

Rattlesden Parish Council

Managing the safety of memorials in Rattlesden Cemetery

This document sets out Rattlesden Parish Council's policy for ensuring, as far as is practicable, that the gravestones and other memorials in the cemetery will not become a hazard. The policy is based on advice given by the Ministry of Justice in its publication *Managing the Safety of Burial Ground Memorials*.

General inspection of memorials

The parish council will inspect the memorials in the cemetery on a regular basis. At present, the regular check takes place once a year, in the spring (after the worst of the winter frosts). Additional checks will be made on an ad hoc basis when any change in the cemetery might affect the memorials.

The inspection is designed to achieve the following aims:

- Knowledge of the different types of memorial in the cemetery (the various designs and materials, their historical and social importance and the likelihood of members of the public visiting or walking past particular memorials)
- An overall assessment of the risks associated with these types of memorials in order to set the priorities for more detailed inspections
- Detailed inspection of the memorials considered to pose any significant risk.

Detailed inspection

In a detailed inspection, a memorial will be checked for:

- Where the memorial is in two or more parts, damaged or eroded bonding
- Movement of parts of a memorial from the original position
- Kerb stones breaking apart
- Leaning
- Cracks (and vegetation, which might widen them)

Where memorials have visible signs of damage, such as cracks, a hand test will be used to determine stability. This will be done by standing to one side of the memorial and applying a firm, but steady, pressure in different directions to see if the headstone is loose.

Many headstones fitted in recent years have a ground support system. These memorials may move - even rock - if the base to the foundation joint is broken, but do so within designed tolerance limits that represent no danger, because the memorial will lock on the ground anchor.

More detailed inspection by a specialist (such as a memorial mason or structural engineer) may be needed where the initial check identifies significant risk. Large, heavy memorials, such as the older columns or obelisk types, may also require an assessment by a specialist.

On the advice of the Ministry of Justice, the parish council has decided not to use mechanical test instruments routinely, because they tend to overestimate risk.

Records

The results of each inspection will be recorded and approved by the parish council at a meeting.

Memorials that constitute a risk

If a memorial is considered to be a potential danger, the parish council will try to contact its owners, so that they can arrange for it to be made safe.

Where the risk from an unstable memorial is low, a warning notice will be placed in front of it, until it can be fixed. In some cases, a memorial may need to be cordoned off until it is made safe. Only if there is imminent danger of it toppling, will it be laid flat.

If, within six months, it proves impossible to trace the owners, or the owners have not had the memorial repaired, the parish council will decide what steps need to be taken.

Memorials will not be routinely staked, as this can be dangerous to undertake and can damage them.

Notifying the parish council of any hazards

If someone notices damage to a memorial, they should contact the parish council. They can speak to any councillor or ring the parish clerk (Bridget Goodchild on 01449 736122). Alternatively, they can send an email from the parish council website (<http://www.onesuffolk.co.uk/rattlesdenPC/>).