KEYNSHAM TOWN COUNCIL

15-17 Temple Street, Keynsham, Bristol BS31 1HF

GRAVE DIGGING POLICY & PROCEDURES

Adopted: 17th March 2026

KEYNSHAM TOWN COUNCIL

GRAVE DIGGING POLICY

CONTENTS

1. The Policy

As Keynsham Town Council is owner and occupier of the Cemetery it has ultimate duty of care under Health and Safety legislation and must therefore set the high standards required and closely monitor activities of contractors to ensure compliance.

All Employees and other workers have a duty of care under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 for their own health, safety and wellbeing, that of themselves, those around them and of any other person affected by their work activities.

It is the Council's policy to ensure a high standard of grave digging whilst always maintaining safety and dignity throughout the process. This extends beyond the day of interment to the weeks and months afterwards when the soil is settling to ensure that all graves are maintained to the highest standard.

2. Grave Digging - General Requirements

Training. All grave digging staff should receive training in this operation. Any untrained staff involved in grave digging operations should be closely supervised by a fully trained member of staff.

It is recommended that gravediggers receive training under the Cemetery Operatives Training Scheme administered by the ICCM details of which are contained in Appendix 1

(As of 10/8/2023 Kelvin Allen and Tony completed grave shoring and burial and use of excavator LANTRA training)

Appropriate safety footwear must be always worn.

A hard hat must be worn when working within an excavation/grave.

Any grave that is left unattended for whatever reason must be completely boarded over in such a manner as to prevent any person falling into the grave. Keynsham Cemetery has 2 full size excavation covers available

Entry and egress from a grave must be by ladder. On **No-account** must a gravedigger climb out of a grave by treading on any part of the shoring.

A ladder must remain in place whenever an operative is working in a grave to always maintain an emergency exit. (**Confined Spaces Regulations 1997**)

The top of the final coffin interred within the grave (or body if no coffin is used) must be at least 3 feet (90cm) below the level of the surrounding ground. 2ft may be acceptable in certain ground conditions (**Local Authority Cemeteries Order 1977**)
The depth of excavation for a single burial should be 4 feet 6 inches (1 metre 30 centimetres).
If the grave is to be prepared to accommodate more than one burial, the depth should be adjusted as follows:
- 2 burials: 6 feet (1 metre 83 centimetres).
- 3 burials: 8 feet (2 metres 43 centimetres).

These depths account for the requirement that there must be at least 6 inches (15 centimetres) of soil between coffins buried one on top of the other.

All finished graves should be prepared using imitation grass matting. The matting will be laid out neatly on staging leaving no folds or gaps which may cause Funeral Director, members of the Clergy, mourners or member of staff to trip. Walkboards / staging must be laid along the length of the grave and supported at each end and must be capable of carrying the weight of the Pall Bearers and Coffin.

All graves must be dug centrally within the respective grave space to the exact dimensions indicated (Appendix 2). Graves that are not dug centrally within the grave space will increase the risk of collapse, as the intervening wall of undug soil on one side will be of reduced thickness.

Any nearby / adjacent memorials may be covered to protect them , it would be courteous to contact owners of such memorials informing them that your actions are intended to protect their memorials from damage it is possible that kerbs will have a soil box erected over the top of them where it is necessary or soil boards/ soil box within a lawn plot. Its advised owners are informed of this that it is necessary for the burial to go ahead and that all care is taken to protect their graves.

Protective eyewear should be worn when appropriate.

Care must be taken when using a pick when shoring is in position to prevent striking and dislodging Speed Braces, hydraulic supports or Timber struts . A damaged hydraulic ram may fail posing a hazard to the operative.

Any foul odours encountered should be reported immediately to the Town Council's Grounds Maintenance supervisor.

The ICCM recommends that a second person is in attendance whenever work is being carried out in an excavation of a depth greater than 3' (0.91m) to comply with the requirements of the Confined Spaces Regulations 1997 and the Manual Handling Regulations 1992.

All tools and equipment required to complete each grave must be available nearby before digging commences.

When hand digging, shoring must be incorporated as digging proceeds. It is advised that shoring should be incorporated as soon as a depth equal to the depth of shoring equipment panel / timber is reached.

Hydraulic equipment should be inspected and serviced by a qualified person to comply with the Provision and use of Work Equipment Regulations 1998

(Teleshore do our servicing, last done 11/25)

DEFECTIVE UNITS MUST NOT BE USED.

