

DEBENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Millennium Gates Policy-2020

1. Scope

The aim of this policy is to establish guidelines for controlling public use of the emergency access gates at the Debenham Cemetery, locally known as the “Millennium Gates”.

2. Objectives

The objectives of this policy are to manage the access and use of the “Millennium Gates” by members of the public, in order to provide an alternative egress in case of flooding, natural disaster or other emergency, whilst ensuring health, safety and safeguarding are observed.

3. Background

The policy came about following concerns raised by members of the public about past misuse of the access point between Priory Lane (a highway) onto Cemetery Lane (a restricted private road) and the decision taken by the Council to stop this from happening by keeping the Millennium Gates locked when not in use.

Cemetery Lane, which is off Aspal Road, provides access not only to the rear of sheltered accommodation (Coopersfield-Sanctuary Housing), but also to the Recreation Ground, the Play area and the Debenham Cemetery. It is the vehicular route taken by funeral directors (including funeral corteges) and members of the public tending to graves, as well as Parish Council Contractors managing the grounds.

It is widely used as a pedestrian route between various key destinations in the village of Debenham, such as the Hoppit Woodland and Lakes, the Debenham Allotments and Priory Lane.

It is unsuitable as an egress route, circular route, or for any other form of alternative vehicular access for any third party and access is only permitted in case of an emergency. Emergency is defined as follows:

- a) Flooding
- b) Natural disaster
- c) Emergency Services need of access

The misuse of the Millennium Gates in 2012 prompted the Debenham Parish Council to stipulate that these would remain locked and a letter was sent to neighbouring residents, who did not benefit from an alternative egress route, with an access code which could be used in case of an emergency.

The Debenham Parish council adopted the Debenham Emergency Plan in 2017 and no further changes were made to this system at that point.

During 2019 and 2020, the Debenham Parish Council received reports of activities and incidents which were of concern and prompted the existing system to be reviewed. These reports included:

- Anti-social activity, including alleged alcohol/illegal substance consumption/abuse within the Recreation Ground car park and open spaces
- Vehicles being driven dangerously

- Vehicles being parked inconsiderably
- Potential of safeguarding risks associated with facilities such as play areas and sheltered housing in very close proximity
- Risks to pedestrians/cyclists due to lack of dedicated footway within the narrow Priory Lane and Cemetery Lanes
- Risks to all users due to drivers of heavy goods vehicles getting lost on their way to carry out deliveries and using Priory Lane, which does not have sufficient turning ratio as it is a “dead end”.

4. The Policy.

In order to control unauthorised use of the Millennium Gates, these will remain locked by way of a coded padlock and the following will apply in the case of an emergency:

The code to open the Millennium Gates will be provided to all members of the Debenham Parish Council, including the Parish Clerk, approved Contractors and the Website Editor. Contact details are available via the Debenham Parish Council website <http://debenham.onesuffolk.net/parish-council-2/> and on the village noticeboard, on Market Green.

This will replace the previous action of sending letters to relevant residents with the access code.

In the event of an emergency, (flood, natural disaster or emergency services require access) a member of the Debenham Parish Council will unlock the Millennium Gates if it is safe to do so. Alternatively, a member of the public may request the code and use it to enable access. The reason for the request will be required when contact is made, and details will be logged in line with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).

Once the emergency that caused the Millennium Gates to be opened has passed, the Gates will be locked and the code will be changed.

The new code will be issued to all members of the Parish Council, Parish Clerk, Approved Contractors and Website Editor.

The Debenham Parish Council reserve the right to amend this policy as and when necessary.

5. To reinforce the policy the following will also happen:

- a) All allotment holders are informed of this policy and asked not to park their vehicles on Priory Lane, so as not to cause any unnecessary obstruction.

Allotment holders to also be informed that any such obstructions will not result in the Millennium Gates being opened to alleviate traffic flow, but may result in their parking being reported to Suffolk Police and the risk of ensuing penalties or fines. Vehicles may also be removed if causing an obstruction of the highways, for which there could be a recovery cost.

- b) That additional signage is placed at the beginning of Priory Lane to inform members of the public that they are entering a road which has a “Dead End” and limited space for turning around.
- c) That the Highways authority is asked to undertake regular road maintenance inspections of Priory Lane and the banks alongside the ditch, so they are kept in good order. This may include ensuring regular maintenance is carried out to hedges, tree lines and other vegetation by the relevant landowners.
- d) That Suffolk Police continue to be asked to carry out regular patrols at the Recreation Ground area in order to deter/address anti-social behaviour, substance abuse and dangerous driving incidents.

Reviewed: 14th April 2025

Next Review: March 2026