

Place Select Committee

Scrutiny Review of Management of Memorials

**Final Report
July 2018**

Place Select Committee
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Church Road
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 1LD

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Select Committee - Membership

Councillor Derrick Brown (Chair)
Councillor Sonia Bailey (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Louise Baldock
Councillor Evaline Cunningham
Councillor Ken Dixon
Councillor Maurice Perry
Councillor Mrs Sylvia Walmsley
Councillor Paul Weston
Councillor Bill Woodhead MBE

Acknowledgements

The Committee would like to thank the following people for contributing to its work:

- Jamie McCann (Director of Community Services) - Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC)
- Craig Willows (Community Services Manager) - SBC
- Jayne Robins (Registration & Bereavement Services Manager) - SBC
- Andrew Ruddock (Cemeteries Superintendent) - SBC

Contact Officer

Gary Woods (Scrutiny Officer)
Tel: 01642 526187
E-mail: gary.woods@stockton.gov.uk

Foreword

On behalf of the Place Select Committee, we are pleased to present the final report and recommendations following our review of Management of Memorials.

A comprehensive review of this issue was undertaken in 2007 which resulted in a number of recommendations, including the creation of the Grave Personalisation Policy still in use today. This subsequent review has enabled the Committee to assess the effectiveness of this policy, as well as understand how Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council manages any issues that arise in what is a very sensitive and complex process. Personalising a grave inevitably means different things to different people, and this brings about challenges in balancing the needs of a grieving family with the wishes of others who have gone / are going through an equally difficult time.

We are very grateful for the support of Council Officers in the Registration & Bereavement Services team for the information they provided, and hope that the recommendations from this review will help both the Council and, more importantly, families in ensuring that grave personalisation continues to be managed in a dignified and respectful way for the benefit of all of the Borough's cemetery-users.



Cllr Derrick Brown
Chair
Place Select Committee



Cllr Sonia Bailey
Vice-Chair
Place Select Committee

Original Brief

Which of our strategic corporate objectives does this topic address?

The review supports the following Council policy principles:

- Developing strong and healthy communities: development and delivery of the Council's Environmental Policy and strategies that contributed to the overall Green Vision.

What are the main issues and overall aim of this review?

Stockton Council ceased approval of fixed, permanent kerb-sets on all graves in 1969 following the adoption of the then much preferred lawn graves, where no items were permitted to be placed on the actual grassed part of the grave. Approximately 15 years ago, however, the Council recognised that some families needed to tend and care for their family graves by the placing of personal items, which reflected the personality and character of their loved ones.

The Council also acknowledged and fully understood its duties under health and safety legislation to ensure that neither its own employees, nor the public, were exposed to risk from potentially dangerous memorials, when visiting the Borough's cemeteries and closed churchyards.

In 2007, the Environment Select Committee carried out an extensive review of the Management of Memorials, which made recommendations to improve memorial safety inspections on existing headstones, introduce robust control measures over memorial masons, and initiate checks on new headstones at point of installation. The Committee also recommended extending the Council's Cemetery Regulations to allow personalisation of purchased graves by appropriate planting of an area at the head of the grave no larger than 25% of the grassed area, with guidance being drawn up. During the review, the Committee consulted extensively with cemetery staff, cemetery visitors, funeral directors, monumental masons and faith groups.

The new policy was implemented in a sensitive way over a five year period. Since the introduction of Council policy, however, it has yet to be assessed/scrutinised for how it is being managed, how it is being received by bereaved families, visitors and cemetery users and whether any amendments or additional choices are required to meet with public opinion.

Whilst the inspection and safety of memorials and control measures for memorial masons within cemeteries has greatly improved since the introduction of the Council policy, criticism of maintenance and access (particularly for the excavation of graves), together with the Council's approach to the 'light touch' enforcement of non-compliance cases to the Grave Personalisation Policy, both for and against, is still being received. Bereaved families, particularly recently bereaved, can become extremely distressed and emotional when they are unable (or feel they are unable) to personalise and memorialise their family grave in their own special way. Likewise, those families who have chosen a lawn grave and whose preference is to have an orderly, tidy and well-maintained grave for their loved one feel this is jeopardised and penalised by the fact that the Council is not fully enforcing the policy.

This review will therefore seek to:

- Understand the current policy around grave personalisation, maintenance of

cemeteries and access requirements for such sites.

- Ascertain how the Council communicates with bereaved families in terms of current policy, and how it manages complaints.
- Establish how effective the current policy is and determine if any amendments are required.

The Committee will undertake the following key lines of enquiry:

- What is the current Council policy regarding the management of memorials, and what rules are in place in relation to enforcement of unauthorised personalisation?
- How was the current policy initially publicised and how does the Council communicate with bereaved families in terms of its content?
- What are the key issues regarding the maintenance of the Borough's cemeteries?
- How effective is the current policy? What are the key issues/concerns being raised and are these pertinent to specific geographical locations?
- How does the Council deal with complaints in relation to unauthorised memorialisation and its impact on maintenance, access and other cemetery visitors?
- Is there a need for changes to the current policy, and if so, what are the identified options?

Provide an initial view as to how this review could lead to efficiencies, improvements and/or transformation:

A publicly accepted approach to grave personalisation and memorialisation that creates greater choice and meets the needs of all bereaved families, whilst ensuring that funeral directors, coffin bearers and mourners can walk safely and easily to gravesides for funerals. Families and those visitors with mobility problems having easy access, and the management and maintenance of the cemetery is unrestricted. Also, items placed on a grave are easier to remove at the time of a second burial or burial in an adjacent grave.

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's scrutiny review of Management of Memorials.
- 1.2 Stockton Council ceased approval of fixed, permanent kerb-sets on all graves in 1969 following the adoption of the then much preferred lawn graves, where no items were permitted to be placed on the actual grassed part of the grave. Approximately 15 years ago, however, the Council recognised that some families needed to tend and care for their family graves by the placing of personal items, which reflected the personality and character of their loved ones.
- 1.3 In 2007, the Environment and Regeneration Select Committee gave detailed consideration to the future development of the Borough's cemeteries and the management of memorials, taking into account a wide range of issues and relevant information. Consequently, a number of recommendations were made, and for the purposes of this review, the most pertinent of these were:
- Memorial masons should be required to attain professional accreditation and comply with more stringent Council controls;
 - To allow an area, at the head of the grave (approx. 25% of the total grave space), to be used for personalisation (implemented in April 2010);
 - To enforce the removal of unauthorised items placed on graves, following an appropriate period of notice to the grave owner(s) (person/s who is granted the Exclusive Right of Burial & Right to Erect a Memorial);
 - To employ an additional member of staff to control the activities of memorial masons within the cemeteries and to deal with enforcement issues (appointed September 2009);
 - To carry out an extensive publicity campaign to raise awareness of these new Council policies (commenced October 2008 – ongoing).
- 1.4 Whilst the inspection and safety of memorials and control measures for memorial masons within cemeteries has greatly improved since the introduction of the Council policy, criticism of maintenance and access (particularly for the excavation of graves), together with the Council's approach to the 'light touch' enforcement of non-compliance cases to the Grave Personalisation Policy, both for and against, is still being received. Bereaved families, particularly recently bereaved, can become extremely distressed and emotional when they are unable (or feel they are unable) to personalise and memorialise their family grave in their own special way. Likewise, those families who have chosen a lawn grave and whose preference is to have an orderly, tidy and well-maintained grave for their loved one feel this is jeopardised and penalised by the fact that the Council is not fully enforcing the policy.
- 1.5 The main focus for this review was to initially understand the current policy around grave personalisation, maintenance of cemeteries and access requirements for such sites. The Committee then aimed to ascertain how the Council communicates with bereaved families in terms of current policy and how it manages complaints, before seeking to establish how effective the current policy is and determine if any amendments are required.
- 1.6 The Committee found that the management of memorials is a particularly sensitive issue for Local Authorities to contend with. Families who are going

through the grieving process following the loss of a loved one have a diverse and sometimes conflicting range of memorial and grave personalisation needs, and this brings considerable challenges when trying to adopt and enforce an agreed policy, whilst at the same time respecting the wishes of the bereaved.

- 1.7 Grave personalisation remains a controversial subject, with some families wishing to place items on a grave to reflect the personality and character of a loved one, and other families choosing not to personalise at all. The Council recognises and respects this spectrum of feeling, and has to manage these varied preferences whilst being mindful of maintenance and access requirements for cemetery-users, including cemetery staff, funeral directors, masons and grave-owners (person/s who is granted the Exclusive Right of Burial & Right to Erect a Memorial).
- 1.8 The introduction of the current Grave Personalisation Policy (GPP) has proved to be an effective tool in managing the levels of grave personalisation across the Borough's five cemeteries. Compliance with the parameters set out within this policy is extremely high (98% of 59,651 audited graves (January 2017)), and there has been a gradual rise in the level of compliance since its inception in 2010.
- 1.9 Looking ahead, the Committee were presented with a number of options regarding the future policy of grave personalisation management. However, such is the divisive and emotive nature of grave personalisation, it is highly unlikely that any one policy would eliminate all issues. Extending the current allowance (25%) for the grave personalisation area may find favour with some, yet for others this would still not be enough, as seen by the examples of encroachment onto other graves. Similarly, a harder approach to enforcing the current, or an amended, policy would be welcomed by many, yet would undoubtedly risk causing recriminations from grieving families, difficulties for cemetery staff (including their welfare), and result in further negative (albeit potentially unbalanced) media attention.
- 1.10 The Committee broadly welcomed the proposals for a new concept in the extension to Durham Road cemetery, providing greater choice to bereaved families through the offer of three distinct grave types, each permitting a different level of personalisation. Although this provides flexibility, it should be noted that people may be resistant to the option of a black-only collar, and the Council should therefore consider the possibility of widening their colour choice offer for grave collars.
- 1.11 The very high GPP compliance rate, allied to the successful working with those families who initially did not confirm to this policy, shows that current practice is effective – as such, in existing cemeteries, this policy should continue to be utilised. The implementation of a new concept in Durham Road will, however, require an alternative policy that clearly sets out the conditions for each grave option, with robust enforcement of this from the beginning – it is imperative that all users of the Durham Road cemetery extension are aware of and adhere to this separate policy, and have a respect for all grave spaces.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend that:

- 1. There be a continuation of the current Grave Personalisation Policy (GPP) (incorporating the 'soft' enforcement approach) in the five existing Borough cemeteries.**
- 2. Further work with memorial masons be undertaken to emphasise the problems with unauthorised professionally-fixed kerb sets and the impact of these on all cemetery-users, and for appropriate action to be taken against masons who knowingly sell items which are not approved or permitted in the Borough's cemeteries.**
- 3. A separate, distinct policy be adopted for the offer of different grave types, initially in the new Durham Road cemetery extension (to operate in tandem with the current GPP), and for this to be effectively communicated to all cemetery-users before, and robustly enforced following, implementation. This would require:**
 - a) a thorough programme of awareness-raising across the Borough to inform relevant organisations within the funeral industry (e.g. funeral directors, memorial masons, North Tees Mortuary & Bereavement Team) and the public of these plans.**
 - b) the Registrars of Births and Deaths to work in partnership with the Bereavement Team. Registrars, following the registration of the death, to advise an informant who is choosing burial of the burial options available to them, thus allowing the family to be aware of what options are available to them prior to meeting with their chosen funeral director/funeral organiser.**
 - c) exploring the potential of widening the colour choice for the grave collars.**
 - d) an evaluation of the grave collar concept to be provided to the Place Select Committee prior to any potential further roll-out in other extensions to existing or new Borough cemeteries.**
- 4. Communication takes place with relevant local media outlets regarding the GPP (current and for the new concept), and the challenges to the Council around grave personalisation, in order to avoid future misrepresentation of situations.**

2.0 Introduction

2.1 This report outlines the findings and recommendations following the Place Select Committee's scrutiny review of Management of Memorials.

