

# **Stroud Cemetery**

## **Management Plan**

Access Improvement Strategy

Stroud Town Council/Stroud District Council – January 2010

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## Introduction

Stroud Cemetery is a Local Nature Reserve partly within and adjoining the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Stroud Town Council (STC) manages it, on behalf of Stroud District Council (the burial authority) and with advice from Gloucestershire Wildlife Management.

The cemetery lies on sloping, south-facing ground on the eastern edge of Stroud with access from Bisley Road and Horns Road. It comprises two distinct sections.

The Old Cemetery is to the north of Horns Road and includes the Victorian Chapel of Rest, historic gravestones, unimproved limestone grassland, scrub, woodland, specimen trees and boundary walls.

The New Cemetery lies to the south of Horns Road and includes access roads, a storage yard and graves laid out as a lawn cemetery. It is the New Cemetery where most of the current burials occur. There is open access to the public on both sites.

As part of an ongoing Management Plan, STC has been implementing a wide range of works over the past 10 years. The Plan seeks to improve both sites, not only as a burial facility but as amenity open space, wildlife habitat and as an historical and educational resource.

Some of the work already completed includes:

- Laying of hedgerows along the eastern boundary to increase burial space and improve access and habitat.
- Clearing undergrowth around historic graves in the Old Cemetery.
- Bi-annual safety checks, including topple-testing of all old grave stones, to ensure safety for users.
- Resurfacing the Paupers' Path entry.

A wider list of activities can be found at Appendix 1 on Page 9

## **The cemetery today...**

The cemetery covers 6.3 hectares, and following the levelling of more land, it has capacity for a further 10 years of burials. There is a much longer availability for cremated remains.

This Access Improvement Strategy seeks to tackle a number of issues which have emerged in recent years due to the unauthorised installation of kerbstones and other structures on the plots.

### **Recent graves**

The New Cemetery contains the graves for burials which have taken place over the past 50 years. The erection of any memorial has required the prior consent of the Burial Authority for many years.

In terms of access for the public and staff, this area is of greater concern as it is more frequently used for burials and by visitors.

Despite the requirement for consent referred to above, this area has become difficult to maintain and to safely access. This is because many 'kerbstones' and other monuments have been laid in front of, or instead of headstones without any permission from the Burial Authority.

A wide range of 'kerbstones' (also known as edgings) or monuments have been installed over many years. Some are large memorial stones, sometimes ornate, which lay around graves. Others are more informal having a 'home-made' approach. Many of these have not been maintained by burial plot owners.

Stroud Town Council is receiving an increasing number of complaints from users, funeral directors and stone masons that these unauthorised structures cause obstructions for mourners and visitors. They pose dangerous obstructions for future burials. They prevent machinery access for grave digging and also hinder access by machinery used in maintaining the cemetery.

### **Reserved plots**

There are a number of burial plots among existing graves that have been reserved. Family members of the already deceased will be buried with them in the future. The presence of unauthorised kerbstones prevents safe access, both for mourners attending burials and for the machinery needed to dig the plots.

## **Access Improvement Strategy.**

### **Broad plans**

The following broad strategy is proposed over the next five years to address the issues raised on the previous pages. The aim is to move increasingly towards the situation where the New Cemetery is managed as a lawn cemetery, with memorials consisting only of a headstone or a cross, a memorial vase or an ashes memorial.

- To comply with Cemetery Regulations, ensure that no further 'kerbstones' or other unauthorised additions are laid in the New Cemetery
- Remove unauthorised 'kerbstones' and other unauthorised items in the New Cemetery
- Improve grave areas in the Old Cemetery.

The above actions will first be carried out in the most frequently used and visited parts of the New Cemetery. This will have the greatest positive impact on all groups who use the cemetery; mourners, visitors, funeral directors, stonemasons and maintenance teams.

### **Outcomes**

The above action intends to yield the following:

- to make the Cemetery tidier and a more pleasant to visit.
- to make the Cemetery a more respectful place for the deceased and as a place of remembrance for mourners and visitors.
- to make the Cemetery safer.
- to improve access for burials by stonemasons, grave diggers and funeral directors.
- to improve access for mourners and visitors.
- to improve access for maintenance staff to manage the Cemetery.

## Communications Plan

For such a sensitive issue, effective communication is essential. Having established, via consultation with site users, stonemasons and funeral directors that the issues outlined earlier need to be attended to, we need to ensure that the messages are communicated effectively.

This plan will focus on the two priorities of the Access Improvement Strategy:

Ensure that no further 'kerbstones' or other monuments are laid in the New Cemetery in line with current Cemetery Regulations.

Remove unauthorised 'kerbstones' and other monuments in the New Cemetery sections.

*Communications and specific actions can be developed nearer the time to cover the third priority, which covers 'Improve grave areas in the Old Cemetery'.*

The Cemetery Regulations do not permit the placement of 'kerbstones' or other monuments around graves.

For the past two years, relatives and visitors have been specifically advised not to install kerbstones and that a kerbstone reduction programme is to take place. They have been informed that the Burial Authority and STC are moving towards a position whereby the New Cemetery will be managed as a lawn cemetery with memorials consisting only of a headstone or cross, a memorial vase or an ashes memorial.

These messages are to be reinforced in any paperwork to all parties involved in the arrangement of future burials, including stonemasons and funeral directors.

