



FELIXSTOWE

TOWN COUNCIL

MEMORIAL HEADSTONE TESTING PROCEDURE



Purpose

To inform people about our testing programme, why and how we carry out testing, and what happens if there is a problem with a headstone.

Background information

Felixstowe Town council is responsible for the cemetery at Langley Road, Felixstowe IP11 2NA, with over 3,000 headstones and memorials. As some of these are not attended to they can become in a poor condition and have the potential to cause danger.

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

- Felixstowe Town Council has health and safety responsibilities to its employees, contractors and visitors to cemeteries (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 monumental mason has the responsibility to work in accordance with the council's conditions and specifications for memorials as laid down in the Cemeteries' Rules.
- An owner, the Deed Holder or successor in title of a memorial, 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 Cemetery staff or contact Felixstowe Town Hall on 01394 282086 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 UK cemetery. This highlighted the risk and liability councils face in cemetery management.

Duties

Primary responsibility for health and safety in Felixstowe Cemeteries lie with Felixstowe Town Council as the burial authority in control of the cemetery. Whilst Felixstowe 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 some cases there is no identifiable owner.

Frequency

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

Notification and signage

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

- Signage will be on display within the cemetery. It will provide details of what is happening and, closer to the time, will detail when the testing will occur and provide the opportunity to observe if families wish.
- The council's website will provide information about how testing is carried out.

Testing process

- We will apply a proportionate approach to testing in each cemetery which will mean that any book, rest or footstone less than 18 inches in height, will not be tested.
- 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 members of staff. One staff member will be the 'Inspector' who will be inspecting the memorial: pointing out any shortfalls and feeding this information to the second member of staff. The second member of staff will then input the received data into the hand held computer.
- The testing will result in one of two categories: 1. Category 1 'UNSAFE' Action required. 2. Category 2 'SAFE' No action required (revisit in 5 years).
- Where a memorial is classified as 'unsafe', immediate action will be taken and the memorial will be carefully staked and banded to make it safe. Only when absolutely necessary will a memorial be laid flat. At the same time a notice will be attached to inform anyone of the reason for staking and who to contact for further information
- After this, the information is passed to the Town Hall for contact to be made with the grave owner.

Headstone failures

Action

- Memorials found to be 'in immediate danger of falling' will be carefully staked and banded in accordance with the training given; lying flat only when absolutely necessary. No fixing of notices to the headstones themselves.

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 temporarily supported or laid flat, 3 or 6 months, in which to carry out repairs. Should no repairs be made, the council will consider the final action in respect of those memorials that have been temporarily supported.
- Whether the memorial is pocketed (inlay) or laid down will be dependent on the size and condition of the memorial and availability of lifting equipment. Pocketing will allow for memorials to remain upright allowing a continuation of the uniformity. This measure can be reversed if at some point a relative wishes to have the memorial reinstated to its original position.
- The records of many owners are extremely old and have not been updated by current relatives/family members. We are now actively campaigning for memorial owners or visitors to the graves to update current contact details so that we may keep you informed of future memorial inspections. You can contact the Cemetery Office at the Town Hall on 01394 288191 between the hours of 8 am until 4 pm Tuesday to Friday to update your contact details. You can also email enquiries@felixstowe.gov.uk.

What do you do if you are advised that your memorial is unsafe?

We understand that this may be upsetting for you, and are really sorry for any distress it may cause. If your memorial has to be laid flat to make it safe you can choose to either:

1. Leave the memorial lying down; and take no further action (we may need to 'dig in' the memorial to remove trip hazards); or
2. Have the memorial repaired by a Registered Memorial Stonemason.

If your Memorial has had a temporary fixing to make it safe and/or a warning notice attached, you can choose to either:

1. Have the memorial repaired by a Registered Memorial Stonemason, or
2. You can give permission for the memorial to be laid down by contacting the Town Hall on 01394 288191.

If you choose to have your memorial repaired then please, for your own safety, do not attempt to repair or remove memorials yourself. Only approved Memorial Stonemasons, or cemetery staff where appropriate, should carry out this kind of work to make sure safety standards are complied with.

A list of Registered Memorial Stonemasons can be obtained from the Town Hall on 01394 288191 or email enquiries@felixstowe.gov.uk.

If you are concerned about the safety of your memorial

If you are concerned about the safety of your memorial you can arrange for a Registered Memorial Stonemason to inspect your memorial for safety or ask for a safety inspection from a trained member of Cemetery Staff.

Alternatively you can get in touch with:

The National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM)
27a Albert Street
Rugby
Warwickshire
CV21 2SG

Tel: 01788 542264

If you are concerned about your family memorial, or even just for peace of mind, we strongly recommend insurance cover. A Registered Memorial Stonemason will know of a company that offers this.

Keep your contact details up to date with the cemetery office at the Town Hall by emailing enquiries@felixstowe.gov.uk.

Please be aware that cemeteries are potentially dangerous places. Visitors to cemeteries should keep to footpaths, avoid touching any memorials and ensure that children are supervised at all times.

For further information on headstone testing please contact:

The Institute of Crematorium and Cemetery Management
City of London Cemetery
Aldersbrook Road
Manor Park
London
E12 5DQ

Tel: 020 8989 4661

Fax: 01753 770 984

E-mail: julie.callender@iccom-uk.com