

Place Select Committee

Cemeteries and Memorials

The Management of Memorials and Grave Personalisation in Cemeteries: Overview and Evaluation

April 2018



Stockton-on-Tees
BOROUGH COUNCIL

1. Background – Previous Recommendations

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. For the purposes of the current review, the most pertinent of these recommendations were:

- Memorial masons should be required to attain professional accreditation and comply with more stringent Council controls;
 - See section 2 below
- 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);
- 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, and see also section 2 below
- To carry out an extensive publicity campaign to raise awareness of these new Council policies.
 - Commenced October 2008 – ongoing

2. Current Management of Memorial Masons

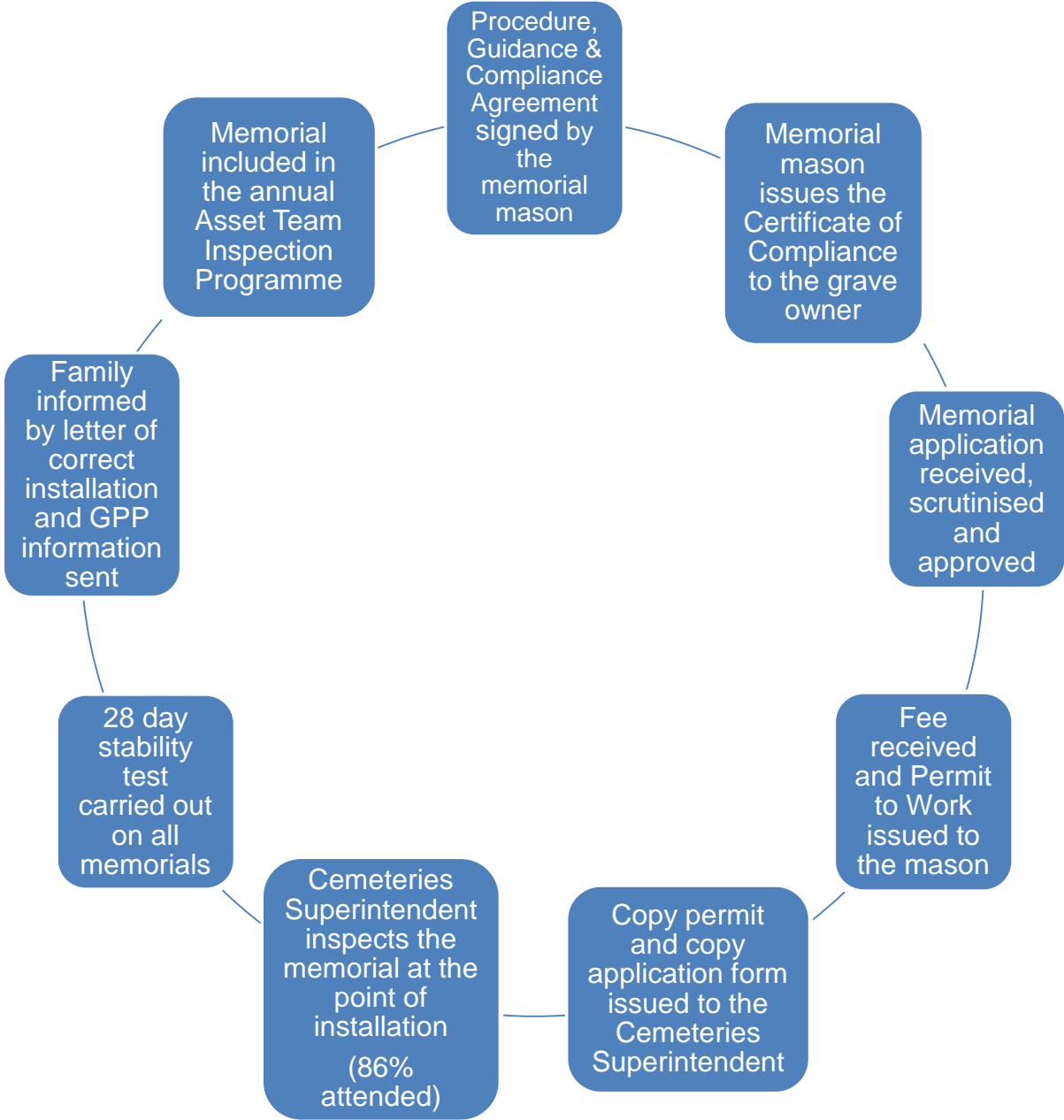
In response to these recommendations, memorial masons now:

- 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 our 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.

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);
- Carrying out an inspection for stability 28 days after installation of each memorial;
- Instigating disciplinary action against masons when necessary.
- Working in partnership with the Asset Management Team in the implementation of their rolling memorial inspection programme.

2.1 Process Map for the Installation of Memorials



These new procedures have proved extremely successful, and have afforded complete oversight of the safe installation of headstones throughout the cemeteries.

3. Raising Awareness of the Grave Personalisation Policy (GPP)

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.

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.

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:

3.1 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" leaflet (see Appendix "A") and graphic sheet
- 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.

