



**MIDCOAST**  
council



# **THE BIGHT CEMETERY**

Restoration Action Plan

April 2020



## Background

During July 2019 Council staff incorrectly laid down a number of headstones at The Bight Cemetery, Wingham. Following concerns from the community all work in relation to the laying down of headstones at The Bight and other cemeteries was indefinitely suspended on 26 July 2019.

In the ensuing weeks a community group “The Blight of the Bight” was formed representing not only the families of those buried at the Bight Cemetery but also the broader community. The group called a public meeting on Sunday 11 August to discuss the matter. The Mayor, Councillors Bell and Epov, the General Manager, Director of Liveable Communities, Manager of Community Spaces, Recreation and Trades and other staff members attended the meeting.

The General Manager and Director of Liveable Communities both apologised for the hurt, distress, anger and general upset caused by Council’s actions at The Bight Cemetery during the meeting.

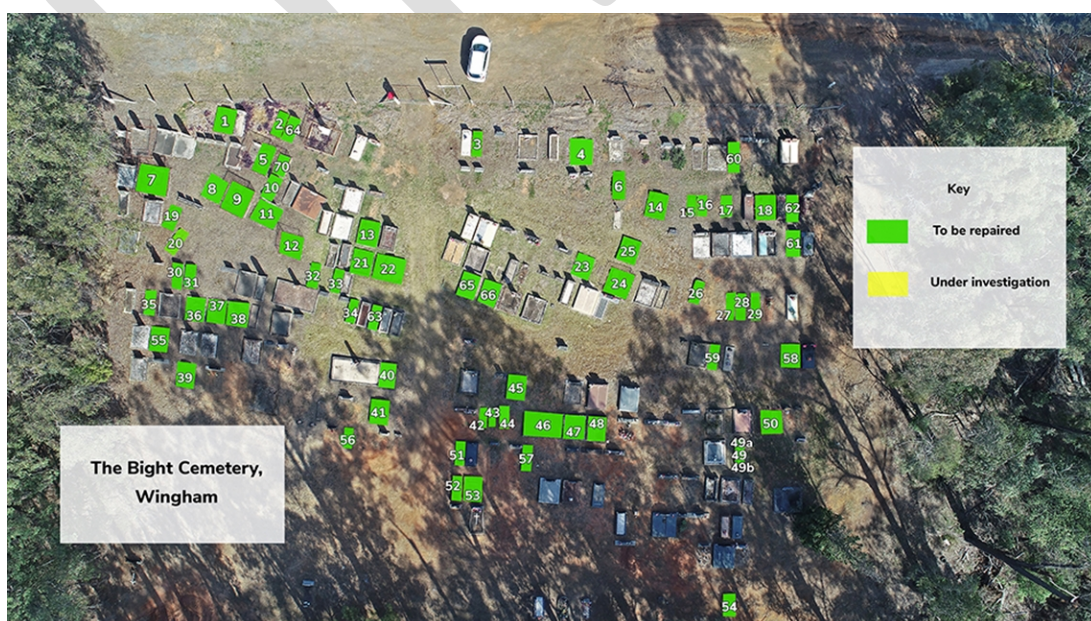
At the meeting the community specifically discussed 16 desired outcomes that were presented by the “Blight of the Bight” group. These outcomes were unanimously supported and the community requested their consideration and adoption by Council.

Both the General Manager and Director of Liveable Communities agreed at the meeting to consider each of the outcomes identified by the community.

Council staff then met with a representative of the “Blight of the Bight” group the following day to discuss the 16 desired outcomes requested by the community.

These outcomes, and Council’s actions to deliver on each of them, were endorsed by Council on 11 September 2019.

An investigation into the condition of the headstones identified both by Council and by the community has confirmed there are 67 headstones in need of repair. Council has committed publicly and to family members that all 67 headstones will be repaired, regardless of how that damage was sustained (through Council actions or the December 2018 storm).



