



ENGLISH HERITAGE

# Landscape Advice Note: Commemorative Benches



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It is common in public parks and other open spaces to find commemorative (or memorial) benches – seats dedicated to the memory of a person or people who particularly liked the park or open space in which the bench stands. Less frequently benches may sometimes commemorate significant personal events such as 25th or 50th wedding anniversaries or important national events such as a Royal jubilee. This Landscape Advice Note provides an overview of how to formulate a policy for commemorative benches in historic gardens and landscapes.

## INTRODUCTION

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Those responsible for managing sites open to the public often receive requests for the installation of commemorative benches. It is important that individual sites have a detailed policy to ensure any requests for commemorative benches are dealt with fairly and uniformly over the long term.

## FORMULATING A POLICY

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Any policy should be clear – even if this is simply that commemorative benches are not accepted. The policy should be included as part of the management plan for the site (Box 1).

## ASPECTS TO BE CONSIDERED

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The following points should be considered when formulating a policy;

- Are benches appropriate?

Benches are not appropriate for all sites. Well positioned benches, and good designs, add to the enjoyment of a park or garden by providing rest places, especially for people who tire more easily because of age, health or disability.

- Total number

Decide if there is a definite shortage of benches and therefore whether the site can accommodate one, 10, 100 or more. If this is carefully considered

at the start and set out in the policy it defines the programme and cut off point.

- Location

Does there need to be specific, non-negotiable bench positions set by the site where benches are considered appropriate or can they be located anywhere? Donors are often very specific about where they want the bench to be positioned and deciding at an early stage whether or not it matters where benches are placed will enable staff to clearly state the policy to potential donors.

- Type and quality of bench

The type of bench needs to be appropriate to both the site and the location in the site. In open spaces, for example, wooden park benches may be appropriate but on a terrace facing the flower garden specially designed seats may be more appropriate. It is important that all involved with the presentation, maintenance, historical and landscape setting of the site are involved with the choice of bench type and design. It is also important to select benches which are of a suitably high quality which will last well. It is not in the interest of the site or the donor to have a cheap, poor quality bench which will quickly deteriorate and embarrass all concerned.

- Materials

In addition to the type, design and quality of benches the materials they are made of are also important. The most common type are the ubiquitous wooden park benches but different types of wood are available. Particular care needs to be taken when deciding on the type of wooden benches to be used and the choice must conform with any site policies on sustainability and the use of timber. A wide variety of benches are also available made from re-cycled materials and where these are being considered any long term deterioration in colour and condition must be taken into account.

- Memorial

Six points need to be considered for the actual memorial – wording, length, inscription, method, location and graphics.

- Wording

It is important to make it clear from the outset that the site retains the right to approve all wording. This is important to ensure that inscriptions which could be inappropriate, offensive or similar are not accepted.

- Length

Setting a maximum length of memorial wording is worth considering in order to avoid unnecessary and inappropriate detail. The length may also be constricted by the number of words it is physically possible to engrave in a given space.

- Inscription

It may be worth stipulating the size and even the type of font for the letters if this is important to ensure uniformity.

- Method

The inscription could be engraved into the wood or added using a plaque. Plaques can tend to give an area the feel of a graveyard and (questionably) stand out more than letters engraved direct into the wood. Plaques can also come in a range of types from brass to black plastic.

- Location

On some sites it might be important to avoid the appearance of a municipal park by not having plaques or engraving on the benches at all. In such cases it may be preferable to have a book which records donations and the position of the bench rather than engraving or a plaque on the back or side-arm of the bench.

- Graphics

With technology continually improving, the types of graphics which can be incorporated into memorials is becoming increasingly sophisticated. A walk around any modern cemetery demonstrates the wide range now available, including photographs. It is worth including in the policy a note of whether inscriptions can include photographs, pictures and so forth, or must be limited to text.

- How much to charge

Costs to consider include the cost of the bench, installation, maintenance and any administration costs. There should also be a policy on whether there the cost will include an element of 'profit' to benefit the site.

- Future maintenance

What maintenance will be necessary for the type of bench chosen and will site maintenance funds cover this or should it be a charge on the donor? An increased initial charge to provide an endowment

would be simplest. Annual or five yearly maintenance charges would be another option although this may be difficult to administer and would clearly add to the costs. Maintenance charges need to be made clear in information provided for donors.

- Time limit

Are the benches to be accepted 'in perpetuity' or should it be made clear that the site only guarantee that they will be kept in place for 5, 10, 20 or 50 years? 'Break points' could be set, for example at 10 years where the donor will be asked for a further contribution towards upkeep (and maybe a major overhaul) might be a useful option. If the donor cannot be contacted or does not wish to contribute the bench could be removed and the space offered up to a new donor.

- Ownership

Any policy needs to make clear who owns the bench. This is particularly important if a 'break point' is planned and the ownership remains with the donor as they must be offered the opportunity to take the bench away if they do not wish to make further contributions. If it is clear that the bench is owned by the site disposal in such circumstances remain the site's responsibility.

- Replacement

Even with proper maintenance benches will have a finite life (even if that is 25 years or more) so there is a need to make clear that, 'break points' excepted, the donation is only for the life of the bench and if replacement becomes necessary it will be the responsibility of the donor or the 'spot' may be offered to a new donor.