2.2 The main focus for this review was to initially understand the current policy around grave personalisation, maintenance of cemeteries and access requirements for such sites. The Committee then aimed to ascertain how the Council communicates with bereaved families in terms of current policy and how it manages complaints, before seeking to establish how effective the current policy is and determine if any amendments are required.

Reflecting these aims, the Committee undertook the following key lines of enquiry:

- What is the current Council policy regarding the management of memorials, and what rules are in place in relation to enforcement of unauthorised personalisation?
- How was the current policy initially publicised and how does the Council communicate with bereaved families in terms of its content?
- What are the key issues regarding the maintenance of the Borough's cemeteries?
- How effective is the current policy? What are the key issues/concerns being raised and are these pertinent to specific geographical locations?
- How does the Council deal with complaints in relation to unauthorised memorialisation and its impact on maintenance, access and other cemetery visitors?
- Is there a need for changes to the current policy, and if so, what are the identified options?

2.3 The Committee took evidence from the Council's Registration and Bereavement Services/Community Services teams, incorporating feedback from cemeteries maintenance staff (including the Council's Cemeteries Superintendent).

3.0 Background

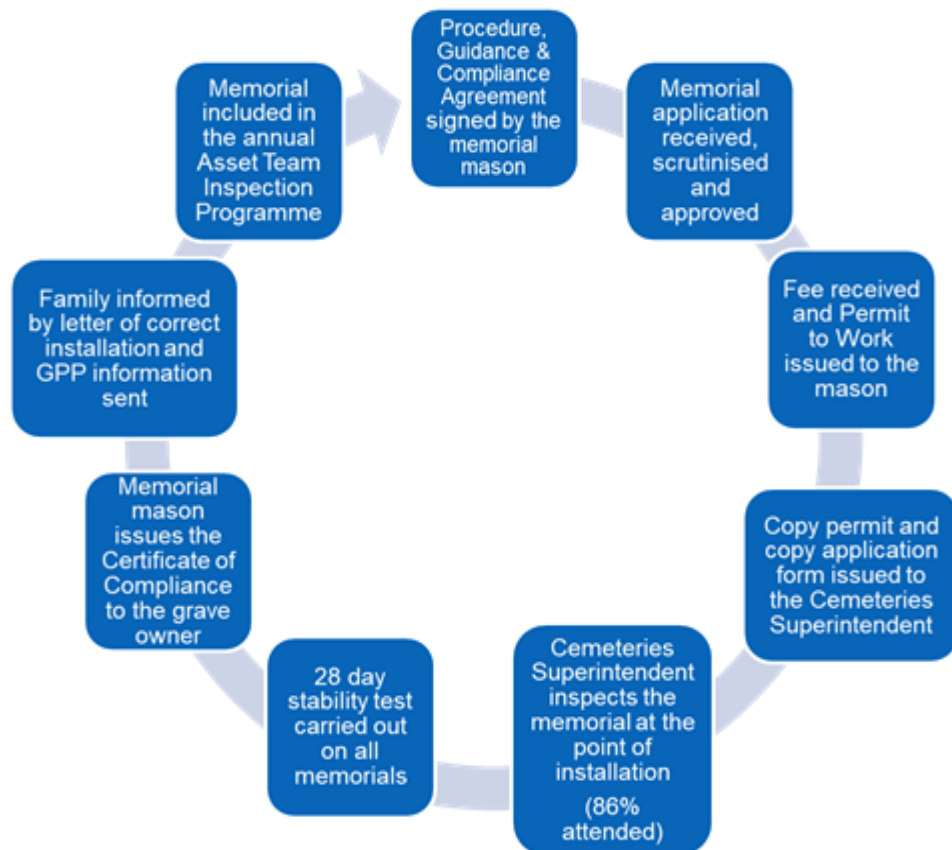
- 3.1 Stockton Council ceased approval of fixed, permanent kerb-sets on all graves in 1969 following the adoption of the then much preferred lawn graves, where no items were permitted to be placed on the actual grassed part of the grave. Approximately 15 years ago, however, the Council recognised that some families needed to tend and care for their family graves by the placing of personal items, which reflected the personality and character of their loved ones.
- 3.2 The Council also acknowledged and fully understood its duties under health and safety legislation to ensure that neither its own employees, nor the public, were exposed to risk from potentially dangerous memorials when visiting the Borough's cemeteries and closed churchyards.
- 3.3 In 2007, the Environment and Regeneration Select Committee gave detailed consideration to the future development of the Borough's cemeteries and the management of memorials, taking into account a wide range of issues and relevant information. Consequently, a number of recommendations were made, and for the purposes of this review, the most pertinent of these were:
- Memorial masons should be required to attain professional accreditation and comply with more stringent Council controls;
 - To allow an area, at the head of the grave (approx. 25% of the total grave space), to be used for personalisation (implemented in April 2010);
 - To enforce the removal of unauthorised items placed on graves, following an appropriate period of notice to the grave owner(s) (person/s who is granted the Exclusive Right of Burial & Right to Erect a Memorial);
 - To employ an additional member of staff to control the activities of memorial masons within the cemeteries and to deal with enforcement issues (appointed September 2009);
 - To carry out an extensive publicity campaign to raise awareness of these new Council policies (commenced October 2008 – ongoing).
- 3.4 The new policy was implemented in a sensitive way over a five year period. Since the introduction of Council policy, however, it has yet to be assessed/scrutinised for how it is being managed, how it is being received by bereaved families, visitors and cemetery users, and whether any amendments or additional choices are required to meet with public opinion.
- 3.5 Whilst the inspection and safety of memorials and control measures for memorial masons within cemeteries has greatly improved since the introduction of the Council policy, criticism of maintenance and access (particularly for the excavation of graves), together with the Council's approach to the 'light touch' enforcement of non-compliance cases to the Grave Personalisation Policy, both for and against, is still being received. Bereaved families, particularly recently bereaved, can become extremely distressed and emotional when they are unable (or feel they are unable) to personalise and memorialise their family grave in their own special way. Likewise, those families who have chosen a lawn grave and whose preference is to have an orderly, tidy and well-maintained grave for their loved one feel this is jeopardised and penalised by the fact that the Council is not fully enforcing the policy.

4.0 Findings

Current Management of Memorial Masons

- 4.1 In response to the 2007 Environment and Regeneration Select Committee recommendations, memorial masons now:
- Register with either the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons (BRAMM) or the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) and hold a valid licence to fix;
 - Fully adhere to the provisions of the Council's memorial application process;
 - Provide the Council with copies of risk assessments, current health and safety policies and evidence of public liability insurance cover;
 - Arrange appointments for all memorial removals and installations;
 - Issue a Certificate of Compliance to the grave-owner, following installation of the memorial.
- 4.2 To manage these new procedures, in 2016, the Council appointed a Cemeteries Superintendent, whose duties include:
- Checking each written memorial application for compliance;
 - Attending with masons to oversee all memorial installations and removals;
 - Receiving the mason's Permit to Work (which acts as the mason's 30-year assurance of compliance and guarantee of stability, and also serves as the Council's guarantee);
 - Carrying out an inspection for stability 28 days after installation of each memorial;
 - Instigating disciplinary action against masons when necessary (depending on the nature of the offence, they could ultimately be banned from working in the Borough's cemeteries for an initial six months, and could be reported to BRAMM/NAMM (regulatory bodies) – it was noted that a number of masons have warnings on their file);
 - Working in partnership with the Asset Management Team in the implementation of their rolling memorial inspection programme.
- 4.3 The Committee were shown a process map for the installation of memorials (see below). It was noted that since these new procedures have been adopted, they have been very successful, and have afforded complete oversight of the safe installation of headstones throughout the Borough's cemeteries.

Process map for the installation of memorials



- 4.4 The issue of unauthorised professionally-fixed kerbs was highlighted, particularly the difficulties in identifying who is responsible for installing them – the masons doing this work do not put their name on the kerb, making it impossible to trace. Members queried whether receipts given to families for any such work undertaken could be requested, but were informed that families have previously been reluctant to say who they have used if an unauthorised kerb has been installed on their behalf.

Current Grave Personalisation Policy (GPP)

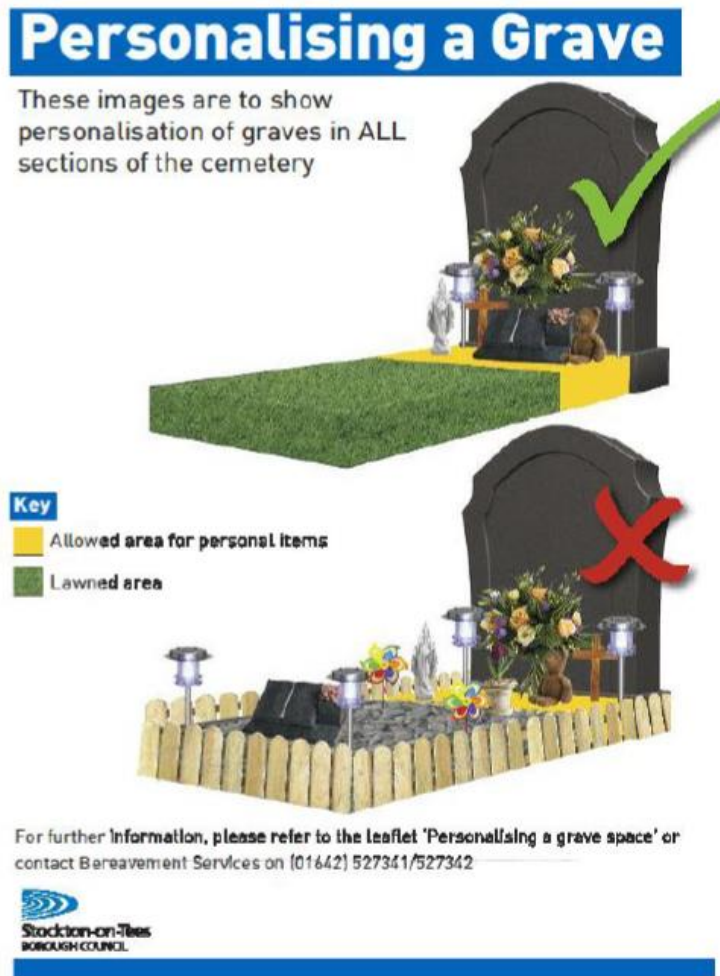
- 4.5 Grave personalisation is often a controversial subject. Many families do find comfort in tending and tidying a grave, as an act of care and respect. They may place personal items on a grave to reflect the personality and character of a loved one. Other families may choose not to personalise at all.
- 4.6 Whilst the Council appreciates the benefit to families in being able to personalise a grave, it must also take into account the difficulties which are often (quite inadvertently) caused in excessive instances of the practice, particularly when graveside kerbs are installed. Unfortunately, kerbs, edging stones, fences, chippings, ornaments and toys placed over the grave space may all create access and operational difficulties. The GPP is a way of allowing families to place a measure of personalisation which does not result in these concerns.

