

ST MARY THE VIRGIN CHURCH, WITHERSFIELD GRAVEYARD RULES AND CHARGES

Regulations for visitors to, and for burials, and for the laying out and management of graves etc in the grounds of St Mary The Virgin Church, Church St, Withersfield, Haverhill CB9 7SG

(Rules amended and approved at meeting on 12th July 2022)

1. General

- a. Copies of the Regulations and Scale of Fees and Charges currently in force may be obtained from the Clerk of the Council.
A plan of the burial ground, showing the sections of the ground and identifying the individually numbered burial spaces, and the Registers of Graves, of Burials and of Exclusive Rights are deposited with the Clerk of the Council and may be seen by prior arrangement.
The Council reserves the right to review and, without notice, alter these regulations and the accompanying scale of fees and charges.
Visitors and users of this Graveyard are deemed to have read and accepted the following regulations and conditions.
- b. In the following paragraphs, unless specified, the term 'grave' means an earthen burial plot or a plot for the burial of cremation ashes with plot dimensions specified in the table of fees and charges.
The right of burial is primarily reserved for residents of the Parish, ('Parishioners'), former residents within the last five years of the Parish and those with close relatives already buried within the Parish Boundary and non Parishioners.
The term 'Parishioner' means a person who is or has been a member of a household that currently pays (or has in the past paid for not less than 5 years) council tax charges to Withersfield Parish Council. In any dispute whether a deceased qualifies as a 'Parishioner', the Parish Council in its absolute discretion will decide.
A child is any young person under 18 years of age.
- c. Withersfield Graveyard is a public burial ground and is non-denominational. However, individual graves may be consecrated under the rites of the particular faith or denomination of the person interred.
- d. Before any burial may take place in a grave, an 'exclusive right of burial' must be purchased from the Council. Additionally, for any burial or any other opening of the ground an Interment fee must be paid.

2. Fees and Charges (see table below))

- a. The Council publishes a list of the fees and charges payable by parishioners (see Para 1b for definition) and non-parishioners for various services and rights.
Fees and charges may be updated from time to time without notice. Fees and charges for non-parishioners are set higher than for parishioners because the whole costs of land purchase, development and maintenance of the Graveyard is and has been exclusively borne by the domestic ratepayers of the parish.
- b. All fees for purchase of exclusive right and interment are to be paid to the Clerk of the Council (or as the Clerk may direct) before the ground is opened, and all fees payable in respect of monuments, headstones and tablets etc must be paid before installation. Cheques, etc should be made payable to 'Withersfield Parish Council'.

3. Arrangements for funerals

- a. Most bereaved families will use the services of a professional funeral director who will normally make all the necessary arrangements with clergy and with the Parish Council including the payment of their various fees and charges.
The following procedures apply in respect of any interment in Withersfield Graveyard, whether or not this is arranged through a professional funeral director.

- b. As much notice as possible should be given for an interment and it is recommended that the person proposing a funeral (normally the funeral director) discusses the proposed date and grave space with the Clerk and obtains a Notice of Interment form. In any case, a completed Notice of Interment and the appropriate fees must be given to the Clerk of the Council not less than two clear working days before the intended burial, including information as to the deceased, and the portion of ground in which it is agreed that the burial shall take place.
- c. The name of the officiating minister (if any), should be given together with the day, hour and length of time agreed for the burial rites. A Registrar's Certificate for Disposal or Cremation or a Coroner's Order for Burial/Cremation must be supplied to the minister or officiant before or at the funeral (a copy will not be accepted).
- d. No interments are permitted on Sundays or Bank Holidays or outside the hours of 9am to 5pm (or sunset if earlier than 5pm) on any other day. The time fixed for the funeral/scattering ceremony should be the time at which the mourners or cortege arrive and punctuality is requested in order to avoid overlap with other funeral groups. If the funeral rites are likely to last more than one hour, prior permission must be obtained from the Council.
- e. Responsibility for digging the grave in the correct location and to the correct depth and dimensions shall rest with the person giving Notice of Interment under whose supervision, at the direction of the Council, such excavation shall take place.
Graves will be dug to double depth (bottom approximately 2m deep). No grave shall have more than two interments. The Council reserves the right to direct that the grave be dug to a lesser or greater depth in some circumstances. All surplus soil must be removed from the site or disposed on site as directed by the Council. The Council will not permit the creation of any underground walled chamber, sepulchre or burial vault.
- f. Except where a child burial plot is requested, grave spaces will be allocated in the sequential order of the numbered/lettered spaces shown on the official burial ground plan. Any other allocation will require the specific approval of the council.
- g. The Council recommend the use of the concrete plinths area for child interments/burial of ashes thereby allowing the early placement of a Memorial headstone