## Addressing community outcomes

The 16 outcomes desired by the community and the corresponding actions endorsed by Councillors (see **Annexure A**) can be categorised into six stages as follows:

1. Immediate – these actions have already been completed
2. Development of an Action Plan for the restoration of headstones at The Bight Cemetery
3. Completion of an independent external review
4. Development of a Memorials Risk Assessment Program

In addition, the following items will happen at a time to be determined, as they rely on factors such as the implementation of corporate software and climactic conditions that cannot be determined at this point in time:

5. Development of register of family interests in graves
6. Beautification program to be developed for The Bight Cemetery

## Scope of The Bight Cemetery Restoration Action Plan

The items this action plan address are those identified as stage two actions – relating to the preparation of *The Bight Cemetery Restoration Action Plan*. Namely:

- “2. Council undertake the restitution of ALL damaged headstones in The Bight Cemetery regardless of their past reasoning or justifications, as a sign of goodwill and true apology to the community
4. Council to commit to the development of a timed Action Plan to restore the headstones at the Bight Cemetery and a separate timed Action Plan in relation to the Memorials Risk Assessment Program.
12. That any work carried out by Council as a result of an adverse risk assessment be done in accordance with National Trust Guidelines with expert supervision”

***Note: this document will be further adjusted following the adoption of a Conservation Management Plan for The Bight Cemetery by Council.***

## Principles of implementation

To meet the desired outcomes endorsed by Council, the action plan to restore The Bight Cemetery will be undertaken based on the following principles:

- All headstones that are damaged will be repaired
- We will communicate directly with the registered families on the works to be undertaken
- General updates will also be provided to the wider community at various points in the program
- Work will be undertaken in accordance with National Trust Guidelines and the advice of qualified heritage stone masons in the case of heritage headstones
- All headstones will be repaired to meet the requirements of Australian Standard AS 4204 -2019 “Headstones and Cemetery Monuments” (where possible), and in the case of heritage headstones (those over 50 years old), in accordance with advice from the National Trust (NSW) and qualified heritage stone masons
- Subject to the advice of stone masons, where the restoration of a headstone or surround/kerbing/ashlar requires new material it should be a like for like material and colour matched as close as possible
- The restoration seeks to restore the fabric of the cemetery to how it was before headstones were laid down in July 2019 as per the principles of the Burra Charter
- Council will liaise with families over the appointment of all stonemasons

## Communicating with impacted families

This plan incorporates information on how and when we will communicate with both the impacted family members and the wider community on the restoration of The Bight Cemetery. The goals of this communication are to:

- Provide open, honest, accurate, timely and accessible information to the community
- Directly communicate with the impacted families regularly throughout the restoration process
- Raise awareness of the actions being undertaken to rectify the situation and ensure it doesn't happen again

The key communication channels to be used during the restoration of The Bight Cemetery will be:

- Direct communication with impacted families
- Website updates
- Media releases
- Provision of information to the “Blight of the Bight” group to share

When this action plan is endorsed by Council the following will occur:

- Direct email to all registered families to provide them with a copy of the finalised action plan
- Council's The Bight Cemetery website page will be updated
- Media releases will be prepared and distributed to all local media channels

Wider communications and engagement plans will be developed to support the development of a Council wide “*Memorials Risk Assessment Program*” when this occurs.

