

Great Gonerby

Memorial Management

Policy

Version History	
First Adopted	03:02:2025
Reviewed & Amended	11.02.2025

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Policy statement

This policy sets out the Great Gonerby Parish Council's approach to managing memorials at the Hill Top Burial Ground and St Sebastian's Church Parish burial ground. The policy covers the responsibilities, the approval process, assessment and testing procedures, practices for temporarily making memorials safe and the processes for memorial owners to effect repairs.

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Burial Ground Regulations.

Please see the Parish Council website www.greatgonerby.parish@lincolnshire.gov.uk for the latest versions of all relevant documents.

Definitions

Memorial - any headstone or tablet or plaque or other memorial affixed or placed upon a grave plot.

ERoB (Exclusive Right of Burial) - a deed of right to burial and the installation of a memorial issued by the Burial Authority. Note: The ERoB does not confer any land ownership rights.

Burial Ground Regulations - the 'rules' established by the Burial Authority that govern the operation of the Burial Ground which must be adhered to by ERoB owners.

Responsibilities

The Parish Council/Burial Authority

The Parish Council acts as the statutory Burial Authority under the Local Authority Cemeteries Order 1977. The terms Parish Council and Burial Authority are effectively synonymous for the purposes of this policy.

Responsibility for the overall safety (duty of care) within the burial ground lies with the Burial Authority. The Burial Authority has responsibilities under the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Occupiers Liability Act 1957 to ensure that '*as far as reasonably practicable*' the burial ground is maintained in a safe condition. This includes ensuring that anyone who enters the site to carry out work, attend interments, visit graves or for any other reason, can do so safely.

The burial ground is open to the public at all times, therefore the Health and Safety of visitors, employees and contractors who are visiting or working in the burial ground is the primary concern of the Burial Authority. Fortunately the Burial Grounds are located away from population centres and do not generally attract many visitors. The general level of risk is therefore considered low.

However, the Burial Authority will carry out inspections of memorials to identify potential hazards and reduce risk where possible. Any memorials identified as Category 1 - (Unsafe) will be made safe temporarily and, where possible, memorial owners contacted. The full procedure for inspection, testing and communication with owners is set out later in this document. While responsibility for general safety lies with the Burial Authority, there are specific responsibilities that lie with the owners of any memorials and the memorial masons responsible for installing them.

Memorial Owners

Owners of the Exclusive Right of Burial (grave owners) are responsible for maintaining any memorial associated with their burial plot in good, safe condition in accordance with the Burial Ground Regulations.

The Burial Authority will regularly inspect graves, test memorials and, where possible, bring any defects to the attention of owners. ***ONLY*** those memorials found to be Category 1 unsafe (as defined) will be temporarily made safe by the Burial Authority. For the avoidance of doubt, 'making safe' may include laying the headstone flat.

Memorial installation and ownership is a significant and long term undertaking and the Parish Council urges memorial owners to obtain adequate insurance as they would with any other property. Advice on insurance is best obtained from memorial masons who are familiar with the market.

Memorial owners must keep their contact details (address, phone and email) up to date with the Burial Authority as these will be used to contact owners in the event of a problem. Failure to advise the Burial Authority of a change of address could lead to unnecessary distress for all involved.

Memorial Masons

Memorial masons are legally liable for the work they carry out and must ensure that memorials are erected safely and in accordance with British Standard BS8415. Memorial masons must also comply with the Burial Authority Regulations and obtain a signed permit (form BG8 on the website) before the work can proceed.

Installation Approval

Owners of the Exclusive Right of Burial at the Burial Ground have automatic entitlement to install a headstone or memorial plaque subject to the Burial Ground regulations and this policy.

Any installation of any memorial **MUST** be approved in advance by the Burial Authority. Approval will not usually be withheld provided that the memorial is installed in accordance with the Burial Ground Regulations. Guidance for Memorial Masons is available on the Parish Council website.

Alterations such as repairs and additional inscriptions **MUST** be approved in advance by the Burial Authority. A specific memorial alteration application (form BG6) is available on the Council website.

ALL work at the Burial Ground must be pre-approved with the Burial Authority before being carried out. The Clerk only works part-time but can be contacted at clerk@greatgonerbyparish.gov.uk

Inspection and testing procedures

Notice:

A minimum of three weeks advance notice of headstone testing will be given via;

- free standing signs at each entrance to the burial ground
- a notice on the Parish Council website
- posts to local social media outlets

Baseline Inspection 2025/26:

As this is a new policy, all headstones in the burial ground will be surveyed between the adoption of this policy in February 2025 and March 2026. This survey will establish a baseline of data on a database to inform an ongoing programme of inspection and testing. All testing will be undertaken by the Parish Clerk who has received appropriate training from the Institute of Cemetery & Crematorium Management.

Testing Procedure:

Every headstone may have the following visual inspection data recorded using the burial ground plot number as the core reference;

- General Photograph(s)
- Note of any issues - eg. lean, cracks, ground heave or animal burrowing
- Photograph(s) of specified issues
- Note of foundations -type and condition
- Other notable grave features

Following this visual inspection each memorial will be subjected to a basic hand pressure test from front to rear and vice versa. If no movement is felt then the memorial will be recorded as Category 3 - Safe. If any movement is felt, then a measured force test will be undertaken as below.

The Force Test:

A force of 25kg will be applied from front to rear and rear to front using a calibrated force test meter. Following the force test, each memorial will be classified as follows;

Category 1 - Unsafe. Immediate action is required to make the memorial safe and/or to stop the public accessing the memorial. This could include laying the headstone flat.

Category 2 - Monitoring. The memorial is not fully stable but is not an immediate danger to the public and/or the memorial has some major defect and/or it is in a higher risk location (eg. near a footpath).

Category 1 memorials

Memorials classified as Category 1 - Unsafe following the the force test will be immediately made safe temporarily using a method appropriate to the size and style of the memorial. A notice will be fixed to the headstone or posted on the grave advising the owner to contact a memorial mason to re-fix/re-set the headstone within 18 months of the failed test.

Attempts will be made to contact the owner using contact details held by the Burial Authority. In the event that the grave owner does not contact the Burial Authority or get the headstone reaffixed within 18 months of the failed test, the Burial Authority will proceed to make the memorial permanently safe using an appropriate method and record a charge against the plot.

Category 2 memorials

If a memorial is classified as Category 2 - Monitoring, the memorial will be checked annually from the date of the baseline inspection to assess any further deterioration.

Category 3 memorials

Memorials classified as Category 3 memorials will be inspected every three years from the date of the baseline inspection.

New Memorial Testing:

All newly installed memorials will be tested between 18 months and two years after installation. This will provide assurance to the grave owner that the memorial has been installed correctly and allow plenty of time for any issues to be rectified by the memorial mason within the guarantee period.

Reaffixing and resetting headstones or plaques:

As per the Burial Ground Regulations, it is ENTIRELY the responsibility of the owner of the Exclusive Right of Burial (ERoB) to have defects corrected.

If the owner of the ERoB is deceased, then surviving family members (if found) will be given the option of taking over the ERoB subject to the usual due diligence and fees, or transferring ownership back to the Burial Authority. The Burial Authority will then make all decisions regarding the memorial and the plot.