Shoring Timbers and Speed Braces should be inspected prior to use for any sign of deterioration. Defective Timbers and Braces should not be used and should be removed to prevent use by any other person.

Speed braces and other shoring must be cleaned after each use.

Lowering webbings and putlogs must be inspected prior to each burial to ensure that no deterioration has occurred and that they can take the weight of the coffin. Frayed webbings should not be used.

3. Pre Excavation Preparation

3.1 Safe Working Area and Memorial Safety

3.1.1 General

It is extremely important that grave diggers follow the advice contained within this Code to ensure a safe working environment for all Cemetery operatives/visitors when excavating a grave, including themselves. It is important that grave diggers are trained to be able to safely assess the working site, including memorials, assess the risk, record the assessment accurately, follow an approved reporting process and understand the range of options available for making the area safe for all who will use it.

3.1.2 Using Risk Assessment Techniques

Risk assessment is central to ensuring a safe working environment. Grave digging within the burial ground should be covered by a suitable risk assessments and safe system of work.(See KTC Risk assessments CEM 1-5). When assessing the hazards on a potential excavation site several decisions need to be made based on sound risk assessment principles to create a dynamic assessment of each individual burial:

- *What areas of the burial process need to be considered during site preparation* – Consideration should be given to the range of hazards that may exist around the excavation area. Consideration should be given to activities that will subsequently take place:
  - Safe and easy access for operatives and equipment
  - Safe access for persons attending and officiating at the burial service
  - The health and safety of operatives during the excavation process
  - The health and safety of Cemetery visitors

What range of hazards exist in the area surrounding the grave to be excavated? – When considering the safety of the site before, after and during excavation work the following must be considered:

- Ground conditions – proper consideration of the ground conditions surrounding the grave and on the route to the graveside should be taken account of with particular care to be taken when areas contain multiple trip hazards. Safest route, proper footwear and care in unstable or wet/slippery conditions should be emphasised in risk assessments for this work
- Memorials – memorials present specific hazards and must be dealt with according to the Guidance produced by the Institute of Cemetery and Crematorium Management (ICCM) and Society of Local Council Clerks (SLCC)
- Correct positioning and marking out of grave – this is essential as reduced Midfeathers in otherwise stable conditions can create a false impression of safe excavation conditions. This is dealt with in more detail later in this Code.
- Protection of excavation – proper techniques to protect the integrity of the excavation are dealt with later in this Code.
- Vegetation – proper consideration should be given to the effect of any evasive vegetation or work being carried out around trees that have low branches or unsafe branches
- Undermining of nearby structures - Should a grave to be excavated be located near to a wall or other structure it may be necessary to provide support to such wall or structure to prevent it falling due to its foundations being weakened by the work in progress. It may be necessary to seek the advice of a qualified structural engineer and take the appropriate action in accordance with such advice that is given.

The above risk assessment information is for guidance purposes only; lists are not to be

considered all-inclusive but indicative of the types of risks that should be considered. Further guidance should be sought from either the Grounds maintenance Supervisor and or H&S Responsible person or Town Clerk, who are responsible for Health and Safety for the Town Council as the Burial Authority.

3.2 Locating Graves – Measuring and Marking

All graves to be excavated should be located and identified by using the statutory grave plan. The location will have been marked in advance by the Council's Grounds team in liaison with the office, this must be carefully checked to ensure accuracy.

All graves must be dug centrally within their respective grave spaces for the following reasons:

- If grave is not dug centrally within its respective grave space one of the walls separating the adjacent grave will be of a narrower width and will increase the risk of collapse of that side of the grave.

- When reopening a grave that was previously dug out of centre the risk of collapse is increased.

- When a memorial is erected centrally on a grave that was dug out of centre the risk of the memorial subsiding and tilting is increased which in turn increases the risk of the memorial becoming unstable and a danger.

Please see Appendix 3 for a guide on measuring and marking the area to be excavated centrally within the grave space

3.3 Walk boards / Work Platform

Hazard Checklist and Risk Assessments

Hazard	Type of Harm	Frequency Rating	Severity Rating	Risk Rating
Unprotected grave edges	Impact injuries from fall	3	3	9
Insecure soil box	Crushing/Trapping	3	3	9
Material falling from soil box into grave	Impact injuries	3	3	9
Unstable Walk boards	Impact injuries from fall	3	3	9
Soil box too close to edge of grave	Impact from fall of soil/stones etc. into grave. Trapping/crushing in collapsed grave	3	4	12

Walk boards

walk boards must be placed along each side of the grave to be dug that are supported on boards placed across the head and foot ends of the grave. This action will bridge the grave sides helping to spread the weight of operatives and prevent falls due to crumbling surface edges.

walk boards should remain in place for the whole of the burial process, i.e. placed before excavation commences and not removed until after backfilling is completed.

