

## Ludgvan Parish Council

# Grave Digging Policy and Procedures

*Adopted by Council – February 2022      Review date: February 2025*

Relevant legislation includes: Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974, The Local Authorities Cemeteries Order 1977

### Introduction

1. The following procedures are advisory and are not exhaustive. It is the responsibility of Funeral Directors to ensure compliance with all relevant legislation. Should these procedures conflict with legislation, then legislation shall prevail.
2. The council may request Funeral Directors, grave diggers and contractors working in the parish council cemeteries to provide to the council copies of policies, risk assessments, method statements, safe systems of work, staff training records, COSHH assessments, insurance certificates or any other relevant document, prior to allowing work on site to be carried out.
3. The council may carry out spot checks without prior notice to ensure compliance with these Policy and Procedures. Any Funeral Directors, their employee, contractor or any other person found to be in contravention of the policy and procedures may be prohibited from working at the cemetery and shall not be entitled to any recompense.
4. The parish council is responsible for the running of St Paul's Cemetery, Ludgvan and Crowlas Cemetery, Crowlas, and so these are the cemeteries to which this policy and procedures apply.

### General requirements

5. **No grave may be dug in the council owned cemeteries without the written permission of Ludgvan Parish Council.**
6. It is the responsibility of the Funeral Director to arrange for the excavation of the grave and removal of any existing memorials or kerbstones and the replacement of same after the burial.
7. Funeral Directors are to employ their own grave diggers. It is the responsibility of the Funeral Director to ensure that the grave diggers employed by them are familiar with the cemetery and abide by this policy and these procedures.
8. Only grave diggers expressly approved by the parish council may be employed to carry out work at the parish council cemeteries.
9. No full grave or cremation plot should be dug more than 48 hours before the interment, except by prior arrangement in exceptional circumstances.
10. Appropriate PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) must be worn at all times, noting that PPE is the last of the precautions to reduce risk of harm or injury. Safe working practices to be determined by risk assessment, working method statements and no work to be carried out before completing a site risk assessment.
11. Entry and egress from a grave must be by ladder (shoring must not be used for climbing). A ladder must remain in place whenever a worker is working in a grave, to maintain an emergency exit.

12. All graves must be dug centrally within the grave space, to reduce risk of collapse should grave sides be too narrow.
13. Shoring timbers and struts must be inspected prior to use for any sign of deterioration. Defective timbers and struts must not be used and should be disposed of to prevent use by any other person.
14. Shoring must be used as digging proceeds. 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.
15. Lowering webbings and putlogs must be inspected prior to each burial, to ensure that no deterioration has occurred and that they are capable of taking the weight of the coffin.
16. The interment area and surrounding graves and headstones are to be left clean and tidy. All equipment to be removed and the paths cleared of any debris.

#### **Pre-excavation preparation**

17. Risk assessments must be carried out before any works commence on site, to inform the safe working methods to be used for each dig.
18. Consideration must be given to:
  - a. safe and easy access for workers and equipment
  - b. safe access for persons attending and officiating at the burial service
  - c. the health and safety of workers during the excavation and backfilling processes
  - d. the health and safety of cemetery visitors.
19. Potential hazard factors include:
  - a. ground conditions
  - b. memorials on or near the grave site
  - c. correct identification, positioning and marking out of the grave

#### **Locating graves, measuring and marking**

20. All graves to be excavated should be located and identified using the cemetery grave plan. If there is any doubt as to the location, clarification to be sought from the parish clerk in advance of the day planned for the digging of the grave.
21. Walkboards must be placed along each side of the grave to be dug, supported on boards placed across the head and foot ends of the grave. Walkboards must remain in place for the whole of the burial process, and not removed until after backfilling is completed.
22. Soil removed from the grave to be stored safely near the grave site. This soil should not be at risk of collapse, and should not obstruct the memorials of nearby graves.

#### **23. Excavation**

24. The grave space set aside for each burial shall not exceed 8 feet long by 3 feet wide.
25. The grave digger will ensure that double depth graves are excavated to a standard depth of 6ft 6" for the first burial, to ensure that there is sufficient space for a second burial in the future.

