

NORTHAM TOWN COUNCIL

DEDICATED BENCHES POLICY

Adopted by Northam Town Council on **TBC**.

	Name	Signature
Mayor	Cllr	
Town Clerk	Guy Langton	

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Note: this policy is to come into effect from the 1st April 2027.

Version	Date	Note	Drafted by
V0.1	28 th October 2026	First draft, reviewed by committee for presentation to Full Council.	Town Clerk

NORTHAM TOWN COUNCIL – DEDICATED BENCHES POLICY

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 People can have a strong emotional connection to Appledore, Northam and Westward Ho! and dedicated benches, displaying a commemorative memorial plaque, have been installed across the parish for many years.

1.2 There are benches across the communities. Thus far, only those in Appledore, along and close to the Quay and Irsha Street have been available for sponsorship, with two notable exceptions – one at Honey Street in Northam and one in Westward Ho! Park.

1.3 The Council supports the wishes of families to commemorate their loved ones in this way but is mindful that these areas are enjoyed by a wide variety of people and they remain, first and foremost, open spaces.

1.4 There is no statutory or legal obligation for the Council to offer the commemoration of benches as a service. However, it can be a way in which the wishes of families can be met, whilst providing a wider community benefit, helping to fund the provision and maintenance of public benches across the parish.

1.5 This policy builds on the previous scheme and sets out the principles and process for managing and administering benches with commemorative memorial plaques (and sponsored benches). The aim is to achieve a balance between the demand for commemorative benches and ensuring open spaces are welcoming and managed for the benefit of all.

1.6 The term **dedicated bench** covers all benches with plaques including sponsored, memorial and commemorative benches.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY

2.1 This policy aims to provide a clear and sympathetic approach to the management of all public benches in open spaces, which will take account of the competing demands of the public.

2.2 The Council is seeking to increase the number of dedicated benches, in locations across the parish. It will also consider requests for benches in new locations in exceptional circumstances at the appropriate committee. However, the focus is on maintaining existing locations, repairing and replacing benches and offering re-dedications.

2.3 The policy seeks to ensure that dedicated benches, which are replaced and / or are erected, have a common appearance, style and size to others in their immediate area.

2.4 The policy sets out who is responsible for maintenance, repair and replacement. This aim, wherever possible will be to minimise the impact on public funds.

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2.5 The Council is committed to ensuring that assets are as sustainable as possible and to minimising their impact on the environment. This shall be a key consideration in the choice of products and materials used to install, repair and maintain benches.

2.6 The Council will endeavour to provide the highest standard of service and customer care.

3. SERVICE STANDARDS

3.1 Northam Town Council offers a sponsorship service for benches on public land to display a commemorative plaque (or in some cases bench sponsorship).

3.2 Many benches are sited on land owned by Devon County Council or Torridge District Council, but those councils have devolved the repair, maintenance, and management of nearly all public benches in Appledore, Northam and Westward Ho! to the Town Council. Any enquiries, complaints or questions should, therefore, be directed to the Town Council.

3.3 All dedications are subject to the policy conditions set out below.

3.4 Ten dedicated benches on Appledore Quay are historic, with plaques installed by Torridge District Council. Where these are subject to an active agreement, which has been entered into within the last 10 years, the Town Council shall honour all the terms of the agreement, if known. Historic agreements or more than 10 years cannot be honoured although the Council will use reasonable endeavours to contact relatives or sponsors and offer a re-dedication or return of the plaque.

3.5 The locations of benches available for dedication are as follows:

Appledore:	Northam:	Westward Ho!:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Quay• Churchfields• War Memorial• Hillcliff Gardens• 'Blackies'• Irsha Street• Marine Parade• Anchor Park• Lords Meadow• Other highway benches across the ward.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Burrough Farm• Bone Hill monument• War Memorial• Other highway and park locations across the ward.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Westward Ho! Park• Other highway and park locations across the ward.

4. POLICY CONDITIONS

4.1 All applications for sponsorship of benches must be made on an application form, which can be downloaded from the Council's website or collected from reception and be signed by the applicant (see appendix).

