



**MIDCOAST**  
council



# **CEMETERY STRATEGY & POLICY COMMUNITY CONSULTATION PLAN**



## Introduction

MidCoast Council has engaged Locale Consulting to work with us to develop documents to guide the strategic direction and future management of the 34 cemeteries under Council's management across the region.

This includes both strategic and operational documents aimed to ensure Council's cemeteries are able to adequately cater for future demands in response to a growing and ageing population. In doing so, the project will review future cemetery needs in the face of changing regulatory requirements and seek to establish greater consistency across the Manning, Great Lakes and Gloucester regions.

This consultation plan outlines how the community and industry stakeholders will be invited to be involved in the development of these documents.

## Background

There are a number of drivers for the development of the documents to be prepared as part of the project. As well as reflecting the ongoing need for consistency in approaches to cemeteries across the local government area, these drivers also include the implementation of the NSW 'Interment Industry Scheme', which introduces a licensing framework for cemetery operators in NSW for the first time.

Another primary driver is the Council resolution of 11 September 2019 that endorsed a number of actions to address the community's desired outcomes following the laying down of monuments at The Bight Cemetery in July 2019.

As part of these commitments, it was indicated that a Cemetery Policy, processes and procedures to be developed would be the subject of community consultation and involvement of industry experts.

This resolution also highlights the important role that community consultation plays in cemetery planning. Consultation will therefore be undertaken across a range of stakeholder groups, including the general public and industry participants, as outlined further in this Consultation Plan.

The project consultants have worked with Cemeteries and Crematoria NSW on the '*Voluntary Code of Practice for Cemetery Maintenance – Cemetery Maintenance Guide*' and with more than 10 local governments on cemetery projects in recent years. These include cemetery strategies for Shoalhaven, Wingecarribee, Kempsey, Dubbo, Central Coast and Newcastle councils. Locale Consulting have also worked on a range of planning projects with MidCoast Council, bringing both their knowledge of the local area, as well as their cemetery planning experiences from around NSW.

## Considerations

There are several considerations in developing and implementing this consultation plan. This includes balancing community views, ongoing cemetery resourcing, and State Government requirements that are beyond Council's control.

The primary aim of the project is to therefore provide practical and realistic directions for Council staff in the delivery of cemetery services over the short, medium and long-term. While it is understood some sections of the community have a particular interest in the way in which

cemeteries are managed, it is also recognised that the project outcomes need to reflect a balanced approach to Council's internal operational needs and limited resources.

Council also recognises that:

- the community currently receives variable levels of service based on the geographic location of the cemetery,
- there is a need for an increased level of confidence in the 10 year works program, and
- there is a need to meet the future and changing requirements of the community.

The project will seek address these needs through a methodical approach to reviewing the existing situation and potential changes to population, demographic and industry trends.

The primary consideration for the consultation process is the integration of long-term community views with sustainable management principles to enable cemetery services to be delivered across the long-term to the MidCoast community.

It is acknowledged that the action of incorrectly laying down monuments at The Bight Cemetery has generated a lot of community interest, concern and comment. While the current restoration program at The Bight Cemetery is not in the scope of this consultation, we understand the community may wish to raise issues in relation to this. While the project consultant will gather feedback on this and provide it as information to Council, the project scope will have much broader perspective to ensure the ongoing sustainable management of all of Council's 34 cemeteries. The community may therefore not see detailed feedback on The Bight Cemetery reflected in documents to be exhibited as part of the project, particularly given the existing detailed documents that already relate to that cemetery.

## Strategic alignment

The consultation outlined in this plan is in keeping with the adopted MidCoast Council Community Engagement Strategy 2022-25.

## Purpose

The purpose of this consultation is to:

1. Gain insight from the interment industry on specific aspects of existing and future operations to support the sustainable delivery of cemetery services for the MidCoast community.
2. Provide key groups (including the Blight of the Bight group) with the opportunity to share their thoughts in relation to cemeteries management as relevant to the project.
3. Provide an opportunity for the general community to provide feedback on specific or general aspects of cemetery management including importance of burial options, memorialisation, affordability, environmental quality, heritage and infrastructure provided at cemeteries.



## Approach

The approach for this consultation will be:

- inform the whole community of the community engagement and how they can be involved via direct email, Council's weekly e-newsletter, media release and information on Council's web page
- provides broadscale opportunities for community input through an online survey process and written submissions
- work through detailed discussions with specific stakeholders, typically through online or face-to-face conversations

## Key messages

The key messages that will be consistently applied through this engagement are:

### Primary messages

- MidCoast Council maintains 34 cemeteries in a variety of landscapes throughout the region.
- The aim of the project is to assist in the operation of Council's cemeteries to adequately cater for future demands in response to a growing and aging population.
- The project will review Council's operations in the face of changing regulatory requirements and to establish greater operational consistency across the Manning, Gloucester and Great Lakes regions.
- The project will consider a wide range of issues and opportunities, from site specific constraints, maintenance needs, fees and charges, burial and memorialisation options, as well as relevant policies and procedures.
- The project will play an important role in ensuring that MidCoast Council residents have access to quality local cemetery services.
- While the project includes The Bight Cemetery and acknowledges the actions of Council associated with that cemetery, this is also being dealt with in detail under Council's ongoing restoration program.
- The project is being undertaken with the assistance of project consultants, Locale Consulting, who have significant experience in cemetery planning projects.

