



## HOLMER AND SHELWICK PARISH COUNCIL

### **Burial Ground Memorial Safety Policy**

**Adopted 11/03/19**

**Updated 11/05/20**

#### **Introduction**

This document sets out Holmer and Shelwick 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'.

It is noted that the risk of injury from damaged or falling headstones is extremely low, however the Parish Council has a general duty under Local Authorities' Cemeteries Order 1977 and the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 to ensure that visitors and those working in the burial ground are not exposed to risks to their health and safety.

#### **Inspection Schedule**

The following inspections will be undertaken:

1. A yearly inspection carried out by a designated councillor or councillors.
2. Ad-hoc informal inspections carried out by a designated councillor or councillors following any change in the cemetery that might affect the memorials (such as major work or repair to the burial ground environment) or a report by a member of the public.

#### **Inspection Methodology**

The inspection will include pathways, grave areas and memorials/headstones (trees are inspected as per the Parish Council's Tree Management Policy). The inspection includes the following:

- Knowledge of the different types of memorial currently installed in the burial ground. For example through a site survey that identifies the various designs and materials of individual memorials and groups of memorials, 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 to assist prioritisation of the more detailed inspections.

The inspection methodology for assessing the risk of each memorial includes:

- A visual check for obvious signs that a memorial is likely to be unstable:
  - Damaged or eroded bonding (where the memorial is in two or more parts).
  - Movement of parts of a memorial from the original position.
  - Kerb stones breaking apart.
  - Undermined or unstable foundations.
  - Leaning memorials – particularly if there is evidence of recent movement.

- Evidence of structural damage or disturbance (e.g. cracks).
- The presence of vegetation, which may cause cracks etc. to widen.
- A hand test to identify stability problems\*. 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. This test involves no tools or equipment and is intended to provide support to the visual checks.
- Where the initial check identifies significant risk or for large, heavy memorials (such as older columns or obelisk types), an assessment by a specialist may be required (such as a memorial mason or structural engineer).

Occasionally there may be memorials that have serious structural faults but which, because of their aesthetic or heritage value, are retained. Specific assessments for each memorial and specific management measures may be required in these cases.

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.

\*If some instability is detected following the hand test, a judgment must be made as to whether this movement is limited, or whether there is sufficient movement for the memorial to present a high risk to people's health and safety. Burial ground inspectors should note that many memorials installed in recent years on independent foundations are fitted with a ground support system. These memorials may move, even rock, if the base to foundation joint is broken, but do so within designed tolerance limits and represent no danger as the memorial will lock on the ground anchor.

## **Records**

The results of each inspection will be recorded and approved by the Parish Council.

## **Memorials that constitute a risk**

If a memorial is considered to be a potential danger, the Parish Council will try to contact its owners within one calendar month to give details of any defects so that they can arrange for it to be made safe. Information may also be posted on the burial ground notice board, as deemed necessary.

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

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.

## **Notifying the Parish Council of any hazards**

If someone notices damage to a memorial, they should contact the Parish Clerk who will make arrangements for inspection.

## **Changes to this policy**

This policy will be reviewed annually in May.