

Orkney Council submission of 28 November 2022

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

All memorials in Orkney's 50 burial grounds were inspected in 2022 with 54 categorised as high hazards out of a total of 21,444 (a rate of 1 in 400). The schedule for the inspection programme was made available on the Council's Burial Services web page in advance of carrying out inspections at the first cemetery. Community Councils across the isles were also given a minimum of 4 weeks' notice in advance of inspections of cemeteries in their respective parishes. Signage was also placed at the main entrances to the cemeteries so that visitors would be aware of the inspection programme and that some stones may be deemed dangerous. A short piece detailing the timeline and processes involved with the inspection programme was also broadcast on local radio.

The 54 memorials categorised as high hazards have an average age of 114 years, presenting a real challenge to find living relatives willing to pay for repairs carried out to the necessary British Standard (8415) – a requirement in our cemeteries.

The high hazards were marked with black and yellow hazard tape around the base of the memorial (taking care not to obscure any inscriptions) along with a small sign on a wooden stake declaring the stone a hazard and with contact details for the Council to discuss next steps. Details of the high hazards were circulated to relevant Community Councils and also to the Orkney Family History Society in an effort to find relatives that may come forward.

A deadline of January has been set for people to initiate repairs on family memorials and to date, 1 memorial has been fully repaired, 9 have contractors assigned, and there have been enquiries about a further 3. Once this deadline has elapsed, a programme of repairs or making safe will be embarked on in early 2023. Details of this programme will be made available through the website and communicated to the Community Councils – again with a minimum of 4

weeks' notice. The wider public will also be made aware of the work through local news media.

On the basis that some of the Council's staff are trained to dismantle and refix memorials to BS:8415, it is possible that a good number of the memorials will be repaired at low cost (where there is little difference in the cost of laying flat or simply repairing while the lifting equipment is in position). A recent review of the high hazards has shown that hopefully only 6 out of 54 memorials will require to be laid flat (where repairs will be too complex to be cost-effective) – provided no-one comes forward to repair them.