peter's Church, Calow  
St. Bartholomew's Church, High Street, Clay Cross  
St. John the Baptist Church, Church Street, Dronfield  
St. Peter and St. Paul's Church, Long Duckmanton  
St. Peter and St. Paul's Church, Eckington  
St. Giles' Church, Killamarsh  
St. John the Baptist Church, Middle Handley  
St. Peter and St. Paul's Church, Old Brampton  
St. Mary's Church, Pilsley  
St. John's Church, Ridgeway  
St. Leonard's Church Shirland

***How do I find out more?***

Please contact the Cemeteries Administrator or the Council's Streetscene Coordinator.

Cemetery Administrator  
Rotherside Road  
Eckington  
Derbyshire  
S21 4HL

Streetscene Coordinator  
Rotherside Road  
Eckington  
Derbyshire  
S21 4HL

Tel No 01246 217272  
Fax No 01246 217264

Tel No 01246 217286 or 01246 217287  
Fax No 01246 217264

***What should I do if a Memorial has been temporarily supported or laid flat?***

You should not attempt to remove the support or attempt to stand the memorial up. This could cause you serious injury.

The memorial may have been laid flat or supported for safety reasons in order to remove a risk.