



DON CONGREGATIONAL CEMETERY MASTER PLAN 2022-2032

June 2021



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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

The Don Congregational Cemetery Master Plan 2022-32 is a guiding document for the development and management of the Congregational Cemetery over a ten-year period commencing July 2021. The development of master plans for all Devonport cemeteries is an action of the Cemetery Strategy 2011-2030.

The central aim of the Master Plan is:

To preserve the individual and shared heritage value of the Cemetery, while sustainably operating the site for current and future community needs.

The objectives of the Master Plan are to:

- Identify relevant heritage and operational constraints and opportunities.
- Understand and respect social and historical values in cemetery management.
- Ensure Council understands and meets its legal obligations as the Cemetery manager.
- Provide a strategic approach towards cemetery management that is realistic, achievable and within reasonable resources available to the Council and community.

1.2 Methodology

Development of this Master Plan has involved:

1. Consultation with the general community in the form of an online and print survey (90 respondents).
2. Onsite meetings with Devonport City Council officers to review consultation outcomes and identify further issues and opportunities.
3. Drafting of guiding principles and actions in line with the purpose of the Cemetery, local site characteristics, community input, and resourcing options.

1.3 Implementation and Review

Devonport City Council will be responsible for coordinating the implementation of the Plan. Review of actions will occur on an annual basis and align with Council's Annual Plan and Estimates process.

1.4 Related Plans and Strategies

The following Council documents inform the development and implementation of the Master Plan.

- *Devonport City Council Strategic Plan 2009-2030*
- *Cemetery Strategy 2011-2030*
- *Signage Strategy 2017-2020*
- *Pedestrian Strategy 2016-2021*
- *Public Open Space Strategy*
- *Disability Inclusion Plan 2020-2025*

1.5 Legislation

Council is required to comply with the following Tasmanian legislation related to cemetery management.

- *Burial and Cremation Act 2019*
- *Burial and Cremation Regulations 2015*
- *Local Government Act 1993*

Devonport City Council, being the cemetery manager, has a range of important legal obligations and duties as listed in the Burial and Cremation Amendment Act 2019. For example, cemetery managers are responsible for:

- the correct handling and interment (burial) of human remains;
- providing public access to cemeteries;
- administration and record-keeping; and
- general maintenance and upkeep of cemeteries.

As per the Act (section 34.3) maintenance of vaults, graves or monuments are generally not the responsibility of cemetery managers. However, with the passing of time Council may be obligated to repair vaults, graves or monuments that present a risk to public health or safety.

2 Context

2.1 Description

The Congregational Cemetery is just under 1 acre (0.4032 ha) of public open space in ownership of Devonport City Council, located at 207 Stony Rise Road.

It is the second smallest of the four cemeteries along this road and is diagonally opposite to St. Olave's Anglican Cemetery (50m to the north) and 350 metres in a straight line from the Devonport General Cemetery (to the south-east).

The site is on a north-west facing incline with the entry at the lower elevated boundary off Stony Rise Road. The property rises from the road to near the centre and falls away towards the rear of the property. There is also a cross fall.

The north and south boundaries are adjacent to industrial properties with no foliage on the fence lines. The rear boundary is treed and meets the Bass Highway.

The Cemetery has a standard layout of headstones organised in straight lines. Some variety exists in monument form with more elaborate headstones in sandstone and marble, some with elaborate figurative carvings and iron surrounds. Later twentieth century headstones demonstrate the simplification in burial practices with predominance of simple granite headstones with cement surrounds. Headstones and plots range in condition, with many in significant disrepair.

The site has a service road of gravel in the centre for 90% of the block length with no dedicated constructed paths. Traditional memorial graves line either side of the access road to a maximum depth of 9-13 (nominal) individual sites each side. There are bare patches of grass haphazardly interspersed between the grave sites suggesting that either memorials have been allowed to disintegrate or the site was never filled to capacity.



