

# Perth and Kinross Council submission of 16 December 2022

## PE1941/N: Stop the destruction of headstones within community cemeteries

### **Q. In response to “Does Perth and Kinross Council routinely communicate with lair owners”**

**A.** Perth and Kinross Council use several strategies to inform lair owners, elected members, funeral directors, local community, and friends of cemetery groups of any planned inspections in a cemetery in their area.

This is carried out using a number of media outlets, Council webpages, Councillor briefing notes, local newspapers, and localised signage.

This information is published and displayed 4 weeks prior to any memorial inspections taking place, and signage and notices remain in place for the duration of any required works informing lair owners and visitors of the estimated inspection time scales and start date. Also displayed are any relevant contacts if they have any questions/problems this included the Bereavement Services contact details.

All headstones are inspected by qualified council employed inspectors who can inspect all types and sizes of headstones which includes memorials from a raised gantry up to 3m high.

All areas are fenced off prior to the instigation and during the works, and signage displayed with contact details of someone who can advise and answer any queries.

The Council helpline is also briefed as to the works taking place and can explain the testing protocols and the process to any concerned callers, if still unsatisfied or the caller has any further questions or concerns, they will be directed to a Bereavement Services officer to assist and advise.

Perth and Kinross council will not lay headstones down as a safety precaution unless it is deemed to be dangerous, and this will be for as short a period as possible and will be prioritised by the contractor to be

dug in to prevent further damage by grass cutting machinery and cause a trip hazard to other cemetery users.

Once a headstone is inspected, all information is recorded from the headstone and a photograph taken. This is then logged on to the councils dedicated internal database, this is whether the headstone has passed or failed the inspection.

**Q. In response to “How Perth and Kinross Council liaises with owners and how it reaches the decision to move headstones”**

**A.** Lair owner details are checked from the burial management system and/or the burial registers. If the headstone has failed the inspection, a recorded delivery letter with a stamped addressed envelope is sent out to the last known address of the lair owner informing them of the inspection and the concerns over the safety of the headstone.

If no one contacts us within a 4-week period, we will make the headstone safe at the expense of the council. Dangerous headstones are laid flat and fenced off in the first instance and contact will be attempted with the lair owner and if no one contacts the Council the headstone will be dug 1/3 into the ground.

Cordoning off headstones can be labour and time intensive as the fences require to be constantly reinspected to ensure they are still serving their intended purpose.

Headstones are only taken down where it fails the inspection process and is deemed to be unsafe, dangerous to staff, or where a risk exists to members attending funeral services, or visitors to the cemetery.

Headstone inspections are done carrying out a prioritised list of cemeteries, but inspections of individual headstones can be reactive, and may be because of interments in adjacent lairs, concerns raised by staff, and visitors.

Inspections are also prompted by the communities where they have taken an interest in forming a “friends of cemetery group” to ensure any work being carried out are in a safe area.

Headstones/structures with a historic value or are in a listed cemetery or area where listed building consent is required, Bereavement Services would consult with colleagues at Historic Scotland and the Heritage

Trust to ensure compliance. Where a headstone is deemed to be dangerous it can be dealt straight away, and consultation should be instigated at the earliest opportunity.

Headstones with a commonwealth war graves link are also inspected and are fenced off in the first instance and Bereavement Services staff will consult with the CWWG staff before commencing any works.

Headstones requiring to be made safe are photographed before taken down and dug in, all works are carried out as promptly as possible and headstones centres marked to ensure they are returned to their original position.

Signage is placed within the working section with contact details displayed.

We can also offer lair owners a headstone foundation and installation service at full cost recovery to install the headstone to a national recognised standard and all works carried out by a qualified contractor, if the lair owner can be located or contacts the Council and wishes to use our scheme or alternatively, they can use a memorial mason of their choice.