



Flitwick Town Council - Memorial & Benches Policy

Overview

Flitwick Town Council implement a bench policy to standardise on recycled 'plastic wood' benches, with a 25 -year guarantee, and 'natural hardwood' benches with a 10-year guarantee with a view to reducing ongoing maintenance and to facilitate a formal manageable regime.

Introduction

Flitwick Town Council receives occasional requests from members of the public who wish to place a memorial bench within a public open space. These are often places with which individuals or families have a particular connection or special relationship. There is no legislative requirement for the provision of public or memorial benches although it is accepted that they provide a useful and valued public amenity.

The provision and management of all seats and benches on all public open spaces owned or managed by the Council is the responsibility of the Town Council. This policy covers the provision of memorial benches in public open space which includes areas such as parks, other recreational land, and streets (subject to approval from CBC Highways Department).

In general, most requests have been accommodated but procedures followed have varied over time, with decisions often being left to the discretion of the Clerk. In most circumstances, 'the applicant' have purchased new benches, although in a few instances they have only purchased plaques to be fitted onto existing benches. This approach, although generally accommodating to the applicant, has resulted in over provision and inappropriate siting of memorial benches in some areas, maintenance difficulties due to a wide range of bench styles being used, and ineffective recording of memorial bench information.

This policy recognises the need for a consistent approach to the provision of memorial benches in public open spaces, much more consideration of the level of infrastructure that can be provided and maintained is required. A rationalisation of the range and quality of infrastructure is also needed to avoid items which are onerous to maintain or have a poor life expectancy. In addition, opportunities to provide infrastructure for public benefit in different and new ways need to be maximised.

The policy therefore continues to welcome donations of suitable benches for appropriate locations in the public open spaces the Town Council manages. The operating principles below will ensure that requests for memorial benches are responded to in a consistent, efficient, and helpful manner. It will result in benches being purchased and installed in appropriate locations to ensure they are easy to maintain and not unduly prone to vandalism.

It is the intention that the policy only covers broad common issues and is not meant to be exhaustive. The content of this policy, including fees, will be revised as necessary to meet changing circumstances.

Operating principles:

1. Only sites which do not already have a sufficient number of benches will be considered. This will be determined by any site-specific management plans or by any Committee with this designated responsibility.
2. Suitable locations within the Town where people are likely to make good use of the bench will be considered. These will be areas which lack any seating nearby or are at a likely stopping point such as a particular view or rest point on a path. In addition, the location will be chosen to minimise maintenance and possible vandalism. Remote locations with poor access for maintenance and users will not be considered.
3. In locations where there will be several benches in the same area, no more than 80% will be offered as a placement for a memorial bench. This is to prevent the area taking on the ambience of a dedicated 'memorial garden' which may compromise the enjoyment of the space for general recreational activities.
4. A limited selection of suitable low maintenance standard designs for memorial benches will be available at a range of costs, the choice of bench being dependent on the location.
5. Occasionally a unique rather than standard bench design may be requested as a memorial. In these circumstances, details of the bench construction, materials and specifications will need to be submitted to the Town Council for approval. On approval the bench would then be supplied to Town Council for installation in an agreed location. There is no guarantee that damage could be repaired, and any costly repairs would be at the discretion and cost of the original applicant.
6. The cost and life expectancy of the bench will depend on the type of bench and its location. To ensure installation is undertaken safely to the required standards, the Council will provide and install the memorial bench with plaque and surfacing in all cases. The applicant's costs will include the bench, plaque, inscription, installation & surfacing, and, as the benches should require minimal maintenance, there will be a moderate 10 year 'up front' charge for this, included in the initial purchase price.
7. Retention of a memorial bench will be for the expected life period of the bench only, after which time it may be removed. Removed plaques will be offered to the original applicant where practical. Any replacement bench on that site would be treated in the same way as a new memorial bench.
8. Where there is no space for an additional memorial bench, requests for placement of a memorial plaque on an existing town bench will be considered where the bench is in good condition and point 3 above has been assessed. As the bench has already been provided through public funds, a charge which includes a modest contribution towards the original purchase of the bench, plus the plaque and installation cost will be required. This will accommodate an applicant's wishes and ensure a fair contribution is made towards the provision of the bench as a personal memorial. The funds raised will be used for the repair or provision of other public benches. The same conditions on life expectancy and maintenance will apply to any existing benches as apply to new benches.
9. The Council's standards of maintenance will be accepted as keeping the bench fit for purpose and clean. This will involve occasionally removing built up algae and grime, removal of graffiti and repairing minor faults within resources available. There is a move away from regular painting as in the long term this proves more costly than just replacing the bench

when it has reached the end of its natural life. The range of new benches has been chosen for durability without the need for regular painting or treatment.

10. Publicity on the Town Council website will provide information and an enquiry form for those interested in purchasing memorial benches.

