

Thame Town Council

Marking the Death of a Senior National Figure Procedure

Announcement / Flag flying

1. On receiving the formal announcement by Buckingham Palace or Downing Street of the Death of a senior national figure (known as Day D), the Town Clerk (or their relevant substitute) authorises the Union Flags outside the Town Hall and in the Memorial Gardens to be lowered to half-mast** immediately until 08:00hrs on the morning following the Funeral (D+10 for the Sovereign and D+8 for other senior members of the Royal family).
2. In the case of the death of the Sovereign, the day following the death will be Proclamation Day (the day when the new Sovereign is proclaimed). On Proclamation Day flags will, at the start of the day, be flying at half-mast. All flags will then be flown at Mast-head from 11:00hrs on D+1 to coincide with the reading of the Principal Proclamation and until 13:00hrs the following day (D+2).
3. Should it happen that between the day of death and the funeral the Flag Policy dictates that a flag should be flown e.g. Merchant Navy Day, Commonwealth Day, etc., those days will pass un-marked and the Union flag will continue to fly at half-mast as a symbol of National mourning.

Book of Condolence

4. A Book of condolence will be opened in the Town Hall on the first working day after the death, normally available for signing during working hours only, but subject to public demand and the availability of staff to supervise, out of normal hours too. Depending on anticipated demand two books may be needed. Books will be placed in a quiet place to afford those signing privacy and quiet reflection.

Table to be covered with suitable black cloth, supply of pens, printed announcement, photograph (as appropriate) and small flower arrangement to be placed next to the Book of Condolence.

5. Books of condolence must not be left unattended. A rota of staff members will be drawn up to provide constant supervision. Staff to ensure adequate sheets are available and to discretely remove any pages that have been defaced or include offensive / questionable comments for later further assessment.
6. Press announcement and item published on the website. Include the official statement from Buckingham Palace and one from the Town Mayor. Provide link to Buckingham Palace e-book of Condolence (www.royal.gov.uk).
7. Books of condolence to be closed at the end of the day following the day of the funeral.
8. Books of condolence to be part of the Town Council's archives.

Letters of Condolence

9. The day after the State Funeral a letter of Condolence to be sent from the Council to the new Sovereign's Private Secretary (in the case of the Sovereign's death) and the Private Secretary of the deceased (for other senior members of the Royal Family).

Photographs

10. On receiving the formal announcement of the Death of the Sovereign a black ribbon will be placed on the portrait in the Upper Chamber.

Cancellation/postponement of Existing Planned Events

11. Office Administration Officer to cancel/postpone all Civic Engagements in conjunction with the Town Mayor / Deputy Town Mayor / Town Clerk.
12. Committee Services Officer to cancel/postpone all Council / Committee / Working Group meetings in conjunction with the Town Clerk.

Proclamation Day

13. Proclamation Day (2 above) – Following County level Proclamation the Town Mayor (and / or Deputy) will read the Proclamation outside the Town Hall at 1.30pm *or later* dependant on the day/time of reading the Proclamation by the High Sheriff (planned for 12.30pm or time to be advised if on a Sunday). Councillors / staff to be informed and announcement made via official media channels.
14. Wording of the Proclamation will be found on Buckingham Palace website (www.royal.gov.uk) and the Privy Council website (www.privy-council.gov.uk). The High Sheriff (Lord Lieutenant's Office) will also have a copy.

Dress Code

15. Up to and including the day of the funeral and on days when public mourning is observed the Town Mayor and Deputy Town Mayor to wear black tie or black rosette as appropriate dependant on public feeling.
16. Consideration to be given as to whether black ties / arm bands to be worn by Councillors and staff dependant on public feeling.
17. Consideration to be given with regard to Chains of Office dependant on public feeling.

Marking a Silence

18. On the death of the Sovereign or other senior member of the Royal Family there will be a Two Minute Silence at 11am on the day of the funeral (D+10 for the Sovereign, D+8 for other senior members of the Royal Family).
19. Town Mayor (and / or Deputy Town Mayor) to lead the Silence outside the Town Hall. Announcement via website / press release.
20. Decision to be made by the Town Clerk in conjunction with the Town Mayor (or Deputy Mayor if Town Mayor not available) on any other marking of silence required.

Flowers

21. Residents / visitors may wish to leave flowers in the Memorial Gardens or at other suitable locations. The flowers will be moved to the Memorial Gardens or left in the location for a week after the funeral. (Some flexibility on timing of removal to be given to weather conditions and decision to remove flowers to be done with great sensitivity).

Timings

22. It is difficult to give definitive information on timings as it is almost impossible to anticipate every conceivable set of circumstances e.g. if the announcement of the death of the Sovereign or senior member of the Royal Family falls on a public holiday, Easter, Christmas, Remembrance Sunday, etc.

23. It is only when the announcement comes through from the first reading of the Proclamation at St. James's Palace that it will be possible to take a view and establish local timings.

Social Media and Websites

24. Ghost pages already prepared in the event of the death of the Sovereign or the Duke of Edinburgh, to be published on receipt the formal announcement.

Guidance

25. In the event of any dispute to be resolved / decision to be taken that is not covered by this procedure, reference should be made by the Town Clerk / Town Mayor to the latest available guidance from the National Association of Civic Officers (NACO). At time of writing the latest guidance available is "Marking the Death of a Senior National Figure - Fourth Edition - Issued May 2018".

** Half-mast - the flag is flown two-thirds of the way up the flagpole with at least the height of the flag between the top of the flag and the top of the mast.

Interim COVID-19 Measures

Flag Flying

Staff, if working and it is safe to do so, will place the Union Flag to half-mast at the Town Hall and Memorial Gardens. If the health of the staff member or wider community outweighs the need to ask staff to leave their homes and travel to lower flags at both sites, the Union Flag will not be flown.

This would also apply to the raising and re-lowering of flags for any Proclamation ceremony.

Books of Condolence

For the duration of the current emergency, it is not appropriate to open physical books of condolence. The safe option will be to encourage the online books of condolence where these are available through the Town Council media channels.

Laying of Flowers and Donations

It will be actively discouraged for people to lay flowers during this time. An alternative solution will be to suggest that people should make donations if they so wish, nobody should feel obliged to donate during this emergency. The Duke of Cambridge has recently launched an urgent appeal asking those who are able to to donate money to the National Emergencies Trust so that the Trust can help local charities, distribute money and support victims in combatting the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Organisation of Local Events

Encouraging people to meet at this time is not possible. Events will be postponed (including civic church services) until it is safe to do so. Social media to be used to explain the events. It is hoped that television broadcasters will step in to fill gaps should the need arise.