

Memorial Inspection

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Why is the council carrying out safety inspections?

The Town Council has been testing memorial headstones following Health and Safety guidance issued to all cemetery authorities. The Council has a duty of care for the safety of all families, visitors and staff visiting the cemetery and churchyard. This testing involves checking all of the headstones following the latest guidance 'Managing the Safety of Burial Ground Memorials' issued by the Burials and Cemeteries Advisory Group (January 2009).

Which cemeteries/churchyards will be inspected?

Bishop's Stortford Old and New Cemetery Apton Road are being inspected in this phase.

Who is responsible for memorial headstones?

All memorials are owned by and are the responsibility of grave owner(s) or their next of kin. However, the Council has the obligation of making a memorial safe, if it is found to be in an unsafe condition. It is important to note, regardless of ownership, the Council may take action, as required, to make the memorial safe.

How long will the inspections take?

It is estimated that inspections will take a maximum of two weeks.

Will I still be able to visit my grave?

Yes. Safety notices are posted throughout the cemeteries; they will remain open during normal opening hours.

What has the Council done to inform people of the inspection programme?

The Council understands that the inspection work may be upsetting for family and friends of loved ones with a memorial. Great effort has been taken to ensure there is as much communication as possible to create awareness of the inspections:

- Notices have been placed on display throughout the cemeteries, on our website and Social media.

Can I test my own memorial?

Under no circumstances should families test their own memorials as they may injure themselves or other members of the public. In addition, memorial stones may also be damaged.

Note: Bishop's Stortford Town Council cannot accept liability for anyone who injures themselves whilst attempting to inspect or test any memorial stone.

Who will carry out the inspections?

All inspections are carried out by experienced independent assessors who are trained in memorial inspection safety testing. They only carry out the testing and do not make any repairs. The approach to testing will be taken in line with the practical and pragmatic methods as laid out in the guidance notes of the Ministry of Justice and BS8415:2018.

How will memorials be tested? What will the inspection involve?

The Council will risk assess and test memorials in accordance with their inspection and testing procedure:

- Memorials less than 0.625 metres full visual inspection
- Memorials 0.625 metres - 1.5 metres full visual inspection, primary hand stress test memorials over 1.5 metres in accordance with BS Standards 8415:2018.
- Memorials over 1.5m in height will only undergo a visual assessment due to the high risk associated with applying load to a large, potential unstable memorial. Memorials greater than 1.5m in height will be assessed by a structural engineer/qualified stone mason if any suspicion of movement or instability is noted
- Tombs will be tested on all four sides, inspecting for cracking and movement. If any faults are found in construction, the area will be cordoned off.

Note: The primary hand test is to test whether memorials can withstand a reasonable hand force, which replicates the pulling against a memorial. A mechanical tester is not used by the contractor

What happens after the inspection?

Any headstone that fails will be risk assessed to determine the best way of making it safe. Unsafe memorials near to high-risk areas such as pathways will be cordoned off and if in danger of imminent collapse, may be in the worst case be laid down. Warning signs will be displayed advising cemetery users.

Each memorial will be categorised once inspected:

Category 1: immediate action will be taken to make the memorial safe. This may result in the memorial being carefully laid flat/rested to alleviate any risk of injury. Where a memorial is a listed item, the memorial may be temporarily supported or the memorial temporarily barriered

Category 2: the memorial is not an immediate danger but is not fully stable and will need to be monitored every 12 months to assess any further deterioration

Category 3: the memorial is found to be perfectly stable and will only need to be inspected in five years' time.

Why have you tested the smaller memorials?

It is important that the Council test all memorials to ensure an accurate record to assess potential risk. Where the risk is deemed to be category 2 (i.e. a lower possibility of the memorial falling and lower risk of harm due to its size/nature of memorial) the Council will monitor this in 12 months' time to assess any further deterioration.

Why have you put yellow tags on so many memorials?

These tags have been placed on all memorials that have failed the test. It is recognised that the tags are very bright, but that is required to warn the public of any risk.

They have been kept as small as possible and are placed to avoid covering any memorial inscriptions.

The Council is required to make to all attempts to communicate with owners. Letters to the grave owners address, that are on the Council's files, have been sent. The yellow tags are another way of informing the grave owner. The Council will assess all the results and within 4 weeks remove any tags from memorials less than 625mm in height as these are deemed less likely to be the cause of a fatal accident.

Will you inform me of the inspection results for the memorial?

Owners will be advised where the condition of a memorial is deemed to pose a Health and Safety risk in order for remedial action to be taken. The Council will provide details of the assessed condition of the memorial and what action has been taken, or is required to be taken, to stabilise or make the memorial safe.

Unfortunately, it will be inevitable that the Council will try to make contact by letter with grave owner(s) who may have since passed away. Please accept the Council's sincerest apologies if this should happen, it is not our intention to cause upset. If this happens, please do let the Council know so records can be updated.

If you believe the information the Council holds in relation to a grave you own is incorrect, please do contact the Council.

For those memorials deemed as category 1 and laid down, a notice may be attached to the grave to inform any relatives or visitors. This is in the event that the address held on Council files is no longer valid and the Council have been unable to reach the owner or their next of kin via any other communication methods.

What if a memorial is found to have no permit?

If a memorial is identified as having no permit and is therefore deemed to be unauthorised, the owner will be notified. It will be the owner's responsibility to apply for permission retrospectively and pay the appropriate fee.

Why are memorials failing?

The majority of older memorials are constructed from a single piece of stone, whereas more modern memorials are constructed from several sections that are joined together. The main reason for memorials becoming unstable is the failure of these joints.

Can I repair the memorial myself?

No. You must contact a memorial mason as soon as possible to arrange for it to be fixed and made safe. An accredited memorial mason will ensure that work carried out on the memorial is done to the proper professional standards and they will also ensure the correct paperwork and permissions are obtained.

Note: If repairs are undertaken by someone other than a NAMMs or BRAMMs approved stonemason, the owner is then liable for the safety of the memorial and any injury or accidental damage it may sustain.

Who is responsible for the cost of the repair?

The responsibility for the cost of a repair or re-fixing of a memorial rests with the grave owner or their descendants. The work must be carried out by a memorial mason who undertakes the work to NAMMs or BRAMMs standards. This includes the installation of anchor pins to secure the base of the memorial and stainless steel dowels to secure bases of the memorial to headstone sections. This method of memorial installation is to ensure all memorials are safe and secure.

What if I cannot afford to pay?

Please email cemetery.admin@bishopsstortfordtc.gov.uk to discuss the issue and what can be done to make the memorial safe.

What if I do not have time or I am not in a position to arrange to rectify a memorial?

Please email cemeteryadmin@bishopsstortfordtc.gov.uk to discuss the issue and what can be done to make the memorial safe.

How do I find out more?

More information can be found on the Council's website

<https://www.bishopsstortfordtc.gov.uk/council-services/cemeteries>

If you have any concerns over the safety of your memorial or you have any further questions

please contact cemetery.admin@bishopsstortfordtc.gov.uk or call 01279 715000.

