

Runnymede Borough Council

Memorial Management and Testing Policy



Introduction

This document sets out Runnymede Borough Council's policy for the safe management of memorials within its cemeteries. The term memorial relates to all structures on or surrounding a grave or cremated remains plot which are also known as gravestones or headstones.

The Council is responsible for the following cemeteries and closed churchyards:

- Addlestone
- Chertsey
- Englefield Green
- Thorpe
- Christ Church, Virginia Water
- St John's, Egham
- St Paul's and Coronation Gardens, Addlestone
- St Peter's, Chertsey
- St Mary's, Thorpe

This policy explains the Council's responsibilities for managing risks associated with memorials and outlines the actions taken when safety concerns are identified during routine inspections. Through this policy and its actions Runnymede seeks to ensure that Cemeteries are safe places for employees, visitors, and contractors to visit.

This policy describes the procedures for the assessment, monitoring and remediation of memorials in accordance with current guidance and best practice.

Responsibilities

Runnymede Borough Council is a Burial Authority under the Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 (LACO) and has duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Occupiers' Liability Acts 1957 and 1984 to control risks within its cemeteries as far as is reasonably practicable. Appropriate procedures must therefore be in place to identify dangerous or unstable memorials and to make them safe.

Under Article 3 of LACO, a Burial Authority may do all things necessary for the proper management, regulation and control of a cemetery. Article 16(2)(b) gives the authority power to alter or re-erect any memorial, subject to the procedures in Schedule 3. Runnymede Borough Council will follow these requirements where memorials need to be moved or removed.

All memorials are owned by the holder of the Exclusive Right of Burial (the Grave Owner) or their successor. The ownership, upkeep, stability, safety, maintenance and all repairs to memorials, including those required following tests carried out by the council, remain the responsibility of the holder of the exclusive right of burial (EROB).

A Memorial Mason has the responsibility to work in accordance with Runnymede's Cemetery conditions and specifications for memorials. They must adhere to the standards current within the industry which is the British standard BS8415 and the British register of accredited Memorial Masons (BRAMM).

Inspection and testing Programme

The Council operates a rolling programme of memorial inspections. The Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) and the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) recommend that memorials are inspected at least once every five years.

Prior to any memorials being inspected, reasonable steps will be taken by the Council to inform members of the public of the intention to inspect memorials and address risk from unsafe memorials.

The management of memorial safety will be undertaken using a risk-based approach with the primary objective to identify memorials that present an immediate and significant hazard and take prompt action to make them safe. Memorials assessed as unstable but not posing an immediate risk will also be addressed to prevent future hazards.

The Council will adopt a proportionate approach to testing within each cemetery. Memorials measuring less than 24 inches (610 mm) in height will not be routinely tested. However, if any hazard is identified during inspection, immediate action will be taken, and the grave owner will be contacted.

Memorials over 1.5m high will receive a visual assessment. Any concerns will result in cordoning off the memorial and instructing a specialist contractor such as a structural engineer to inspect and provide a report with costs and safety options.

All remaining memorials will be assessed as follows. Memorials will be inspected by trained members of staff using a two-part assessment, a visual inspection and a physical hand test assessment known as a push test.

Visual Inspection

The inspector will stand to the side of the memorial and conduct a visual assessment without physical contact, recording:

- Cemetery name
- Plot number
- Grave number
- Name/s of interred

The inspector will then check for:

- Signs of weathering or erosion
- Vegetation intrusion
- Integrity of joints
- Soil erosion around the base
- Cracks, splits, or damage to the memorial, kerbs, or foundation
- Loose vases or pots
- Deterioration of grave surrounds or rails
- Severe leaning (10° or greater)

Manual Inspection – the hand or push test

While standing to the side, the inspector will apply firm, progressive hand pressure at a suitable point to detect movement, without using excessive force. Any movement will be assessed and recorded, noting:

- Movement at the foundation
- Movement between foundation and plinth
- Movement between plinth and base or joints
- Presence of dowels or ground anchors
- Adequacy of foundation size and material

For note memorials erected to BS8415 standards may exhibit slight joint movement, restricted by dowel pins.

Based upon the results of both the visual and hand tests the memorial will be classified as either category 1, 2 or 3 with category 1 deemed to be unsafe (fail).

Category 1 – Unsafe (fail)

Where a memorial is found to be unsafe, immediate action must be taken to remove or reduce the hazard. Staff will make the memorial temporarily safe or cordon it off until the Grave Owner arranges permanent repairs. Before taking action, the memorial will be photographed and details of any existing damage recorded. A notice explaining the action taken and contact details for the Cemeteries Team will be placed on or next to the memorial.

Actions to make the memorial safe may include:

- **Laying Flat**
Laying the memorial flat, preferably within an existing kerb set to avoid trip hazards
- **Staking and Banding**
Securing the memorial to a wooden stake with banding. This is a temporary measure and will be re-inspected every 12 months
- **Monolith Conversion**
Sinking one third of the memorial into the ground, wrapped with suitable material. The memorial may need slight repositioning.
- **Cordon Off**
Restricting access around one or more memorials with warning signage.
- **Removal**
In extreme cases, removing the memorial for storage if no other option is safe.

Following a test failure, the Council will attempt to contact the Grave Owner to explain the test findings and the options to make the memorial safe. If requested, the Council may arrange a meeting at the cemetery to demonstrate the inspection outcomes.

If the Grave Owner is deceased, or if the last burial was over 50 years ago, correspondence will not be sent. However, a notice will be placed on the grave for at least 12 months.

If a memorial less than 6 years old fails inspection, the Council will contact the memorial mason directly, as installations must be guaranteed for at least 6 years.

If the Grave Owner cannot be contacted or does not act within 6 months, the Council may, under Article 16 of LACO, alter the position of the memorial to protect public safety. If no other safe option is available, the Council may move or remove the memorial. A notice will be placed at the site explaining the reasons and providing contact details.

Permanent repairs to make a memorial safe may include:

- bringing the memorial up to BS 8415
- burying one third of the memorial below ground

- embedding the memorial flat within the grave
- other necessary work, including removal under LACO where required.

Category 2 – Stable but with concerns

The memorial is currently safe but shows signs of deterioration and there are concerns about the long term stability of the memorial. Reassess within 12 months.

Category 3 – Safe

The memorial is stable. These memorials will be reinspected in 5 years

Ongoing Monitoring and Informal Inspections

A schedule of inspections will be maintained and updated by the Cemeteries Team. Additional informal inspections may be carried out following severe weather to identify damage or hazards.

All newly installed memorials must be covered by a Guarantee of Conformity provided by the mason, confirming compliance with NAMM standards for a minimum of 30 years. If a memorial becomes unstable due to installation issues, the mason must refix it at no cost to the owner or the Council.

Memorial Liabilities and Insurance

Memorials remain the property of the Grave Owner, who is responsible for their maintenance and safety. The Council does not accept liability for damage to memorials. Owners are strongly advised to obtain suitable insurance to cover repair or replacement costs.

Memorials are exposed to weather and environmental conditions, which may cause deterioration over time. Memorial masons can advise on available insurance options.

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