**MEMORIAL INSPECTION PROCESS**

**Memorial safety inspection process**

1. The Council want all their cemeteries to be welcoming and maintained to a high standard. Responsibility for health and safety is taken very seriously and the Council must ensure that our cemeteries are safe for visitors and our staff. Memorial inspections are undertaken to avoid any child or reasonable person being injured from accidental contact with a monument.
2. The Council regularly inspect and test memorials in our cemeteries to make sure that they are safe. These inspections will be done as part of a rolling five-year programme, as recommended by the Health and Safety Executive. The Council will make safe any memorial that fails a safety test.
3. In the first instance, as a temporary measure Cemetery Staff will make safe any unstable memorial found to be unsafe. The options to make the memorial safe will be either:

• lay the memorial flat

• cordon off the area where the unsafe memorial is located

• stake and band

• put up a substantial barrier around the unsafe memorial, or

• look to leave the components of the memorial within the grave space to allow the owners to carry out the necessary repairs.

**Communication**

1. At least 28 days before starting memorial safety inspections in any grave section, the Council, in accordance with the provision of Section 3 (1) of the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977, will display a notice in an obvious place at the entrance to the cemetery and within the relevant grave section. Notices will be published two successive weeks in local newspapers and information will be placed on our website and posted on social media. These notices will detail what is being done, when it will be done and how people can get further information or raise objections. The Council will consider any objections raised to the memorial safety inspection.
2. All memorial safety inspections will be carried out by trained cemetery staff or contractors in accordance with BS8415 in its latest form guidelines.
3. The Council will keep a record of all memorial inspections and the inspection results will be available to view on request (you will need to give one week’s notice for each request).

**Memorials up to 1.5 metres high**

1. For memorials up to 1.5 metres, inspections will include both a visual check and a hand test. The hand test will be used to check the stability of the memorial. There will be an inspection of all memorials with experienced staff and as a result of the finding of the inspection we may have to call upon either a competent memorial mason or a structural engineer to carry out further investigative tests which may result in restrictions to a grave and its surrounds. Even where a visual check reveals no sign of defects, the hand test will be used to confirm that the memorial is stable.
2. The hand test will be carried out by standing to one side of the memorial and applying a firm but steady pressure in different directions. The hand test will be used to check if, or to what degree, the memorial is unstable.

**Memorials over 1.5 metres high**

9. If the Council Staff think the memorial is unsafe, they will ask a memorial sculptor (or Structural Engineer) to carry out a more detailed assessment. Where the memorial sculptor does not have the experience needed, or where there remains uncertainty as to whether or not a memorial is safe, the Council will ask a specialised structural engineer or other suitably qualified professional to inspect the memorial thoroughly.

**In the case of a dispute**

10. The Council may also use mechanical force measuring equipment to test the stability of memorials. But we will only use this if the safety of a memorial is under dispute. In these circumstances, the equipment may be used to confirm that the memorial is unable to withstand a force of 25kg and is, therefore, an ‘immediate danger’. The Council staff will record the calibrated score of the mechanical tester.

**Unsafe memorials**

11. Whilst the Council have overall responsibility for the safety of our cemeteries, including risks from unstable memorials, they don’t own the memorials. The owner of the memorial is the Deed Holder (plot owner of exclusive right of burial) or their successor in title. This is the person responsible for maintaining the memorial so that it does not become a hazard. However, in some instances the Council may not be able to identify the current plot owner, as some records are extremely old and, in many cases, have not been updated by relatives or family members.

12. Where the Council find a memorial to be unsafe the following process will be followed:-

1. The Council will send a letter to the grave owner at their last known address within 10 days of the inspection. This letter will inform the owner that their memorial has been found to be unsafe, that a temporary make safe repair has been carried out by cemetery staff, and details of the action needed to be taken by them to make the memorial permanently safe. We will also attach a notice to the unsafe memorial.
2. If a response is not received, the Council will send another similar letter three months later.

(iii) After a further three months have passed, if the Council still haven’t received a response from the grave owner, the cemetery staff will take the necessary steps within the next 6 to 12 months to permanently make safe the memorial.

1. This action by Council will involve:

**In lawn cemeteries:**

1. Removing the memorial from its foundation and partially sinking it into the ground at the head of the grave – at least 25% of the memorial will be below ground, or

(ii) In exceptional circumstance, the Council will remove the memorial.

**In all other cemeteries**:

(i) Lay the memorial flat on the grave – where there is a surround on the grave, or

1. In extreme circumstances a memorial may be removed.

14. If we haven’t been able to contact the owner of a grave with an unsafe memorial on it, or the plot owner is unwilling to make the permanent repair arrangements, or arrange to set the memorial repaired to BS 8415 current standards and someone then wants to open the grave, any outstanding fees owed to us for making the memorial permanently safe must be paid before a burial can take place.

15. The Council will keep an up-to-date database of all grave owners and relative contact information. When you buy a new grave, the Council will ask the Proprietor to keep the Council informed of any changes to their contact details.

**Dealing with memorials that pose a significant or immediate risk**

16. When a memorial poses a significant or immediate risk, such as likely collapse in a way that could lead to serious injury, the Council will take one or more of the following actions:

1. The Council will temporarily make safe the memorial. A safety notice to tell people that the memorial is unsafe will be erected in the vicinity of the memorial.
2. Fencing and cordoning off the unsafe memorials may be necessary under some circumstances. For example, for very large memorials or where a significant number of memorials are unsafe within a specific area

(iii) The memorial may be partially buried into the ground at the head of the grave.

1. Memorials may be laid flat if there is no other practical way of making them safe, or where the plot owner or relative asks for this.

17. If we find that a large number of memorials aren’t safe within a section of burial ground, we may fence off the whole area. We’ll display signage to inform visitors of the danger and provide our contact details for further information.

18. Where a memorial is thought to have historical or social significance, we will do our best to consult with the relevant conservation or heritage association before any remedial works are carried out.