- Relocation

The site needs to reserve the right to re-locate benches for operational requirements. For short term relocation, for example to clear access routes for crowds at events, this should not need consultation, provided benches are put back. For longer term re-location, donors should be advised of the new position and the reasons for moving.

- Dedication of benches

Donors should clearly be informed of when benches are ready to be positioned. Donors may wish to have some form of ceremony (possibly religious). It may be advisable to include within any policy a mention of whether this is acceptable or not, and what limitations might be imposed such as size of gathering, timing, press involvement and so forth.

## POLICY DOCUMENT

1. All enquiries for commemorative benches will be added to the Commemorative Bench File (include File Number xxx).
2. Allocation of benches will be on a strictly 'first come first served' basis.
3. Commemorative benches will only be placed in positions specified in the Management Plan. A choice of position may be offered but the applicant donor may not specify locations other than those specified by the Management Plan. All existing and potential bench locations on the site have been mapped and are shown on Drawing xxx in File xxx.
4. A maximum number of x benches will be on site in public areas at any one time.
5. The right to remove or relocate commemorative benches for short periods of time without reference to the donor is reserved. If their benches need to be removed or relocated on a long-term basis reasonable effort should be made to inform the donor along with an explanation of the reason for such action.
6. Commemorative benches will be of standard design. The currently approved design is xxx. Change to the approved design must be authorised by xxx.
7. Commemorative inscriptions, specified by the donor and approved by the site can be inscribed on the wood of the bench top rail in letters x cm high, on a single line. The maximum number of characters for inscriptions is xxx (or no inscription, brass plaque etc. as agreed in Management Plan).
8. The minimum donation that is required to place a commemorative bench is £xx plus £xx per letter for inscriptions (to be reviewed annually). The donation covers the purchase of the seat, installation (and maintenance charges for a xx year period)
9. Payment in full must be made before an order can be placed. Notification of a space to donors and collection of payment should be co-ordinated by xxx. Donors will be notified when the bench is ready for installation.
10. No payments should be made until the site has notified the donor that a space is available and the donor is satisfied with its location.
11. After xx years there will be the opportunity for donors to keep their bench position and conserve the condition of the bench by renewing a xx year maintenance agreement on the terms that will be in place at the time. Currently the minimum donation that is required to maintain a bench for a further xx years is set at £xx (to be reviewed annually).
12. Maintenance will include annual cleaning in spring, with soapy water, or by use of a pressure hose with a multi-nozzle jet as prescribed by the manufacturer. Cleaning will remove accumulated dirt and algae. Benches will be oiled as required (or whatever is recommended for the style of bench chosen).
13. Extreme acts of vandalism are not covered under the routine maintenance agreement.
14. If a maintenance agreement is not renewed after xx years then the seat will be disposed of or offered to the donor for collection and removal from site. The vacant position may then be offered to a new donor.
15. Benches will be maintained for three xx year terms, inclusive of the initial placement agreement. After three terms the condition of the bench will be reviewed. The right not to enter into a fourth term maintenance agreement is reserved.
16. Benches pre-dating (year policy implemented) will be surveyed for their serviceability. If a bench is considered unserviceable by the site it may be removed from public access areas. All reasonable attempts should be made to contact the original bench donor or family. The inscribed top rail of the bench will be kept for a period of one year after its removal from public access areas and all bench inscriptions will be kept in the archives on File xxx.

### FRONT COVER

Bench at Kenwood House, English Heritage. © English Heritage Photo Library

### BOX 1

An example of how a policy document might be laid out. It contains a number of details which are useful to record internally for the benefit of new staff.

## INFORMATION FOR POTENTIAL DONORS

1. All enquiries for commemorative benches will be added to the Commemorative Bench waiting list. All applications will be considered in strict order based on the date of the application.
2. Commemorative benches will only be placed in positions identified by the site. A choice of position may be offered but the applicant donor may not specify locations.
3. A maximum number of x benches will be on site in public areas at any one time.
4. The site reserves the right to remove or relocate commemorative benches for short periods of time. Reasonable efforts will be made to inform donors if their bench needs to be removed or relocated on a long-term basis along with the reasons for such action.
5. The design of the commemorative benches will be xxx. The site reserve the right to change the approved design.
6. Commemorative inscriptions, specified by the donor and approved by the site can be inscribed on the bench top rail in letters x high, on a single line. The maximum number of characters for inscriptions is xxx (or no inscription, brass plaque, etc. as agreed in Management Plan).
7. The minimum donation that is required to place a commemorative bench at is £xx plus £xx per letter for inscriptions. The donation covers the purchase of the seat, installation (and maintenance charges for a xx year period).
8. Payment in full must be made before an order can be placed. Donors will be notified when the bench is ready for installation.
9. After xx years there will be the opportunity for donors to keep their bench position and conserve the condition of the bench by renewing a xx year maintenance agreement on the terms that will be in place at the time. The minimum donation that is required to maintain a bench for a further xx years is currently set at £xx.
10. All necessary maintenance will be carried out by the site.
11. Acts of vandalism are not covered under the routine maintenance agreement.
12. If a maintenance agreement is not renewed after xx years then the seat will be disposed of/offered to the donor for collection and removal from site. The vacant position will then be offered to a new donor.
13. The site will maintain a bench for three xx year terms, inclusive of the initial placement agreement. After three terms the condition of the bench will be reviewed.

### BOX 2

An example of the policy document at Box 1 converted into an information document for potential donors. This excludes the internal information which would not be of interest to potential donors

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