4. Memorials, headstones, tablets and grave markers

- a. No work should start until consent has actually been given. Applicants for monuments should ask the memorial supplier to confirm whether the memorial falls within the scope of the authority delegated by the Parish Council. Any contract between the memorial supplier and the client is conditional on the appropriate approval being granted. (see notes on headstones below). All Memorial suppliers must be registered members of NAMM - The National Association of Monumental Masons - who will be able to mediate in any dispute. (www.namm.org.uk)
- b. The Parish Council cannot give consent to a monument outside the scope of conditions listed in sections **j. to n.** inclusive below even if there are existing monuments in the Graveyard that are broadly similar.
- c. Applications for earth burial (as opposed to cremation) monuments are unlikely to be considered until at least six months after a burial. Applicants are advised to read carefully the regulations regarding monuments and contact the Clerk to the Parish Council with any queries.
- d. The Parish Council can order the removal of unauthorised memorials and monuments and will charge accordingly for the cost of such removal and any ancillary expenditure.
- e. The Council offers the following guidance for those who would like to install any item on or adjacent to any grave or cremation plot to commemorate the interred or to distinguish the grave -
At least one month before the erection or installation of any tablet, monument, gravestone or other form of grave marker, including markers intended to be temporary, a drawing thereof, specifying the dimensions, materials, finish and any proposed inscription shall be sent to the Clerk of the Council for the approval of the Council.

The Council reserves the right in its absolute discretion to forbid designs or materials it deems unsuitable or wording it deems untrue or potentially offensive to other parties. Following interment in a grave, a simple wooden plaque or cross bearing no more than the name of the person interred and date of death may be permitted as a temporary grave marker for up to eighteen months after which the Council reserves the right to remove it. In the absence of any other permanent marker, the Council may identify the grave with an Oak stake and brass numbers showing solely the grave number.

- f. Coffin burial areas within the Graveyard are laid out as lawns for neatness and maintenance. Consequently, headstones, grave markers, vases and commemorative or decorative items may only be placed or erected at the head of graves, and on the plinth of the headstone. For the same reason, the Council will not permit the installation of kerbs, fences or any kind of grave surrounds nor the planting of bulbs, flowers, shrubs or trees or the creation of any kind of hard or gravelled surfacing on or beside any grave or cremation plot. All new graves will be turfed after settlement of the grave surface and when the weather permits. Any items or planting placed on or by graves or elsewhere in the Graveyard precincts not in accordance with the Council's specifications or written permission will be removed without notice. For safety reasons, glass vases and ornaments are not permitted anywhere in this Graveyard.
- g. An identified area in the Graveyard is set aside for the unmarked scattering of cremated ashes. It is important that ashes are fully broadcast and not simply heaped in one spot (which might prevent the natural growth of the grasses and flowers or might leave an unpleasant deposit in wet weather). No markers of any kind are permitted in or around this area. Any request for the placing of trees, shrubs, statuary and seats 'dedicated' as marked memorials may be considered provided they form part of the landscaping of the Graveyard. The potential costs and positioning must be discussed with the Clerk and approved by the Council. The Council will not be held responsible for any damage to any item installed to mark a grave or commemorate a buried person except that caused by the action or proven negligence of its own employees or agents. Responsibility for the cleaning, repair and maintenance of such items, including vandalism damage, rests with the persons who install them. Insurance is available from stonemasons and funeral directors and such policies are encouraged. The Council reserves the right to reinstall or to lower any such item if, in the opinion of the Parish Council, it is deemed unsafe.
- h. All surplus soil, equipment or materials for the digging of graves, or installation or maintenance of gravestones, markers and monuments etc must be conveyed to and from the plot in such a manner as to cause no injury to the surfaces of roads or walks, to other graves, their furnishings or to landscaping.
- i. Both faces of the headstone must be flat, not curved and be erected horizontally. A base forming an integral part of the headstone is permitted. The headstone must be fixed in accordance with the National Association of Memorial Masons Code of Practice and in strict accordance with British Standard 8415. The person carrying out the work must have adequate public liability insurance and produce evidence of same if it is required. The base shall not project more than 100mm beyond the headstone in any direction. Not more than two vases (not glass) may be incorporated in the base – in such case the base may be extended to a maximum of 200mm in front of the headstone. The base itself shall be fixed on a foundation slab (which may be reinforced concrete) and should be positioned just below the turf so that a mower can pass freely over it. The foundation slab shall extend beyond the base by between 75mm and 125 mm all round.
- j. Headstones for young children should be large enough to be seen easily so that they are not damaged inadvertently and should be strong enough to avoid accidental damage. The minimum sizes should be 450mm in height by 300mm in width and 75mm thickness for all materials other than slate which must have a minimum thickness of 38mm.
- k. Cremated remains may be commemorated by a memorial not exceeding 600mm square, upright or flush with the turf. A vase may be incorporated.
- l. Headstones and memorials should not be garish in colour. Stones traditionally used in local buildings or similar to them in colour and texture are preferred.

