

# **Place Select Committee**

## **Cemeteries and Memorials**

### **Report 1: The Management of Memorials in Cemeteries – Re-visited**

**February 2018**



**Stockton-on-Tees**  
BOROUGH COUNCIL

## 1. Introduction and Scope of Review

Memorial management is primarily concerned with two distinct issues:

1. Ensuring that the memorials fixed on graves within cemeteries are safe, and do not pose a risk to visitors (including the public, Council employees and external contractors).
2. Managing the extent to which grave-owners are permitted to place personal items on graves, in order to prevent access and operational difficulties.

With regard to memorial safety, this is clearly an important issue – unstable memorials can kill. The Council needs to be sure that the memorials within its cemeteries are in a safe and stable condition, and that procedures are in place to take remedial action when necessary.

Grave personalisation is often a more controversial subject, the nature and extent of which may differ greatly, according to the tastes and preferences of the individual. 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.

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 all create numerous difficulties:

- They are operationally restrictive for grave preparation;
- They require removal prior to the re-opening of a grave for a second burial;
- It becomes difficult for coffin-bearers to lower, and for mourners to attend at the graveside;
- It becomes difficult for memorial masons to move headstones;
- Wheelchair or disabled access may become impossible;
- Grass-cutting and general maintenance is hampered.

Both of these issues have been previously considered under Scrutiny, with recommendations having been made and implemented. Further review will entail an assessment of the success (or otherwise) of those measures, and whether additional steps ought to be taken.

Members are asked to consider whether the existing policy for grave personalisation strikes the right balance between allowing the bereaved to individually grieve for their loved one's, whilst also ensuring that this isn't impacting upon other grave owners and also ensuring that cemeteries staff can manage, access and maintain the site to a high standard.

Areas to consider will include the current management and maintenance arrangements, an analysis of the extent of encroachment on graves, the sensitivities associated with any change or any other areas of best practice that may arise during this process. It is anticipated that a full analysis of the issues will be presented through a range of formal reports as well as site visits to several of our Cemeteries.