



northern  
beaches  
council

14 June 2019

Ms Jennifer Vincent, Director - Pricing  
IPART  
PO Box K35  
Haymarket Post Shop NSW 1240

Our Ref: 2019/332082

Dear Ms Vincent

### **IPART review of interment costs and pricing – Discussion Paper**

Thank you for the opportunity for Council to participate in the review of interment pricing for cemeteries in NSW. Northern Beaches Council manages two cemeteries in the local area at Mona Vale and Manly. Mona Vale Cemetery conducts over 150 interments annually while Manly Cemetery conducts less than 20 (ashes) interments each year. Council is a member of the Cemeteries and Crematoria Association of NSW and supports their recent submission to IPART. However, we would like to add the following comments that are relevant to our particular situation.

#### **Annual review of fees and charges**

Council undertakes a review of fees and charges in preparation for public exhibition of the draft Delivery Plan each year. Generally prices are either raised by CPI or in line with (or slightly under) market pricing in the North Shore and Northern Beaches regions of Sydney. A detailed analysis of actual costs that make up the various fees and charges has not been undertaken for some time.

#### **Perpetual care**

The Mona Vale Cemetery is self-funded by sales of interment sites and interment fees. Any surplus funds are transferred into a perpetual care fund (established some fifteen years ago) at the end of each financial year. This fund earns a modest amount of interest each year and some withdrawals have been made to fund capital works, such as cremation memorial areas, that will lead to increased capacity and sales. The cemetery is approaching full capacity for burial sites and will suffer a dramatic loss of annual revenue when new sites for burials are exhausted within the next ten years. It would be very difficult to dedicate any of the remaining space to a "basic" or "entry level" grave area.

Income from the Manly Cemetery is not sufficient to cover costs so this site is subsidised by Council. There is no perpetual care fund and cross subsidisation from the Mona Vale Cemetery is not permitted at this time. No new grave sites have been released at this site for over 50 years. While an audit of burial sites may uncover opportunities to release sites and increase sales, at this stage limited funding is available for expansion and it would be subject to extensive community consultation and the preparation and adoption of a plan of management for the site.

### **Maintenance in monumental cemeteries**

Both Mona Vale and Manly Cemetery are "full monumental" cemeteries – that is, the construction of a full cemetery monument (with headstone, kerb and a lid or ledger) is permitted (upon application). Maintenance requirements for these cemeteries is more intensive than that required in lawn cemeteries. It also takes longer to excavate and backfill graves, since smaller plant and machinery that is able to fit between the narrow aisles is required. For example, at Mona Vale a Yanmar 1.7T excavator is used to excavate graves, which can take as long as 2.5-3 hours. In a lawn cemetery a backhoe may be able to accomplish this task in under 30 minutes.

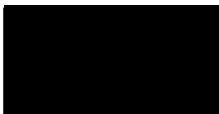
### **Responsibility for cemetery monuments in the future**

Although any monumental work erected on a grave site is the responsibility of the interment rights holder, after a couple of generations there is rarely anyone in the family either willing or able to take care of this obligation. While monuments in older cemeteries (such as Manly) were "built to last", many lack modern safety features (such as pins) that are now considered essential to protect unsupervised children or other unwitting visitors. This combined with vandalism, natural processes (such as erosion and subsidence), as well as undermining by plants or animals can lead to degradation of the structural integrity of any monument.

Council is of course responsible for the safety of staff, contractors and visitors to the site, making the ongoing inspection and basic care of older monuments a necessity and a significant financial liability. To address this issue, a "Grave Monument Safety and Inspection Program" has been commenced, that aims to identify any current and potential hazards at Manly Cemetery. This ongoing program is subsidised by Council and is likely to be rolled out at Mona Vale Cemetery in the near future.

In summary, the above key points serve to illustrate the challenges facing cemeteries like Manly and Mona Vale with aging infrastructure and limited capacity to accumulate adequate funds to fund both ongoing and perpetual care.

Yours sincerely



Kristie Debney  
Manager – Commercial, Property and Tourist Assets

Enquiries, 