

CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL

OFFICER REPORT

Subject: Amendment to Chigwell Cemetery Regulations

Report of: Cemetery Registrar

Date: 18/11/2025

Meeting: Chigwell Parish Council – Full Council Committee

1. Purpose of the Report

To seek Council approval for amendments to the Chigwell Cemetery Regulations relating to:

1. Liability for existing memorials that include cladding extending down the side of the landing; and
 2. A prohibition on such cladding on all new memorials from 1 January 2026.
 3. Introduction of a regulation allowing inscriptions on the reverse (back) of headstones, which the current regulations do not permit.
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2. Background

Chigwell Cemetery contains a number of traditional memorials some constructed with cladding that extends down the sides of the landing. This design feature can create difficulties when moving memorials to allow for burials in adjacent plots, as the extending cladding is only an inch thick when the memorial is lifted the full weight of more than 1-2 ton is on this cladding causing it to crack or become dislodged from the landing. Repairing such damage typically costs in excess of £400 just to replace these strips.

The existing regulations do not set out the Council's position regarding liability for damage to such memorials, nor do they restrict the installation of new memorials with this design. As the number of burials increases and available space becomes more constrained, the Council's grounds staff and contractors have reported operational challenges that necessitate clearer regulation.

Additionally, the current regulations do **not** allow inscriptions on the back of headstones. This has increasingly been raised by families wishing to record additional information, especially when front-facing space is limited. Allowing reverse inscriptions poses no operational difficulty and would help with sustainability of a non-renewable resource such as granite or marble.

3. Proposed Amendments

3.1 Liability Relating to Existing Memorials

It is proposed that the Council adopt a clear statement confirming that:

Where an existing memorial incorporates cladding extending down the side of the landing, Chigwell Parish Council shall accept no responsibility for any damage, alteration, or required relocation of the memorial that may arise in order to facilitate or accommodate a nearby

burial. While all reasonable care will be taken during such works, the Council shall not be held liable for any consequential impact on the cladding, the memorial structure, or any associated fittings.

This amendment aims to provide clarity for families and memorial owners and to protect the Council from liability where such designs hinder access to neighbouring plots.

3.2 Prohibition on Cladding Extending Down the Side of the Landing (New Memorials)

It is further proposed that the following regulation be introduced:

With effect from 01 January 2026, memorials featuring cladding that extends down the side of the landing shall not be permitted within Chigwell Cemetery. All memorial applications submitted on or after this date must comply strictly with this requirement.

The prohibition will help ensure easier access for future burials, reduce maintenance issues, and minimise the risk of damage to adjoining memorials.

3.3 Permission for Inscriptions on the Reverse of Headstones

The current regulations prohibit inscriptions on the back of headstones. It is proposed to amend the regulations as follows:

Inscriptions on the reverse (back) face of a headstone shall be permitted, subject to prior approval by the Cemetery Registrar. Such inscriptions must comply with all existing standards relating to content, design, and workmanship applied to front-facing inscriptions. No inscription shall extend beyond the boundaries of the memorial or interfere with neighbouring plots.

This amendment enables families to add additional commemorative information—such as names, verses, or later interments—without affecting the front design or requiring the installation of additional stones or plaques.

4. Consultation

Informal feedback has been gathered from cemetery staff and memorial masons, who support the introduction of clearer guidelines. The proposed lead-in time to 1 January 2026 allows masons and families to prepare for the change and adapt their designs accordingly.

5. Legal and Risk Implications

The amendments reduce the Council's exposure to claims relating to accidental damage during burial works. The clarification regarding existing memorials provides a defensible position should disputes arise. The forward prohibition further reduces the Council's exposure to claims relating to accidental damage by taking a proactive stance.

6. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial costs associated with implementing the revised regulations. The reduced risk of accidental damage to memorials may prevent future unbudgeted expenditure.

7. Equality and Diversity Implications

The proposed amendments apply equally to all cemetery users and do not disadvantage any specific group. The notice period before the design prohibition takes effect allows fair transition for all.

8. Recommendations

That Council:

1. **Approves the amendment regarding liability** for existing memorials featuring cladding extending down the side of the landing.
2. **Approves the prohibition** of new memorials with such cladding, effective from **01 January 2026**, and requires all memorial applications from that date to comply with this provision.
3. **Approves the introduction of a regulation permitting inscriptions on the reverse of headstones**, subject to approval by the Cemetery Registrar.
4. **Authorises** officers to update the published Cemetery Regulations and notify relevant stakeholders, including memorial masons and funeral directors