4.2 For new or replacement benches, the council commissions a bench in keeping with the others in the location. In park locations, the benches will be fully recycled plastic black benches with brown slats. Benches installed in public spaces must be constructed from materials rated for long-term outdoor exposure and minimal maintenance. Where applicable, coatings must comply with ISO 12944-6 for corrosion resistance in harsh environments. Benches to be located on or near highways would need to meet the standards set out in:

- **Highways Act 1980: Street Furniture Permissions and Obstruction Rules**
This foundational legislation governs the installation of street furniture on public highways in England and Wales. It outlines rules around obstructions, public rights of way and the need for local authority consent before placing items like benches or bins on pavements or verges.
- **Historic England Guidelines**
In areas of historical or architectural significance, materials and designs must align with conservation objectives. Street furniture placed in heritage zones must be sympathetic to the local character, often requiring timber finishes, cast iron, or bespoke detailing to preserve visual harmony.
- **Pavement Licences (2020 Update)**
Introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic, pavement license reforms allow businesses to apply for **short-term use** of public space with a simplified process.

Only these bench designs of the type and colour specified by this Council will be approved at any specific location.

Standard & Recommended Widths

4.3 Under UK design and government guidance, the recommended minimum unobstructed pedestrian clearance width for a standard footway is 2.0 metres (2000 mm). Specific rules vary depending on the context and site constraints:¹

4.4 Department for Transport (DfT) Inclusive Mobility (Section 4.2): Recommends an ideal clear width of 2.0 metres (2000 mm) to allow two wheelchair users or people with buggies to pass each other comfortably.

¹ <https://www.activetravelengland.gov.uk/planning-active-places/pavements-and-footpaths>,
<https://www.openspace.eca.ed.ac.uk/resources/idgo-design-guides/the-design-of-streets-with-older-people-in-mind/widths-of-footways-and-footpaths/>,
<https://www.civilistix.com/news/designing-safe-pedestrian-routes-across-vehicle-accesses/>

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4.5 Manual for Streets: Suggests a general minimum unobstructed width of 2.0 metres for lightly used residential or commercial streets, with wider paths required in high-activity zones (such as near shops, schools, and bus stops).

4.6 Building Regulations (Approved Document M, Vol. 2): Requires a minimum surface width of 1.5 metres for accessible approaches to non-residential buildings.

Minimum & Exceptional Thresholds

4.7 Reduced / Tight Spaces: Where physical constraints make 2.0 metres impossible, guidance suggests a reduced clear width of 1.5 metres.² Government outdoor seating guidance sometimes references 1.2 metres, while critical safety thresholds note that less than 1.0 metre clear width is a critical safety issue.

4.8 Definition of "Clear" Width: The clearance width is measured around permanent obstacles like street furniture, lampposts, trees, signs, and outdoor seating in use rather than total pavement width.

4.9 The Council will maintain a waiting list for dedication benches. Applicants are free to request a particular location but will be advised of any current waiting time for popular locations. Specifying only one location may result in a longer wait. Applicants will be offered an alternative, wherever possible. Applicants cannot "reserve" a bench prior to the death of a loved one. No-one can remain on the waiting list longer than two years if they have been offered a bench at a parish location and declined it.

4.10 The exact location, in which the bench will be placed, is determined by the Council, and dependent on need and availability. Whilst the Council will try to locate a bench at a requested site, due to the popularity of some locations and license restrictions, this cannot be guaranteed.

4.11 The Council will limit the number of commemorative benches in particular areas so that they do not detract from the primary purpose of the open space. Therefore, the size and location of the space shall limit the number permitted. In most locations, no new bench sites are available. Only the replacement of existing benches in poor condition or re-dedications of benches on existing sites are available.

4.12 The applicant will be required to pay the full amount once a bench dedication has been agreed. It is expected that any commemorative bench will have a serviceable life of 10 years. This 10-year period is calculated from the date of installation. There are two options and these are dependent upon the location and circumstances:

² <https://app.hauc-uk.org.uk/footway-and-footpath-works-look-after-pedestrians>,
<https://www.openspace.eca.ed.ac.uk/resources/idgo-design-guides/the-design-of-streets-with-older-people-in-mind/widths-of-footways-and-footpaths/>,
<https://www.civilistix.com/news/designing-safe-pedestrian-routes-across-vehicle-accesses/>

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- I. Re-dedication: payment for the production, engraving and installation of a plaque on an existing bench in reasonable condition, together with an administration and maintenance fee. The duration of the dedication is limited to the current 10-year maintenance period for the bench (but are capable of being extended).
- II. Replacement: payment for the production, engraving and installation of a plaque on a new replacement bench at an existing site, together with an administration and maintenance fee for 10 years.

4.13 The current schedule of fees is appended to the application form. Fees may be reviewed annually and the relevant fee in the year of installation will be the fee payable.