Personalising a Grave

These images are to show personalisation of graves in ALL sections of the cemetery



For further information, please refer to the leaflet 'Personalising a grave space' or contact Bereavement Services on (01642) 527341/527342



3.2 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.

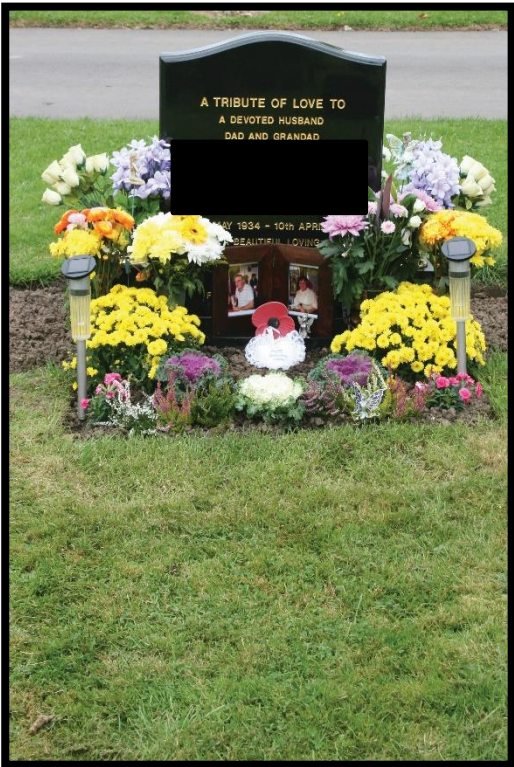
3.3 Management of the GPP – Categories of Grave Personalisation

The level of grave personalisation is categorised from **one** to **five**, as follows:

Categories 1 and 2:

No Kerbs or Edging

Category 1

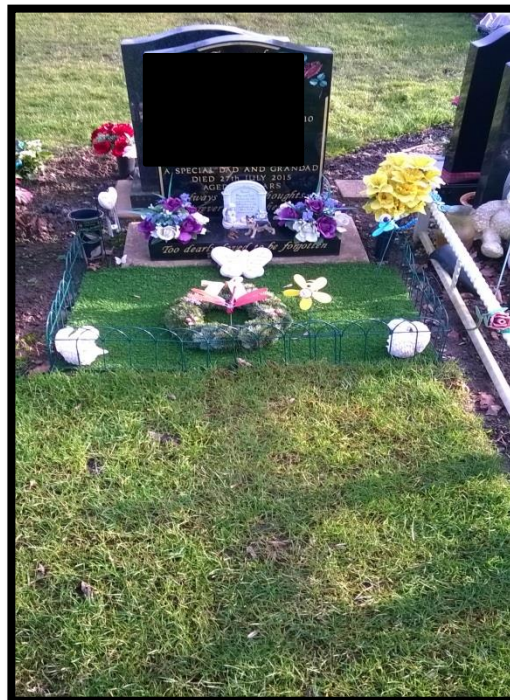


Category 2



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).

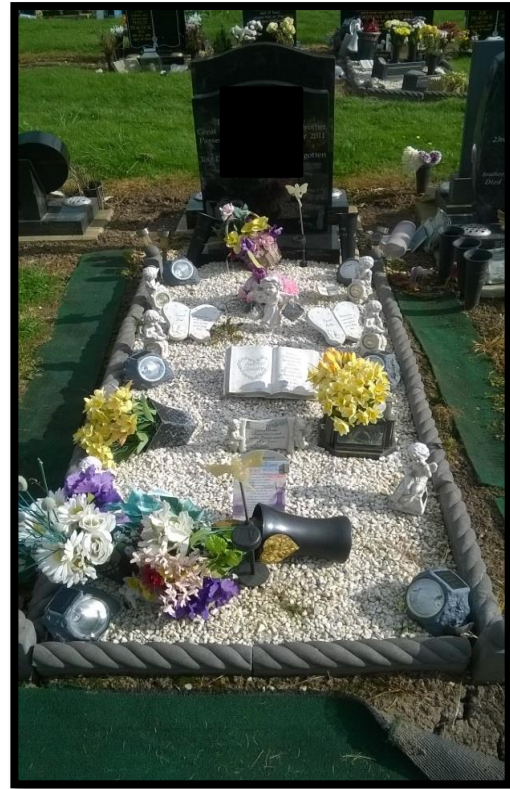
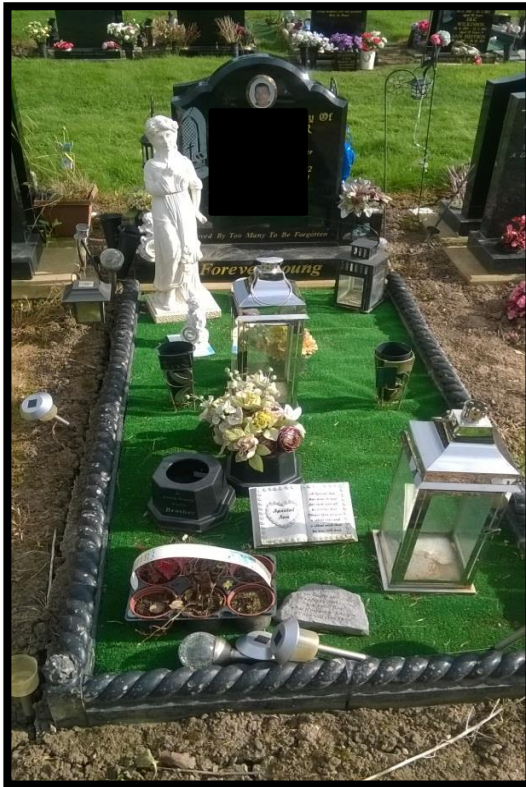
Category 3: Kerbs or Edging at the Head of the Grave Only



