



MEDSTEAD PARISH COUNCIL

POLICY FOR REQUESTED BENCHES

1. Introduction

Medstead Parish Council will consider requests from Parishioners for benches to be installed on the following Council-owned public spaces within the parish: the cemetery, the village green or the wildflower meadow. These facilities will be enjoyed by a wide range of people and the Council will ensure that they are managed and regulated for the mutual benefit of all.

2. Objectives of the policy

This policy has been produced with the following guiding principles:

- The Council needs to ensure a proposed site is suitable for benches.
- The Council needs to ensure that the number of benches does not become too large for any realistic level of use and that benches enhance the appearance of sites and do not detract from their prime purpose.
- The Council needs to ensure that benches are safe at all times, that they are inspected periodically to identify any issues and are removed when they are no longer safe.
- The siting of benches does not unduly interfere with the ability to upkeep the surrounding grounds.
- The position of benches is such that it can be enjoyed by a wide number of users.
- Any inscription on a plaque is short and non-controversial, and is to be agreed by the Council.
- Requesters can easily understand the process of giving a bench and are clear what they need to pay and what they can expect.
- The Council needs to clearly establish the responsibility for maintenance, repair and replacement of requested benches.
- The Council needs to achieve full cost recovery for any benches provided, including installation, maintenance and end of life removal costs, so that it does not become a burden on the general tax-payers of the parish.
- The Council needs to determine the design of benches installed so that they are easy to maintain, complement other existing benches and fit into the landscape.

3. Purchase of benches

Medstead Parish Council will not receive donations of actual benches but rather receive funds equal to the costs involved which will be used to buy a bench in the requester's name. This is the only realistic way that the Council can assure that benches are of good quality with long guarantees and of favourable material and design. This is important, given the Council will have liabilities and responsibilities for the bench going forward as it will be sited on its land.

Also, the Council will be able to buy the same bench at a better price than a member of the public. It removes any ambiguity over what is actually being purchased and avoids the

possibility of the requester presenting to the Council something unsuitable that does not fit with this policy. By explaining the reasons in this policy, the Council hopes that any potential requester will understand the constraints the Council has to work within, and will not interpret that as a lack of gratitude should a bench be offered.

4. Design and material of benches

Medstead Parish Council will only install benches made from recycled plastic. Wooden benches need frequent wood treatment, and are prone to be covered in algae and hold moisture for a long time when wet, making them less suitable for use in winter. They are prone to rot and have shorter lives and therefore need more regular inspections to ensure they are safe from splinters or collapse.

Recycled plastic benches suffer none of these problems, except of dirt and algae which will be removed as part of the bi-annual cleaning of the playground equipment and benches. This process also has the effect of inhibiting growth of algae.

To ensure that benches complement the landscape and existing benches, they will only be provided in brown, with specific on offer. The designs will be reviewed at least one a year to make sure that they are still currently-stocked products and offer the best value for money.

5. Installation, maintenance and removal

Whilst some requesters may offer to do the installation, maintenance and end-of-life removal of benches themselves to save money, there is too much risk involved in this for the Council.

Due to the Council's liabilities for safety and to avoid invalidating any product guarantee, it has to make sure that a bench is assembled and installed correctly. For these reasons, the Council will assume responsibility for installing a bench through the use of chosen contractors. It will levy a one-off fee at the time of purchase which will also cover maintenance and end of life-removal.

Requesters may have good intentions at the outset to maintain their bench, but then over the years they may become unresponsive: they may move away from the area or their life circumstances change, meaning that they become too busy, ill or otherwise indisposed, or the Council loses contact for any other reason. In all of these scenarios, the Council will be left bearing the ongoing costs, so it needs to make provision of this from the outset.

The Council will only install a bench at a location where there is level ground that is sufficiently firm. It will not automatically opt to install benches on concrete bases but will consider the circumstances: this is because once a bench is at end of life and removed, the Council is either be obligated to replace it with another bench of the same dimensions at its own cost, or have an unsightly concrete slab in the public space for posterity until another bench is acquired. Whilst the Council recognises that benches are a welcome feature for the public, there will typically not be funds available to replace a bench if it has not been planned in advance and incorporated into the budget (in competition with other worthy uses of public funds).

Where a concrete base is not used, the Council will fix benches into the ground with metal pegs to reduce the risk of theft. This is subject to the exact chosen location (and will also be a factor for consideration when picking a location). If the requester wants to pick a site where it is not possible to insert pegs, they will be made aware of the additional risk of theft and the implications.

6. Location

The location of a bench will be discussed and agreed with the requester prior to purchase. The Council will never buy a bench with donated money and put it somewhere the requester does not wish. However, it may not be possible to accommodate all of a requester's requirements so any compromise will be agreed in advance. If compromise cannot be agreed, the Council's decision is final and the requester has the option not to proceed.

The Council will listen to which site is important to the requester but will also need to consider a range of factors including proximity to other benches, locations where people most frequently sit, ease of fixing the bench into the ground, ensuring it does not block access for mowers, grave diggers, access to the green, footpaths, future grave plots or usage of cricket or football pitches. Benches placed in the shade and under trees are far more likely to get covered in leaves or algae and will be less popular sites for the public.

