

THORNBURY TOWN COUNCIL



Policy on Memorial Trees and Memorial Benches on Town Council Land

Date Ratified: 24 November 2022
Meeting: Finance and General Purpose Committee
Next review date: November 2025

Purpose of the Policy

Thornbury Town Council receives requests from members of the public for the planting of memorial trees and the installation of memorial benches on land owned or looked after by it. The Town Council is happy to consider these requests but recognises the need for a consistent and planned approach to whether those requests are granted.

Thornbury Town Council is committed to increasing the overall numbers of trees on its land and has commissioned environmental surveys of all of its green spaces, including the identification of suitable areas for tree planting and suitable species of trees for those areas. Planting of trees and installation of benches will only be carried out in line with recommendations of the most recent environmental survey reports and other experts that may be consulted.

The Town Council maintains the right to refuse any requests.

SECTION ONE – MEMORIAL TREES

Overview of the Application Process

Only applications made on the appropriate official application forms will be considered. The application form should be completed, signed and submitted to the Town Council either by post, by email or by hand.

Once submitted, the application form will be considered by the Town Council (see below for a full outline of the decision-making process – “Locations for Planting, Species and Numbers of Trees”).

If an application is agreed, an agreement letter will be sent to the applicant for signature. This letter will set out the conditions for planting (outlined in more detail below), the process for planting, payment arrangements, etc. Payment must be received in advance of the planting.

Requests for memorial trees in Thornbury Cemetery will only be considered in memory of a deceased individual who is interred in Thornbury Cemetery (either coffin or cremated remains) or whose cremated remains have been officially scattered at Thornbury Cemetery (and recorded as such).

Payment and Costs

The purchase price of memorial trees will be set out in the schedule of Town Council fees and charges which shall be updated annually. This will be at least £200 in the 2022/2023 financial year but must always be at least the cost of the tree plus 50%, so could be higher. The costs will always be confirmed with the applicant before the application is agreed. Once an application has been agreed, the Town Council will invoice the applicant. Details for payment will be included on the invoice. The purchase price will cover the tree, planting, planting accessories and ongoing maintenance.

Locations for Planting, Species and Number of Trees

Applications will be considered in the following way:

- The environmental tree report will make recommendation regarding areas of Town Council land where tree planting is appropriate and desirable, as well as confirming appropriate numbers and species of tree.
- Using these recommendations, the Open Spaces Committee and the Climate Change Officer will agree areas suitable for planting and the numbers and species of tree that can be planted in those areas. This may differ from the report recommendations due to operational or structural considerations (see below). It is planned that this information will be collated, in time, into a Thornbury Town Council Tree and Hedge Policy.
- Individual locations will be considered and decided by the Tree Warden and Council officers in line with the areas, numbers and species already agreed by the Committee and the Climate Change Officer.
- The Tree Warden and/or Town Council officers will liaise directly with the applicant to keep them informed of the progress of their application and details regarding the tree.

The Town Council retain the right to decide on the location for the planting of any memorial trees. This is to ensure that any tree planting enhances its natural environment, is in keeping with its surroundings, will not affect any structures e.g. memorial stones, walls, etc, and that the trees can be surveyed and maintained appropriately and will not overcrowd working areas. Consideration will also be given to tree “debris” and how this might impact the area around the tree. It is possible that there will be a very limited choice (or possibly no choice) for the applicant as to the location, as the Town Council retains complete control of this process. The Town Council retains the right to refuse requests for a specific planting location, if it feels this location is not in line with the considerations set out above.

The Tree Warden and Council officers will liaise with relevant outdoor staff as necessary as regarding the location and species of tree to be planted. The Open Spaces Committee will be kept regularly updated on memorial tree planting by Council officers and the Tree Warden.

It is important that the species of tree planted is suitable for its location both in ecological terms and practical terms. The species must not impact on any surrounding structures as it matures. It is unlikely that requests for specific species will be allowed, but the Town Council will consider reasonable requests whilst retaining the right to refuse them (for the reasons set out above).

Timing of Planting

The planting will only take place during an appropriate time period as identified by the Tree Warden. The time of the planting cannot be decided by the applicant. It is possible that there will be a delay between the time of the application and the actual planting of the tree. The applicant will be notified once the tree is planted.