Partially non-compliant, with unauthorised kerbs around part of the grave, and a small number of unauthorised items within.

Category 4:

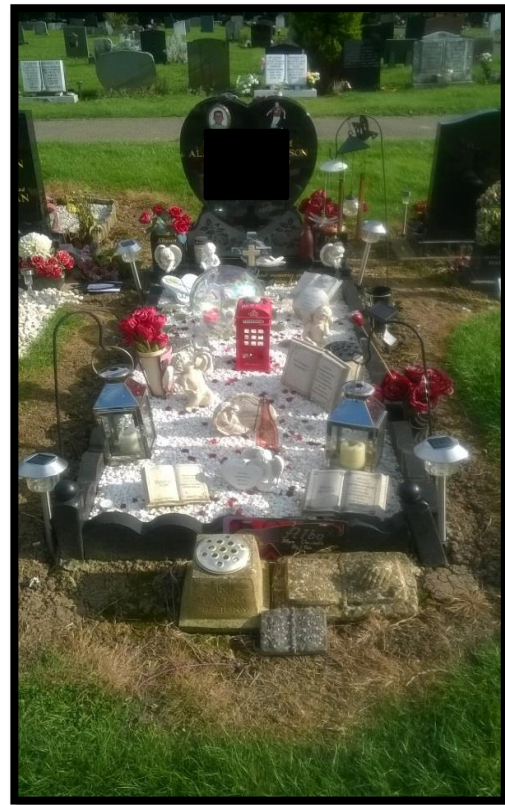
Kerbs or Edging Around the Whole Grave Space, and Items Within.



Non-compliant, with unauthorised “DIY” kerbs on the whole of the grave, and a large number of unauthorised items within.

Category 5:

