



Fakenham Town Council

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Memorial Inspection Policy

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1 - Introduction

This policy sets out Fakenham Town Council's responsibilities, regarding the management of memorial safety and actions that will be taken to minimise risk to users of its cemetery sites.

2 - Responsibility and Liability

Fakenham Town Council (the burial authority) has responsibility for the overall safety of its burial grounds under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 (Section 2 staff & Section 3 visitors) and Occupiers Liability Act 1957 to ensure that as far as is reasonably practical, sites are maintained in a safe condition. The Management of Health & Safety at Work Regulations 1999 places a legal duty on the Council to assess hazards and ensure that these are controlled.

Monumental Masons have specific responsibility for ensuring that memorial stones erected are safe and secure. Their work must be in accordance with BS 8415, the standards set by the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM).

The Owner, Holder of the Grant of Exclusive Right of Burial or successor in title of a memorial is responsible for maintaining the memorial in a safe condition (as defined by standards set by NAMM/BS 8415 and applicable Health & Safety legislation) and for paying for any repairs required to ensure the memorial does not present a hazard to those visiting the cemetery.

3 - Notice of Intent

Before commencing any memorial inspection or safety testing Fakenham Town council will take all reasonable steps to inform grave owners of the intention to inspect memorials and to mitigate or remove the danger posed by unsafe memorials by giving general notice at least one month in advance of the commencement of inspection/testing (unless action is required for an immediate risk) via;

Public notices in the cemetery sites or on cemetery notice boards.
A notice on the Fakenham Town Council Website.

A notice on social media
Notices in local press

4 - The Risk Assessment Process

Fakenham Town Council will adopt a risk based proportionate approach to memorial inspection and testing carried out only by trained personnel with a knowledge of the site. The risk assessment process will take two stages, the first stage will consider the priority.

The age or deterioration of the memorial – material that erodes easily.
The location of the memorial – close to paths or with regular visitors
The number of visitors
Ground conditions.
The type of memorial – multiple joints can fail.
The size of the memorial

The second stage risk assessment will consider;

A visual inspection to identify signs of instability, damage or erosion.
Movement of the memorial from its original position
Kerbs breaking apart
Unstable foundations
Leaning (especially if recent)
Damage / eroded bonding
The presence of vegetation that may cause cracks to widen.

Memorials more than 1.6M in height will only be inspected visually and must only be inspected by a structural engineer or monumental mason.

A hand-push test on memorials up to 1.6M in height to assess any lateral movement following the visual inspection. A hand push test is simply a firm, steady pressure on the memorial to determine if the headstone is loose. ICCM current guidance does not recommend the use of a mechanical topple tester device.

Where inspection and testing are being carried out to memorials in consecrated ground, it may be necessary to obtain a faculty. This Faculty grants permission to the burial authority to undertake memorial safety inspections and testing and to make safe any memorial that requires safety control measures.

War graves will only be visually inspected with any defects being reported directly to the War Graves Commission for implementing repairs.

5 - Risk Categorisation

The ICCM defines a dangerous memorial as one that will move and continue to fall to the ground with the exertion of a force of 25Kg or less.

Priority 1: For a dangerous and unstable memorial, as defined above, immediate action must be taken to make the memorial safe and prevent access to the memorial.

Priority 2: A memorial which is not dangerous or unstable, as defined above, but which is not fully stable, will be monitored every 12 months to assess for further deterioration.

Priority 3: A memorial which is stable and safe will be re-inspected on a 5 yearly basis.

6 - Safety Measures

Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) must be worn by staff.

If a memorial is identified as a priority 1, staff will need to take immediate action to make that memorial temporarily safe or cordon it off until permanent repairs can be made by the grave owner. Staff will consider relevant factors and select the most suitable action based upon their assessment of the memorial and surrounding area.

Ideally actions would be implemented in order of;

Staking and banding - The memorial will be fastened tight to a post(s) which will act as a temporary support. The banding will also hold a warning notice. The stake and band will be reinspected every 12 months to ensure no deterioration.