### Secondary messages

- Cemeteries play an important social role in the history and heritage of the region, as well as providing a resting place for many in our communities.
- Operational cemeteries are available for use to varying degrees, including for burial and memorialisation of loved ones.
- Some operational cemeteries are only available for existing reservation holders or where existing family members have previously been buried.
- There are also several cemeteries managed by Council that are no longer used for interment, often referred to as closed or historical cemeteries.
- There are some cemeteries in the region that are operated or managed by others, and Council does not have any responsibility for these, including for example the Manning Great Lakes Memorial Gardens.

## Stakeholders

Given the nature of the project, there are specific stakeholders that are important to consult with as they have an ongoing connection to the management and operation of our cemeteries. These stakeholders hold insights to the everyday ongoing use of cemeteries and may be directly impacted by the outcomes of the project.

The following outlines who we will consult with, their interest in the project, and how we will consult with them.

Stakeholder	Interest in the project	How consulted
Funeral directors	Funeral Directors are regular users of a variety of cemeteries, having insights to family needs, as well as being required to work within our policies and procedures.	Email, phone, video conferencing
Aboriginal working groups	Aboriginal people often having specific burial interests within regional cemeteries, as well as a connection to the lands upon which the project is based.	Video conferencing, scheduled meeting
Heritage Reference Group	The Heritage Reference Group has an interest in the historical integrity of local cemeteries.	Video conferencing, scheduled meeting
National Trust	The National Trust has an interest in the historical integrity of local cemeteries.	Email, phone
Monumental masons	Monumental masons are required to work in cemeteries across the region on a regular basis.	Email, phone, video conferencing
Blight of the Bight representatives	The Blight of the Bight group has a interest in the ongoing management of local cemeteries.	Face to face
Contractors	Contractors, such as grave diggers, work in local cemeteries on an ongoing basis.	Email, phone, video conferencing
Council staff	Council's operational staff are working in cemeteries on an ongoing basis.	Email, video conferencing, face to face
General community	The general community has an interest in the ongoing management of cemeteries which are important places for them on a social, historical and family level.	Online survey and written feedback options
Councillors	Councillors have an interest in the appropriate management of our cemeteries.	Workshops, briefings, reports

## Timeframe and activities

Initial consultation activities are intended to be delivered during April-May 2023, with a public exhibition process to follow later in the year. The table below shows the timeline for the different stages of consultation.

<b>Stage 1: April-May 2023</b>  <b>Purpose:</b> To gather feedback from the community to inform elements of the draft documents	<b>Stage 2: July-August 2023</b>  <b>Purpose:</b> To gain feedback on the draft Cemetery Strategy and Policy
<b>Stage 1 to gather information from specific interest groups and the general community</b>	<b>Stage two will see the draft Cemetery Strategy placed on public exhibition</b>
<b>Informing, consulting</b>	<b>Informing, Consulting</b>
<p>This stage will include specific consultation with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funeral directors</li> <li>• Aboriginal working groups</li> <li>• Heritage Reference Group</li> <li>• National Trust</li> <li>• Monumental mason</li> <li>• Blight of the Bight group representatives</li> <li>• Contractors</li> </ul> <p>Feedback from the general community will also be sought via an online survey. The online survey promoted via media, website, social media, and advertising.</p>	<p>Feedback on the draft strategy will be sought from across the LGA.</p> <p>The draft strategy and policy will be available on Council's website during the public exhibition period.</p> <p>An information session will be held while the draft documents are on public exhibition to explain the process and implications to interested members of the community.</p>

## Flexibility

This plan outlines how Council intends to listen to our community. As new information is gained, or concerns are raised by the community, the plan can be revised as required. We will remain agile enough to take advantage of the opportunities and changing circumstances that may arise.

## Communications tools and channels

The following communications tools and channels will be used to support the consultation:

Method:	Timing:	Details:
<b>Website</b>	Throughout	Raise awareness of engagement and provide information on the project and how to participate and direct feedback to consultants.
<b>Media release</b>	Stage 1 and Stage 2	Issued to print, radio, and television contacts in a timely manner to help inform the community of the consultation and public exhibition periods
<b>Email to community database</b>	Stage 1 and Stage 2	Use our community databases to raise awareness and encourage feedback
<b>Survey</b>	Stage 1	An online survey will provide the community with the opportunity to participate in the development of the strategy and policy
<b>Advertising</b>	Stage 1 and 2	Advertisement providing information on the consultation and the public exhibition period
<b>enewsletter</b>	Stage 1 and 2	Inclusion in weekly MidCoast News Wrap
<b>Social media</b>	Stage 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use social media channels to inform members of the community how they can participate</li> <li>• Monitor responses and use them to inform engagement</li> </ul>
<b>Intranet (internal)</b>	As required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Customer Service briefings</li> <li>• News and updates - all staff</li> </ul>

## Reporting

We will report back to our community on the outcomes of this consultation and the information collected during the process will be used to inform the draft document that will then be placed on public exhibition for further community feedback.