- 4.7 For the policy to succeed, it must be brought to the attention of grave-owners and cemetery users in a timely fashion. There are a number of opportunities to do so throughout the bereavement process:

Before Placement of the Memorial

The staff of Bereavement Services highlight the provisions of the GPP from the very outset of their involvement with bereaved families, and continue to promote it throughout the grave purchase process.

- All grave-owners are required to complete a Notice of Interment form prior to burial. This document contains a section, to be signed by the grave-owner, which specifically details the allowable personalisation area, and the types of item not to be placed therein, including kerbs.
- In respect of new graves, the Grant or Ownership paperwork contains explanatory text regarding the GPP.
- Following the funeral, all grave-owners are sent copies of the Council's 'Personalising a Grave Space' leaflet (see Appendix 1) and graphic sheet (below).
- In addition, this graphic is used as a poster, which is prominently displayed throughout the cemeteries.
- The Council's Rules and Regulations in Respect of the Borough Cemeteries refer specifically to the provisions of the GPP.
- The Bereavement Services website contains full details of the GPP, with links to the Rules and Regulations and information leaflets.



After Placement of the Memorial

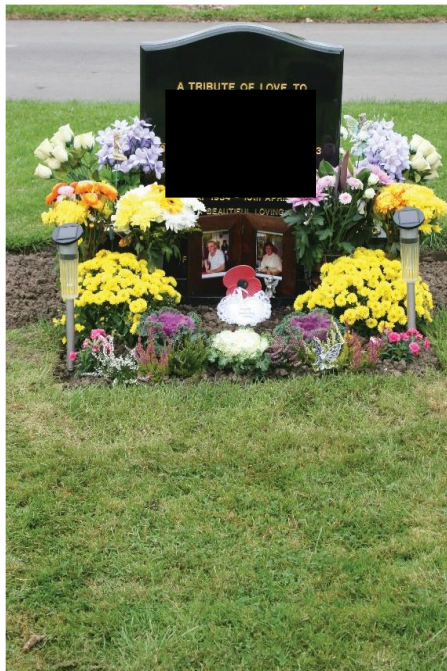
The Cemeteries Superintendent is present at the installation of every memorial. After installation, he writes to every grave-owner:

- To confirm that the fixing has been properly carried out;
- To advise grave-owners to expect the mason's Certificate of Compliance;
- To advise as to the forthcoming 28 day stability test;
- To remind grave-owners of the GPP and explaining the reasoning behind it;
- Enclosing further copies of the Council's GPP leaflets.

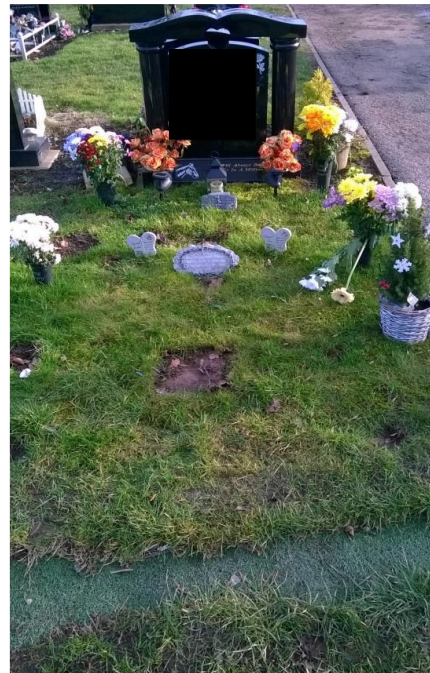
Management of the Grave Personalisation Policy (GPP)

4.8 The Committee were provided with visual examples of the different categories of grave personalisation which demonstrated those graves considered fully compliant with the GPP, those which were partially compliant, and those that were deemed not compliant.

- Categories 1 & 2 (No kerbs or edging) – fully compliant with nothing at all on the grave (Category 1), or with a small number of easily removable items outside the personalisation area (Category 2).

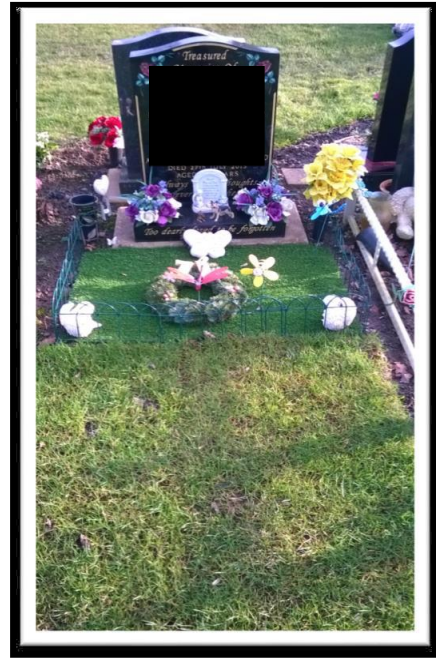


Category 1



Category 2

- Category 3 (Kerbs or edging at the head of the grave only) – partially non-compliant, with unauthorised kerbs around part of the grave, and a small number of unauthorised items within.



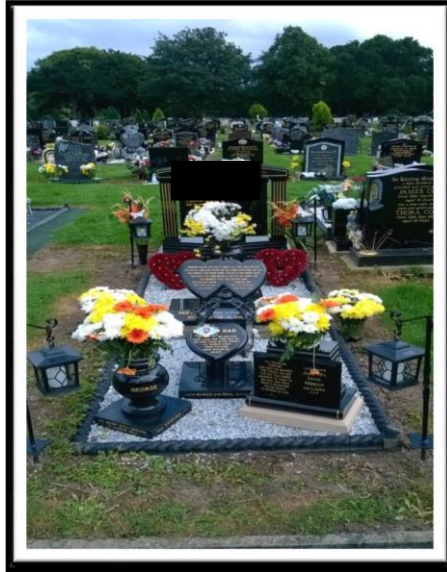
Category 3

- Category 4 (Kerbs or edging around the whole grave space and items within) – non-compliant, with unauthorised 'DIY' kerbs on the whole of the grave, and a large number of unauthorised items within.



Category 4

- Category 5 (Kerbs or edging, with items inside and outside) – non-compliant, with unauthorised kerbs on the whole of the grave, and a large number of unauthorised items placed inside and outside the kerbs.



Category 5

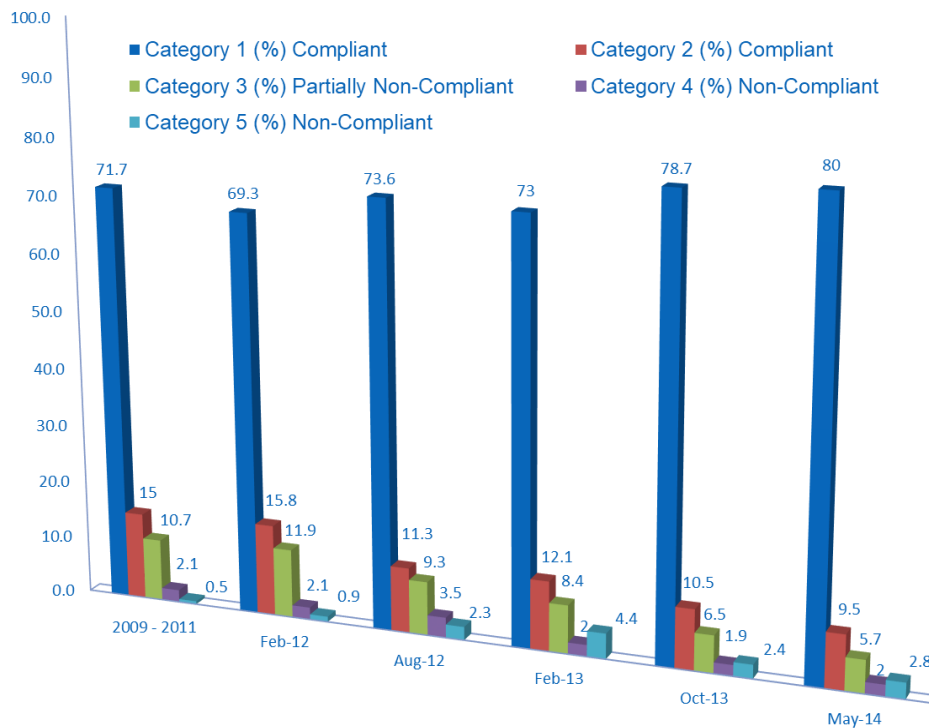
Effectiveness of the current GPP

4.9 As part of the Committee's aim to determine the effectiveness of the current GPP, the results of the last audit (January 2017) of the level of grave personalisation across all five of the Borough Cemeteries was presented. Of the 59,651 graves audited:

- 98% (58,466) were compliant, with either no personalisation at all, or where families have placed a few items outside the personalisation area at the head of the grave (Categories 1 and 2);
- 1.8% (1,053) were partially compliant (Category 3) where families have chosen to personalise a small area at the head of the grave:
- 0.2% (130) were non-compliant, with families choosing to place kerbs on the full length of the grave, and filling them with many items (Categories 4 and 5).

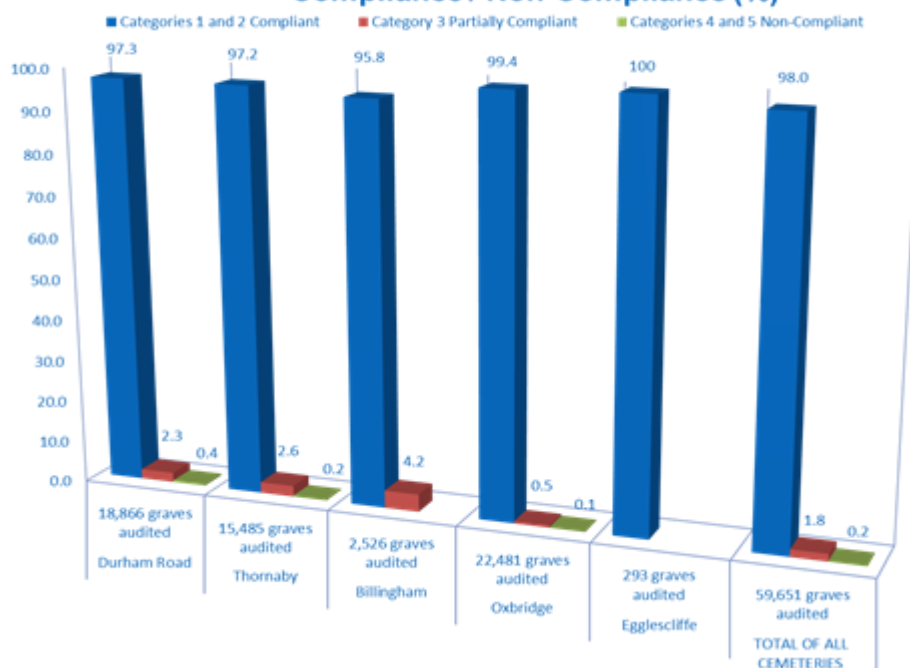
These figures indicated a continuing upward trend in compliance when compared against audit data from 2009-2014 regarding the percentage of compliance in relation to new graves on lawned sections. In 2009-2011, 86.7% of graves were compliant (categories 1 and 2), rising to 89.5% in May 2014.

