

## Headstone testing video transcript

[At the top left of the image a Durham County Council logo followed by the text 'Headstone Testing' is displayed. Both are visible throughout the video.]

[Ian Hoult, Neighbourhood Protection Manager]

[Head and shoulder video of Ian standing in a churchyard under a tree whilst talking. The video is interspersed with video clips as Ian talks.]

We have forty-six cemeteries and we have ninety-eight closed churchyards that Durham County Council's got responsibility for. As you can tell from here, they are absolutely beautiful places, places of respect for our loved ones. Durham County Council maintain these sites and it's really important that they are safe places for people to be, to respect their wishes of their families. As part of that we, on an ongoing basis, we will test memorial and headstones and we do that really for the safety of those people that visit our cemeteries.

[Video clip of two men working in the cemetery. One is checking a headstone that is leaning whilst the other man is taking notes.]

Standards have changed compared to what they used to be like and headstones are a bit smaller than they used to be. But, if you can imagine that some of the headstones are really quite big and if they fail or fall, then actually they could cause quite significant injuries to people.

So what we do is we look to check visually around the headstone, to see if there are any signs of them coming away at the base for example, or the lean that they have got on them.

[Video clip of two men working in the cemetery. One is checking a headstone around its base whilst the other man is taking notes.]

We take into consideration the type of material that they are made from and ultimately if we need to we will place our hand to test them to see if they are safe to stay.

If we come across a headstone that is not safe, what we will look to do firstly is to make it safe.

[Video clip of large headstone laid down flat at grave.]

So that could be in some instances really large ones, actually we have to either cordon off the area or we will lay it down. In the instance of smaller ones like we have got at this part of the cemetery

[Ian turns his shoulders and indicates behind him with his hand]

we will actually put stakes in and put some banding to actually make sure it is secure and that it is safe.

[Video clip of headstone with stake knocked into the ground at the side of a leaning headstone. The stake and headstone have two loops of banding around them, which are spaced apart, to secure the headstone with the stake.

What we will do after that we will look to try and contact the known relatives. If you can imagine though some of these headstones are actually quite old and there are nobody that we have got records of them being about. But if we do have records then we will try and contact the family to see whether or not they want to make plans for making safe that headstone, that memorial, prior to the steps we might need to take.

[Video clip of cemetery followed by a view of a large upright headstone]

If we do not have any details, or we don't get any response, we look to make that headstone safe permanently and we do that by placing it in the ground at the same location so that it is respectful for the families if they come at a later stage.

But it is also importantly reversible so if the family want to come along at a later stage and put a new base in, that is good and secure and place that existing headstone on top of it, then that's not a problem, that's fine.

[Video clip of part of the cemetery showing the rows of headstones and some trees. There is a deep shadow, possibly from a building, in the foreground and bright sunshine across the rest of the cemetery. Beyond the distant hedge is a row of houses.]

We are really conscious about what we are doing when we test headstones. You know, these memorials are a remembrance of their loved ones, their family and so we are very, very conscious about that. So some of the things we have done is we want to make sure that there is signage around the site to make sure that if visitors come in they know we are going to be doing some testing.

[Video clip of signage which reads:

Notice to all persons visiting this cemetery or closed churchyard.

A health and safety audit of headstones (memorial stones) will be commencing on (gives date handwritten) in this area.

Those headstones which are identified as being in potentially dangerous condition will be clearly marked. Do not touch or approach these monuments.

(Durham County Council logo)

If you wish further information contact Burial Admin. Support 03000 265609. ]

We contact the local clergy and local Councillors as well, to make sure they are aware of the testing that will be going on. But also we have made sure we have invested in the training in our staff. We have got the right equipment and indeed they have now also got the qualification around this as well, which is much more than lots of other Local Authorities do. So we are really [said with emphasis] very sensitive to the fact this is a memorial to our loved ones, families loved ones, in a beautiful place and we need to respect that and that is what we plan to do.

[Video still: Find out more at [www.durham.gov.uk/headstonetesting](http://www.durham.gov.uk/headstonetesting).]