Location Context: Don Congregational Cemetery



Location: Don Congregational Cemetery

2.2 Historic and Heritage Value

The Congregational Cemetery is a small burial ground, with the older headstones dating from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Cemetery is one of the oldest in the State of Tasmania¹. At rest in this historical patch of ground are many of the Don Pioneers, many of whom were the original pioneers of the City of Devonport and its surrounding district.

The Cemetery occupies one acre of land, granted by James Fenton in 1864 and contains many headstones and graves of local significance, for example members of the Henry family, including John Henry CMG, member of Parliament, member of the Australian Federal Convention which framed the Australian Constitution; Henry Carter, a prominent Devonport pioneer and landowner; Senator Alexander Lillico; and Stephen Priest, a prolific builder, in Devonport's early history are also buried at the site.

There are over 700 known recorded burials and several unmarked sites. The first recorded burial is 17 October 1865 of Elizabeth June and Jane Hodgkiss. The historical record is incomplete.

The cemetery is closed to new burials, with only reserved plots and re-openings available.

The site is permanently registered on Tasmania's Heritage Register due to its identification as a place of importance to Tasmania, and Tasmanians, because of its connection to the State's history, culture, and society.

Places entered on the Register are protected through the *Historic Cultural Heritage Act 1995* to ensure that future changes or improvements to the place complement its significant aspects.



Image: Kelly Slater 2020

¹ Pendrey, B., 2000, *The cycle of time: an enduring epitaph of the Old Don Congregational Cemetery*, Devonport, Tas.

2.3 Previously Identified Issues

Identified issues acknowledged in 2009 as outlined in the Cemetery Strategy include:

- Deterioration of monuments, lack of conservation eroding character.
- No interpretive signage.
- No fencing (along front boundary) and limited landscaping.
- Increased risk of vandalism if site appears disused.

These issues remain current, although there have been minimal reports of vandalism.



Unmarked gravesites



Damaged headstone

In late 2019, the Congregational Cemetery was one of several cemeteries involved in a sample audit by the Tasmanian Government to assist in developing processes for monitoring compliance under the *Burial and Cremation Act and Regulations*. Areas for improvement identified through the audit include:

- Development of a site plan with locations of each grave, accessible to the public.
- Completion of burial records.
- Maintenance of tombstones and fences that are a risk to public health or safety.

At the time of writing, these improvements were in progress.

3 Key Findings from Consultation

The Don Congregational Master Plan draws on community comments raised through an online and print survey conducted in late February 2021. The main findings are summarised below.

The survey attracted 90 responses, with 56.8% or 50 respondents living in the Devonport municipality, 34.4% or 31 respondents living in other parts of Tasmania, 8.8% or 9 respondents from other Australian States (Vic, NSW, and Qld). The response rate was higher than expected demonstrating the level of community interest in the site.

3.1 Visitation

In terms of visitation, respondents were asked how often they visited the cemetery and the main reason(s).

- 75.3% of respondents visit the cemetery for special occasions, 6.7% visited monthly and 18.0% respondents have never visited.
- 60.0% respondents visit to pay their respects; 54.1% visit to conduct research such as genealogy; 36.5% visit as interested in the design and architecture of headstones and plots; and 10.6% visit to take some time out and enjoy the peaceful, park like experience.

Other reasons to visit included maintaining family graves, interest in the site as relatives are buried there (although never visited), and general interest in historical elements.

Reason to Visit	Responses	
To pay respects	60.00%	51
Conduct historical research, eg, researching family tree	54.12%	46
Interested in the art / design / architecture of headstones and plots	36.47%	31
To take some time out, enjoy the peaceful, park like experience	10.59%	9
To attend a burial service	1.18%	1
Other	29.41%	25
	Answered	85
	Skipped	5

3.2 Priorities for Management

Respondents were asked to rank the importance of a range of aspects for managing the cemetery. The number and percentage of responses that ranked each aspect as high or very high are outlined in the following table.