New Graves Audited on Lawned Sections – 2009 to 2014 Compliance / Non-Compliance (%)



4.10 The January 2017 audit also revealed high grave personalisation compliance (Categories 1 and 2) across all five Borough cemeteries – this ranged from 95.8% in Billingham (lowest percentage of compliance) to 100% in Egglecliffe. The highest percentage of partial compliance (Category 3) was at Billingham (4.2%) and the highest level of non-compliance (Categories 4 and 5) was at Durham Road, Stockton (0.4%).

Full Audit of all Graves – January 2017 Compliance / Non-Compliance (%)



- 4.11 The data suggests that the implementation of the GPP has been largely successful, with an overall low incidence of non-compliant personalisation across all five cemeteries. Encouragingly, personalisation in Categories 4 and 5 is particularly low, at 0.2%. While Category 3 is slightly more common at 1.8%, this level of personalisation is generally more manageable, and does not always bring about the difficulties associated with more extensive placement. Furthermore, when compared to the data from previous years, there is a clear downward trend in the placement of non-compliant personalisation which would indicate that efforts to promote the GPP have met with success.
- 4.12 Nonetheless, it should also be borne in mind that whilst the extent of personalisation may appear minor, the 2017 figure of 2% non-compliance actually equates to 1,183 individual graves, the majority of which are located in the most recent and frequently used sections of the cemeteries, and therefore have the potential to cause the most disruption.

Enforcement

- 4.13 In 2009, the complaints of a small, but distressed, minority brought about extremely negative publicity in connection with an improvement scheme to the Garden of St. Francis (the babies' garden in Durham Road Cemetery).

“Anger at Stockton Council cemetery decision

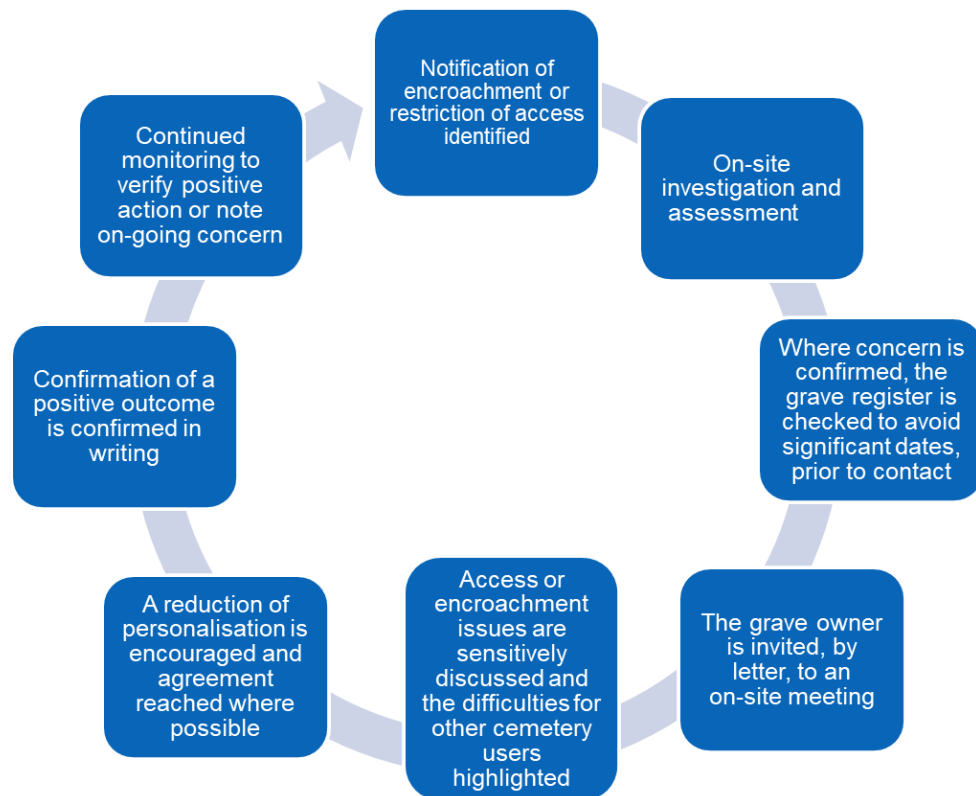
BEREAVED parents have reacted in anger and disbelief to the banning of sentimental tokens from a baby memorial garden”

- Evening Gazette - 13 January 2009

This resulted in a more sensitive approach to the issue of enforcement. Bereavement Services' current practice is to adopt a softer position, working sensitively with families, to attempt to bring about improvement when access or encroachment concerns arise:

- Personal telephone calls or brief letters, asking to meet families, paying heed to significant dates, and allowing a respectful grieving period;
 - Meeting with families, on-site, being mindful of the pain and distress they are experiencing;
 - Discussing how access is restricted due to placed edging, and allowing time to digest this information;
 - Endeavouring to reach an agreement on the reduction of the kerbs or edgings.
- 4.14 The process can take time, and can take years to conclude, though numerous successes have been seen using this approach. A process map of the management of the GPP when issues arise was provided to Members confirming current practice (see below), and examples of reductions of 'DIY' stone surrounds, wooden surrounds and cremated remains garden grave surrounds were highlighted.

Management of grave personalisation process



- 4.15 However, even with such an approach, negative publicity may still ensue, as in one case highlighted to Members from September 2016 where the Council requested a meeting to discuss the removal of an unauthorised, professionally installed set of full kerbs in Durham Road cemetery.

“Family 'heartbroken' as council demands the remove kerb on young dad's grave

Stockton Council say rules are rules, but family of 'Marky' Rayner say they own the land - and should be allowed to do what they want

- Evening Gazette – 27 September 2016

Such media coverage is generally inaccurate, lacking in balance, and tends to focus on the distress of the families and individuals in question, without addressing the legitimate concerns of the Council. In addition, these cases frequently generate a great deal of activity on social media, including the organisation of online petitions. Even a cursory reading of such material indicates that public opinion on the issues at hand is sharply polarised, but often reveals a considerable level of support and understanding for the Council's need to limit grave personalisation.

- 4.16 Other than where families have voluntarily reduced personalisation, there has been no physical removal of items or kerbs by Council Officers.

4.17 Additional difficulties present themselves when kerbs are professionally installed:

- They are placed by masons without Council authority or approval;
- They are usually designed to complement the headstone and form a single large memorial;
- They are expensive to purchase and install, so families are reluctant to remove or shorten;
- Such kerbs effectively become permanent;
- They present a greater challenge for Officers to work with the family, as was evidenced in the media in 2016;
- They have led to complaints from neighbouring grave-owners, seeking removal of the kerbs.

It was noted that if a formal application was submitted to the Council for this type of work, it would be rejected.

Complaints

4.18 The Committee were informed that, over the last three years, only three formal complaints had been made to the Council regarding grave personalisation – it was noted that all three incidences concerned placement of excessive personalisation by other grave-owners, rather than dissatisfaction over an inability to place sufficient personal items.

Financial year	Summary	Outcome
2016/17	Complaint regarding the placement of kerbs and appeal for its removal.	Not Upheld
2016/17	Full set of fixed marble kerbs on the grave adjacent which are restricting access.	Partially upheld
2017/18	Complaint about unsuitable items around the memorial headstones including solar lights, wind spinners, shepherds' crook lanterns (that are taller than the permitted height) and flags.	Not upheld

4.19 Members questioned if any feedback had been received from those grave-owners who refuse to conform to the GPP as to why they were not adhering to the stated guidance. It was reported that this can sometimes occur because others are not conforming (therefore they themselves do not see why they should follow the rules), and sometimes bereaved families feel that if they do not tend like others do they are not displaying the same level of love and respect to their loved ones as those of neighbouring graves.

The Long View

- 4.20 The first year of bereavement is usually extremely difficult for families, and is likely to see a number of the deceased's relatives wishing to leave flowers and other tokens of affection on the grave. Eventually a family may remove, and then choose not to replace, DIY kerbs and other personalisation once the items have deteriorated, or their need to visit becomes less pronounced. On other occasions, personalisation features such as wooden fences and novelty items may perish naturally over time and disappear, as the family ceases to regularly visit and tend the grave.



Above and below: same lawn section in Durham Road Cemetery showing change over time



Review of the Grave Personalisation Policy (GPP) – future options

- 4.21 The issue of grave personalisation is clearly divisive, with public opinion evenly split as to the extent to which it ought to be permitted, and also with

regard to subsequent methods of enforcement for non-compliance. Indeed, the issue of removal is so emotive that any form of enforcement has the potential to cause hugely disproportionate negative publicity – conversely, a failure to enforce invites criticism and complaint. It is, therefore, essential that the likely consequences of any policy of enforcement must be fully considered and evaluated.

4.22 The Committee was presented with a number of possible options for the management of personalisation:

1. Continuation of the ‘soft’ approach	
Essentially maintaining the status quo by continuing to concentrate on category 4 and 5 cases only, where access or encroachment is an issue, and attempting to persuade grave-owners to remove or reduce personalisation to an acceptable level.	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ A ‘tried and tested’ approach, which can work in many cases. ➤ Avoids outright confrontation, which can greatly upset many bereaved families, and result in potential negative publicity, or risk to Council employees. ➤ Often, when grave-owners are made aware of the difficulties caused by their personalisation, they become willing to assist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Some grave-owners simply refuse to cooperate. ➤ Lack of further sanction in absence of progress. ➤ Can result in Council appearing ineffectual. ➤ Working with families can take up a great deal of Officer time.

2. A ‘harder’ approach to professionally-fitted kerbs	
The Council could enforce the removal or reduction of professionally fixed kerbs, and also discipline any masons found to be supplying or installing them.	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sends a clear message that the Council is pro-active, and that regulations will be enforced. ➤ Will deter families from placing such kerbs in future. ➤ May also deter families from placing ‘DIY’ kerbs, and thereby lead to overall improvement across the board. ➤ Will please those families who do not approve of excessive personalisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Likely to prove a controversial move, generating a great deal of adverse publicity. ➤ Who will carry out the removal work? Where will the kerbs be stored? Potential personal risk to Council employees or contractors involved. ➤ Will cause genuine distress to families concerned. ➤ Does the Council enforce against pre-existing kerbs (post Grave Personalisation Policy 2009) or merely newly fitted ones?

	➤ Difficult to prove any 'case' against masons, in the absence of solid evidence.
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3. Blanket full enforcement	
<p>The Council could go further, and compel the complete reduction of all kerbs and surrounds (professionally fitted and DIY), within a given time-scale, providing due notice. The 'pros and cons' pertaining to the harder approach above would obviously be applicable here, albeit increased by a considerable order of magnitude, given the nature of the proposition. In addition:</p>	
Pros	Cons
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Could bring about a complete 'clean-up' of the cemeteries. ➤ Could eliminate the operational difficulties caused by excessive personalisation. ➤ Could provide a 'clean slate', discouraging ongoing personalisation, and simplifying future enforcement considerably. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Likely to result in a level of adverse publicity previously unseen. ➤ Real prospect of demonstrations and civil unrest. ➤ High level of personal risk to Council employees or contractors involved in the programme, both on site and in office premises. ➤ A considerable undertaking under any circumstances – audit data indicates that, as at January 2017, there were 1183 graves falling into categories 3, 4 and 5. ➤ Contacting so many grave-owners in advance would present difficulties, as a considerable number are likely to have changed address. ➤ Widespread genuine distress to grave-owners. ➤ Considerable use of Officer time and resources.