Wherever possible two boards width should be placed on each side of the grave. There are graves where neighbouring kerb memorials may make this difficult.

3.4 Soil Box

A Soil box (soil tidy) should ideally be erected to contain the excavated material. This structure must be securely erected so that pressure from the soil inside does not cause it to collapse. The

use of a soil box will assist with protection of nearby memorials and turf and is recommended best practice.

The soil box should be situated no closer than 2' (0.61m) from the edge of the excavation to reduce pressure near to the edges of the grave and therefore reduce the risk of collapse. Consideration should be given to increasing the distance of the box from the edge of the grave where unfavourable ground conditions exist.

The soil in the box should be sloped (battered) away from the grave to reduce the weight at the side nearest to the grave. A front board can be placed across the front of the box to stop soil, stones etc. from rolling off the soil stack and onto any operative who may be working in the grave.

It is advisable to estimate and remove excess soil from the grave (i.e. soil that would remain after backfilling is completed) before the soil box is used. This action will keep the amount of soil placed in the box to a minimum and will reduce pressure within the box and subsequently the risk of the box collapsing.

3.4.1 Soil Boards

In Some cases, individual graves are better served using soil boards and covered soil piles rather than a soil box as this spreads the weight out further and with 8-foot burials if often required as the capacity of KTC soil boxes is not sufficient

Please see Appendix 4 for specifications for walk boards and soil box.

4. Excavation and Ground Support

4.1 Preliminaries and Preparation

All tools and equipment required to complete the excavation process must be available in proximity to the grave to be excavated before digging commences.

The amount of shoring equipment required should be assessed according to the required depth of excavation, soil type and weather conditions and the depth of shoring timbers / hydraulic units.

For types of shoring, please see Appendix 5

4.4. Machine Excavation

Hazard	Type of Harm	Frequency Rating	Severity Rating	Risk Rating
Weight of machine on ground causing collapse of grave	Crushing / Trapping	3	4	12
Vibration of machine causing collapse of grave	Crushing /Trapping	3	4	12
Impact with moving boom	Impact injuries	3	4	12
Impact with moving machine	Impact injuries	3	4	12
Fumes entering grave	Asphyxiation	3	4	12
Noise from machine	Tinnitus/deafness	2	3	6

Only authorised trained persons should be permitted to operate grave digging machines.

Training and certification in the safe use of grave digging machines is provided by the ICCM under the Cemetery Operatives Training Scheme. Unlike other excavator operators courses the COTS course focuses on the hazards, implications and problems specific to the cemetery environment. Details of the Scheme courses are contained in Appendix 1

The machine operator must ensure that no person stands within the area of the radius of the machine boom or bucket.

When moving a digging machine within the Cemetery the driver must exercise caution and treat the Paths and grounds with respect.

When a machine is not in use, it must be parked on hard ground in such a manner that it does not cause an obstruction to traffic or pedestrians. When parked, the boom must be lowered with the bucket resting on solid ground. The ignition key must be removed. The blade on tracked machines must be in the down position whenever the vehicle is parked.

The machine operator must ensure that the machine is safely manoeuvred into the digging position. Tracks must be correctly positioned as far away as is practicable from the grave to be excavated. Ensuring ground boards are always used underneath where the excavator will be positioned can spread the weight of the machine.

The blade on a tracked machine must always be in the down position when digging is in progress. The operator must ensure that the machine as level as possible before digging commences to ensure that the sides of the grave are vertical. The level of the machine can be adjusted using the tracks / blade. An unlevelled machine will cause one side of the grave to be under dug, which will increase the risk of grave collapse.

The machine must be switched off whilst shoring is being installed into a part dug grave. This action will reduce the risk of collapse caused by vibration of a running machine. The bucket must be rested on solid ground to the side and as far away as is possible from the grave being excavated.

