



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL

Memorial Inspection FAQs

Revised June 2023



Frequently asked questions

Why is the council carrying out safety inspections?

The Health and Safety Executive requires us to do memorial safety inspections following a number of accidents across the country. We have a duty of care for the safety of families, visitors and staff visiting and as part of a rolling program, the council inspects all memorials at least once every five years.

Who is the Health and Safety Executive?

The Health and Safety Executive is a central government enforcement agency who is responsible for general health and safety in public places.

Which cemeteries/churchyards will be inspected?

Cemeteries:

Bybrook Cemetery
Canterbury Road Cemetery
Tenterden Cemetery
Willesborough Cemetery

Closed Churchyards:

Grave Yard, Station Road, Tenterden
St Mary's Church, Ashford Town Centre
St Mary's Church, Kennington
St Mary's Church, Stone
St Mary's Church, Willesborough
St Mildred's Church, Tenterden
St Michael and All Angels Church,
St Michaels, Tenterden
St Peter and Paul Church, Appledore
St Peter's Church, Newenden
St Peter's Church, Molash
St Mary's Church, High Halden
Old burial ground, Vicarage Fields, Ashford
Remains of St Mary's Church, Little Chart

Who is responsible for memorial headstones?

All memorials are owned by and are the responsibility of the 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 difficult to accurately judge how long the testing programme will take but we estimate this to be a maximum of nine months in total across all cemeteries and closed burial grounds.

We will publish a programme of works on our website giving updates on which cemeteries are complete.

Will I still be able to visit my grave?

Yes, although there will be safety notices 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 will be taken to ensure there is as much communication as possible to create awareness of the planned inspections prior to them starting.

- Notices will be placed on display throughout the cemeteries and closed churchyards regarding planned inspections
- The local clergy will be informed so that they may pass the information onto parishioners
- The council will write to all last known owners of graves/memorials that are being inspected, where records exist (that are 30 years old or less) to notify them of the planned inspections
- All information relating to the inspections will be placed on the council's website
- The council will issue a press release, converse with local newspapers and publicise inspections on 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: Ashford Borough 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 will be carried out by competent staff who are trained in memorial inspection safety testing.

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:

- a. Memorials up to 500mm full visual inspection and hand stress test
- b. Memorials 500-1500mm full visual inspection, primary hand stress test
- c. Memorials 1500-2500mm full visual inspection, primary hand stress test (non-complex structures), review for more complex structures in line with (d) below
- d. Memorials over 2500mm and complex structures full visual inspection, note potential problems and consider cordon off, follow up full inspection supported by a structural engineer and/or qualified stonemason
- e. Where deemed necessary by inconclusive hand stress test, a mechanical force test will be carried out by a competent individual

Note: The primary hand test is to test whether memorials can withstand a reasonable hand force, which replicates the pulling against a memorial.

What happens after the inspection?

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.

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

All inspection results will be detailed on the council website as well as within onsite notice boards.

The council will also endeavour to contact the last known grave owner, where records exist of every memorial that is less than 30 years old. We 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 safe the memorial.

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 themselves. Please accept the council's sincerest apologies if this should happen, as we certainly do not wish to upset anyone. We would appreciate it if you could let us know if this happens so that we can update our records.

If you believe the information we hold in relation to a grave you own is incorrect, please contact us so we can check this for you.

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

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?

The council may be able to undertake remedial work on your behalf, following a written instruction to the council, to that effect, from the memorial owner. The council may then be able to set up a payment plan to recoup the cost of repair works. Alternatively, the council can arrange for the memorial to be laid flat and where appropriate partially bury the memorial in the ground.

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

The council may be able to undertake remedial work on your behalf and invoice you for payment, following a written instruction to the council, to that effect, from the memorial owner.

How do I find out more?

More information can be found on the council's website www.ashford.gov.uk/memorial-inspections

If you have any concerns over the safety of your memorial or you have any further questions please contact the council's Cemeteries Officer via email on cemeteries@ashford.gov.uk