New Grave Personalisation Concept for New Cemeteries and Extensions to Existing Cemeteries

4.23 The Council's grave personalisation data, gathered in audits of the existing cemeteries, clearly demonstrates that many families wish to place kerbs, albeit in varying sizes. It is equally apparent that many other families are satisfied with simple lawn graves, therefore is it possible to satisfy both groups, whilst also addressing the operational difficulties that often result from excessive personalisation? The extension to Durham Road Cemetery offers

a 'clean slate' which can be used to develop fresh ideas and concepts, specifically designed to address these issues.

4.24 In partnership with the Council's Horticultural and Cemeteries Teams, a new model has been developed, tailored to meet the needs of all bereaved families, which will also offer significant operational improvements. In summary:

- The size of all full-size adult graves will be increased from 4' x 9' to 5' x 10', to accommodate increasingly larger coffins, to limit the movement of grave walls during excavation, and to provide a greater space between graves for bereaved families (the Committee welcomed this proposal).
- Three distinct grave types will be offered, each permitting a different level of personalisation, and thereby providing the bereaved with greater choices as to the grave's ultimate appearance.
- Coupled with the section layouts, the new style graves should encourage compliance with the GPP, reduce access difficulties, and simplify maintenance and grass-cutting.

It is anticipated that this model will commence in the Durham Road Cemetery Extension and, if successful, rolled out across future cemetery developments.

4.25 Members were presented with a plan of the Durham Road Cemetery extension which is divided into six sections, each of which will contain graves of a particular type, with three distinct grave options available. Each of the three grave types permits a different level of personalisation (see Appendix 2).

4.26 A number of further considerations in respect of this new concept were outlined:

- It should be borne in mind that the scheme detailed above is intended for potential implementation in future burial grounds and extensions to existing cemeteries. It has the benefit of full advance planning and groundwork, and it will not be easily possible to retroactively apply this model to pre-existing cemetery sections.
- It is essential that families are made fully aware of the three new grave options at the point of purchase, and that they properly understand the level of personalisation applicable to each option from the very outset.
- In order to promote the new options, the intention is to provide promotional literature which sets out the available grave choices using clear text, coupled with attractive pictorial references (see Appendix 3).
- Successfully imparting this information will also require effective partnership liaison between the Registrar of Births and Deaths and the North Tees Mortuary and Bereavement Officers.
- For the concept to function as intended, a clear and well-publicised policy of enforcement will need to be in place to deal with any breaches of the GPP, and ideally authorising officers:
 - To write to grave-owners, requesting the removal of unauthorised items within a given time-period, and
 - To remove such items in the absence of a satisfactory response.

4.27 The Committee raised a number of comments and queries in relation to this new concept, and questioned the likelihood of families conforming to policy in

the new/extended parts of cemeteries when people are not conforming in the old existing areas (particularly if the Council is not enforcing the old areas). Assurance was provided that full enforcement would be undertaken from initial opening of the new Durham Road Cemetery extension.

- 4.28 Concerns were expressed around the option of full personalisation collars, and whether this offer would pose a tripping hazard for cemetery users. Members were informed that the section containing full collars will be designed to have a pathway between each grave, and that there will be sufficient space for people to walk.
- 4.29 The new collar design provides clarity on the space allowed for personalisation which may not be the case with the current policy as people may find the current 25% allowance difficult to measure. It was noted that the Council's Bereavement Service will continue to work with families to arrange the marking out of the grave when requested.
- 4.30 Members queried whether the colour restriction for the proposed collar may cause a problem – grave personalisation issues arise because people do not want the same. Officers confirmed that the feasibility of other colour options and costs can be explored, and noted that the collar has a 20-year guarantee which has been tried and tested as the product is currently used for grave markers.
- 4.31 The idea of an area within a cemetery where people can personalise in whichever way they want, without the Council being liable, was suggested. However, the Committee were made aware that the responsibility of the overall safety within a burial ground lies with the burial authority, which has responsibilities under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Occupiers Liability Act 1957 to ensure that, as far as reasonably practicable, their sites are maintained in a safe condition.
- 4.32 Acknowledging the very personal nature of memorialisation, Members agreed with the notion of families having greater choice, but expressed concern that families would have to make a final binding decision so soon after the death of a loved one – trying to process these options could be challenging, and they may choose an option they later regret (which could then lead to breaches of the grave personalisation policy). Officers re-iterated the role of the Council's Registration and Bereavement Services Teams in this new concept, principally to make immediate contact with a bereaved family so an informed choice about which grave type they wanted could be made. Awareness-raising, marketing and publicity was also highlighted to allow families to make informed decisions before a death occurs.
- 4.33 Since the different grave options have different costs, it was felt that there could be a risk that people may purchase a cheaper option and encroach over time – clear enforcement is needed, and enforcement must be prompt or else issues may spread quickly. Assurance was provided that full enforcement would be undertaken from the initial opening of the new Durham Road Cemetery extension.
- 4.34 Whilst noting the benefits of this new concept, Members also questioned if it would be more prudent to carry on with the current policy and continue trying to reduce non-conformity year-by-year, particularly as that approach is reported to have been successful since it was implemented. The Committee

were informed that these new proposals had been put forward by Officers who have lived this for many years, and that whilst some sites are not quite fit for purpose any longer, Stockton performs well when compared to other Local Authorities, even though people's grieving is changing. It was re-iterated that the new proposals would need to be enforced from day one (start as the Council means to go on), with emphasis put on the fact that this enforcement is for new sites (not intermingled with existing sites).

Summary

4.35 Audit data indicates that implementation of the Grave Personalisation Policy (GPP) has delivered a steady and continuing decrease in problematic grave personalisation. The Council's most recent information confirms that, of a total of 59,651 graves across the five cemeteries, only 2% featured non-compliant personalisation. Nonetheless, excessive grave personalisation, and particularly the fixing of kerbs, can lead to a number of issues:

- Operational Issues for Cemeteries Staff
 - Kerbs restrict the use of the mechanical excavator, resulting in reduced efficiency in grave preparation;
 - Kerbs require removal prior to the re-opening of a grave for a second burial (and possibly requiring the services of a mason);
 - Grass-cutting and general maintenance is hampered by kerb placement.
- Access Issues for Visitors
 - It becomes difficult for coffin-bearers to lower, and for mourners to attend at the graveside;
 - Wheelchair or disabled access may become impossible;
 - It becomes difficult for memorial masons to move headstones;
 - The likelihood of accidents is increased.

4.36 When problems do arise, they frequently attract disproportionate negative publicity, and usually require disproportionate effort to resolve. Accordingly, when considering the GPP, and in particular the scope of any enforcement action in existing cemetery sections, the Council needs to be mindful of the likely effect of such action, and weigh the potential benefits against possible negatives.

4.37 New concepts, implemented in future cemetery developments, might provide additional and/or complementary means of regulating and managing personalisation issues. It may be that the adoption of such concepts will require a separate, dedicated policy, dealing with their specific details, and operating in tandem with the original GPP.

It should be noted that in order to ensure the success of the new model (and regardless of decisions made in relation to enforcement in older cemetery sections), there is a requirement for a sufficiently robust policy of enforcement which is clear, fair, well-publicised, and applicable as of right.

5.0 Conclusion & Recommendations

- 5.1 The management of memorials is a particularly sensitive issue for Local Authorities to contend with. Families who are going through the grieving process following the loss of a loved one have a diverse and sometimes conflicting range of memorial and grave personalisation needs, and this brings considerable challenges when trying to adopt and enforce an agreed policy, whilst at the same time respecting the wishes of the bereaved.
- 5.2 Since the new procedures were initiated following the agreed recommendations from the 2007 review of the Management of Memorials, the Council has successfully worked with memorial masons to ensure the safe installation of headstones throughout the Borough's cemeteries. The appointment of a Cemeteries Superintendent in 2016 has further enhanced the oversight of this process. However, concerns remain over cases of unauthorised professionally-fixed kerbs being covertly installed, and the difficulties in identifying who is responsible for this work.
- 5.3 Grave personalisation remains a controversial subject, with some families wishing to place items on a grave to reflect the personality and character of a loved one, and other families choosing not to personalise at all. The Council recognises and respects this spectrum of feeling, and has to manage these varied preferences whilst being mindful of maintenance and access requirements for cemetery-users, including cemetery staff, funeral directors, masons and grave-owners (person/s who is granted the Exclusive Right of Burial & Right to Erect a Memorial).
- 5.4 The introduction of the current Grave Personalisation Policy (GPP) has proved to be an effective tool in managing the levels of grave personalisation across the Borough's five cemeteries. Compliance with the parameters set out within this policy is extremely high (98% of 59,651 audited graves (January 2017)), and there has been a gradual rise in the level of compliance since its inception in 2010.
- 5.5 Whilst the implementation of the GPP has seen increasing conformity, the 2% who are not compliant represent 1,183 individual graves, the majority of which are located in the most recent and frequently used sections of the cemeteries. In terms of enforcement, the Council adopts a 'soft-approach' when dealing with those families who go beyond the agreed levels of grave personalisation, working sensitively to attempt to bring about improvement when access or encroachment concerns arise. Although this can take considerable time, numerous successes have been achieved.
- 5.6 Looking ahead, the Committee were presented with a number of options regarding the future policy of grave personalisation management. However, such is the divisive and emotive nature of grave personalisation, it is highly unlikely that any one policy would eliminate all issues. Extending the current allowance (25%) for the grave personalisation area may find favour with some, yet for others this would still not be enough, as seen by the examples of encroachment onto other graves. Similarly, a harder approach to enforcing the current, or an amended, policy would be welcomed by many, yet would undoubtedly risk causing recriminations from grieving families, difficulties for cemetery staff (including their welfare), and result in further negative (albeit potentially unbalanced) media attention.

- 5.7 The Committee broadly welcomed the proposals for a new concept in the extension to Durham Road cemetery, providing greater choice to bereaved families through the offer of three distinct grave types, each permitting a different level of personalisation. Although this provides flexibility, it should be noted that people may be resistant to the option of a black-only collar, and the Council should therefore consider the possibility of widening their colour choice offer for grave collars.
- 5.8 The very high GPP compliance rate, allied to the successful working with those families who initially did not confirm to this policy, shows that current practice is effective – as such, in existing cemeteries, this policy should continue to be utilised. The implementation of a new concept in Durham Road will, however, require an alternative policy that clearly sets out the conditions for each grave option, with robust enforcement of this from the beginning – it is imperative that all users of the Durham Road cemetery extension are aware of and adhere to this separate policy, and have a respect for all grave spaces.