## Action Plan

Item	Action	Details	Responsibility	Timeframe
1.	Inspect and confirm all headstones impacted	Compile a photographic record of all damaged headstones in The Bight Cemetery	Community Spaces Recreations and Trades - <i>Parks and Reserves</i>	<b>Completed</b>
2.	Create database of impacted family members	Collate information using records at hand and information provided by the community to create a database of affected families/ interested parties	Community Spaces Recreations and Trades - <i>Cemeteries</i>	<b>Completed</b>
3.	Issue written apology to families	Apology issued from the Office of the Mayor to all parties who have registered an interest in one of the damaged headstones	Community Spaces Recreations and Trades - <i>Cemeteries</i> Office of the Mayor	<b>Completed</b>
4.	OEH Section 91 licence application	Complete OEH Section 91 licence application to carry out works on site to ensure the protection of the critically endangered orchid <i>Diurus flavescens</i> at all times	Community Spaces Recreations and Trades and Natural Systems	<b>Completed</b>
5.	Coordinate with National Trust	Coordinate with the National Trust of Australia (New South Wales) in the assessment and restoration of headstones to ensure it is undertaken in a manner recommended by the National Trust	Community Spaces Recreations and Trades - <i>Parks and Reserves</i>	Underway
6.	Seek advice from qualified stone masons	Gain advice from qualified stone masons to determine the works that need to be undertaken on each of the damaged headstones. Appropriately qualified and experienced heritage stone masons will be sought in relation to the restoration and repair of all headstones over 50 years old	Community Spaces Recreations and Trades - <i>Parks and Reserves</i>	Underway
7.	Communicate with all families on process	Following adoption of this action plan a letter or email to all parties listed on the database to inform them and what to expect from here on – i.e. next communication will be on individual circumstances. Indicate we have a number of headstones that have multiple registrations and we will be looking for families to nominate a main contact person to progress restoration. Communicate the same information to the “Blight of the Bight”	Community Spaces Recreations and Trades – <i>Cemeteries</i> and Communications	Within a week of the adoption of this plan

		group to assist in their communications with their members. Update website.		
8.	Prepare individual scope of works	The headstone will be inspected and assessed by a stone mason or heritage stone mason (as appropriate depending on the age of the monument). This assessment will inform the individual scope of works to be prepared for each of the damaged headstones. In developing each scope of work the advice received from the National Trust and an appropriate stone mason will need to be taken into consideration.	Community Spaces Recreations and Trades - <i>Cemeteries</i>	The assessments will be undertaken while the Conservation Management Plan is being prepared  Scopes of work will only be finalised following the adoption of this plan
9.	Gain family approval	Correspond with the registered family members on the individual scope of works required for their particular headstone. The scope of works is to be provided to the family for review. Written approval will then be sought from the family for the repairs to be undertaken, within an expected timeframe.	Community Spaces Recreations and Trades - <i>Cemeteries</i>	To occur following the finalisation of the scopes of work
10.	Communications on repairs to be undertaken	Communication to be undertaken via information to the 'Blight of the Bight' group, media release, website update, signage at the cemetery and regular newspaper advertising to inform the community that works are about to start on the repairs, so it is clear when activity is underway that it is repairs being undertaken.	Communications	When works are scheduled to start

11.	Undertake repair works	<p>The repairs will be undertaken by a suitably qualified stone mason appropriate to the type of headstone i.e. heritage stone masons with experience in the restoration of monuments, for those monuments older than 50 years.</p> <p>Ensure the repair works are undertaken as per the scope of works for each of the damaged headstones, by implementing a self-certification process to be undertaken by the monumental masons undertaking the work.</p> <p>This would include documenting the materials used, certifying how the work complied with Australian Standard AS 4204 -2019 “Headstones and Cemetery Monuments” and if this was not possible why it was not.</p> <p>Council’s Heritage Advisor will provide a monitoring and overseeing role of all documentation.</p>	<p>Community Spaces Recreations and Trades – <i>Cemeteries</i></p> <p>Heritage Advisor</p>	At a time to be determined following the adoption of this plan
12.	Document repair works	Provide photographic evidence of repair works to registered family members/interested parties. The photographic evidence of the repair works will include photos of the work being undertaken at various stages.	Community Spaces Recreations and Trades - <i>Cemeteries</i>	As repairs are being undertaken
13.	Report back to the community	Communication to be undertaken via media release, website update and information to the Blight of the Bight group to advise the community all repairs have been undertaken.	Communications	When all repair works completed