Kerbs or Edging, with Items Inside and Outside

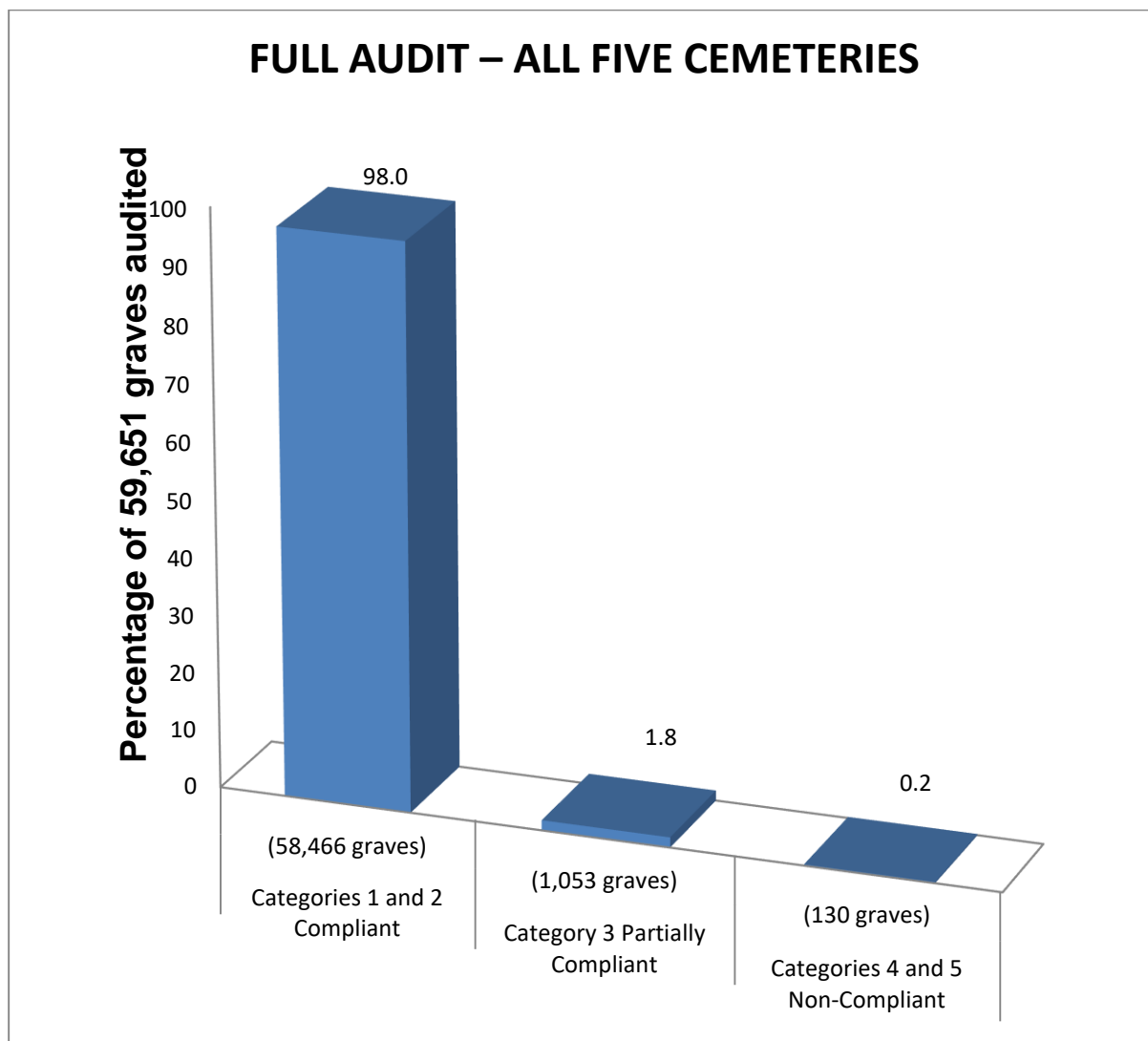


Non-compliant, with unauthorised kerbs on the whole of the grave, and a large number of unauthorised items placed inside and outside the kerbs.

3.4 January 2017 Audit of All Full-Size Graves

In January 2017 the level of grave personalisation across all five of the Borough Cemeteries was audited.

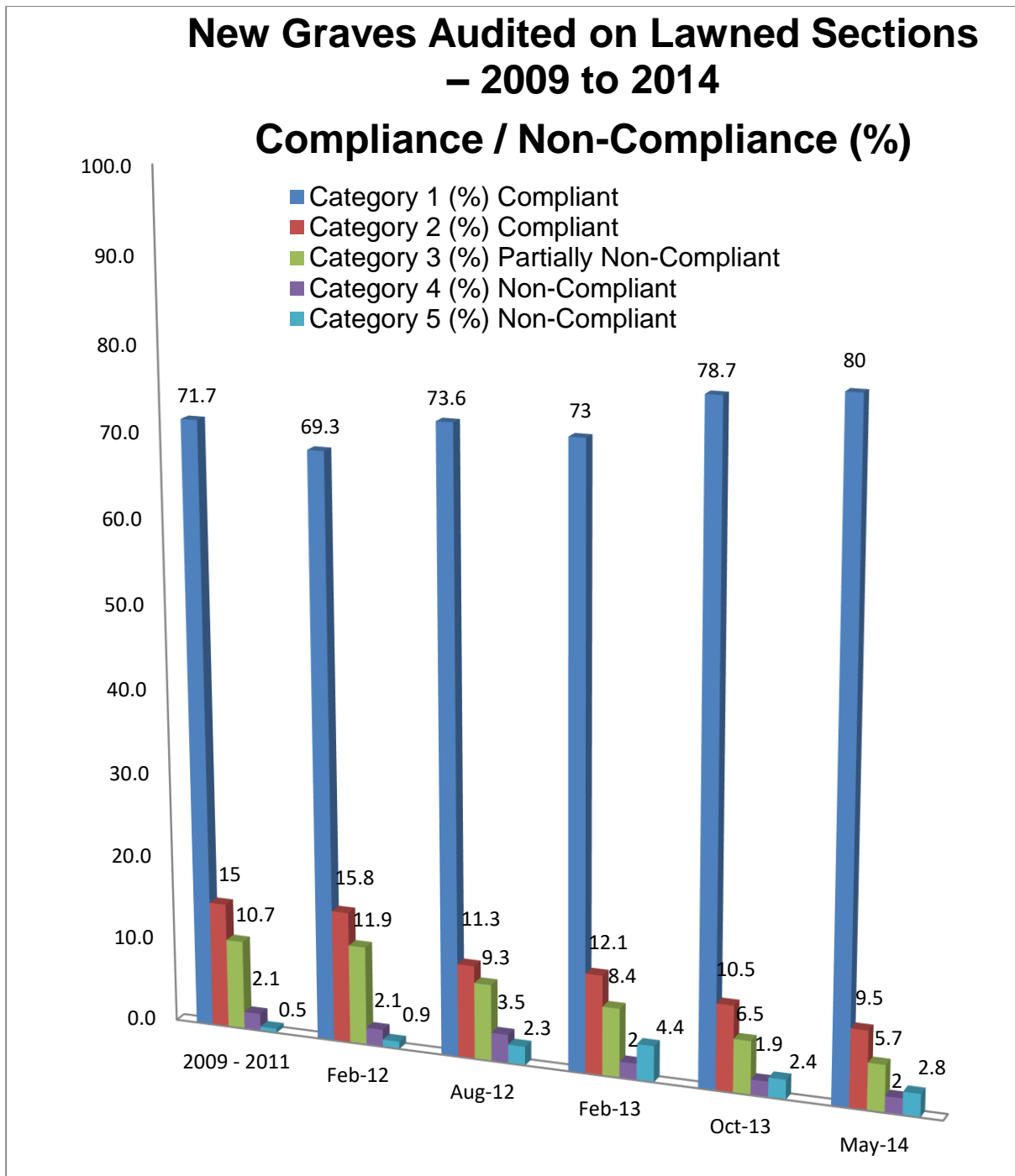
Overall Personalisation



Of the 59,651 graves audited:

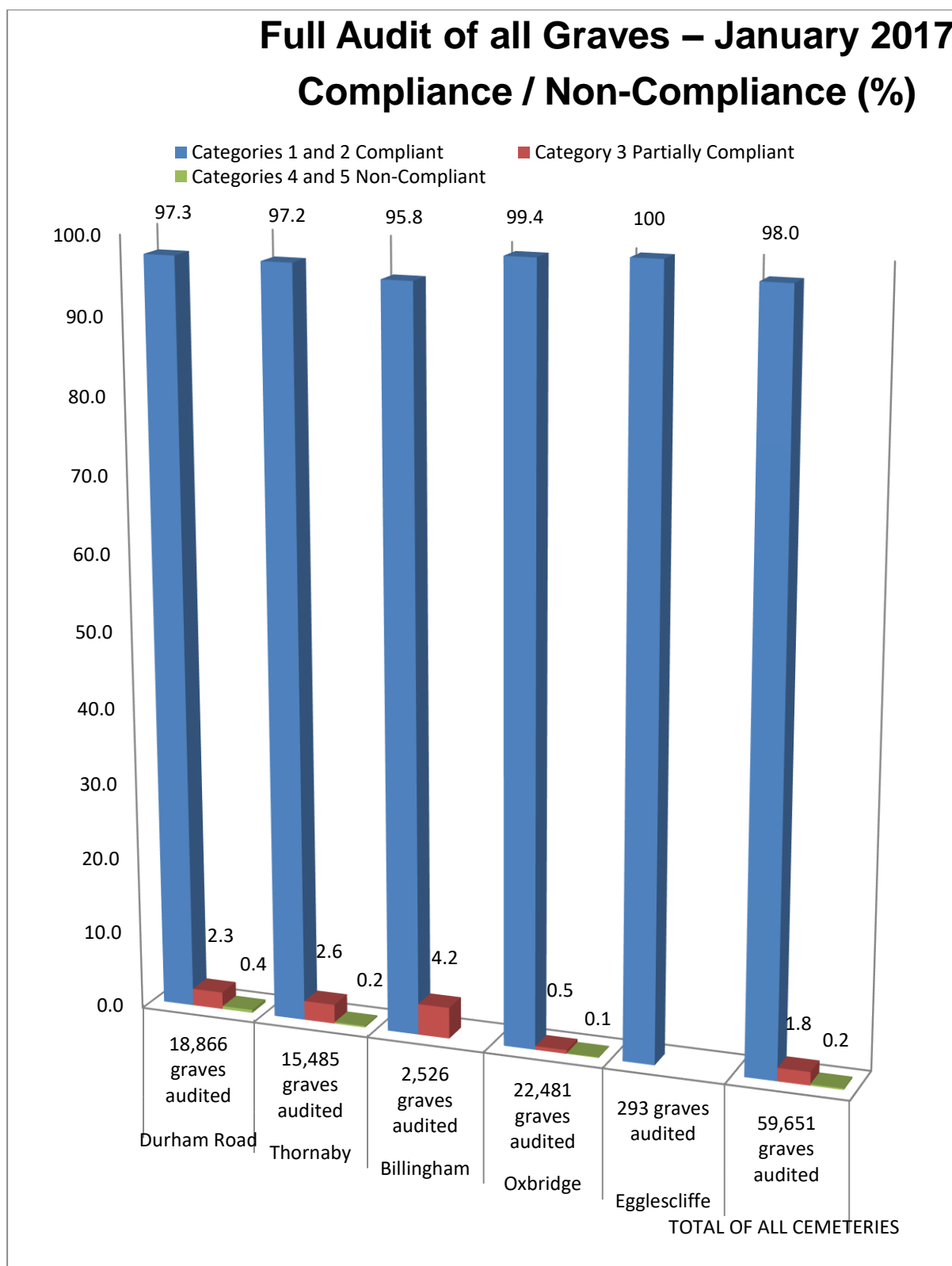
- 98% are compliant, with either no personalisation at all, or where families have placed a few items outside the personalisation area at the head of the grave (**Categories 1 and 2**);
- 1.8% are partially compliant (**Category 3**) where families have chosen to personalise a small area at the head of the grave:
- 0.2% are 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**).

Previous Audit Data – 2009 - 2014



- The more recent figures obtained in 2017 (overleaf) indicate a continuing upward trend in compliance in all categories.

Personalisation by Cemetery



- Levels of compliance (**Categories 1 and 2**) are broadly similar across the cemeteries.
- There is some minor variance in the level of **Category 3** personalisation.
- Personalisation in **Categories 4 and 5** remains low.

3.5 Analysis of Audit Data

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.

