

Innes Gardens Memorial Park Crematorium and Lawn Cemetery

What services are currently provided at Innes Gardens Memorial Park?

Innes Gardens Memorial Park provides a range of crematorium, lawn cemetery and memorialisation services to the community in conjunction with funeral services provided by local Funeral Directors. Innes Gardens is located at Philip Charley Drive Port Macquarie and includes a 150-seat chapel, administration offices, extensive grounds and memorial gardens.

Why is Council considering selling or leasing Innes Gardens Memorial Park?

Council has undertaken a review to ensure the services we deliver are efficient and effective, taking into consideration long-term financial sustainability and meeting the needs of the community. As part of this review, it was identified that we should look further at the options for delivering the services provided at the Innes Gardens Memorial Park (including the option for the services to be delivered by the private sector).

When Innes Gardens Memorial Park was established in 1984, it was the only crematorium in the region. There are now three private crematoria in the region (including Kempsey) which operate in direct competition with Innes Gardens Memorial Park. This has resulted in declining market share and profitability, and an increasing financial risk associated with ongoing operations and the level of capital investment required.

Innes Gardens Memorial Park has operated for many years as a self-funded business of Council, meaning that it has not needed funding from Council's general fund and the rates paid by ratepayers. If the current trend in declining market share and profitability continues as forecast, Council will need to fund (subsidise) the services provided at Innes Gardens. This would come at the expense of other Council services and projects.

If Council were to consider the sale or lease of Innes Gardens Memorial Park it would likely capture the value of the business for the community while it remains profitable, with the proceeds being available to Council to fund other services and projects for the benefit of the community.

What would happen to existing burial and cremation remains if Innes Gardens is sold?

There will be no impact on existing remains. The perpetual care, protection and management of existing interments and inurnments at Innes Gardens is secured under the *Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2013*.

Council acknowledges the importance and sensitivity of this issue for the community, and will also seek a binding commitment from any new operator as part of a contract of sale to ensure the perpetual care, protection and management of existing interments and inurnments at Innes Gardens Memorial Park.

Changes to the *Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2013* introduced in 2013 allow for new interment rights to be granted either in perpetuity or as a renewable right (with an initial term of 99 years for cremated remains and 25 years for a lawn burial). It is important to note that a renewable right only applies in the case of a new interment and cannot be applied to existing remains which will continue to be maintained in perpetuity.

While the Act reflected this new option in 2013, Council is not aware of any operator in NSW that has implemented the option of renewable interment rights to date.

What is the process for Council considering this matter?

Council originally considered a report on the Innes Gardens Memorial Park in October 2018 and resolved to seek proposals from providers of funeral, cemetery, crematoria and related services, to determine market interest in the potential sale or lease of the facility.

A request for proposals process ran from 19 March 2019 to 9 May 2019, and a number of proposals were received during this period from existing providers of funeral, cemetery, crematoria and related services. At the June 2019 meeting, Council considered the proposals received and has now decided to enter into further detailed negotiations with the organisations.

In parallel with these negotiations, Council has committed to further community consultation regarding the options being considered for Innes Gardens Memorial Park, with feedback received from the community to assist in informing a future decision by Council on the facility.

Council is due to consider the matter including feedback received from the community, at the Council meeting in August 2019. At this stage, no decision has been made by Council to sell Innes Gardens Memorial Park.

Shouldn't Innes Gardens Memorial Park remain as a public asset?

Crematoria facilities are not something that legally need to be managed by local government. There are very few Council operated crematoria in NSW with most facilities operated by private operators.

Should Council proceed with a proposed sale, we will still retain ongoing responsibility for the day-to-day and in perpetuity management of other cemeteries located across the local government area.

Can the land at Innes Gardens be developed for other purposes?

No. The land at Innes Gardens Memorial Park is zoned "SP2 Crematorium" under the *Port Macquarie - Hastings Local Environmental Plan (LEP) 2011*.

Should Council decide on a sale in the future, Council would seek a binding commitment from any new operator to ensure the ongoing delivery of crematorium, lawn cemetery and memorialisation services at Innes Gardens Memorial Park.

I have recently purchased a reservation at Innes Gardens Memorial Park - will a new operator honour the reservation?

Yes. Council will ensure that reservations (and pre-paid burials) are honoured by a new operator. This would be a condition of sale, should Council decide to proceed with the sale of the facility.

Would Innes Gardens Memorial Park continue to be maintained to the standard expected by the community?

Yes. Council is currently considering proposals from existing providers of funeral, cemetery, crematoria and related services. These organisations currently operate facilities similar to Innes Gardens Memorial Park, ensuring similar high standards of service and maintenance for the communities where they operate.

Would funeral costs increase if Council decides to sell Innes Gardens Memorial Park?

Funeral costs are determined by Funeral Directors independent of the cost of burial and cremation services at Innes Gardens. A sale of Innes Gardens is likely to increase competition in the local market ensuring downward pressure is kept on prices.

What are the benefits to the community if Council was to sell Innes Gardens Memorial Park?

Council's current consideration is aimed at ensuring the best possible ongoing delivery of cremation, lawn cemetery and memorialisation services to our community. The current process will seek to identify if there are potential benefits able to be offered by other operators to improve the current level of service and expand the range of facilities and services available for the community.

A sale would also protect Council against the financial risk associated with ongoing operations and the level of capital investment required, with the proceeds from a sale being available to Council to fund other services and projects for the benefit of the community.

How can I comment on the proposal?

During July, Council is inviting community feedback on the future of Innes Gardens Memorial Park. To provide feedback, please visit Council's website at <https://haveyoursay.pmhc.nsw.gov.au/> from 1 - 28 July 2019 or contact Council on 6581 8111.

What happens next?

Council will consider a further report on Innes Gardens Memorial Park at the Council meeting in August 2019. At that meeting, Council will consider proposals received following the negotiation period, in conjunction with feedback received from the community, to determine whether to proceed with a proposed sale or lease of Innes Gardens Memorial Park.

**For more information visit pmhc.nsw.gov.au
or contact Council on (02) 6581 8111**