It is possible that exhaust fumes from the engine can collect in the bottom of the grave. Wherever possible the machine should be positioned down wind of the excavation to reduce the risk of this occurring. The risk is increased on days when there is no breeze. (Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations 2002)

Care must be taken when excavating a grave whilst shoring is in place so as to avoid striking any part of the shoring equipment with the machine bucket.

Striking or dislodging shoring will not only increase the risk of collapse of the grave but will also increase risk to the gravediggers who are required to rectify the situation.

Digging machines must be operated in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. Machines should be regularly serviced by a qualified person. (KTC hire in the relevant size excavator either 1.5 or 3 tonne depending on grave depth and access from Alide Hire, a local company)

Machine operators should be trained to carry out pre-start checks and routine maintenance. This action will increase familiarity with the machine and assist in identifying faults before they worsen and become hazards. Training in routine maintenance and pre-start checks is included in the Cemetery Operatives Training Scheme details of which can be found in Training Details.

(maintenance done by Alide as part of hire agreement)

4.5 Hand Excavation
Shoring must be incorporated as digging proceeds. Adequate shoring will be incorporated to prevent the collapse of the sides of the grave. Soil type and weather conditions will affect the requirements for each particular grave.

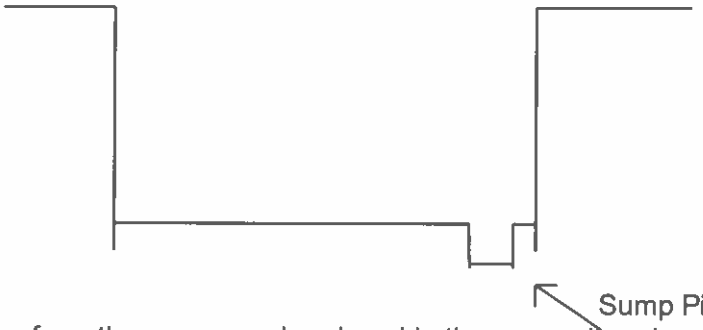
Care must be taken during periods of wet weather when it is advisable to close shored graves to full depth.

On completion of each excavation the gravedigger must ensure that the sides and ends of the grave are vertical and that the bottom of the grave is level. Shoring units must be level.

The *ICCM* recommends that a second person is in attendance whenever work is being carried out in an excavation of a depth greater than 3' (0.91m) to comply with the requirements of the Confined Spaces Regulations 1997. The second person will be able to give warning to the gravedigger, raise the alarm in an emergency and commence emergency procedures.

4.6 Dealing With Ground Water
Should water collect in a grave it should be removed prior to the interment. Ideally a motorised pump should be used, as this action will not require a gravedigger to enter the grave. The hose from the pump can be lowered into the grave from surface level.

When conditions indicate that water may collect in a grave a sump pit can be dug in the bottom of the grave towards one end.



The hose from the pump can be placed in the sump pit and as water is pumped out of the pit the remaining water in the grave will be drawn towards the pit thus leaving the greater part of the bottom of the grave dry.

When hand digging a sump pit can be kept open at one end with the gravedigger working away from it. This action will assist in reducing the amount of mud created on the bottom of the grave.

When machine digging a sump pit can be dug when final hand levelling off the bottom of the grave is carried out.

Should water be removed from a grave using a petrol driven pump no gravedigger should be working in the grave while the pump is running as exhaust fumes may enter the grave and collect at the bottom. (Exhaust fumes are heavier than air)
Ideally the pump should be positioned as far away from the grave as is possible and positioned down wind.

Water removed from a grave should ideally be pumped into the nearest soak away or sewer.

Should foul odours be encountered a supervisor should be informed immediately. Phenolic disinfectant should be used if required.

[Attention is drawn to the Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977 which states "no person shall remove therefrom any soil which is offensive" (Part 1 of Schedule 2)]

4.7 Lifting Equipment
(Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998)

When excavating deep graves by hand a point will be reached where the grave digger cannot throw the soil out of the grave without the risk of stones, debris etc. falling back. To remove this risk, it will be necessary to employ lifting equipment such as a winch and bucket. The bucket is lowered to the bottom of the grave and is filled by the gravedigger. When the bucket has been filled a second person will operate the winch.

When using lifting equipment for this purpose such equipment must be securely set up at one end of the grave so that the gravedigger in the excavation can stand at the opposite end during the lifting operation. Should the bucket fall or debris fall from the bucket during lifting the risk to the gravedigger from being struck by falling objects is reduced. To eliminate this risk entirely the gravedigger can exit the grave before the lift commences and return after the emptied bucket has been lowered. (KTC don't have a winch just roped buckets that are lifted out however above procedure still applies.)