Comparison – 2014 and 2017

	May 2014	January 2017
Level s 1 & 2	89.5%	98.0%
Level 3	5.7%	1.8%
Level s 4 & 5	4.8%	0.2%

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 1183 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.

3.6 Current Enforcement Policy

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”

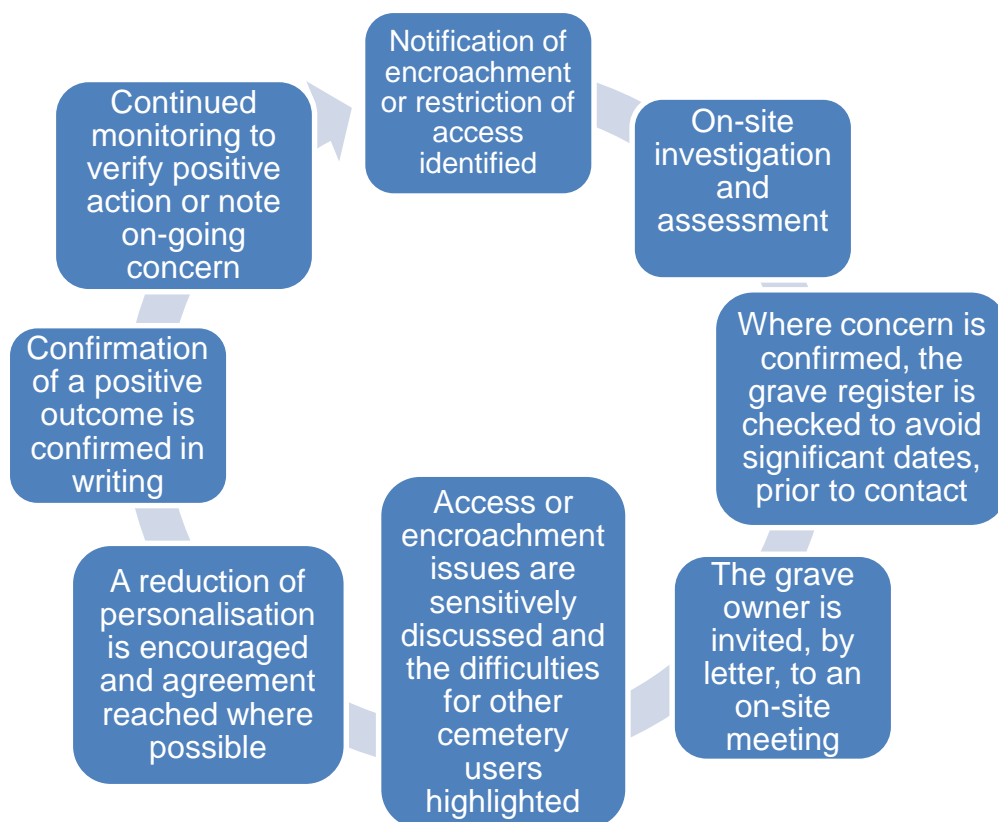
- Evening Gazette - 13 January 2009

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.

The process can take time, and may sometimes take years to conclude.

3.7 Process Map of the Management of the GPP when Issues Arise



However, even with such an approach, negative publicity may still ensue, as in one recent case 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 they 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 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.

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

3.8 Complaints

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

Formal complaints regarding grave personalisation are relatively rare. The table above sets out the corporate complaints concerning the issue, logged by the Council over the last three-year period. It will be 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.

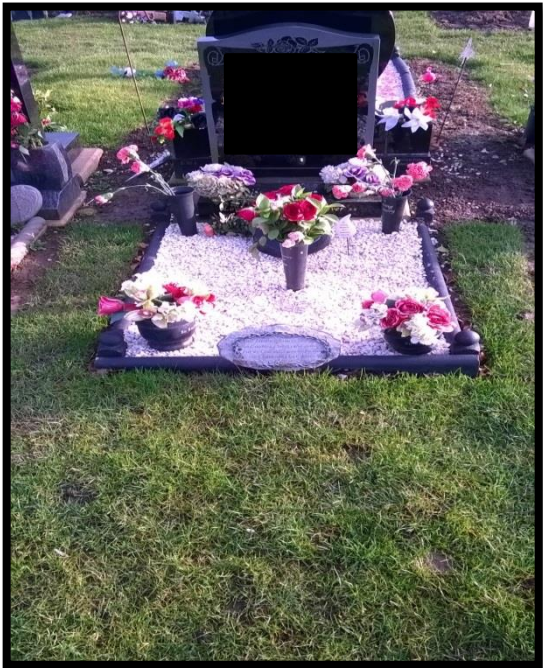
3.9 Successes – “DIY” Kerbs

In spite of occasional negative publicity, Bereavement Services has nonetheless had success in its work with families:

Reduction of “DIY” Stone Surround



Before (Category 4)



After (Category 3)

- Families who place edgings to enclose personalisation most commonly purchase decorative blocks or fencing.
- These materials can easily be removed or shortened to reduce the extent of the personalised area.
- However, removal or shortening relies heavily upon the co-operation of the family concerned.