Solid wood memorials are permitted with a natural matt finish. All other materials are prohibited including concrete, synthetic and / or composite stone, plastic, fibre glass and metal.

- m. The following items are generally prohibited – kerbs, surrounds, railings, stone or other chippings, statues, sundials, birdbaths, portraits, wind-chimes, windmills and similar, candles, trees, shrubs, photographs, holograms, laminated cards, seats, lights, toys, horizontal ledgers and slabs **.
- n. Memorials and monuments should have a simple shape, shall not be in the form of a figure, heart, book or anything else unusual. Designs of a simple nature and/or words may be incised on one side only. Inscriptions must not be profane or offensive. Uncoloured lettering is preferred, black, silver or gold may be allowed but not leaded.

Laser etched photographic images of the deceased may be permitted providing they fit within a 22cm square on the headstone (round or oval permitted) subject to the absolute and final discretion of the full council.

Further inscriptions may be added with the written permission of the Parish Council, usually on a second interment in the same grave. Existing lettering may, in such case, be renovated so as to match the new but not otherwise.

No advertisement or trade mark shall be inscribed on the monument but the name of the mason may be inscribed at the side or on the reverse of the headstone in letters no more than 12mm in height.

5. General rules for all visitors to the Graveyard grounds

- a. The Graveyard is open to the public during daylight hours every day of the year and visitors are welcome to enter the land to tend graves, to pay respects to former loved ones or simply to contemplate or pray silently in the tranquil setting.
- b. Visitors are particularly asked to ensure parked vehicles do not obstruct Church Street. Alternative parking is usually available at the Village Hall.
- c. Only dogs kept under control of their owners are allowed in the Graveyard. Visitors are asked to keep to the walks and to avoid damage to surfaces, plants, seats, signs and monuments and to the flowers and furnishings of graves. Please close all gates behind you.
Children should be supervised at all times. It should go without saying that dog mess, litter and dead flowers should be removed from anywhere in the Graveyard grounds and placed in the waste bin. Picnicking/camping, singing or the playing of music (except as part of funeral rites), the playing of games, horse riding and the use of any kind of guns or bows are strictly prohibited.
Please help to promote a tranquil atmosphere in this setting and respect the feelings of others visiting the final resting place of their loved ones.
- d. Water for flower vases may be obtained from the water butt located at St Marys Church. Please note there is currently no water tap available.
- e. The Council asks all users and visitors to the Graveyard and St Marys Church precincts to be on the alert for vandalism, littering and disrespectful behaviour and report the same as soon as possible to the Police or to the Clerk of the Council.

****Any exceptions to these rules will be considered by the Parish Council on a case by case basis and the decision of the Council will be final. All decisions will be held in public and minuted.**

Memorial Benches

Permission for Memorial benches and their plinths, in memory of loved ones, can be approved via the Parish Council. The cost of purchase for the bench and plinth groundwork/installation are to be met in full by the owner.

There are restrictions to where the benches can be placed. The Parish Council will endeavour to authorise the placement of the bench close to the requested area. Please note memorial benches in the Graveyard will not be placed next to graves but in prominent areas of the Graveyard.

Individual benches may be shared by no more than two recipients, who may wish to share the cost.

The placement of memorial benches will be reviewed at a 10-year period. It is the owner's responsibility to maintain the bench. After 10 years, the bench may be removed subject to its condition; it can be collected by the owner if requested.

It is advised to have an inscribed carving in the back of the memorial bench rather than a plaque. However, plaques will be limited to 60mm x 120mm in size. All inscribed carving or plaque wording has to be approved by the Parish Council prior to installation.

The Parish Council cannot be held responsible for any acts of vandalism or theft that may result in your memorial seat being broken or damaged. If the benches are not maintained or become damaged the Parish Council have the right to remove the bench.