Memorial inspections: 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 could have unsafe memorials in our cemeteries and we have a duty of care for the safety of families, visitors and staff visiting.

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?

Open churchyards:
- Canterbury Road Cemetery
  Ashford TN24 8LB
- Willesborough Cemetery
  Church Road, Willesborough TN24 0JG
- Tenterden Cemetery
  Cranbrook Road, Tenterden TN30 6UG
- Bybrook Cemetery
  Cemetery Lane, Kennington TN24 9JX

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 Field, Ashford
- Remains of St Mary’s Church, Little Chart
Who is responsible for memorial headstone?

All headstones 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 3 months in total over all cemeteries and closed burial grounds.

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 available to make people aware of the planned inspections prior to them starting.

• Notices will be on display throughout the cemeteries and closed churchyards.

• The local clergy will be informed so that they may pass the information on to 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. We will also communicate the inspection findings with them (providing the original letter is not returned as not known at address).

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 500mm – 1500mm full visual inspection, primary hand stress test
c) Memorials 1500mm – 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

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 it is 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 then 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, therefore, need to be monitored every 12 months to assess any further deterioration. Where a memorial that was previously a Category 2 is inspected and re categorised as a Category 1 the action for a Category 1 will be undertaken.

Category 3 the memorial is found to be perfectly stable and can be assessed again in five years’ time.

What happens if the category changes on reinspection?
If a memorial has deteriorated and moves from a category 3 to a category 2 or category 2 to a category 1 then the action undertaken is as detailed above for the new categorisation.

If a memorial is found to be in an improved condition and the category moves from a category 1 to a category 2 or a category 2 to a category 3 then records will be checked to ascertain whether a permit for the works was received. If there has not been a permit received from a NAMMs approved stonemason then we will request a retrospective permit.
What happens if a NAMMs approved stonemason did not carry out repairs?
If the correct procedure was not followed and the repairs have been undertaken by someone other than a NAMMs approved stonemason, the owner is then liable for the safety of the memorial and any injury or accidental damage it may sustain.

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 issued by the NAMMs, plus they will also ensure the correct paperwork and permissions are obtained.

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 NAMM 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.

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 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 injure themselves whilst attempting to inspect or test any memorial stone.
Will you inform me if my memorial fails?
The council will endeavour to contact the last known grave owner, where records exist of every memorial that is less than 30 years old. We will also post a notice on the grave to inform any relatives or visitors in this respect.

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

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, 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.

How long will I be given to make my memorial safe?
If your memorial was a category 1 at the time of the last inspection and no repairs have been undertaken then the memorial will be made safe immediately. This may result in the memorial being carefully laid flat/rested to alleviate any risk of injury. Where a memorial is a listed item then the memorial may be temporarily supported or the memorial temporarily barriered.

If the memorial was a category 2 at the time of the last inspection, the owners would have been notified where possible and advised of the situation so that they could monitor and carry out any repairs. If it is identified during the inspection that the memorial’s condition has deteriorated to a category 1 the memorial will be made safe immediately. This may result in the memorial being carefully laid flat/rested to alleviate any risk of injury. Where a memorial is a listed item then the memorial may be temporarily supported or the memorial temporarily barriered.

What if I do not have time or I am not in a position to make arrangements?
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.

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.

Is income generated from the Memorial Safety Inspection Scheme?
No, income is not generated from any aspect of this scheme.
How do I find out more?
More information can be found on the council’s website. Please visit [www.ashford.gov.uk/cemetery-memorials](http://www.ashford.gov.uk/cemetery-memorials)
If you have any concerns over the safety of your memorial or you have any further questions please contact the council’s Cemeteries Officer.

- 01233 330472
- cemeteries@ashford.gov.uk