Recommendations

The Committee recommend that:

- 1. There be a continuation of the current Grave Personalisation Policy (GPP) (incorporating the ‘soft’ enforcement approach) in the five existing Borough cemeteries.**
- 2. Further work with memorial masons be undertaken to emphasise the problems with unauthorised professionally-fixed kerb sets and the impact of these on all cemetery-users, and for appropriate action to be taken against masons who knowingly sell items which are not approved or permitted in the Borough’s cemeteries.**
- 3. A separate, distinct policy be adopted for the offer of different grave types, initially in the new Durham Road cemetery extension (to operate in tandem with the current GPP), and for this to be effectively communicated to all cemetery-users before, and robustly enforced following, implementation. This would require:**
 - a) a thorough programme of awareness-raising across the Borough to inform relevant organisations within the funeral industry (e.g. funeral directors, memorial masons, North Tees Mortuary & Bereavement Team) and the public of these plans.**
 - b) the Registrars of Births and Deaths to work in partnership with the Bereavement Team. Registrars, following the registration of the death, to advise an informant who is choosing burial of the burial options available to them, thus allowing the family to be aware of what options are available to them prior to meeting with their chosen funeral director/funeral organiser.**
 - c) exploring the potential of widening the colour choice for the grave collars.**

Recommendations (continued)

The Committee recommend that:

- d) an evaluation of the grave collar concept to be provided to the Place Select Committee prior to any potential further roll-out in other extensions to existing or new Borough cemeteries.
- 4. Communication takes place with relevant local media outlets regarding the GPP (current and for the new concept), and the challenges to the Council around grave personalisation, in order to avoid future misrepresentation of situations.



Personalising a grave space

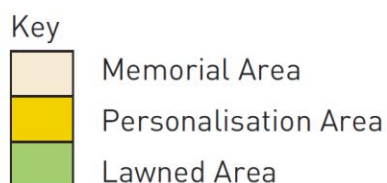
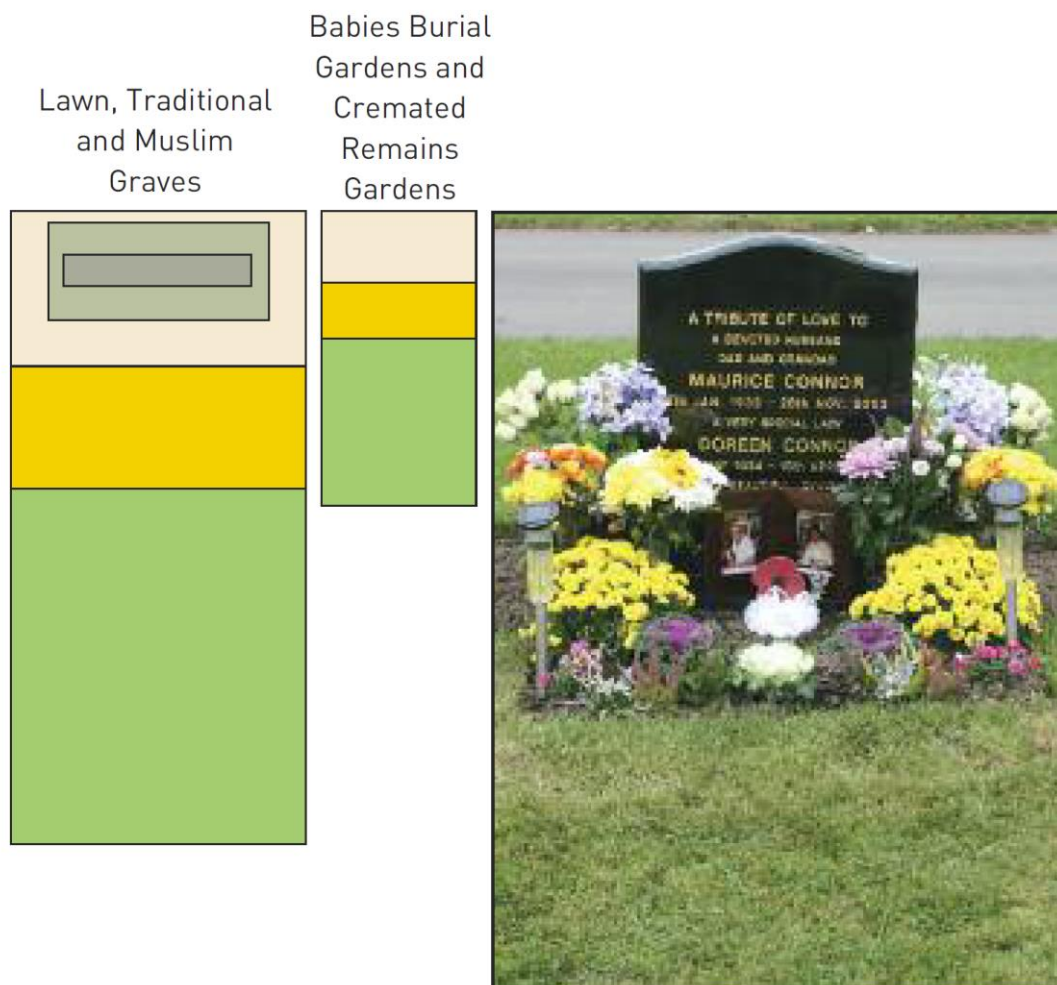
Personalising a grave space

The grave of a loved one is a special place where many of us find comfort in tending and tidying as an act of care and respect. Many families also choose to place personal items upon a family grave to reflect the personality and character of their loved one.

We appreciate the benefits of personalising a grave space, but we must also consider the feelings of families who have chosen not to personalise a grave or have placed just a small number of items. We also need to ensure that the cemetery staff are able to carry out grounds maintenance and that coffin bearers and mourners can walk safely and easily to graveside for funerals.

What area is available for personalisation?

The actual area available is dependent upon the type of grave; for Lawn, Traditional and Muslim graves, this area is 1'9" (53cm) x 4' (122cm) and for Cremated Remains Gardens and Babies Burial Gardens, the area is 9" (23cm) x 2' (60cm). These dimensions are shown in the diagram below and illustrated in the photograph.



Following a funeral

Where a burial has recently taken place, there will usually be more floral tributes than can be placed within the personalisation area; these will only be removed by the Council when they become spent.

As soon as possible following the funeral, the cemeteries staff will turf or seed the whole of the grave space. Any floral tributes will be temporarily moved to allow turfing and replaced following the completion of the works.

After approximately 3-months following the burial, only the personalisation area should be used for flowers. Vases and flower holders made from glass, porcelain or other fragile materials should not be used.

We understand, however, that during significant dates such as religious festivals or anniversaries you may need to place floral tributes or wreaths outside of the personalisation area.

How will I know exactly how much of the grave can be personalised?

The cemetery staff will mark out the personalisation area on individual graves by request. Where the whole of the grave space is grassed, the cemeteries staff will remove the turf from the agreed area ready for planting.

To arrange for the personalisation area to be marked out on your family grave, speak to a member of the cemeteries staff or telephone Bereavement Services on (01642) 527341/42.

What kind of plants should I use to personalise this area?

We recommend that planting is restricted to bedding plants, alpines and flowering bulbs to avoid plants quickly out-growing the personalisation area.

Conifers and other fast-growing shrubs should not be planted within the personalisation area, as these can not only hide a memorial, but also weaken the foundations, which could lead to damage to the memorial.

What personal items are not allowed?

Stockton Council has endeavoured to develop a policy that will be acceptable to both the families that wish to personalise a grave space and those who object to the placement of personal items.

A small number of personal items may be placed within the personalisation area, to allow a degree of variety for families personalising graves and to ensure that the carefully chosen personal items can be appreciated fully by visitors.

The types of items that are not permitted are:

- Fences, edging stones and other surrounds
- Gravel and other decorative chippings
- Glass, porcelain, brittle plastics or other fragile items
- Items that make a noise
- Balloons

In order to prevent memorials being hidden, height restrictions on the items that are placed are also in effect. Items placed on lawn and traditional graves should be no taller than 12" (30cm) and for cremated remains and babies burial gardens, no taller than 6" (15cm).

What if a grave is personalised outside of the agreed area?

Where possible, the Council's Cemeteries Inspector will move items to the personalisation area, but we may not always be able to do so, especially where a large number of items are present.

In these cases, Bereavement Services will notify you asking for items to be moved and placed in the personalisation area within 14 days. If, after 14 days, items are still present outside of the personalisation area, the items will be carefully removed, labelled and stored for your collection. We will try to allow some flexibility around significant dates such as religious festivals and anniversaries.

Arrangements for collection can be made by contacting Bereavement Services on (01642) 527341/42. Items, which have not been collected after 3-months will, unfortunately, need to be disposed of.

What if items or plants within the personalisation area have been identified

Again, the Cemeteries Inspector may remove any items or plants that do not fall within our guidelines, but will make every effort to do so with the greatest of care and avoiding significant dates. Where items are removed from the personalised area, we will notify you by post and place a notice on the grave space.

To be able to contact grave owners, it is very important that Bereavement Services are informed of any changes of address.

What if I am not sure if an item or plant is suitable?

If you are unsure about any item or plant, please either ask a member of staff at the cemetery, or telephone the Bereavement Services Team on (01642) 527341/42.

For further information about the range of leaflets we have available, please contact:

Bereavement Services
The Register Office
Nightingale House
Balaclava Street
Stockton-on-Tees
TS18 2AL

Telephone: (01642) 527341/42

Fax: (01642) 527725

Email: bereavement.services@stockton.gov.uk

www.stockton.gov.uk/bereavementservices

www.stocktonroots.co.uk

APPENDIX 1: SBC Leaflet – Personalising a Grave Space

If you would like this information in any other language or format for example **large print** or audio please contact 'Bereavement Services' (01642) 527341/42.

إذا كنت ترغب الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغات أو بأشكال أخرى على سبيل المثال بالطبعة الكبيرة أو بالشرط المسجل فالرجاء الإتصال 'بدايفرستي نيم' [Bereavement Services] على هاتف رقم 01642 527341/42. ARABIC

欲要這份資訊的其它語言版或其它版式例如大字體印刷/錄音帶，請致電 01642 527341/42 接洽 '多元化隊' (Bereavement Services) MANDARIN

اگر شما این اطلاعات را به زبان یا شکل دیگری مثلاً چاپ بزرگ یا بصورت صدا میخواهید لطفاً با تیم دایورسیتی (گوئاگوئی) [Bereavement Services] یا شماره 01642 527341/42 به تماس شوید FARSI

Si vous souhaitez obtenir ces informations dans d'autres langues ou sous un autre format, par exemple, en gros caractères / version audio, veuillez contacter l'équipe "Bereavement Services" au n° 016 42 52 73 41/42 FRENCH

