



Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Memorial Safety Inspection Policy

Bereavement Services
September 2023

1. Introduction

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council is currently responsible for eight cemeteries and fourteen closed churchyards and has a duty under Health and Safety legislation to ensure that the dangers within these settings are controlled.

The aim of this policy is to provide a proactive and robust system of memorial inspection and management that will fulfil the council's statutory requirements of managing memorial safety while also recognising that memorial safety in burial grounds is a highly sensitive issue and any works carried out will need to be done so respectfully and sensitively.

Whilst the maintenance and insurance of a memorial is the responsibility of the owner of the Exclusive Right of Burial and Memorialisation for the grave the council has an obligation to ensure the safety of all visitors to, and staff working in, the cemetery grounds and as such all memorials will be routinely inspected on a five year rolling programme.

The council will carry out inspections in line with ICCM guidance on memorial management. The guidance defines a dangerous or unstable memorial as one that will move and continue to fall to the ground with the exertion of a force of 25kg or less.

2. Responsibilities for Memorial Safety

- Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

The council has health and safety responsibilities to its employees, contractors and visitors to the borough cemeteries and has a legal duty to assess the risks from cemetery structures and work activities and ensure that the identified risks are controlled. The cemeteries must be a safe place to work in and visit.

- Memorial Mason

The memorial masons permitted to work within the borough cemeteries have the responsibility to work in accordance with the council's terms and conditions, the council's current memorial regulations, to carry out all works in accordance with the current standard BS8415, to comply with the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) Code of Working Practice and with the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons (BRAMM) Blue Book.

- Grave Owner

The owner of the Exclusive Right of Burial and Memorialisation has the responsibility to maintain the memorial on the grave so that it does not become unsafe and cover all costs incurred from an appointed memorial mason to make safe their memorial in the event that it is found to be unsafe.

3. Memorial Safety Inspection Process

All members of staff involved with the memorial safety inspection processes have received suitable training and have completed the ICCM Management of Memorials – Inspection Workshop.

All memorials will be routinely inspected on a five year rolling programme.

Any relevant Faculties will be applied for prior to any memorial inspections being carried out on consecrated ground.

The safety inspection process is to test whether a memorial can withstand a reasonable hand force of 25kg; the force has been arrived at scientifically and replicates the force of a person falling, pushing or pulling against a memorial.

For all memorials up to 625mm in height a visual inspection will be carried out. Memorials less than 625mm in height are deemed less likely to cause injury and do not need temporarily making safe.

For all memorials between 625mm and 1500mm in height, the inspection will comprise a visual inspection and a hand test.

The visual inspection will assess and identify:

- Movement
- Leaning
- Cracks
- Joints
- Missing parts
- Ground condition
- Memorial material

If a memorial is found to be unsafe and in need of immediate action it will be temporarily made safe by either the use of a support, being laid flat or cordoned off.

Possible reasons for memorial instability include:

- Accidental or intentional damage
- Lack of maintenance
- Age of memorial or weathering
- Ground condition or subsidence
- Animal activity
- Inferior materials
- Poor workmanship

Once a memorial has been inspected it will be classified into one of the following three categories:

- Category 1: Unsafe and immediate action is required to make the memorial safe
- Category 2: Not fully stable but not an immediate danger to the public; a 24 month review to assess any deterioration will be needed
- Category 3: Safe and stable or below 625mm

A notice will be placed on every grave/memorial found to be unsafe asking the grave owner to contact the cemetery office to discuss the findings and the options for making the memorial safe.

For all memorials over 1500mm in height a visual inspection and a hand test will be carried out and if this has suggested a potential safety issue an external structural survey will be completed.

Any memorial found to be unsafe outside of the memorial safety inspection survey programme of works will be subject to the same procedures.

4. Contacting Grave Owners and Make Safe Options

If a memorial has been identified as Category 1 the memorial will be temporarily made safe by the council by either the use of a temporary support, being laid flat or being cordoned off to restrict access.

A notice will be placed on all the Category 1 graves asking that the grave owner contact the cemetery office to discuss the findings and the options for making the memorial safe.

If there is a grave owner they will be written to; the letter will explain the inspection process, the findings of the inspection and that the memorial has been temporarily made safe.

To permanently make a memorial safe the grave owner can either:

- Option 1: Contact a memorial mason permitted to work within the borough cemeteries and instruct them to carry out the make safe works, covering all costs incurred themselves
- Option 2: Instruct the council to make the memorial safe, free of charge, by either laying the memorial flat, burying the memorial within the grave space or burying the memorial upright by 1/3

A signed authorisation form from the grave owner or next of kin stating which of the above two options they authorise is required for council records.

For Option 2 the council will permanently make safe a memorial by either laying it flat, burying it within the grave space or burying the memorial upright by 1/3. The option chosen by the Council will depend on the stone type, size and material.

The council is committed to safely retaining as many memorials upright as possible in order to preserve the ambience and character of the cemeteries. If a memorial is considered to be of historical importance the council will consider carrying out the repair works, subject to available funding.

All permanent make safe works will be completed within eighteen months. This also applies to memorials where there is no current grave owner and no next of kin have come forward.

5. Inspection Records

A written inspection record of all Category 1 and Category 2 memorials will be kept detailing:

- Cemetery and grave number
- Name of deceased
- Date of inspection
- Memorial category and explanation
- Temporary make safe works
- Permanent make safe works

A photographic record of all Category 1 and Category 2 memorials will be recorded.

6. Communication

Memorial safety in burial grounds is a highly sensitive issue and all communication of the memorial safety inspections must be regular, relevant, clear and concise. A statutory Notice

of Intent is displayed in every cemetery noticeboard and on the council website detailing the routine memorial safety inspection works.

Publicity notices before each phase of inspections will be posted on council social media pages, the council website and released to the local media.

Memorial safety inspection information will be presented at any Open Days held by Bereavement Services and all grave owners will be encouraged to update their contact details while on-site at an Open Day or by phoning or emailing their up-to-date information through to the cemetery office.

Notices will be placed on each memorial that is found to be unsafe and a list of the grave numbers alongside the name(s) of the deceased on the memorial will be displayed in the cemetery noticeboards, on the council website and where appropriate, in local media, public buildings and on social media.