5. TERMS OF THE AGREEMENT

5.1 Benches shall always remain the property of the Council.

5.2 Benches shall remain in place for the 10-year agreement period. Within that period, the Council reserves the right to remove the bench or plaque at any time if it becomes unsafe, damaged beyond economic repair or unacceptable from an aesthetic or procedure perspective. If the Council chooses to remove a bench on the grounds of aesthetic appearance alone, an alternative location will be sought in consultation with the sponsor. If an alternative location cannot be agreed, the Council will compensate the sponsor with a sum equivalent to 1 tenth of the total donation cost, multiplied by the number of years remaining of the agreement period and the plaque sent to the sponsor.

5.3 Should a bench or plinth become damaged or unsafe through general wear and tear during the 10-year period, the Council will consider arranging for repair or replacement, as appropriate. However, the Council is under no obligation to replace the bench and will do so at its discretion.

5.4 Under no circumstances will any installation of a bench by a third party be permitted. If it is found that a bench has been installed by anyone other than the Council, it will be removed without notice and without guarantee of safe return.

5.5 Commemorative plaques fitted to benches are approximately 150mm x 50mm. This allows space for approximately 4 lines with 22 letters, to include spaces, on each line. The plaque will generally be fitted to the centre of the upper most lath of the back of the bench. Any inscription that is deemed to be inappropriate, offensive, or likely to bring the Council into disrepute shall be refused.

OR

5.5 Commemorative plaques fitted to benches are approximately 150mm x 50mm. This allows space for approximately 4 lines with 22 letters, to include spaces, on each line. Plaques will generally be fitted to the upper most lath of the back of the bench, to a maximum of four, as follows:

- I. A bench up to 1,500mm may have 2 plaques.

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II. A bench between 1,501mm and 1,800mm width may have 3 plaques.

III. A bench over 1,801mm may have 4 plaques.

Any inscription that is deemed to be inappropriate, offensive, or likely to bring the Council into disrepute shall be refused.

5.6 Applications for commemorative benches for pets will not be granted.

5.7 No additional mementoes e.g. vases, statues, flowers, wreaths, balloons or other ornamentation etc or additional unauthorised plaques shall be permitted on or around the bench. If found, these will be removed without prior notice. The bench should always be accessible to the public.

5.8 Nothing in the dedicated bench scheme confers special rights to the sponsor, it should be noted and accepted that any person may sit on any public bench at any time.

6. SPONSORSHIP

6.1 In addition to dedicated benches, the Council operates a sponsorship scheme through which local businesses can sponsor a public bench, to assist with its repair and maintenance. Sponsorship opportunities shall only be available for existing benches, which are not subject to an existing dedication agreement. To sponsor a bench, businesses must be local to the parish and specific community with the parish (i.e. Appledore, Northam or Westward Ho!) and the following terms shall apply in addition to 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.7 above:

- I. The agreement will be for a period of 3 years, extendable up to 10.
- II. The fee shall be paid at the beginning of the sponsorship agreement.
- III. The size, location and wording of the sponsorship plaque shall be agreed by the Council, and will be in keeping, proportionate in scale and respect the location and setting of the bench.
- IV. No corporate branding will be permitted.

7. THE END OF THE DEDICATION PERIOD

7.1 After a period of 10 years, the Council will make reasonable endeavours to contact the sponsor to ascertain whether they require the removal and the return of any plaque. The bench can then be made available for rededication by another sponsor.

7.2 Up to 1 year, prior to the end of the agreement, the sponsor is encouraged to make contact the Council to confirm their wishes, either to extend the dedication period or request that the plaque be removed.

7.3 The sponsor can also opt for a re-dedication of a plaque in the same location.

OR

7.3 The sponsor can also opt for a rededication of a plaque in the same location, for either the whole bench or for joint dedication (see 5.5 above).

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7.4 It is essential that sponsors ensure that the Council holds up to date records of their contact details. These will be kept in accordance with data protection legislation in force at the time. Should contact details not be available, or the Council be unable to make contact, after having made reasonable attempts, the Council will remove the plaque. The bench will either then be replaced or rededicated with **a new memorial plaque OR new memorial plaques.**

7.5 Any plaque from removed benches will be retained by the Council for a year, for the sponsor to collect. After this time, the Council will relocate it to a suitable location.

8. HISTORIC AGREEMENTS

8.1 For those benches that have been sponsored prior to October 2015 and without an active agreement in place, the Council reserves the right to replace benches or plaques that have been in place for more than 10 years. The sponsor, should the Council be in possession of current contact details, will be contacted and offered first refusal to enter a further 10-year sponsorship agreement. A sponsor must be able to provide written evidence of an existing bench maintenance agreement, should they wish to challenge to the Council's decision.

