

South Lanarkshire Council submission of 9 December 2022

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

I have detailed below the process followed by South Lanarkshire Council in relation to Burial Ground Memorial Safety. The Council is in the process of inspecting all headstones within our 55 cemeteries. As a Burial Authority the Council has a duty of care to provide a safe environment for both visitors and staff.

The following list of actions are what we consider necessary to meet this duty of care and is broadly in line with the actions of other Council's in Scotland.

An initial inspection is undertaken, and this involves looking for any movement of the memorial headstone. Following the inspection one of the following actions is taken:-

- If the headstone shows no movement then no further action is taken other than to record that an inspection has taken place and that the headstone was found to be safe.
- If the headstone shows some movement although not sufficient to be of an immediate concern no physical action is taken. The lair holder is however contacted by letter and informed that although there is no immediate concern, they should contact their memorial mason and ask them to carry out a formal inspection and any minor repairs to stop any further deterioration.
- If the headstone shows significant movement and is deemed unsafe the headstone is immediately secured by use of wooden posts and banding. This allows Bereavement Services to contact the lair holder requesting that they engage with their memorial mason and arrange for a repair as soon as possible.

The Council aims to provide information to the lair holder where known within 3 days of the initial inspection and where the headstone has required to be secured. We do acknowledge that this gap may result in families attending the lair without full knowledge of the process and we would apologise in advance for any distress caused.

If no contact is received from the lair holder we will attach a sign to the headstone advising that the headstone is deemed unsafe and that the lair holder or family member should make contact using the details provided. Should no contact be made we will subsequently revisit the headstone and trench the headstone into the ground by digging a hole of approximately one third the size of the headstone and inserting the headstone into this. This “trenching in” method is carried out in front of the plinth or at the head of the lair and would secure the headstone until such times as the lair holder makes contact.

It is our intention to inspect all headstones on a 5 yearly basis as identified in the Health & Safety Executive’s Guidelines on Headstone Inspection.

Information will also be posted on the notice boards at the entrance to each cemetery when inspections are taking place.

I trust this clarifies South Lanarkshire Councils position in relation to this matter.