The existing 'no kerbstone policy' will be rigorously enforced on all new burials.

It is important to note that under the Cemetery Regulations, relatives are allowed a 'garden' area in front of headstones. This may extend up to a metre's length measured from the back of the headstone.

### **PRIORITY TWO: Action the removal of kerbstones in the New Cemetery over the next five years**

This covers two areas:

- (a) inviting people to remove kerbstones themselves
- (b) the removal of remaining kerbstones, after a period of notice, by the Burial Authority/STC

The following Communications Plan has been put together for this priority. It acknowledges that direct communication with people responsible for specific graves can be difficult.

<b>Timing</b>	<b>Action</b>
Early February 2010	STC to write to last known contacts for each affected grave to explain what we are doing and why we are doing it. Letter will advise that people can make their own arrangements for the removal of kerbstones from their plot within a 12-month period. If they are not removed after that period, STC will remove and store them (for a limited time).*
	Feature length article or press release for submission to local media. This will cover what we are doing, why and how. Key journalists invited to attend the site for photo opportunity to see extent of issues. Include consultees in publicity.
	Ensure stonemasons, funeral directors and all relevant staff are informed of the process being undertaken and why.
	Place notices and posters on cemetery noticeboards and pegs, STC noticeboards and window
	Update STC and SDC websites with clear information about the process and contact details for any queries
	Provide information on the process in appropriate newsletters
	Post Cemetery Regulations in relevant locations
September 2010	Reminder letter sent to last known contacts for graves where kerbstones remain in place
	Reminder publicity in papers/media, websites and newsletters, notices and posters on cemetery noticeboards and SDC and STC websites
February 2011	Final reminder letter sent to last known contacts for graves advising of a further 3month period of 'grace' and that kerbstones which have not been removed by 1 <sup>st</sup> May 2011 will be removed by STC, on the instruction of the Burial Authority, and placed in storage.* Reminder publicity in papers/media, websites and newsletters, notices and posters on cemetery noticeboards and SDC and STC websites.
February 2011	STC/SDC to meet to discuss communications for April 2011 onwards

\*The 15 month period from the start of publicity to the actual removal of kerbstones is required to ensure that we do all we can to make sure people are aware of our plans. Many people visit graves once a year and we need to ensure that a year's cycle has passed before removing any kerbstones – otherwise they may not see the notices in the cemetery, and for such a sensitive issue, we would not wish for them to have any unpleasant surprises.

There are currently 189 sets of kerbstones and headstones that will need to be removed or re-sited.

## **Consultation and feedback – the need to improve the cemetery...**

"Kerbing causes problems for bearers when trying to access a grave whilst carrying a coffin. It can be a struggle to get in place."

**James Nicholls,  
Fred Stevens Funeral Directors, Nailsworth.**

"We feel a lawned cemetery is a much better arrangement. Kerbstones can be dangerous for mourners at the graveside as they can present a trip hazard."

**Michael Gamble  
Michael Gamble Funeral Directors**

"I can understand why people want kerbs but it can make the cemetery look untidy and doesn't show our work off in a good light.

Kerbing can get in the way when fixing headstones and those that are not installed by professionals can be quite dangerous.

Removing illegal kerbs will make the cemetery easier and safer to work in."

**Steve Cottle  
Cottle Memorials**

"I think it's only fair that everyone is treated the same. We have ensured our family grave is within the size allowed and it annoys us when other people do not. The areas that are a proper lawn cemetery look much nicer and tidier."

**Mr Peter Anderson, Cainscross**

"I'm not as agile as I used to be and it is getting very difficult to get around all the obstacles to get to my wife's grave. It's not very thoughtful."

**Retired cemetery visitor from Stroud**

"Every member of the Greenspaces Team wishes to provide a cemetery that is clean, tidy and as user-friendly as possible. We are getting an increasing number of complaints from visitors who find it difficult to access their graves and who believe a lawned cemetery looks much better."

**Paul D'Angelo – Greenspaces Manager, STC**

## **Appendix 1:**

As part of an ongoing Management Plan, Stroud Town Council (STC) and Stroud District Council (SDC) have been implementing a wide range of works over the past 10 years. Some of the work already completed includes:

- Laying of hedgerows along the eastern boundary to increase burial space and improve access and habitat.
- Clearing undergrowth around historic graves in the Old Cemetery.
- Bi-annual safety checks on old gravestones.
- Resurfacing the Paupers' Path entry.
- Topple-testing of all old gravestones twice a year to ensure safety for users
- Accreditation of the site as the district's only Local Nature Reserve.
- Replanting of the ornamental beds at the main entrance.
- Carefully pruning the ornamental cherry trees and the cedars at the entrance to the new cemetery.
- Installing history interpretation boards and producing a leaflet on the site's historic and cultural importance.
- Holding public events such as the glow worm walks and a textile festival event.
- A new equipment storage and bunker area to improve the site's appearance.
- Moving the skips off-site to improve access and amenity.
- Digitalisation of the cemetery records to help preserve them and to make it easier for people to conduct family research and to access information.
- Installing bird and bat boxes.
- Supporting the first detailed research into the site by the Stroud Local History Society

## **Further information...**

### **Storage Costs**

Should the registered owner of a grave arrange the removal of kerbstones through a local stonemason, it is estimated that the cost to the registered owner would be approximately £100 per set.