Plaques, Tagging, “Mementos” and the Scattering of Ashes near Memorial Trees

The Town Council no longer allows the use of plaques by or on memorial trees. This has been allowed in the past and the Town Council have decided not to remove existing plaques. Therefore, old plaques are in place on Town Council land, but the Town Council will not allow any new plaques to be placed. This is because plaques can easily become damaged, stolen, or interfere with grounds maintenance equipment. If a new plaque is placed, it will be removed by Town Council staff without notice to the applicant.

The Town Council will aim to “tag” memorial trees in some way in order to identify them as memorials. This will be done in a way that does not affect the growth of the tree. This is likely to necessitate changing the position of the tag as the tree grows. Although the Town Council will make reasonable efforts to place the tag securely, it is not responsible for any damage to the tag by a third party. Efforts will be made to replace damaged tags, but repeated damage may mean that a tag is not replaced.

The Town Council do not allow any additional “mementos” to be placed on, or in the vicinity of, memorial trees. This includes, but is not limited to, vases, statues, flowers, wreaths, balloons and ornaments. The Town Council is aware that such items may already be in place around existing memorial trees and is working towards the sensitive removal of these. However, these items will not be allowed on or near memorial trees planted since the implementation of this policy. If such items are placed, they will be removed by Town Council staff without notice to the applicant.

The Town Council do not allow the scattering or burial of cremated remains/ashes on or near memorial trees.

Ongoing Maintenance

Whilst reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that the tree is established and grows, the Town Council cannot be held responsible for any tree that does not thrive, nor be responsible for replacing the tree. Applicants should understand that sometimes trees do not thrive for reasons which are beyond the reasonable control of the Town Council.

Once the memorial tree is planted on Town Council land, it becomes the property of Thornbury Town Council and will be managed in line with all other trees on its land. All trees on Thornbury Town Council land are regularly surveyed and maintenance is carried out in line with expert advice given by the surveyor. It may be necessary for memorial trees to have significant sections removed, or the tree felled, if expert advice recommends this, for example if the tree is damaged, unsafe or diseased. Thornbury Town Council also retains the right to remove trees that create unforeseen operational difficulties, although reasonable efforts will be made to avoid this.

Damage/Vandalism

Thornbury Town Council will not be held responsible for any damage caused to the tree for reasons outside of its reasonable control. These reasons include, but are not limited to, vandalism, accidental damage caused by visitors to Town Council green spaces and severe

weather. If a tree needs to be removed due to such reasons, Thornbury Town Council is not responsible for replacing the tree. Reasonable care will be taken by Thornbury Town Council during routine grounds maintenance but it cannot be held responsible if the tree suffers a small amount of damage during this maintenance.

SECTION TWO – MEMORIAL BENCHES AND MEMORIAL PLAQUES ON BENCHES

Overview of the Application Process

Applications can be made for either a memorial bench plus plaque or for a memorial plaque to be placed on an existing bench onto which a number of plaques can be placed.

Only applications made on the appropriate official application forms will be considered. The application form should be completed, signed and submitted to the Town Council either by post, by email or by hand.

Once submitted, the application form will be considered by the Town Council, liaising as necessary with outdoor staff and relevant Town Council Committees.

If an application is agreed, an agreement letter will be sent to the applicant for signature. This letter will set out the conditions for the installation of the bench or the placement of a plaque (outlined in more detail below). Payment must be received in advance of the installation or placement.

The Town Council reserves the right to refuse an application for a bench on the grounds that it feels that it currently has sufficient numbers of benches, in which case the application will be added to a waiting list. Should “spaces” for a bench become available, applicants on the waiting list will be considered in strict date order.

Payment and Costs

The purchase price of the memorial bench and/or a memorial plaque will be set out in the schedule of Town Council fees and charges which shall be updated annually. This will be confirmed in advance with the applicant by Town Council officers. The price will cover the cost of supply of the bench/plaque plus an administration/installation fee and an amount in consideration of ongoing maintenance. In the case of a plaque to be placed on an existing bench on which multiple plaques can be installed, there will also be a charge made for a contribution towards the cost of the bench.

Once the costs are confirmed, the Town Council will invoice the applicant. Details for payment will be on the invoice. Payment must be received in advance of the bench and/or plaque being ordered and installed.