Reduction of Wooden Surround



Before (Category 4)



After (Category 3)

Reduction of Cremated Remains Garden Grave Surround



Before (Category 4)



After (Category 3)

3.10 The Long View

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.



Lawn section in Durham Road Cemetery

3.11 Enforcement in Respect of Professionally Fixed Full Kerbs

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.



4. Review of the Grave Personalisation Policy

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.

Accordingly, a review of the current GPP will need to consider:

- Whether it is fit for purpose in its current form;
- The extent and implementation of associated enforcement procedures;
- Potential new concepts for the future, within new sections of existing cemeteries, extensions to cemeteries and new cemeteries, which may address and alleviate personalisation issues.

5. Possible Options for the Management of Personalisation

5.1 A 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

- 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.

Cons

- 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.

5.2 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

- 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.

Cons

- 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.

5.3 Blanket Full Enforcement

The Council could go further, and compel the complete reduction of all kerbs and surrounds (professionally fitted and DIY), within a given timescale, providing due notice. The “pros and cons” pertaining to option 5.2 above would obviously be applicable here, albeit increased by a considerable order of magnitude, given the nature of the proposition.

In addition:

Pros

- 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.

Cons

- 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.

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

Our 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. Is it possible to satisfy both groups, whilst also addressing the operational difficulties that often result from excessive personalization? The extension to Durham Road Cemetery offers a “clean slate” which we can use to develop fresh ideas and concepts, specifically designed to address these issues.

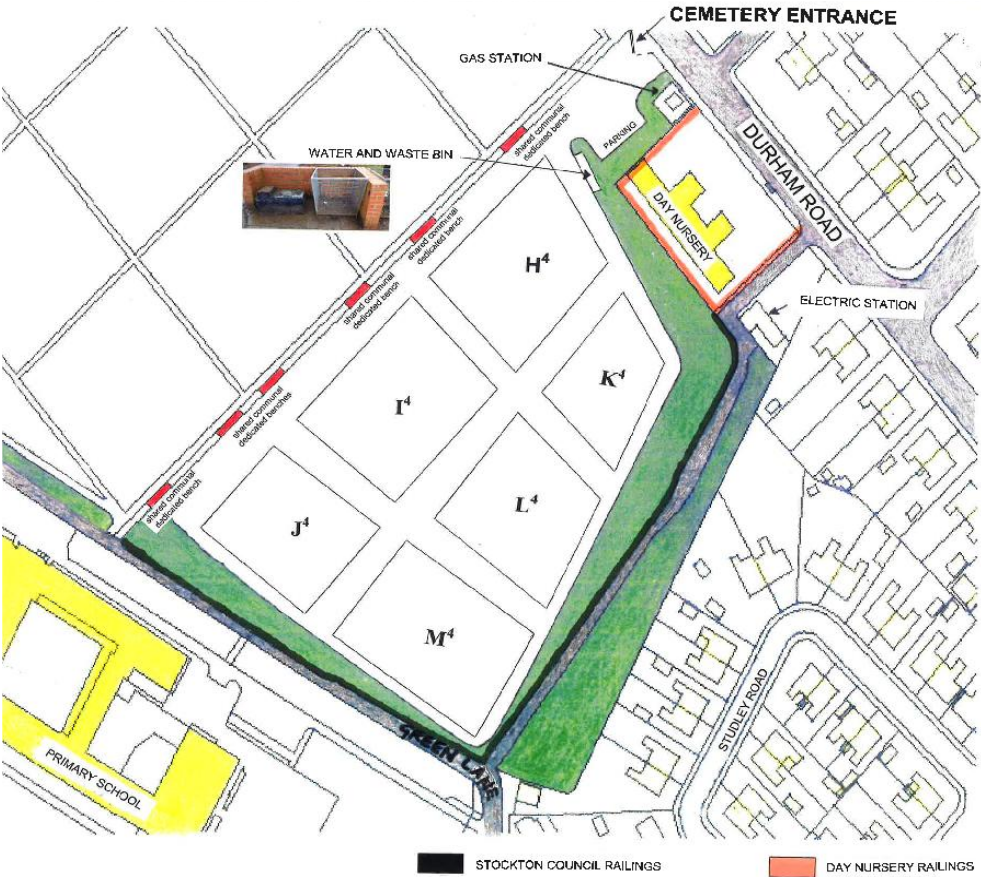
In partnership with our Horticultural and Cemeteries Teams, we have developed a new model, tailored to meet the needs of all bereaved families, which will also offer significant operational improvements.

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.
- 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.

6.1 Plan of Durham Road Cemetery Extension



Durham Road Cemetery

First sections to open:

- H⁴** Pure lawn
Single rows
221 graves
1 year, 9 months
- I⁴** Personalised
Short collar
Single rows
230 graves
1 year, 10 months
- J⁴** Personalised
Full collar
Double rows
198 graves
1 year, 6 months

Notes:
 Total of 1,169 available solid grave spaces for all sections:
 (H⁴, I⁴, J⁴, K⁴, L⁴, M⁴)
 Life expectancy of 9 years, 2 months

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.

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.