The person operating the lifting equipment should swing the bucket clear of the grave and as far away as is possible and rest it down before detaching the rope / hook. Ideally the bucket should be emptied onto the back of the soil box to reduce the risk of stones or debris rolling off of the spoil heap and onto the grave digger in the excavation.

The requirements of the Lifting Operations and Lifting Equipment Regulations 1998 are available on request.

4.8 Power Barrow /Dumper
Power Barrow should be regularly serviced and maintained by a suitably qualified person.

The user must carry out daily prestart checks and report any faults however minor to prevent such faults worsening and becoming hazards.
The employer and driver have legal obligations to ensure that a Power Barrow is safe to use under health and safety legislation

The User must ensure that the Power Barrow is not overloaded in terms of weight as this can dramatically affect the handling / steering of the barrow.

Load should not be so high as to obstruct the all-round view of the user.

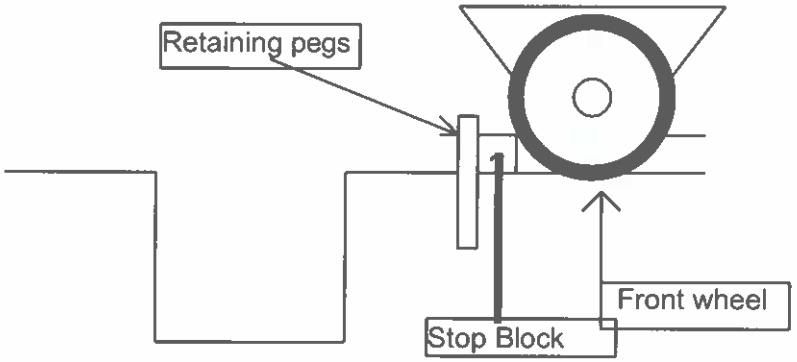
Within the Cemetery the driver must exercise caution and treat the roads and grounds with respect and adhere to the appropriate speed limit when driving on the public highway. The driver must hold the appropriate license.

When a dumper is being used to remove excess spoil from a grave great care must be taken when manoeuvring into place. The Power barrow should be stopped as far away as is practicable from the grave to minimize the risk of collapse of the grave caused by the weight or vibration of the machine.

No person should be working in a grave when a dumper is being moved into position, being filled with soil or being moved away.

A stop block can be placed at a pre-determined distance from the excavation to prevent the dumper truck from being driven too close. The stop block will reduce the risk of accident should a user error / misjudgement occur or if the breaks fail.

Diagram



Further information on the safe use of dumpers is available from the HSE at: HSE publications

5. Ground Support

The example procedures contained within this section demonstrate approaches for dealing with the most favourable and most unfavourable of soil types. These procedures can be modified by the user according to the results of dynamic risk assessments covering local soil type and conditions.

For clarity the diagrams contained in the procedures do not show walk boards in position. It is stressed that walk boards should be placed in position before digging commences and not removed until after backfilling is completed.

Hazard Checklist and Risk Assessments

Hazard	Type of Harm	Frequency Rating	Severity Rating	Risk Rating
Un-shored grave	Crushing / Trapping	3	4	**12**
Insecure shoring	"	3	4	**12**
Inadequate shoring	"	3	4	**12**
Defective shoring	"	3	4	**12**
Unstable non cohesive ground	"	3	4	**12**
Falling material and objects including nearby unstable memorials	Impact injuries	3	4	**12**
Foul water	Infection	2	4	**8**
Manual handling	Back strain / hernia	3	3	**9**
Repetitive strain	Arthritis	3	3	**9**
Unprotected grave edges	Impact injuries from tripping / falling	3	3	**9**
Unattended open graves	Impact injuries from falling	2	4	**8**

NOTE : The above risk assessments were considered in respect of an operative working in

or near to a grave of 7' (2.13m) in depth.
Risk is increased for graves of greater depth.

