

Fife Council submission of 24 November 2022

PE1941/D: Stop the destruction of headstones within community cemeteries

Thank you for your recent letter.

Like other local authorities, Fife Council takes its obligations under the Health and Safety at Work Act very seriously and is of the view that although headstones in each of our 115 cemeteries are not in the ownership of the council, we are responsible for the cemeteries in our care and therefore we have a duty of care to visitors to our cemeteries. Accordingly, we have instigated a headstone inspection and remedial programme and have three dedicated teams of staff who undertake this work. The remedial programme is supported by a risk assessment of cemeteries through which we have prioritised our inspection regime.

As required our headstone teams are supplemented by specialist memorial masons and engineers to undertake remedial works required to, for example larger memorials.

The practice in Fife is to make good deficient headstones as they are identified. In particular we do not 'stake and band' memorials nor do we lay headstones flat other than temporarily as part of remedial works.

Remedial works are typically undertaken on a cemetery-by-cemetery basis. Remedial works are recorded in our management system to support future inspections.

While records of lair holders are maintained for most of our burial grounds, given the age of many of our cemeteries, with older lairs it would be very difficult to compile and maintain such a list as lair holders/successors die or move within or outside Fife without informing the Council.

However, in advance of undertaking works we use a range of communication channels to advise that remedial works are due to begin. In addition, we place signs on cemetery gates advising the remedial works are due to begin or are ongoing. Where we have had feedback from lair holders on the remedial work we have undertaken, this has been positive.

Longer term we have recognised the need to develop a more sustainable funding solution for the maintenance of our cemeteries and as part of consultation that is ongoing on the development of a future cemeteries' strategy, we have sought feedback on the best way to achieve this.

I hope this information is of assistance.