

3. SYDENHAM CEMETERY PROPOSED NEW ASHES MEMORIAL GARDEN

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The purpose of this report is to outline the proposal to develop a new Ashes Memorial Garden at Sydenham Cemetery, in the space occupied by the former Sexton's residence.

HISTORY OF SYDENHAM CEMETERY

Sydenham Cemetery opened in 1896 and along with Addington Cemetery, served the City of Christchurch and in particular the south western suburbs. Situated beside Somerfield Park, the cemetery is a busy pedestrian through-fare between Studholme and Simeon Streets. Typical of the older style of cemetery it has mostly large upright memorials with concrete surrounds and in many cases concrete tops to the graves. The cemetery covers an area of 6.5177 ha and shares the trees and open space of adjoining parkland. In the last decade additional tree planting, garden development on grave tops and seats have been installed.

CURRENT USE

There is still demand to use this cemetery from families living in the locality and having forebears and relatives interred in the cemetery. Full burial use is nearly at an end as only 115 burial plots remain unused. About 21 interments are currently undertaken annually. So far this financial year nine interments have been carried out.

NEED FOR MORE ASHES PLOTS

In Christchurch there has always been a much higher proportion of cremations compared with full burials. Currently it is running at about 25% burials and 75% cremations.

The number of ashes interments in city cemeteries is increasing with 25% ashes burials from a total of 883 interments in 1998/99.

A new independent cremator has also opened in Wigram which will increase the number of requests for ashes interments outside the two private companies operating at Harewood and Linwood.

For these reasons several new ashes gardens are being proposed in our current cemeteries.

As the population in Christchurch continues to age, the need for additional final resting places increase. It is expected that the death rate for Christchurch will increase by 12% by 2016.

THE DEVELOPMENT PROPOSAL

The ashes memorial garden will be developed at the frontage behind the main gates on Simeon Street.

This will necessitate removal of the former Sexton's house (Circa 1910) which has not been used for Sexton's accommodation for many years. The house, which is in very poor condition, has a book value of \$38,000 but a substantial sum of money would be needed to bring the house to a reasonable standard. There are several old sheds and garages on the site.

The grounds contain several good specimen trees that will be retained apart from two plum trees. A number of trees will be relocated to fit the proposed new ashes memorial garden.

The tabled concept plan shows a unique set of smaller intimate spaces, which provide a sensitive enclosure while retaining a strong sense of connection to the existing cemetery grounds. The existing gravel driveway will separate the new ashes memorial garden from the older section of the cemetery. Smaller shrub plantings will buffer the garden from the residential boundary fences on the northern side.

The original shelter building at the entrance to the cemetery will be relocated to the new memorial garden. The rear wall of the shelter will be removed to provide security and give a view of the beam layout, which is in a radial arm and spiral form. An existing golden totara tree will form the central focal point of the garden.

The overall site offers 30 burial plots adjacent to the older part of the cemetery and 500 ashes memorial garden plots. The existing entrance wall will be enhanced with specimen tree plantings. This is an ideal opportunity to utilise a mature landscaped site that has reached the end of its current use.

Site security in terms of locking the gates is provided by a local resident on contract to the Parks Unit. Several other local residents keep an eye on the cemetery and report any incidents.

The estimated total cost of this proposal is \$30,000. However, there is no current funding for this development in the Annual Plan. The write off cost of the Sexton's house (\$38,000) is accommodated in the draft 2000/01 budget for asset disposal. The Annual Plan Working Party is considering the provision of additional funding for cemeteries in 2000/01 and beyond and, if successful, the work could be carried out in a staged programme utilising these funds.

SUMMARY

The development of an ashes memorial garden in the area of Sydenham Cemetery is opportune and makes better use of space than retaining the former Sexton's house which is no longer used and in poor condition.

Good landscape features already exist on site in terms of trees and the proposed spiral gardens will enhance the cemetery entrance. The old shelter building will be retained as a central feature to the garden but opened up to improve security.

There is a need for more cemetery space in Sydenham and this small development goes towards meeting this need.

Funds are very limited in the Parks Unit Capital Programme but the garden could be staged and developed as funds become available.

The proposed development plan will be circulated to residents and stakeholders for comment as part of the Council's Seeking Community Views Policy.

- Recommendation:**
1. That the new ashes memorial garden proposal at Sydenham Cemetery be developed as per the proposed concept plan and as funds allow, following community consultation.
 2. That full community consultation be undertaken on the proposal prior to work commencing which will be staged as funds allow for the full development.

Chairman's Recommendation: That the above recommendation be adopted.