26. The grave digger will ensure that all new graves are aligned so that memorial stones, when installed, will be in a straight line along the row.
27. No part of the coffin shall be at a depth less than 3 feet below the level of the surface of the ground next to the grave.
28. A second burial in a grave shall ensure that the new coffin is effectively separated from any other coffin previously placed in the grave space, by means of a layer of earth not less than 6 inches in depth.
29. As the excavation progresses, grave shoring shall be installed by trained workers. It is important to note that the use of a machine digger, the installation of grave shoring and acting as banksman are key activities, which should only be undertaken by properly trained and accredited workers.
30. Excavation shall be either by hand or by machine digging, depending on whether access is available and safe, as well as whether it is a new or re-opened grave. In any event, it shall be a two-person operation. All grave sides shall be square and vertical.
31. During the excavation process care must be taken to note anything of concern, such as the discovery of remains or a risk of grave wall collapse. In any of these circumstances, work shall cease and the matter shall be immediately referred to the Funeral Director and/or the parish council clerk for guidance. During this time a worker must remain at the site for safety reasons.
32. 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.
33. All cremation plots will measure 18" x 18" for a single casket and the top of the casket should be a minimum of 2ft 6" below ground level.
34. No person shall disturb any interred human remains.
35. Excess spoil following burial to be removed from site and disposed of by the grave digger.

#### **Machine excavation**

36. The grave digger must ensure that any machine used to dig a grave is operated by a person who has received appropriate training in the use of the machine. The machine operator must ensure that no person stands within the swing area of the machine boom or bucket. When moving a digger within the cemetery, the driver must exercise caution and treat the burial ground with respect.
37. 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.

#### **Dealing with ground water**

38. Should water collect in a grave it should be removed prior to the interment, preferably using a motorised pump. Water removed from a grave should be pumped into the nearest soakaway or sewer.

#### **Preparation for interment**

39. Any trip hazards that may be present must be removed. The grave area should be clear of obstructions and safe for the persons attending the burial.

## **Backfilling**

40. Backfilling should commence immediately after all mourners have left the cemetery and be completed fully on the same day. The coffin should be protected from damage by rocks when backfilling.
41. Walkboards should be left in place during the whole of the backfilling process to prevent anyone from waling on any unprotected grave edge.
42. In order to reduce later subsidence and settlement of the grave, all backfill materials should be tamped and compacted. The grave is to be finished with a tidy mound of soil, covered with saved turfs. It is important to avoid instances where the bereaved may later find the grave to be sunken, or for risk of the memorial tilting and becoming unstable.
43. If there is to be any mourner participation in the backfilling of the grave, the management of this process is to be the sole responsibility of the Funeral Director.

## **Excavation of re-opened graves**

All processes and procedures above shall apply, with the following additions:

- care shall be taken when approaching the depth of the previous interment, to ensure no damage to previously interred remains.

## **Exhumation**

All processes and procedures above shall apply, with the following additions::

- a) work must not take place unless the relevant paperwork is in place (ie the licence issued by the Home Office, of the Faculty issued by the Church Authority)
- b) Work will only commence following the erection of suitable screening, to prevent public view of the exhumation site
- c) suitable lifting equipment shall be engaged as necessary to remove the coffin/remains from the grave. Excess soil shall be cleared from the remains/coffin.
- d) freshly ground lime and disinfectant shall be used as required
- e) the removed items shall be carefully placed in a suitable container. All other items removed from the grave shall be treated and disinfected.
- f) Should any other remains require removal (to attain access), then such remains shall be returned to the grave in the same position.
- g) All workers involved with the process shall be supplied with specific PPE (goggles, disposable coveralls, gloves, etc) all of which will be disposed of following the completion of the exhumation.
- h) Wherever possible, the procedure shall be arranged as early as possible in the morning and outside normal working hours, seeking to achieve completion outside the view of the general public.