



Memorial safety testing

Information on keeping our cemetery a safe place to visit

We conduct safety testing of memorials (headstones) in our cemetery which we have responsibility for maintaining.

These checks are undertaken by a trained officer roughly every five years which is in line with guidance issued by the Health & Safety Executive (HSE).

Testing is required as Newhaven Town Council (NTC) has an obligation to provide and maintain a safe cemetery. Tragically, there have been incidents in other areas of the country where children have been killed by falling memorials whilst playing in a cemetery. Therefore, we need to ensure that the memorials in our cemetery are not unsafe due to lack of maintenance or general deterioration.

The frequently asked questions below should answer any questions you may have about the testing we undertake, and what happens if a memorial has been deemed unsafe.

Frequently asked questions

Why is this work being conducted?

The safety checks are undertaken to ensure that our cemetery, which we are responsible for, is safe for our employees and visitors. These checks have been ongoing in our cemetery on a regular basis for many years and will continue to be conducted to ensure our cemetery remain a safe place.

Who is responsible for keeping memorials repaired and in a safe condition?

The grave owner is responsible for the memorial and have a duty to keep the memorial repaired and in a safe condition.

What do the safety tests involve and who will carry them out?

Each memorial is visually checked to assess its condition. It is then given a gentle 'topple test' to check that the stone is not in immediate danger of falling. If the stone does not move or show signs of instability during the test it is passed as safe. The checks are conducted by a trained officer who will make sure that the work is conducted carefully and with due respect. Each memorial assessed will be recorded to indicate that the safety check has been conducted. The record will include the condition of the memorial and any action that was taken.

What will you do with memorials that fail the test?

Once a memorial is found to be unsafe, NTC has a duty of care to make sure that it is made safe as soon as possible because the cemetery is a public place. Memorials that are in immediate danger of collapse may be laid down or supported. Those that require work to make them safe will have a notice attached to them and the grave owner contacted explaining what to do next. Where we have up to date contact details, we will write to grave owners as soon as possible to inform them. The grave owner has a responsibility to have works undertaken promptly to rectify the issue. Memorials will not be removed from the grave space as part of the testing.

What should I do if my memorial has been lowered to the ground?

Please contact admin@newhaventowncouncil.gov.uk detailing the grave number and the name of the deceased that you are contacting us about. We will discuss with you arrangements for re-erecting your memorial safely.

You should NEVER try to re-erect the memorial yourself; this could be extremely dangerous and may result in serious injury to yourself and/or to members of the public, as the repairs may not be up to the required National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) standards.

Please note: Only professional repairs to NAMM standards are permitted in Newhaven Cemetery.

If I have insurance cover on my memorial, will the costs of repair be covered?

NTC recommends that all memorials sited within our cemetery are insured against all risks. Please check with your monumental mason or insurer to find out if repair work is covered.

My parent's memorial has had a notice placed on it and I have not been contacted first. Why?

Our immediate priority is to make sure that our cemetery is a safe place for the public to enter.

Every headstone failing the test will have a notice attached to it advising the owner what to do next - this also acts as a warning to members of the public so please leave the notice in place. We will contact as many grave owners as possible whose memorials have failed the test. If we have not written to you, it may be because we do not have an up-to-date record of your contact details.

This is unfortunately a common occurrence, as many of the graves are very old and grave owners have moved from the address recorded in the burial records.

Will my memorial be subject to further tests in the future?

Yes, we will be conducting similar tests at approximately every five years. Because of this we recommend that your memorial is insured and regularly checked and maintained by a memorial stonemason to ensure it is safe.

Where can I get further information?

NTC understands how upsetting it can be for families to see work being conducted on a memorial to a loved one and we want to help people deal with their unsafe memorials as quickly as possible. Anyone who wants to talk about what is happening or needs information can contact us as follows:

Email: admin@newhaventowncouncil.gov.uk

Tel: 01273 516100