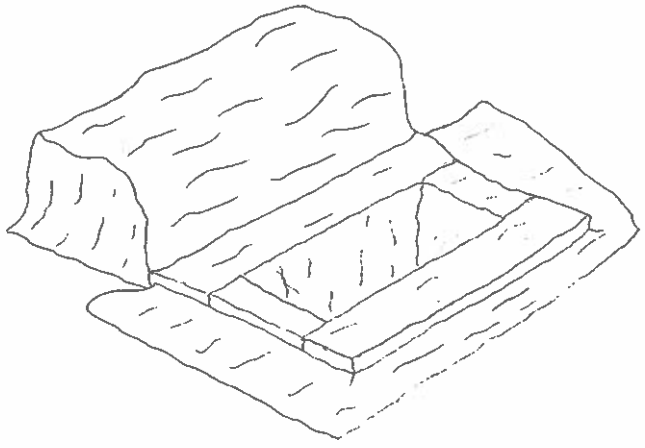
Information on different methods of shoring in differing ground conditions can be found in Appendix 5

6. Preparation for Interment

Hazard	Type of Harm	Frequency Rating	Severity Rating	Risk Rating
Limited access	Impact injuries from Trip / Fall	3	3	9
Unstable walk boards	" " "	3	3	9
Folded or torn grass matting	" " "	3	3	9
Frayed webbing breaking	Back / muscle strain. Injuries from falling.	3	3	9
Insecure nearby memorials	Injuries from Crushing / Trapping	3	4	12

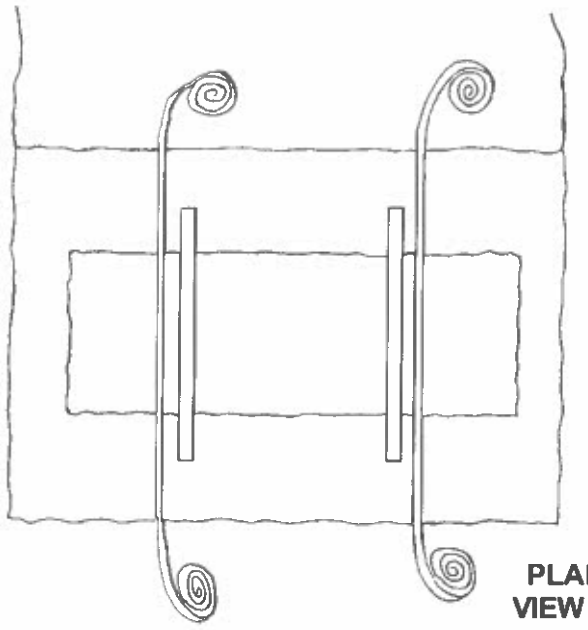
Prior to preparing / dressing the grave the surrounding area should be examined to ensure as far as is reasonably practicable a safe, unobstructed access for Funeral Directors staff, clergy and mourners. Any trip hazards that may be present must be removed.

Walk boards must be checked for stability with adjustments made as required. Unstable walk boards may cause a pall bearer (s) to fall whilst placing a coffin onto putlogs.



Grass matting can be draped into the grave to cover the internal walls and shoring equipment. The soil box, walk boards and immediate surrounding area can then be covered.

Care must be taken to avoid trip hazards caused by folds in the matting. Torn or holed matting must not be used.



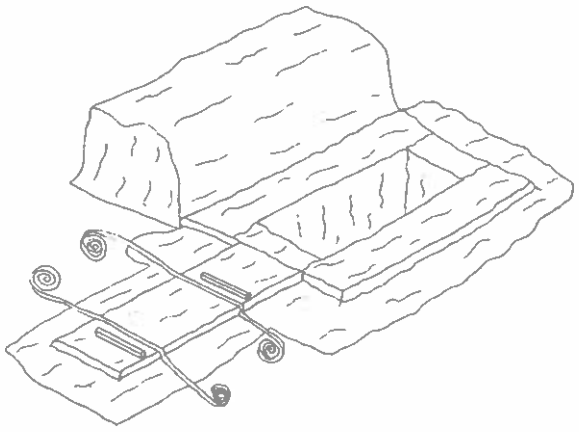
PLAN VIEW

Two putlogs should be placed across the grave onto which the coffin may be placed prior to the committal. Putlogs should be 4'6" x 4" x 4" (1.37m x 102mm x 102mm) and of good quality knot free planed timber.

The distance between the putlogs should be no less than 3'6"(1.07m).

Two lowering webbings are placed as shown in the diagram. Care must be taken to ensure that sufficient webbing is placed on either side of the grave to enable each pallbearer to lower the coffin to the bottom of the grave.