Locations for Installation of New Memorial Benches

The Town Council retain the right to complete control over the location of all memorial benches. This is ensure that the bench is in a location that is safe, will not create a nuisance (in Council’s opinion), will not interfere with grounds maintenance work, will not affect

underground utilities, will be in keeping with its surroundings, will be in an area where it is likely to be used and that the Town Council feels there is a need for an additional bench, will not overcrowd the area and will be easily accessible for maintenance. Its location must also align with the recommendations in the most recent environmental reports on Town Council green spaces.

The location of the bench will be discussed and agreed between the applicant and the Town Council, via the Open Spaces Committee. It is possible that there will be a very limited choice (or possibly no choice) for the applicant as to the location of the bench, as the Town Council retains complete control of this process. The Town Council will consider requests for a specific location but retains the right to refuse the request if it feels this location is not in line with the considerations set out above.

Location for Placement of New Memorial Plaque on an Existing Memorial Bench

The Town Council is happy to receive applications for a memorial plaque to be placed on existing benches that have been installed with the intention of having a number of plaques placed on them. Applicants should contact the Town Council to request up to date details of the location of these benches and what spaces are available. It is likely that there will be a bench of this kind within Thornbury Cemetery and potentially in another Town Council green space.

Installation of Benches/Plaques

There are a number of considerations that will affect how quickly a bench/plaque can be installed including, but not limited to, underground utility checks, staff workload, supplier lead times, etc. It is therefore possible that there will be a delay between the application being agreed and the actual installation. The timing of installation cannot be decided by the applicant. The applicant will be notified once the bench/plaque has been installed.

The Town Council will be completely responsible for the installation of the bench/plaque and will arrange for all relevant utility checks to be made.

Type of Bench/Plaque and Inscription on Plaques

Only benches selected and procured by the Town Council may be installed on Town Council land. The Town Council retains the right to complete control of the type of bench/plaque that it supplies. The Town Council will only supply benches that it considers are of an appropriate quality to ensure they are sufficiently robust. It will also usually only allow simple designs which are in keeping with its surroundings and other benches, and are also low maintenance. The applicant may therefore only be offered a choice of bench from a very limited range, or possibly no choice if there are supply issues affecting some options.

With regard to plaques, the Town Council will only supply plaques that are sufficiently robust and will be of simple design and in keeping with other plaques.

The inscription on the plaque will be agreed in advance by the applicant and the Town Council. The Town Council reserves the right to refuse any inscription that it feels is inappropriate. The inscription must be within the designated number of characters allowed.

“Mementos” and the Scattering of Ashes near Memorial Benches

The Town Council do not allow any additional “mementos” to be placed on, or in the vicinity of, memorial benches. This includes, but is not limited to, vases, statues, flowers, wreaths, balloons and ornaments. If such items are placed, they will be removed by Town Council staff without notice to the applicant.

The Town Council do not allow the scattering or burial of cremated remains/ashes on or near memorial benches.

Ongoing Maintenance

Once the memorial bench is installed, it becomes the property of the Town Council. The bench will be maintained to a reasonable standard by Town Council staff. Maintenance of the bench by any third party will not be allowed. The Town Council also retains the right to remove or reposition benches that create unforeseen operational difficulties. Applicants should also understand that memorial benches and plaques will have a limited lifespan and will most likely need to be removed at some point in the future. The Town Council retains the right to remove any bench that has reached the end of its lifespan. Should a bench need to be removed, reasonable efforts will be made to return the plaques to the original applicant.

The Town Council will inspect plaques from time to time and carry out minor maintenance tasks, such as tightening loose screws, but will not polish the plaque. Third parties are welcome to arrange or carry out the polishing of plaques for which they are responsible but the Town Council will not check with third parties carrying out such work that they are responsible for the plaque, nor is the Town Council responsible for any damage caused to any plaque by any third party.

Damage/Vandalism

Thornbury Town Council will not be held responsible for any damage caused to the bench for reasons outside of its reasonable control. These reasons include, but are not limited to, vandalism and accidental damage caused by visitors to Town Council green spaces. Should such damage occur, reasonable efforts will be made by the Town Council to repair the bench, but it retains the right to remove the bench if it considers repair to be impractical. If a bench needs to be removed due to such reasons, Thornbury Town Council is not responsible for replacing it. Reasonable care will be taken by Thornbury Town Council during routine grounds maintenance, but it cannot be held responsible if the bench suffers a small amount of damage during this maintenance. The Town Council will make reasonable efforts to install the bench securely but cannot be held responsible if the bench is stolen and are not responsible for replacing it.