Cordoning Off – It may be necessary to cordon off a particular memorial or an area containing a number of memorials. Warning signs will be attached to any cordon placed around a memorial or group of memorials.

Monolith Conversion – This involves digging out a depth roughly one third of the overall height of the memorial from the last joint in order that it can be sunk into the ground and made safe. The memorial will have a suitable material wrapped around the part under the ground and a memorial warning notice will be added to the grave. Due to foundations, it may be necessary for the memorial to be moved slightly forward into the grave space to avoid existing foundations.

Laying the memorial flat – In most cases this will invariably be where a memorial can be laid down on or within an existing kerb set so as not to cause a new trip hazard. A warning sign will be placed near to the memorial.

All the above are regarded as 'Temporary Fixes' and are not a permanent solution to deal with an unsafe memorial. They are only intended to reduce or remove the risk of a memorial causing harm or damage to someone. Prior to taking any of the actions above the memorial will be photographed and details recorded of any existing damage or issues. These measures will be put into place without prior notification.

All memorials found to be in the priority 1 category will have a notice placed on or within the grave space explaining the situation and advising them to contact a monumental mason or the office.

If a memorial is defined as a priority 2, no temporary make safe action will be taken, it will be monitored every 12 months. A notice will be placed on or within the grave space explaining the situation and advising them to contact a monumental mason or the office.

If a memorial is defined as a priority 3 it will be recorded and re-inspected within 5 years.

7 - Documentation and Recording

A record will be kept of all memorial inspections to include;

Plot identifying section and number.

Name(s) of the deceased.

Date(s) of burial.

Type of memorial – headstone, cross etc

Height of memorial – below 625mm, between 625mm to 1500mm or over 1500mm

Condition – leaning/stability/erosion/cracks/joints/movement.

Assessment result – Classification of priority 1, 2 or 3

If priority 1 or 2 – reasons

Remedial action taken – stabilize/cordons/notices etc.

Name & date of inspection team.

Photos before and after.

A list of unstable memorials will be posted on the cemetery notice board. All records will be kept by Fakenham Town Council and results available to view on request. Holders of the Exclusive rights can attend inspections.

8 - Contacting the Holder of the Exclusive right of burial

Where a memorial is found to be unsafe or in need of remedial work Fakenham Town Council will take all possible measures to locate and contact the Exclusive rights holder. Contact will be made in the form of a letter using the last known address within 4 weeks of the inspection, explaining the problem, and advising that the rights holder seek the advice of a monumental mason for any remedial work required. A memorial mason should undertake the repair to the current applicable standard as recommended by NAMM or equivalent. Confirmation of repair from the monumental mason completing the work will be required before the memorial is considered to be repaired. No attempt should be made to repair or remove any memorial except by a qualified memorial mason.

If Fakenham Town Council are unable to trace the holder of the Exclusive right of burial or have not received a response to letters after a period of 12 months, they retain the right to make the memorial safe which may as a last resort include permanently laying down or removing the memorial.

If repairs to a memorial are carried out without prior contact with Fakenham Town Council and without the use of a qualified monumental mason, or in cases where there is no known holder of the Exclusive Right of Burial and repairs are undertaken without consultation and confirmation of a qualified mason, the Council reserves the right to make the memorial safe in the manner it deems most appropriate. Furthermore, such memorials will be subject to increased safety testing to ensure ongoing compliance with safety standards.

9 - Retesting and Follow-Up Inspections

Formal retesting will occur at least every five years.

Any memorials which fail the test and are temporarily made safe will be visually re-inspected every month to ensure any temporary repair is sound. A follow up inspection after a period of one year will take place to ascertain whether they have been repaired by a qualified memorial mason.

Informal visual inspections naturally occur while staff are working in the sites and any issues will be reported.

This version Reviewed & Ratified at Governance & Finance Committee 22nd July 2025