Webbings should be checked for signs of deterioration or fraying before each burial service. Frayed or damaged webbings must not be used and should be cut down to prevent use by any other person.



In some instances, there may be insufficient space to the side of the grave for the pallbearers to safely carry the coffin and place it on putlogs directly over the grave.

A safer method for this situation is to place a board at either the foot or head end of the grave covered with grass matting on which to place the coffin.

Two putlogs are placed across the board so that the coffin can be rested down with no risk of pallbearers trapping fingers. The lowering webbings are also placed across the board.

At the appropriate time during the committal service the pallbearers can lift the coffin using the webbings and walk along the walk boards and safely lower the coffin into the grave

7. Backfilling

7.1. General Requirements and Considerations

Backfilling should commence immediately after all mourners have left the cemetery and be completed fully on the same working day where possible, (if not possible due to funeral time and light conditions in the winter ensure the coffin is fully covered and the grave cover securely placed on top, with full backfill to be a priority next day.)

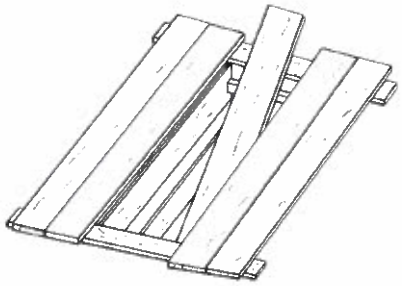
Webbings and grass mats must be removed before backfilling commences.

Walkboards should be left in place during the whole of the backfilling procedure to prevent persons walking on any unprotected grave edge.

To reduce later subsidence and settlement of the grave, all backfill materials (including the material placed between the liners or vaults and sides of opened graves), shall be tamped and compacted in layers not to exceed 150mm in depth so that a compacted density of 90 percent shall result, using soil free from large lumps. **The grave is to be finished with a tidy mound of soil. With any flowers carefully arranged on top.** The importance of this action cannot be stressed highly enough as the reduction of instances where the bereaved may be confronted with sunken graves is imperative. It will also subsequently reduce the risk of the memorial tilting and thereby becoming unstable.

Monitoring of the condition of the backfilled grave is to be carried out weekly within the first month and thereafter at regular intervals (at least monthly). Remedial work must be undertaken immediately if there is soil settlement leading to an untidy, uneven or sunken surface and/or if the turves show signs of drought or die-back. The responsibility for monitoring and maintenance rests with the Grounds team when the soil has had time to settle it is made level and covered with saved and if necessary, imported turfs to leave an immaculate finish.

7.2 Protection of the coffin



When backfilling large flints, pieces of rock or lumps of clay may damage the coffin when they impact from height. To reduce the risk of coffin damage a timber can be placed into the grave as shown in the above diagram. Backfill material will strike the timber, break its speed of fall and deflect to the sides of the grave.

7.3 Mourner Participation

Some ethnic and religious groups require carrying out the backfilling of the grave themselves.

There is a conflict between health and safety and customer care in this situation, and it is for the Town Council to assess the risk involved and decide whether to permit mourners to backfill.

Should it be decided to permit mourners to backfill the grounds maintenance team must take

control of proceedings and stop backfilling at the relevant stages in order that gravediggers can remove shoring equipment.

It is vital to the health and safety of mourners that co-operation between Cemetery staff, Mourners and the Funeral Directors conducting the funeral is established.

Guidance on procedures for Backfilling can be found in Appendix 6

8. Funeral Directors

Whilst the Town Council and the Funeral Director will combine to serve the same client it is important to also combine in the interest of health and safety.

Funeral Directors should be requested to provide their risk assessments, safe systems of work and staff training information together with a copy of their public liability insurance certificates.

9. Contractors and others working in the Cemetery

Tender documents for major contracts must contain a section relating to Health and Safety requirements. This section will contain full details of how the contractor will comply with all legislative requirements with copies of policies, risk assessments, safe systems of work, staff training records, COSHH assessments, insurance certificates etc.

(See Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999)

Small contracts that are not submitted to the full tendering process should also require that bidders submit full details of the Health and Safety documentation as above.

Any contractor, appointed to do work at Keynsham Cemetery, agree to comply with the above requirements, Keynsham Town Council's Cemetery Regulations, and the Local Authorities Cemetries Order 1977.

(See Health and Safety at Work Act 1974)

Chairman .....

Clerk of the Council.....

Date.....7th March 2026.....

Date of next review: March 2028