11. A standard written letter of agreement will be sent by the Town Council to the applicant to ensure all terms and conditions are clearly understood prior to purchase. The form will be returned to the Council with payment in advance of the memorial bench being purchased & placed.

Memorial bench purchase procedure

This procedure describes the process which will be followed from the first contact with the applicant / donor's enquiry to the last contact to inform them that their memorial bench is in place.

1. Applicant enquiries coming to the Town Council are directed to the website to view the policy and download a memorial bench enquiry form. If required, this information can be sent by post or e-mail to the applicant.
2. The applicant completes the enquiry form specifying a requested location, bench and plaque style, and sends this by e-mail or post to the Town Clerk. The request is allocated to the appropriate Committee for consideration and action.
3. The allocated Committee considers the requested location for the bench and decides, by applying the operating principles, whether a memorial bench is appropriate in this location. If the requested location is not suitable, the nearest alternative location will be offered.
4. The Committee will ensure that the requested bench and plaque size and style is suitable for the location and that the plaque text is clear and suitable for use on a public bench. Only approved bench styles will be used and will be at the discretion of the Committees or Council for each specific site.
5. The appropriate officer contacts the applicant to confirm or discuss the details by phone. If an alternative location is required, a letter with a map to illustrate the alternative site being offered will be sent.
6. On agreement, a standard agreement letter is sent to the applicant to confirm arrangements and request payment / donation in full.
7. When payment / donation is received, the Town Clerk orders the memorial bench with plaque and inscription from the Council's nominated supplier, and schedules installation with a completion target of 2 months from receipt of payment / donation and bench from supplier. From this point, the ownership of the bench is with the Town Council
8. The allocated officer will ensure the work has been carried out as specified, photographs the bench, and ensures all information is recorded in the asset register for future reference.
9. The Clerk ensures a letter and photograph are sent to the donor to notify them that the bench is in place.

Council specification, and prices for installation of memorial plaques.

Plaques should be either bronze, stainless steel, or plastic, and will measure 5" x 2" (127mm x 51mm).

All text must be approved by the Council.

Plaques will be mounted centrally on the topmost back rail, or on the back seat slat of a basic bench. A photograph of the new bench and plaque will be sent to the donor. Plaques provided by the applicant direct, for fitting on their new donated bench, must comply with the specification above, and be received by the council prior to bench installation.

Plaques provided by an applicant, to replace a missing, or damaged plaque, on a bench previously donated by them will be subject to a contribution of £50 towards the cost of fitting by the Council, and photographic evidence of such.

Plaques provided by an applicant, to be fitted to an existing Council bench, should comply with the specification above, and will be subject to a contribution of £100 towards the cost of the bench, its maintenance, fitting of the plaque, and photographic evidence.

The Council will place the bench / plaque in the agreed location within two months of receiving cleared funds, as well as the plaque and/or memorial bench. The Council will be responsible for the bench for the period of its natural life (approximately 10 to 15 years if teak, or 30 to 50 years if plastic). Once the bench has reached the end of its natural life, the bench and plaque may be removed.

The council will then contact you, the applicant, offering to return the plaque to you, or giving you the opportunity to purchase / donate another bench to replace the removed bench. Please keep the council advised of your contact details, giving reference to your memorial bench. If the council is unable to contact you, the plaque will be disposed of. The Council cannot guarantee against theft or vandalism and may not be able to replace either the bench or plaque in this event.

POLICY – Terms & Conditions

- 1. All applications for memorial benches should be completed on the official request form and be signed by the applicant.***
- 2. All memorial benches should be paid for by the applicant as a donation.***
- 3. All fees to cover the plot, installation, & maintenance is due to the Town Council prior to installation.***
- 4. The Town Council may limit the number of memorial benches in particular areas.***
- 5. The Town Council will notify the applicant in the event that the memorial bench is damaged, beyond normal wear and tear. The applicant should ensure that the Parish council is in possession of current contact details***
- 6. The Town Council reserves the right to remove any memorial bench that has been damaged and is in the view of the Council beyond economical repair, or dangerous, or has not been repaired within 4 weeks of the notification referred to in T&C 5 above.***
- 7. The Town Council accepts no liability for damage to any memorial bench from vandals, third parties, or whilst the Council carries out routine maintenance.***
- 8. Benches will be of the type specified by the Town Council to be in keeping with the intended location.***
- 9. Memorial plaques fitted to benches to be a maximum size of 127mm x 51mm (5" x 2") and shall fit in the centre of the upper most lath of the back of the bench.***
- 10. The Town Council will maintain memorial benches in line with the current maintenance regime.***
- 11. The Town Council accepts no replacement liability for the plaque or the bench at the end of its useful life and will dispose of any such bench at that time. Any replacements of benches or plaques will be the responsibility of the original applicant.***

12. Any maintenance carried out by a third party will be in strict agreement with the Town Council and by appointment only.