9. REVIEW

9.1 The policy, approved bench designs and fees and charges may be reviewed annually.

10. FEES AND CHARGES FOR 2027-28

All costs include a plaque as described in paragraph 5.5, above.

I.	Sole dedication/sponsorship of a current or refurbished bench	£500
II.	Joint dedication/sponsorship of a current or refurbished bench (see 5.5)	£200
III.	New installation of a recycled bench in black/brown	£1,750
IV.	New installation of a bench on the public highway	£2,750 ³

The above fees are excluding VAT, which will be applied as appropriate and the total is payable upon approval of the application.

³ subject to the approval of the Highways Authority.

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Bench Sponsorship Form

Northam Town Council

Town Hall, Windmill Lane,

Northam, EX39 1BY

01237 474976

www.northamtowncouncil.gov.uk



I would like to sponsor a bench in the parish of Northam (Appledore, Northam and Westward Ho!) – please tick as appropriate:

Type of dedication / sponsorship	Cost	Tick your choice
Sole dedication/sponsorship of a current or refurbished bench	£500	
Joint dedication/sponsorship of a current or refurbished bench	£200	
New installation of a recycled bench in black/brown (for park and recreation ground locations)	£1,750	
New installation of a bench on the public highway (subject to the approval of the Highways Authority)	£2,750	

At (brief description of location)

///What3Words location

With an appropriate plaque reading

up to 4 lines, 22 characters per line
(inc. spaces)

Line 1

Line 2

Line 3

Line 4

The bench is dedicated to / sponsored by:

Once completed please email this form to the Community Engagement Officer by mail to the Town Hall at the address above or by email to admin@northamtowncouncil.gov.uk.

You will be contacted to arrange a site visit, so location and plaque details can be discussed.

- Northam Town Council promises to install all benches in a secure fashion that will deter theft, however, theft and vandalism of benches is always a risk.
- Whilst the Council will make every effort to maintain and repair sponsored benches whenever possible, we reserve the right to remove it if it is damaged beyond repair.
- If this is the case, or if a bench is stolen, there is no guarantee that the Town Council will be in a position to replace it.

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Please note, the Commemorative Bench scheme at Northam Town Council is subject to the following conditions. Please read the following carefully and sign your agreement below

1. Bench sponsorship is for a period of 10 years from the day payment is received.
The estimated lifespan of a bench is 10 years, but this cannot be guaranteed. If after 10 years a commemorative bench is deemed to be in a good state of repair, it may remain in position at the discretion of The Town Council until it becomes beyond repair when it will be removed from the position. Any plaques will be removed and returned to Northam Town Council who will contact the supporter to enquire if they wish for the plaque to be returned to them.
2. Benches are a standard specification and will be supplied by Northam Town Council.
3. Benches will have one standard specification plaque which will be placed in the centre of the uppermost wooden slat on the back of the bench. The plaque will display a message of your choice. All wording is to be approved by Northam Town Council prior to being placed on the bench. A draft will be sent to you before the plaque is ordered, the sponsor is solely responsible for checking the accuracy of the wording.
4. If we are notified that a repair is needed (by sponsors or staff), the bench may be removed from its position and assessed:
 - I. If repairable, it will be repaired and returned to its existing place.
 - II. If beyond repair, any plaques will be removed and returned to the Council who will contact the supporter to enquire if they wish for the plaque to be returned to them.
5. If a commemorative bench is deemed “beyond repair” by the Town Council, it will be removed from its position even if the bench is within the estimated 10-year life-span. A replacement bench may be offered at the discretion of the Council.
6. Benches may not be fixed in their location – the bench will be placed in the desired area on delivery, but it could be moved and therefore its exact location cannot be guaranteed. The Town Council cannot take responsibility for this movement and if the benches are moved, Council staff may not be able to search for or locate them.
7. On delivery we will attempt to place the benches in the sponsor’s preferred area, but this may be subject to availability as some areas of the are likely to be more popular than others – therefore if there are sufficient benches in one area we may have to pursue the sponsor’s second or third choice.

Agreement to the conditions of the Commemorative Bench Scheme at Northam Town Council.

By signing this agreement, you are agreeing to the conditions outlined above and the location agreed.

Name:

.....

Email:

.....

Telephone:

.....

Address:

.....

.....

Sign:

Date:

.....