KEMPSEY CEMETERIES
STRATEGY & MASTER PLAN

Kempsey Shire Council operates 11 cemeteries throughout the local government area that range in both use and setting. These cemeteries are (in order of their current level of use):

- East Kempsey Cemetery
- Arakoon Cemetery
- Bellbrook Cemetery
- Toms Gully Cemetery
- Euroka Cemetery (descendants only)
- Frederickton Cemetery
- Kinki Cemetery (Stuarts Point)
- West Kempsey Cemetery (reservations only)
- Crescent Head Cemetery (memorial only)

The Comara and Arakoon Historical cemeteries are closed to burial and memorialisation.

Council's cemeteries provide an important service to the local community in times that are often confronting and difficult. Cemeteries also play an important role in documenting the history of the Kempsey Shire and are of significant cultural, historical and social value.

However, the way that cemeteries operate is changing. There is increased regulation and legislative requirements, greater competition, changing burial preferences and a need for Council to respond.

Considering this changing landscape, the Kempsey Cemeteries Strategy & Master Plan project seeks to ensure that suitable, accessible and affordable cemetery services will continue to be made available to residents of the Kempsey Shire. It also recognises the limited resources and the competing priorities of Council.

To ensure that long-term objectives are achieved Council intends to implement three key directions:

- Responding to the increasing cremation rate by improving memorialisation options
- Being prudent about improvements to ensure ongoing value for money for the community
- Acknowledging past, and facilitating future, community connections with the cemeteries

These are further discussed throughout this Strategy and, where applicable, highlighted on the Master Plans and other Site Plans attached.

Arakoon Cemetery lawn burial section

BACKGROUND

Following industry consultation and engagement, background analysis and internal discussion, the Cemeteries Strategy & Master Planning process has established a range of existing positive attributes and key challenges for the future.

A positive foundation

There are many positive aspects of Council's existing cemeteries, including:

- Extensive capacity across Council's network of cemeteries
- Council's cemeteries are popular, being the prominent service in the area
- Council's cemeteries are generally well maintained and well located to service the community
- Costs to operate the cemeteries and the overall fees charged are relatively consistent with industry standards

East Kempsey, Frederickton and Arakoon cemeteries accommodate around 90% of all Council facility interments and these cemeteries are expected to continue to be the main cemeteries that service the community.

Master Plans have been prepared for these three higher use cemeteries, whilst Site Plans have also been prepared for the other nine cemeteries - refer to all these plans attached to this Strategy.

This careful forward planning will allow Council to continue to deliver cemetery services for the foreseeable future.

Key challenges for the future

The positive foundations of the existing service provide a strong basis to address the challenges and opportunities that face Council's cemeteries in the future. These challenges are outlined below and on the following pages.

East Kempsey Cemetery Capacity

East Kempsey Cemetery is Council's largest cemetery (by number of burials). The main part of the cemetery area is now reaching its burial capacity.

It is therefore recommended that:

- The available burial area be extended by developing existing zoned cemetery land in the north-eastern corner of the site to provide up to almost 600 new burial sites.
- A new memorialisation area be developed with potential for further expansion to ensure ash interment can be undertaken well into the future.

Other options to provide for and/or offset burial demand at East Kempsey Cemetery include:

- Policies that restrict forward reservations
- Investigating potential to increase capacity in other nearby cemeteries
- Exploring alternatives to traditional burial
- Expanding the available cemetery area

Council will continue to respond to capacity needs using these options as required.

View across underutilised cemetery land at East Kempsey Cemetery

Increasing regulation

Legislative change and regulation of the interment industry has been increasing since the introduction of the *Cemeteries & Crematoria Act* in 2013. A recent review of the Act identified the introduction of an "Industry Interment Scheme" or a licence to operate cemeteries.

These changes recognise that cemeteries are now operated not only by government, but also by private operators, including within the Kempsey local government area. Whether this scheme is introduced or not, there is expected to be greater reporting and regulatory requirements that Council will need to address in the near future.

Council is planning for the resourcing implications of these additional requirements which may also require some operational changes to meet licencing conditions.

Financial sustainability

Many councils have traditionally operated cemeteries as a community service. With increasing competition and pressure from burial shortages in Sydney, IPART has now determined "reasonable costs" for cemetery operations - highlighting that costs in Sydney are generally too high, and costs in regional areas are generally too low.

While Council's fees are at the low end of IPART's "reasonable cost" findings, they are consistent with overall costs when benchmarked with other regional providers. However, IPART recommends consistency of timing of when fees should apply and this differs to Council's current arrangements. For example, maintenance and cemetery development costs should be charged at the time of site reservation rather than at the time of burial which is currently the case.

The State Government's proposed Interment Industry Scheme is also likely to enforce the need for a "perpetual maintenance fund" to provide for the long-term care of cemeteries. Whilst Council has an existing headstone maintenance fund, there is a significant gap in funding to assist in cemetery care - referred to as a "legacy" gap.

Council will address this "legacy" gap by investigating alternative funding, such as through advocating to the State Government. Council will avoid the need for any substantial price increases unless required by State directions, but will change the timing of when maintenance costs are charged to align with the IPART recommendations.

Greater emphasis on memorialisation

Cremation rates have increased in recent years, with up to 80% of families choosing this option over burial. With two crematoriums located in the Kempsey Shire, high rates of cremation are expected to continue into the foreseeable future.

Council intends to respond to these changing preferences by having a renewed focus on providing for high quality memorialisation spaces. For higher use cemeteries, this will include a variety of options such as new interment walls, gardens and no-interment memorials that cater for a range of community needs.