We will provide:

- A lawn grave, 5ft (1.52m) wide by 10ft (3.05m) long
- A concrete plinth for the placement of a memorial at the head of the grave
- Graves set out in single rows, to create the feeling of a more spacious and expansive environment
- The remaining grave area will be lawned and kept free of all obstruction

Operational benefits:

- No lawn heading to maintain
- Neat and tidy appearance
- Memorial fixing is much simplified:
 - No issues with poor drainage or waterlogged ground around the heading
 - Stability is ensured without the need for a ground anchor
 - Memorials are not affected by ground movement
- Easy access for grave preparation and cemetery visitors
- Ease of maintenance and grass-cutting

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.

We will provide:

- A 5ft (1.52m) wide by 10ft (3.05m) long grave;
- A **Short Personalisation Collar**, constructed of durable, recycled black material, and measuring 5 feet wide by 3 feet deep. This clearly defines the area available for personalisation and is supplied with a membrane and polar white chippings, ready for the placement of a memorial and personal items;
- The remainder of the grave 7ft (2.1m) will be lawned;
- Graves set out in single rows.

Operational benefits:

- Allows a level of controlled personalisation which should satisfy a large proportion of families, whilst simultaneously resolving the operational difficulties presented by current practices ;
- The collar is a unique and appealing product:
 - It is not presently commercially available elsewhere
 - It is considerably more robust and visually attractive than the “DIY” options currently being placed by families
 - It has the appearance of a set of granite “mini-kerbs”, but at a fraction of the price, and provides an affordable option to families
 - It will not fall apart or blow away
 - It can be easily wiped clean and maintained
 - It will not require a mason to remove, if the grave is re-opened
 - It comes with a manufacturer’s 20 year warranty, and for the price, represents excellent value for money
- No lawn heading to maintain;
- Ease of access for subsequent burials, via the removal of the front section of the collar;
- The collars will sit uniformly side-by-side, resulting in an immediate neat and tidy appearance
- The lawned area will be easy to maintain, and will provide ease of access for visitors and operational staff alike

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.

We will provide:

- A 5ft (1.52m) wide by 10ft (3.05m) long grave;
- A **Full Personalisation Collar**, constructed of durable, black recycled material and measuring 5 feet wide by 6 feet 7 inches deep. This clearly defines the area available for personalisation, and is supplied with a support system and filled with polar white chippings, ready for the placement of memorial and personal items;
- The remainder of the grave 3ft 5in (1.04m) will lawned;
- Graves set out in double rows.

Operational benefits:

- Allows a level of controlled personalisation which should satisfy a large proportion of families, whilst simultaneously resolving the operational difficulties presented by current practices ;
- The collar is a unique and appealing product:
 - It is not presently commercially available elsewhere
 - It is considerably more robust and visually attractive than the “DIY” options currently being placed by families
 - It has the appearance of a set of full granite kerbs, but at a fraction of the price, and provides an affordable option to families
 - It will not fall apart or blow away
 - It can be easily wiped clean and maintained
 - It comes with a manufacturer’s 20 year warranty, and for the price, represents excellent value for money
- No lawn heading to maintain;
- Ease of access for subsequent burials, via the removal of the front section of the collar, and without the need for the family to employ a mason;
- The collars will sit uniformly side-by-side, resulting in an immediate neat and tidy appearance
- The lawned area will be easy to maintain, and will provide ease of access for visitors and operational staff alike
- We have been able to take safety considerations into account at the preliminary stage, and therefore the inner area is reinforced to permit safe access, even after grave sinking (see below);

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

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.

We will provide:

- A grave space measuring approximately 3ft 3 inches (1m) wide by 4ft (1.22m) in length
- One black collar surround, constructed of durable, recycled black material, and measuring 3ft 3 inches (1m) square. This clearly defines the area available for personalization and is supplied with a porous membrane and quantity of polar white chippings, ready for the placement of a memorial and personal items.
- A name plate positioned centrally at the front of the collar surround
- Graves set out in single rows

Operational benefits:

- Allows a level of controlled personalisation which should satisfy a large proportion of families, whilst simultaneously resolving the operational difficulties presented by current practices ;
- The collar is a unique and appealing product:
 - It is not presently commercially available elsewhere
 - It is considerably more robust and visually attractive than the “DIY” options currently being placed by families
 - It has the appearance of a set of granite “mini-kerbs”, but at a fraction of the price, and provides an affordable option to families
 - It will not fall apart or blow away
 - It can be easily wiped clean and maintained
 - It comes with a manufacturer’s 20 year warranty, and for the price, represents excellent value for money
- Ease of access for subsequent burials, via the removal of the front section of the collar;
- The collars will sit uniformly side-by-side, resulting in an immediate neat and tidy appearance

6.6 Further Considerations in Respect of the New Concept

- It should be borne in mind that the scheme detailed above is intended for 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, our intention is to provide promotional literature which sets out the available grave choices using clear text, coupled with attractive pictorial references (see draft leaflet and poster).
- 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.

7. Conclusions

Audit data indicates that implementation of the GPP has delivered a steady and continuing decrease in problematic grave personalisation. Our 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

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.

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.