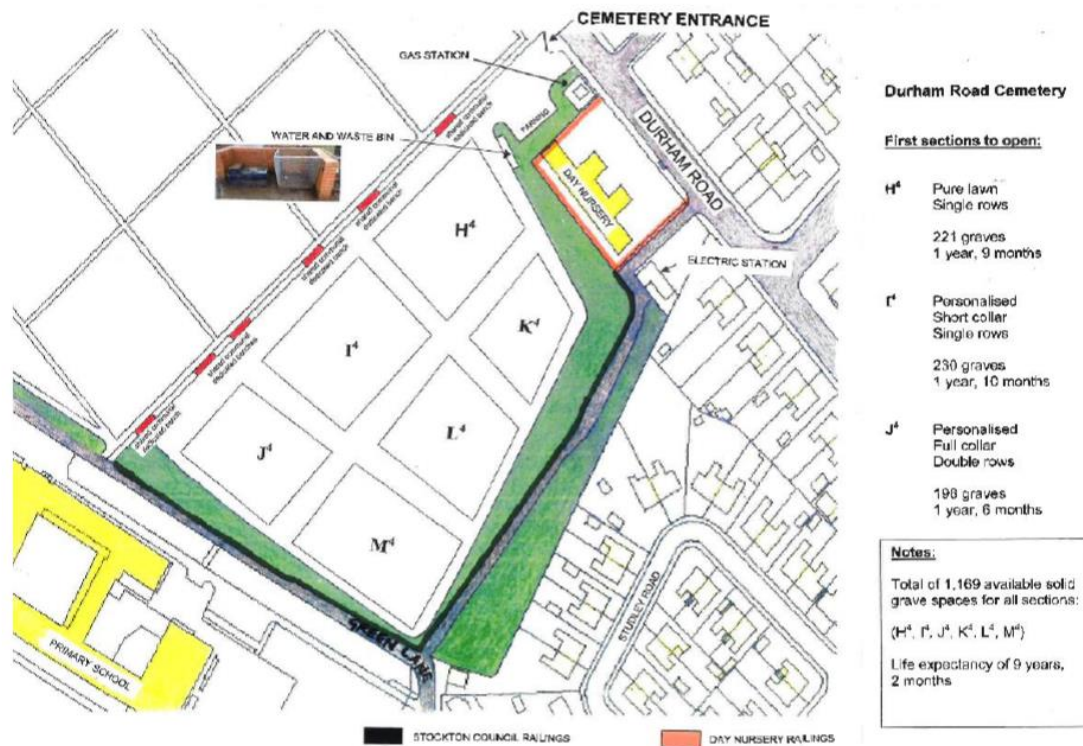
نه گهر جهزت لى به نهم زانباريه به ده سنتت بکه و نبت به زمانه کابى تر بان به شيوه يه کى تر بو نمونه چاپى گه وره/بان به تىبى نو مارکراو تکابه به يوه ندى بکه به 'تيمى دايفرستى' [Bereavement Services] له سه ره زماره ى ته له فون 01642 527341/42 KURDISH

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਬਣਤਰ ਜਾਂ ਬੋਲੀ ਵਿੱਚ, ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ ਵਿੱਚ ਜਾਂ ਟੇਪ/ਸੀ ਡੀ 'ਤੇ ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ 'Bereavement Services' ਨੂੰ 01642 527341/42 ਨੰਬਰ ਉੱਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ। PUNJABI

اگر آپ ان معلومات کو کسی بھی اور زبان یا انداز، مثلاً بڑے پرنٹ/آڈیو ٹیپ وغیرہ میں حاصل کرنا چاہیں، تو ڈاؤن لوڈ کریں (Bereavement Services) کو اس نمبر پر فون کیجئے 01642 527341/42 URDU

APPENDIX 2: Durham Road Cemetery Extension (Grave Options)

6.1 Plan of Durham Road Cemetery Extension



The extension is divided into six sections, each of which will contain graves of a particular type, with three distinct grave options available. Each of the three grave types permits a different level of personalisation, as detailed below.

APPENDIX 2: Durham Road Cemetery Extension (Grave Options)

6.2 Durham Road Extension – Option 1: Pure Lawn Grave



Consultation carried out for the purposes of the previous Scrutiny Review highlighted a definite 50/50 split in the public's views on grave personalisation. It follows that a very significant proportion of grave owners do not wish to place any form of personalisation at all, and would prefer the simplicity of a pure lawn grave. With this in mind, section H4 of the extension would be suitable for that purpose, and concrete plinths have been laid out in single rows to accommodate the installation of headstones.

There is a clear advantage to providing a facility of this kind, as it will immediately appeal to those who desire an understated appearance for their family grave and the surrounding area, without being troubled by the personalisation choices of their neighbours, who may otherwise have very different tastes in this regard. Properly managed, such a cemetery section should eliminate not only this common concern, but also complaints as to the encroachment of kerbs and/or other personal items.

APPENDIX 2: Durham Road Cemetery Extension (Grave Options)

6.3 Durham Road Extension – Option 2: Short Personalisation Collar



Data indicates that where the level of personalisation is non-compliant with the GPP, it is **Category 3** cases which are most prevalent (i.e. where an area at the head of the grave is surrounded by kerbs or edging). This would suggest that many families do not wish to personalise the whole grave, but require only a small area in which to place their personal items.

The Short Personalisation Collar should allow us to meet the needs of those families, whilst simultaneously enabling us to restrict personalisation to a level which does not cause operational difficulties. The collars will be placed in their own designated sections of the extension, meaning that families with similar views as to personalisation would be “neighbours”, thereby immediately reducing possible tensions. The uniform design of the collars should also prevent encroachment disputes, as all grave owners would receive the same easily identifiable personalisation area.

APPENDIX 2: Durham Road Cemetery Extension (Grave Options)

6.4 Durham Road Extension – Option 3: Full Personalisation Collar



The Full Personalisation Collar is designed to replicate the appearance of a full set of kerbs and should appeal to those families who prefer a traditional appearance to the grave, with an extended area in which to place personal items. By providing this option, we can satisfy those who wish to set apart and cover the whole grave area of their loved-one, regardless of whether they subsequently elect to fill the space with personal items.

The Full Personalisation Collar shares the same benefits as the short version, and should allow us to meet the needs of families, whilst simultaneously enabling us to restrict personalisation to a level which does not cause operational difficulties. The collars will be placed in their own designated sections of the extension, meaning that families with similar views as to personalisation would be “neighbours”, thereby immediately reducing possible tensions. The uniform design of the collars should also prevent encroachment disputes, as all grave owners would receive the same easily identifiable personalisation area.

APPENDIX 2: Durham Road Cemetery Extension (Grave Options)

Full Personalisation Collar – Safety Benefits

- The natural sinkage of a grave may be obscured by the placing of kerbs, inadvertently creating a potentially dangerous void.
- The **Full Personalisation Collar** is reinforced with tubular steel supports, a steel grid and heavy duty plastic board, and has been tested to withstand a weight of one tonne. The system provides invisible support, allowing full and safe access to grave-owners.



Tubular Supports and Grid



Heavy Duty Plastic Board



Weight Testing

APPENDIX 2: Durham Road Cemetery Extension (Grave Options)

6.5 Durham Road Extension – Option 4: Babies’ and Cremated Remains Graves



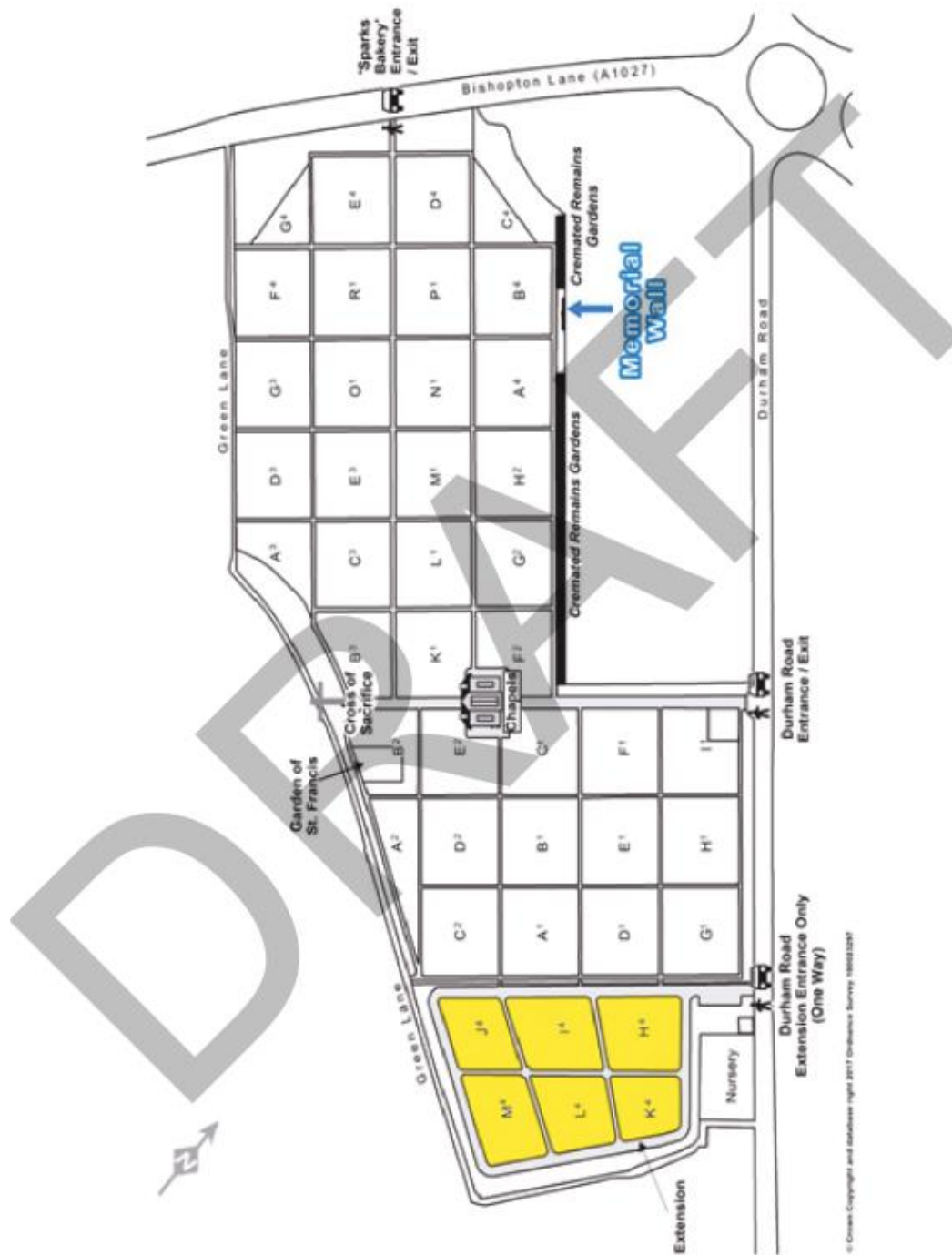
Each section of the extension will feature a single row, solely accommodating either cremated remains or babies’ graves.

Each such grave will be supplied with a smaller version of the Personalisation Collar detailed previously. The collars will be placed, side by side, at the head of each grave, forming neat rows and clearly setting out the area available for personalisation.

Durham Road Cemetery (Extension) Grave options



Durham Road Cemetery Extension



Introduction

Durham Road Cemetery (Extension)

We understand that each family may wish to tend their loved one's grave in their own special way, and we have taken great care to reflect this when planning the new extension to Durham Road Cemetery. The extent of grave personalisation is very much a matter for the individual, and so we are pleased to now offer a range of grave types which will provide families with a greater degree of personalisation choice than previously.

This leaflet explains the grave types that are available in the extension, their layout, and the level of personalisation which may be placed on each of them. In addition, we have tried to anticipate some of the questions you may have about the different options, and to answer them as straightforwardly as possible.

Although the new grave options do permit more extensive personalisation than in other sections of the cemetery, it is nonetheless important that personal items are not placed outside the designated areas. Such items can create significant difficulties in gaining access to neighbouring graves for mourners and coffin-bearers, and also for carrying out general grounds maintenance and operational work.

