



## Chilton Town Council

# Cemetery Inspection Procedures

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## Introduction

The purpose of this procedure is to let people know about our testing programme, why and how we carry out testing and what happens if there is a problem with a headstone.

Chilton Cemetery has been open since 1925. Some of the headstones in our Cemetery may, due to their age, be in poor condition and have the potential to cause danger.

The following parties have responsibility for memorial safety in our Cemetery:

- The Town Council has health and safety responsibilities to its employees, contractors and visitors to the cemetery (Section 2 & 3: Health and Safety at Work Act 1974). It also places a legal duty on the Council to assess the risks from cemetery structures and work activities and ensure that the risks are controlled (The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999).
- A memorial mason has the responsibility to work in accordance with the council's conditions and specifications for memorials as laid down in the Chilton Cemetery Regulations document.
- An owner of a plot (the Deed Holder) has the responsibility to maintain it so as not to present a hazard.

Members of the public who see an unsafe headstone/memorial may notify Chilton Town Council so that an inspection, followed by appropriate action, can be carried out.

Historically, health and safety concerns in cemeteries have focused on the risks arising from grave digging. In recent years, there has been increasing attention on the stability of memorials and the risks they present to cemetery staff and visitors.

In July 2000, a six year old child died as a result of a collapsed headstone in a Harrogate cemetery. This highlighted the risk and liability councils face in cemetery management.

## Duties

Primary responsibility for health and safety lies with Chilton Town Council as the burial authority in control of the cemetery. Chilton Town Council is required to control the risks associated with the cemetery.

Whilst Chilton Town Council has overall responsibility for the safety of the cemetery, including risks from unstable memorials, it does not own the memorials. The owner of the memorial will be the grave owner. In many cases there may be no identifiable owner.

## Frequency

An inspection programme has been drawn up and is in place for Chilton Cemetery. This is a '5 year rolling programme approach' which the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) describe as 'reasonable'.

## Notification and Signage

We will endeavor to help families understand when the testing will take place and how it will happen. This will be done in the following ways:

- A notice will be placed in the cemetery noticeboard. It will provide details of what is happening and will detail when the testing will occur and provide the opportunity to observe if families wish.
- The local County Councillor will be informed
- The Town Council's website and social media account will also provide the information about when and how the testing will be carried out.

## Testing process

- All staff carrying out inspections have been trained through the ICCM (Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management) or the National Association of Memorial Masons training sessions.
- Memorial inspections are recorded to identify surname of first burial and date. The memorial is measured for height, width and thickness; type of material; joints and cracks; lean per metre; foundations and physical test.
- A visual test will be carried out first to consider if there are signs that the memorial is showing evidence of damage or if the joints are giving way (cracks). It will also consider if the foundations are undermined/ unstable or have signs of recent movement. It may also assess the presence of vegetation that may cause structural damage to worsen.
- After the visual inspection, a gentle hand push test is used to identify any movement between components. A pressure up to 25kg may be applied; however it is unlikely that the hand test will achieve this pressure. This test pressure of 25kg is advised in the latest version of BS8415.
- The inspection will normally be carried out by two people. One will be the 'Inspector' who will be inspecting the memorial: pointing out any shortfalls and feeding this information to the second person. The second person will then record the details.
- The testing will result in one of two categories:

Category 1 'UNSAFE'	Action required.
Category 2 'SAFE'	No action required (revisit in 5 years).
- Where a memorial is classified as 'unsafe' a notice will be attached to inform anyone there is a problem and who to contact for further information. If a memorial is classed as 'UNSAFE' the memorial will be laid flat.
- After this, the information is passed to the Town Council for contact to be made with the grave owner.

## Headstone Failures

### Action

Memorials found to be 'in immediate danger of falling' will be carefully laid flat and a notice attached.

### Notification

- Contact with the last known grave owner will be made, if the information held is less than 30 years old. (We will not write to anyone where the information is older than this, because we have no way of knowing if the owner has since died themselves and would not wish to distress relatives in this respect).
- Additional notification will give owners of memorials that have been laid flat, 3 or 6 months, in which to carry out repairs. Should no repairs be made, the council will consider the final action.