

Dundee City Council submission of 8 December 2022

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

Dundee City Council follows the current Scottish Government “Burial Ground Memorial Safety” Guidelines 2019 and has a proactive approach to upholding health and safety standards in cemeteries which incorporates the maintenance and inspection of headstones and endeavours to contact individual lair owners where possible. The information below articulates the processes which are currently in place.

As part of the Council’s headstone stabilisation program, headstones are inspected for stability and the potential risk to public health and the findings are recorded. Due to the large volume of headstones within our city cemeteries, inspections are implemented on a priority basis, by inspecting areas of higher risk, for example road side, pedestrian areas and cemetery compartments with large old headstones. In addition, as good practice dictates, cemetery headstones which are adjacent to lairs where an interment is about to take place are also inspected for stability, the findings of which are recorded.

If a headstone has been identified as unsafe, burial administration officers undertake a search of burial records and archive information in an effort to establish the lair proprietor. If the proprietor’s information is available, a letter or email is sent or telephone call made notifying the proprietor that the headstone is unsafe and repairs should be carried out. The search for proprietors is concluded in advance of any repair works being undertaken to the headstone. Due to a high percentage of headstones dating back several decades, contact details are often out of date and therefore contact with the proprietor is not possible.

However additional communication methods are also deployed in an effort to reach proprietors which includes public notice boards in Cemeteries and digital means such as Council web page etc.

If repair works are required to be undertaken on headstones over 1.5m high, Dundee City Council engage an accredited contractor who carries

out works to a standard set out by the National Association of Memorial Masons (NAMM) standards as a minimum as outlined below. These works are integral to an ongoing programme of headstone safety repairs which has been in place for a number of years.

- Safely dismantle or part dismantle the memorial if in sections & set aside.
- Remove existing under build or existing foundations.
- Excavate the existing foundations and re-size where appropriate.
- Install new foundation as per current NAMM / BRAMM specifications.
- Re-attaching of the memorial slip bases and previously removed sections to the repaired foundations. (Works shall also include subsequent repair and re-attaching of urns, angels, etc)

Where headstones are below 1.5m in height, health and safety stability works are undertaken by trained Dundee City Council employees. The methodology of this work is outlined below

The headstone is lifted by means of a gantry with the old foundations removed, the headstone is then placed back into a larger excavation using the memorial slip base for stability. With this method no dismantling of the headstone is undertaken and the impact on the headstone is minimal.

If the proprietor is established or approaches the authority at a later date then arrangements can be made by the proprietor to instruct necessary repair works as appropriate and to established standards.

In addition, contractual terms are issued by the Council to a proprietor on the purchase of a lair. Council consent is required to erect a memorial which has to be to approved standards and it is the proprietor's responsibility to ensure any memorial is in a safe condition at all times. A fee is paid to cover 30 years of inspection which is to happen at least once every 5 years. If a memorial fails an inspection, in terms of the contractual conditions the Council contacts the proprietor to request work to be done to make it secure. Further, in terms of the contractual conditions the Council may require to take immediate action to ensure the memorial is safe and the Council are entitled to remove such structures as are damaged or dilapidated.

The above information articulates the current processes which Dundee City Council have in place in an effort to ensure the safety and stability of headstone within cemeteries.