Stockton deserves cemeteries to be proud of. We believe that if we all work together, we can achieve well-maintained and attractive cemeteries which meet the needs of our bereaved families, allow ease of access for all visitors, and assist the work of our burial team.

Grave Options

As a starting point, the size of all full grave spaces within the extension has been increased in order to accommodate correspondingly larger coffins, and also to provide additional space between graves.

The extension is divided into six separate sections, which are highlighted on the map, opposite. Each section contains graves of a particular type, with three distinct types available. Each grave type allows a different level of personalisation, one of which we hope will accommodate your needs. Please see pages 4-8 for full details of the available options.

Pure Lawn Graves



Graves in this section are set out in single rows.

For those families who do not wish to place any personal items at all, and would prefer only a memorial set on a concrete plinth at the head of the grave, there is a section set aside for pure lawn graves.

The whole of the grave space and pathway will be kept turfed and must remain clear, for ease of access.

The placement of kerbs, surrounds or any personal items on the lawn is not permitted. If any such items are placed, then the Cemeteries Superintendent will write to you to request their removal. We will give you some time to do this, however, should the items remain, we will need to remove and store them for you. We will write to you again when the items are ready for you to collect.

This option includes:

- A full size grave measuring approximately 5ft (1.52m) wide x 10ft (3.05m) in length
- A concrete grave heading (which forms part of the total grave space) for the placement of a memorial
- A name plate, positioned at the centre of the 5ft width, on the concrete heading

Graves with a Short Personalisation Area



Graves in this section are set out in single rows.

The area at the head of each grave is enclosed by a collar surround, which clearly sets out the area available for personalisation. The surround is constructed of durable, weatherproof, recycled black plastic, which will require little maintenance. A porous membrane and quantity of polar whitechippings are placed within the surround, ready for you to then place a headstone and any personal items.

The collars are placed side by side, across the width of each grave, to form neat rows.

This option includes:

- A full size grave measuring approximately 5ft (1.52m) wide x 10ft (3.05m) in length
- One black short collar surround, measuring 5ft wide by 3ft in length
- A porous membrane and a quantity of polar white chippings
- A name plate, positioned centrally at the front of the collar

The purchase of this option includes one collar surround only. If, in the future you wish to renew it, Bereavement Services will be pleased to advise on purchase and delivery costs. Our full contact details can be found on page 11.

Graves with a Full Personalisation Area

Graves in this section are set out in back-to-back rows.

This option is designed for those families who prefer a larger designated area in which to place personal items, vases and pots. The appearance is more in keeping with the look of a traditional kerbed grave.



The designated personalisation area is enclosed by a collar surround measuring 5ft wide by 6ft 7 inches in length. The surround is constructed of durable, weatherproof, recycled black plastic, which will require little maintenance.



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Following burial, the grave area is fully reinforced at ground level with steel supports, and covered with a hard plastic sheet, before placement of polar white chippings. This will provide immediate access for families, and enable them to quickly place their personal items inside the surround, without having to wait for the grave to settle.



Graves are monitored for sinkage, and will be topped up accordingly. Topping up will require the temporary removal of the collar and any personal items within. Typically, a grave may take some time to fully settle. When the grave has settled, the steel reinforcement supports will be removed by the Cemeteries Team.

This option includes:

- A full size grave measuring approximately 5ft (1.52m) wide x 10ft (3.05m) in length
- One black full collar surround measuring 5ft (1.52m) wide x 6ft 7 inches (2.007m) in length
- Grave reinforcement system and hard plastic sheet
- A quantity of polar white chippings
- A name plate, positioned at the front of the collar surround

The purchase of this option includes one collar surround only. If, in the future, you wish to renew it, Bereavement Services can advise about purchase and delivery costs. Our full contact details can be found on page 11.

Cremated Remains and Babies' Graves



Each section of the extension has a single row, solely accommodating either cremated remains or babies' graves.

The area at the head of each grave is enclosed by a collar surround, which clearly sets out the area available for personalisation. The surround is constructed of durable, weatherproof, recycled black plastic, which will require little maintenance. A porous membrane and quantity of polar white chippings are placed within the surround, ready for you to place a memorial and any personal items.

The collars are placed side by side, across the width of each grave, to form neat rows.

This option includes:

- A grave space measuring approximately 3ft 3 inches (1m) wide by 4ft (1.22m) in length
- One black collar surround, measuring 3ft 3 inches (1m) square
- A porous membrane and quantity of polar white chippings
- A name plate positioned centrally at the front of the collar surround

The purchase of this option includes one collar surround only. If, in the future, you wish to renew it, Bereavement Services will be pleased to advise on purchase and delivery costs. Our full contact details can be found on page 11.

Questions & Answers

General

Q: Can I choose the location of a grave?

A: Whenever possible, we will do everything we can to accommodate your wishes, but please bear in mind the following:

Each of the grave options must be purchased in a section of the extension which has been set aside for graves of that particular type.

Graves will be prepared for burial on a “next-in-line” basis.

Should you wish to purchase a grave for future use (known as a “solid purchase”) then this will usually be the grave next-in-line, adjacent to one of the last graves used for burial.

Pure Lawn Graves

Q: Where can I place floral tributes for special and significant dates?

A: Floral tributes can be placed on the lawned part of the grave, and will only be removed once they have fully faded.

Q: I understand that personal items may not be placed on the lawned area. Can I plant flowers and shrubs on the lawned part of the grave instead?

A: No. This option does not allow for any planting at all, because the section is designed to accommodate pure lawn graves only.

Flowers or shrubs found planted on any part of the lawn will unfortunately need to be removed. The Cemeteries Superintendent will first write to you and request the removal of the plants. We will give you some time to do this, however, should the plants remain, we will need to remove and store them for you. We will write to you again when the plants are ready for you to collect.

Q: Am I allowed to place pots or small personal items on the concrete heading?

A: Yes. The concrete heading is part of the grave, and may be used for the placement of flower vases or a few small items, provided that they do not encroach onto the adjacent grave, or spill onto the lawn area.

If you would like to place more personal items, vases or pots, then you may wish to consider a grave with a personalisation collar, which offers a designated area for this purpose (please see pages 3-8 for more information).

Graves with Personalisation Collars

Q: When will you place the surround, membrane and chippings?

A: As soon as possible following the burial, typically within one week.

Q: Can I use different coloured chippings?

A: We have chosen white chippings to provide a neutral backdrop to the personal items which families choose to place. However, you may replace these chippings with ones of your preferred colour, at your own expense.

Q: Where can I get the same chippings to top up or replace the ones originally placed?

A: Bereavement Services can advise about replacement or top-up, and the relevant fee. You can find all our contact details on page 11.

Q: Can I plant flowers and shrubs in the personalisation area and/or around the outside of the surround?

A: No. All flowers, plants and shrubs, regardless of size, should be in vases or containers, and placed within the designated personalisation area, on top of the chippings.

Flowers or shrubs found planted on any part of the grave must unfortunately be removed. The Cemeteries Superintendent will first write to you and request removal, and we will give you some time to do this. However, should the plants remain, we will need to remove and store them for you. We will write to you again when the plants are ready for you to collect.

We understand that, in the case of graves with a short personalisation area, or cremated remains graves, larger floral tributes to mark special dates or anniversaries may need to be placed outside the collar, and will only be removed once they have fully faded.

APPENDIX 3: Draft SBC Leaflet – Durham Road Cemetery Extension

Q: If I have a lot of personal items, can I stand them on the collar surround and/or outside it?

A: No. The only permitted area for items is within the surround. If items are found to be outside the designated area, then the Cemeteries Superintendent will write to you, and request that you replace them in the personalisation area. We will give you some time to do this, however, should the items remain outside the surround, we will need to remove and store them for you. We will write to you again when the items are ready for you to collect.

The short surround will only accommodate a small number of items. If you feel that you, or your family members and friends would each like to place more personal items, then you may wish to consider the full collar, which offers a larger designated area (please see pages 6 to 7 for more information).

Q: How do you prepare the grave for a second or third burial?

A: The personalization collars are constructed with an easily removable front-piece. Once you have removed your personal items, the Cemetery Team will remove the front-piece and chippings to allow access to the grave and prepare for burial. The front-piece and chippings will then be replaced.

If we have not answered all the questions you may have about the grave options in this leaflet, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Bereavement Services who will be happy to help and assist further.

Bereavement Services (All Enquiries)

Visiting: Registration & Bereavement Services
The Register Office
Nightingale House, Balaclava Street
Stockton-on-Tees TS18 2AL
(No appointment is necessary)

Telephone: 01642 527341 or 527342

Email: bereavement.services@stockton.gov.uk

Updating Your Details ... Please help us to contact you

There may be times when we need to contact a grave owner. Please remember to update Bereavement Services should you move to a new address. It would also be helpful if you could provide us with any additional contact telephone numbers.

APPENDIX 3: Draft SBC Leaflet – Durham Road Cemetery Extension

If you would like this information in any other language or format for example **large print** or audio please contact
'Bereavement Services' 01642 527341/42.

إذا كنت ترغب الحصول على هذه المعلومات بلغات أو بأشكال أخرى على سبيل المثال
بالطبعة الكبيرة أو بالشريط المسجل فالرجاء الإتصال 'بدايفرستي تيم'
'Bereavement Services' على هاتف رقم 01642 527341/42

ARABIC

اگر شما این اطلاعات را به زبان یا شکل دیگری مثلا چاپ بزرگ یا بصورت صدا
میخواهید لطفا با تیم دایورسیتی (گونگونی) 01642 527341/42 با شماره 'Bereavement
'Services' به تماس شوید

FARSI

Si vous souhaitez obtenir ces informations dans d'autres langues ou sous un
autre format, par exemple, en gros caractères / version audio, veuillez
contacter l'équipe 'Bereavement
'Services' au n° 01642 527341/42

FRENCH

ئەگەر حەزرت لێ بە ئەم زانیاریە بە دەستت بکەوت بە زمانەکانی تر یان بە شێوەیەکی تر یۆ نمونە
چایی گەورە/یان بە تیبی تۆمارکراو تکایە بە یۆهەندی بکە بە 'تیمی دایفیرستی'
'Bereavement Services' لە سەر ژمارەکی ئە لە فۆن 01642 527341/42

KURDISH

欲要這份資訊的其它語言版或其它版式例如大字體印刷/錄音帶，請
致電 'Bereavement
'Services' 接洽 '多元化隊' 01642 527341/42

CHINESE

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਹ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਕਿਸੇ ਹੋਰ ਬਣਤਰ ਜਾਂ ਬੋਲੀ ਵਿੱਚ, ਵੱਡੀ ਛਪਾਈ ਵਿੱਚ ਜਾਂ ਟੇਪ/ਸੀ ਡੀ 'ਤੇ
ਚਾਹੁੰਦੇ ਹੋ ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ 'Bereavement
'Services' ਨੂੰ 01642 527341/42 ਨੰਬਰ ਉੱਤੇ ਫੋਨ ਕਰੋ।

PUNJABI

اگر آپ ان معلومات کو کسی بھی اور زبان یا انداز، مثلاً بڑے پرنٹ/آڈیو ٹیپ وغیرہ میں حاصل کرنا چاہیں، تو ڈائریکٹی ٹیم
'Bereavement Services' کو اس نمبر پر فون کیجئے 01642 527341/42

URDU