

NEWINGTON PARISH COUNCIL

Safety in Newington Cemetery & Graveyard – Headstones & Memorials

Newington Parish Council (NPC) is committed to ensuring the safety of its cemetery to ensure the wellbeing of those visiting or working there.

How we propose to do this

The Council will periodically undertake inspections of its cemetery and graveyard.

The Council will arrange an immediate inspection of the cemetery following any safety complaints, accidents or reports of danger.

All safety checks will consist of a visual inspection to identify any memorials that appear visually unsafe. If there is any concern about the stability of a monument, this will be followed up by a light manual tapping test. There will be no intention to knock over a headstone or push it until it topples. If, however, at this stage it does topple, then it will be left in its fallen position and reported to the owner of the Exclusive Rights of Burial as soon as possible.

The Council will not use any kind of machine or implement to carry out this stability test. It will be a gentle finger tap and if the risk of falling over is assessed to be high, the owner of the Exclusive Rights of Burial will be contacted as soon as possible.

Risk Assessment

The Council is also required to have a risk register in place for all of its areas of responsibility including the cemetery and a major part of the risk here relates to the stability of headstones and memorials.

Regular checks of headstone and memorial stability will take place and plot owners are responsible for ensuring that they are firmly affixed to the ground and are not liable to topple.

How problems will be resolved

The Council may require the owner of any monument, gravestone or other structure, which in their opinion has become unsafe, to lay it down or reinstate/repair it. The Council will take all reasonable steps to contact the grave owner in advance of this action by trying to make contact and/or advertising on the cemetery notice board and the Parish website.

If, however, in the opinion of the Council the removal should be effected immediately due to the risk involved, then the Council may carry out the work without incurring any liability for any damage arising and the costs thereof shall be recoverable from the owner

If the owner fails to comply with any such requirement within 3 months of notification or advertising, then the Council will take action to lay the headstone down and the costs thereof shall be recoverable from the owner.

If the owner chooses to re-instate or lay down the headstone they must use the services of a registered Stone Mason, who should submit plans to the Clerk for approval showing how they will necessitate the work.

The owner is not permitted to do this work themselves. This is because the Council needs to be sure the work is done properly and with third party liability insurance cover in case of any accident.

The owner may ask the Council to lay the headstone down providing their written prior consent is granted and the cost incurred will be recoverable from the plot owner.

Responsibility.

Although the council has a duty of care to ensure the cemetery is safe, the responsibility for memorials lies with the owner of the Exclusive Rights of Burial and we will recommend that they should contact the memorial mason who supplied the memorial as soon as possible to arrange for it to be fixed and made safe.

We fully appreciate that this may be upsetting for bereaved families and we are very sorry for any distress it may cause. Memorials are a lasting tribute to our loved ones and through careful testing to ensure their safety, we would like to work with you to ensure that all the memorials in our cemeteries and churchyards remain a fitting tribute for years to come.

The Council's position

The council will not remove the memorial from its site or lay it flat on the ground, except in exceptional circumstances when it presents an imminent or serious hazard. If it has actually toppled over or falls during the finger tapping, the Council will leave it in the fallen position.

The Council will not touch the memorial until after three months of trying to contact the owner or advertising for the owner to contact the Council. When a memorial owner cannot be traced or there is no contact, and a memorial has been identified as not being safe, the Council will make the memorial safe by laying it in a horizontal position and/or partially sinking it. Care would be taken to ensure, where possible, that inscriptions are not affected but it may involve the ground on the plot being levelled and then re-seeded with grass. It could also mean that space has to be made available within the plot area which may disturb other ornaments or vases (see sample letter at Appendix A)

How we keep visitors and owners up to date

We will place a copy of this policy on the Councils website.