Other cemeteries will also be assessed for providing smaller scale offerings to ensure that there are suitable interment options available across Council's cemeteries, as indicated on the Site Plans attached.

Connecting with the community

Council recognises that many community members have a strong connection to their nearby cemetery. Ensuring that the community is aware and embracing of Council's cemeteries means that they have extensive choices available when needed.

Council intends to increase the awareness of facilities and offerings at cemeteries through:

- Enabling faith and non-faith based non-profit groups and organisations to undertake cemetery related events and activities on Council's cemeteries, as well as promoting community discussion on the death care processes - e.g. 'death cafes' / 'dying to talk'
- Improving website material and access, whilst marketing and disseminating information to enable easy access and to promote awareness of new offerings
- Engaging with community and Aboriginal groups to assist in addressing specific needs and issues such as affordability, access and provision of natural burial opportunities.

Together, these initiatives are intended to complement Council's efforts in providing the physical facilities with the assurance that the cemeteries are easily recognised and understood by the community at their time of need.

SPACE FOR THE FUTURE

With ongoing investment in cemetery infrastructure, there is sufficient capacity in place for both burial and memorialisation needs. Master planned outcomes and key directions for high use cemeteries are identified in the table below.

Other fully operational cemeteries that are available for current use generally have sufficient long-term capacity without detailed planning (50 years+ based on current trends). Opportunities for these cemeteries are identified in the attached site plans.

Cemetery	Burial capacity	Key directions
East Kempsey Cemetery	Current: Less than 1 year Master Planned: Up to 900 burial plots or 22.5 years at 40 first interments (new plots utilised) per annum	Draft and implement a Policy to restrict reservations until master plan development can be undertaken to provide sufficient (10 years+) future capacity Improve memorialisation options consistent with long-term plans Seek determination of land claim and undertake extension on cemetery land (~600 plots) Close adjoining road and maximise use for burial (~200 plats) Infill where possible (~100 plots) Investigate opportunities for cemetery expansion Monitor for further cemetery space needs when at 10 years capacity Minimise burial plot reservations before need if and when needed Upgrade other cemeteries to reduce demand if and when needed (e.g. West Kempsey)
Frederickton Cemetery	Current: 4-5 years within current lawn cemetery area Master Planned: Up to 1,150 burial plots or 46 years at 25 first interments (new plots utilised) per annum	Prepare new north-west area whilst maximising use of existing lawn cemetery area Improve memorialisation options consistent with long-term plans Progressively utilise north-west area Monitor for further cemetery space needs when at 20 years capacity or if East Kempsey reaches burial capacity
Arakoon Cemetery	Current: 20 years within current lawn and monumental areas Master Planned: Up to 618 burial plots or 50 years at 12 first interments (new plots utilised) per annum	Progressively prepare burial spaces for future expansion (selective tree and understorey vegetation removal) Improve memorialisation options consistent with long-term plans Monitor for further cemetery space needs when at 20 years capacity

KEY STRATEGY OUTCOMES

Ultimately, this Strategy seeks to provide for suitable, accessible and affordable cemetery services that will continue to be made available to residents of the Kempsey Shire. These directions also need to be understood within the context of Council's limited resources and competing priorities.

To enable this to occur, there are two key aspects that need to be considered by Council:

- Providing physical cemetery infrastructure that meets the needs of the community in a variety of ways, and which is cost effective for Council, and
- Delivery of the associated services to enable the community and the broader industry to readily interact with the cemetery facilities.

To ensure that long-term objectives can be achieved, three key directions are proposed:

- Creating a range of memorialisation opportunities to facilitate ongoing connection between the community and Council's cemeteries, whilst also ensuring burial capacity remains available across Council's cemetery network.
- Providing value for money and being smart about how, when and where improvements are made so that they can best be enjoyed / add value to the community's experiences through focused development plans and maintenance schedules.
- Connecting the community with Council's cemeteries, meaning that Council's staff and facilities are well recognised, respected and representative of Council's broader service directions.

FACILITY IMPROVEMENTS

Consideration in the short term will be given to the future planning of both East Kempsey Cemetery and Frederickton Cemetery to ensure that decisions being made now will benefit their long-term use.

For East Kempsey Cemetery, maximising the available space for burial and supplementing this with memorialisation opportunities will be key to the longevity of the cemetery. Resolution and incorporation of necessary Aboriginal cultural and planning considerations will also need to be carefully considered at this cemetery when undertaking further detailed design and subsequent improvements, including determination of the current land claims and fencing of sensitive areas.

At Frederickton Cemetery, ensuring that the site is well designed and accessible to cater for increased use as East Kempsey reaches burial capacity will be important. Having effective and well-established infrastructure and an attractive setting at both East Kempsey and Frederickton will be a short-term focus that will meet longer-term needs.

With substantial population growth forecast in the South West Rocks area, creating long-term and co-ordinated plans for improvement of Arakoon Cemetery is also required. This will facilitate more diverse offerings that balance the unique character, natural environment and community preferences of the cemetery whilst preparing the cemetery for increased use in the future.

Other cemeteries will also continue to be improved, with a focus on resolving existing issues, maintaining available burial space and incorporating greater availability of memorialisation opportunities to meet changing community preferences. Consideration of undetermined Aboriginal Land Claims and Aboriginal interests in the land will also need to be considered when considering improvements.

The attached Master Plans and Site Plans outline these proposed improvements.