The Council needs to consider the overall number of benches in its public spaces to make sure that the number does not become detrimental rather than a benefit to the public. At present there is sufficient space for more requests. As part of the annual review of this policy, the Council will consider the availability of space and if space becomes limited will create a plan of potential spots, and once a limit is reached will introduce waiting lists to this policy.

7. Maintenance and end-of-life

By opting for recycled plastic benches, the Council will keep maintenance requirements to a minimum.

The benches will have a 20 to 25-year construction guarantee period. Should the bench fail within that period, the Council will arrange replacement with the manufacturer if simple repair is not feasible. Outside of that guarantee period, the bench will be removed at end of life if it fails and cannot be cost-effectively repaired. The initial fee paid by the requester will cover the cost of removal and disposal. The requester will be informed before removing it if they have kept the Council up to date with their contact details.

The benches near the playground will be inspected formally at least four times a year by the contracted playground inspector, and the benches on the other side of the green, cemetery and flower meadow will also be formally inspected by the Clerk at least four times a year. Informally they will be inspected by the Clerk more often and in between times the Council will receive any reports from members of the public or the contracted groundsman on any problems spotted.

The benches will be cleaned with anti-algae treatment every two years, and will intermittently be cleaned if particularly dirty. If the requester wants the bench clean at all times of leaves or bird droppings, they will need to undertake this themselves, as it would simply cost too much to inspect and clean all benches on a weekly basis.

8. Theft and vandalism

The Council assumes no responsibility for loss of benches due to theft.

In the event of vandalism, the Council will attempt to rectify the situation, if possible, such as cleaning, and this will be included in the fee paid towards maintenance.

If vandalism cannot be rectified and if the bench is left unattractive and unsuitable for the location or unsafe to use, the same process applies as for theft. The Council will assume no responsibility for replacement. The Council would bear the cost of removing the damaged bench as part of the initial fee paid. Again, the requester will be engaged if the Council has up-to-date contact details.

If the vandalism can be rectified but is repeated and it is clear that for some very unlikely reason that specific bench is being targeted, the Council will discuss options with the requester, and has the discretion to remove the bench altogether if other options fail.

9. Memorial plaque

The amount paid by the requester will include a small plaque and inscription. The Council will check the wording of the inscription before it goes ahead.

Benches can be bought jointly by more than one person if they choose to do so.

10. Replacement of a bench

If a requester wants to replace a bench at the end of its normal life, they would be able to purchase another bench if they wanted too, subject to there not already being a waiting list for bench sites for other requesters.

If there is a waiting list for bench sites, the previous requester does not get preference on purchasing a second bench at the site, in order to give other residents a chance to buy a memorial bench.

The same fees would apply as for any new bench application.

11. Requester's contact details

It is the requester's responsibility to keep the Clerk up to date with new details should they change address, email address or phone number.

In the event of a bench needing to be removed for safety concerns or being stolen or vandalised, the Clerk will make attempts to contact the requester to keep them informed and to discuss the situation as needed. In the case of damage, unless an absolute emergency, the Clerk will tape off a damaged bench for a short time whilst contact is established. However, the Council has the right to remove an unsafe bench without informing the requester if contact cannot be made in 30 days or less at the Council's discretion in case of an urgent safety situation.

12. Ownership of a bench

Once a bench is acquired, it becomes the property of the Council. Other than the Parish Council, nobody has a right to remove it, move it or change it in any way. If the requester wants to add an additional inscription plaque, this can be arranged for a fee but the requester should contact the Council first.

If there are any reasons why the requester wants the bench moved, this would be at the Council's discretion and would only be permitted if there are exceptional reasons. The requester would bear the cost of doing so in all cases.

13. Fees

The one-off upfront fee includes costs for the following:

- purchasing the bench, plaque and inscription, including cost of delivery
- installing, inspecting and maintaining the bench throughout its anticipated lifetime
- removing and disposing of the bench at end-of-life
- administrative work-load in the above

Given ad hoc changes in the cost of benches and variations in fixing costs depending on the location, the exact fee will be confirmed at the point of making an enquiry.

14. Application process

Potential requesters should contact the Clerk in the first instance. They will be given details of this policy and details of the benches on offer and associated fees. If they wish to go ahead, they will be sent an application form and payment in full must be received.

If a bench is to be purchased by multiple requesters, they should choose one person to liaise with the Clerk, agree arrangements and make payment, and they should make other arrangements amongst themselves to decide things and share costs. However, the Clerk will be happy to take more than one set of contact details for the event of emergencies.

15. Version Control

Version	Date adopted	Minute ref.
Policy for Requested Benches 2026	8 th October 2025	Minute 25.153c

This policy will be reviewed every two years. The designs options agreed by the Maintenance Committee will be reviewed every year, and fees will be reviewed with each application.

Appendix: Bench Design Options

The following three designs are the shortlisted options available to purchase

1. Marmax –‘Traditional Seat’

Three-seater, 157mm long, 25 year construction guarantee.



2. Marmax ‘Witton Seat’

Three-seater, 157mm long, 25 year construction guarantee.



3. TDP ‘Dale Commemorative Seat’

Three to four-seater, 150mm or 180cm long, 20 year construction guarantee.

