

Grand Western Canal



# Memorial bench policy

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## Introduction

Devon County Council (the Council) owns the Grand Western Canal Country Park (the Country Park) and employs a Canal Ranger Service to manage and maintain it. The Council receives requests from members of the public who wish to commemorate loved ones and or events by placing plaques on a bench within the Country Park.

This policy sets out how requests will be considered and the terms and conditions where requests are approved.

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 and are also valued by the individuals and families who make the requests.

This policy recognises the need for a consistent approach to the provision of memorial requests to be placed in the Country Park. It also acknowledges that the demands for memorials may be far greater than some parts of the Country Park can accommodate and that the attractiveness and atmosphere of the historic canal landscape can be adversely affected by inconsistency in design of benches and inappropriate decoration by flowers, plants and other adornments.

The policy therefore continues to welcome requests, but provides controls on the locations, designs and decorations that are acceptable.

### Policy principles:

The following principles will be applied in considering requests and making decisions for memorials and will also set out the principles of the type of memorial to be approved, the location, future maintenance and replacement.

1. The type of memorial bench is limited to two designs, provided and installed by the Canal Ranger Service.

One is a simple oak bench (as shown in the photo to the right) built by the Canal Ranger Service to a standard design, with any memorial plaque to be provided by the donor, but fitted by the Canal Ranger Service.



The second design is an oak seat with back rest as shown in the photo to the right. This one has a factory-fitted stainless steel plaque and wording provided by the donor.



2. Requests for memorial benches will only be considered where these can be reasonably accommodated. A number of factors will be considered by the Canal Ranger Service when assessing a potential location for a new memorial bench, including:
  - Sensible spacing – are there already other benches nearby?
  - Sufficient width – would the tractor that trims the banks and hedges be able to safely get past?
  - Tree safety – new memorial benches are not usually placed under large mature trees due to the risk of falling branches.
  - Any potential negative impacts on other users or Canal wildlife / heritage?

Prospective donors of memorial benches need to contact the Canal Ranger Service to discuss potential locations. The decision of the Canal Ranger Service on the acceptability of a proposed location will be final.

At the time of writing (2023) there are virtually no new spaces available for memorial benches in the South-western half of the Canal between Tiverton and Sampford Peverell. There are still several new potential locations for memorial benches between Sampford Peverell and Lowdells.

3. The current price of a memorial bench of either design will be available from the Canal Ranger Service upon request. The price is based on the cost to the Council of providing and installing a new memorial bench (and plaque in the case of the oak seats) and is not seen as an opportunity for the Council to generate income.
4. In the case of the simple oak benches, the donor will provide the memorial plaque to a pre agreed design, size and text.
5. The donor will have no claim of ownership to the bench (which will remain the property of the Council) and will not be permitted to make any changes to it after installation.

6. The donor will not be allowed to place any additional mementoes or memorials at the site whether temporary or permanent. This is to prevent the Country Park taking on the ambience of a dedicated memorial garden which may compromise the enjoyment of the space for general recreational activities.

An exception to this rule will be an allowance to place flowers on or beside the bench to mark up to two significant dates each year. These must not be left wrapped in plastic and must be collected within one week. Failure to follow these conditions may lead to the removal of the bench or the plaque.

The Canal Ranger Service reserves the right to remove any items fixed to or left on or beside the bench, in line with this policy.

7. Using its discretion, the Canal Ranger Service will maintain the bench as part of the Country Park's visitor infrastructure, as time and resources allow.
8. The Council will not be responsible for replacing the bench where it has reached the end of its natural life or as a result of damage whether accidental or wilful. However, once a bench is deemed by the Canal Ranger Service to be in need of replacement, they will endeavour to offer the donor (if they can be traced) the opportunity to pay for a replacement.
9. Any donor that proceeds with an order for a memorial bench will be deemed to have agreed to the conditions set out in this policy.

**Canal Ranger Service contact details:**

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