Aspect Ranked as High or Very High	Responses	
Heritage value (for instance maintenance of headstones/plots)	92.22%	83
Interpretive / historical signage	76.67%	69
Appearance / look and feel	75.56%	68
Welcome and directional signage including plan of gravesites	75.56%	68
Walkways and roads to access plots	62.22%	56
Landscaping / gardens / trees	57.78%	52
Parking	36.67%	33
Seating	36.67%	33
Shelter	26.67%	24

Additional issues identified through staff consultation:

- Lack of community awareness about responsibilities for restoration and management of headstones and plots.

- No existing plan of gravesites which is made more difficult due to unmarked graves. This is currently being addressed by Council officers.
- Safety risks posed by deteriorating headstones and plots.

3.3 Improvements

Respondents were asked for their suggestions to improve the Cemetery. The open-ended question attracted a variety of responses with similar themes.

The top three improvements suggested were:

- General maintenance (weed control, clean).
- Historical and interpretive information (on site and online).
- Plot maintenance/restoration.



Improvement	Responses
General maintenance (e.g. weed control, clean)	20
Historical and interpretive information and promotion	13
Plot maintenance / restoration	10
Site burial map	6
Landscaping	3
Parking	3
Volunteer assistance with maintenance / restoration	3
Boundary fencing	2
Road/walkway accessibility	2
Seating	2
Footpath access to site	1
Greater security if site increases in popularity	1
Improve entrance	1
Shelter	1
Signage – directional to cemetery	1

4 Principles and Actions

Three key principles that underpin the development of the Master Plan have been drawn from community and staff consultation, these are as follows.

- **Conserving Heritage Values**
- **Improving Access**
- **Enhancing the Cemetery Experience**

The principles and recommended actions are summarised below, with a detailed action plan provided on page 13.

4.1 Conserving Heritage Values

Cemeteries may be the only place where a person's life is recorded. Unusual examples of art and craft may also be found in the design of monuments which portray views of death often quite different from current customs. The long timespan of burials in the cemetery may also provide valuable social insights of changes in taste, custom and design over time.

The cemetery is culturally significant to many visitors as a source of genealogy and the resting place of many prominent individuals in Devonport's history; 92% of respondents ranked conserving of the cemetery's heritage values as a 'high' or 'very high' management priority. This presents a maintenance challenge for Council, as Council has no legal obligation to maintain or conserve headstones and plots unless elements pose a risk to public health or safety.

ACTIONS:

- Develop and promote information regarding plot restoration and maintenance.
- Encourage the community to be involved in the cemetery's maintenance and development (for instance, general maintenance/landscaping, heritage interpretation projects, genealogical research to coordinate plot maintenance/restoration).
- Promote historical significance and improve interpretive elements of the cemetery.

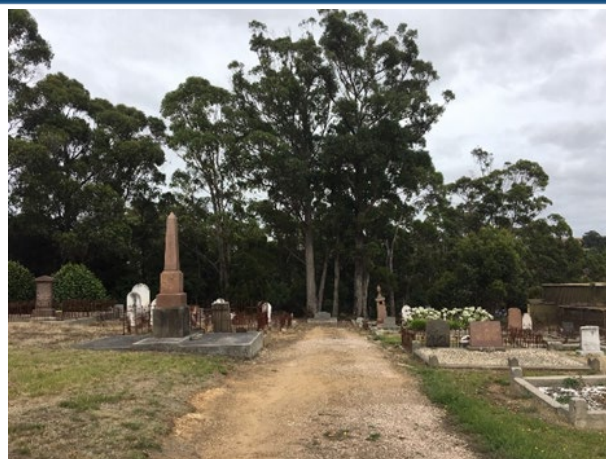
4.2 Improving Access

This principle focuses on assisting visitors and pedestrians find their way around the cemetery, as well as accessing site and burial information. Welcome signage, including a plan of gravesites, were one of the most prominent topics raised by respondents.

Pedestrian and vehicle movement should be simple, convenient and a positive experience for all visitors. Topographical and geometric constraints will restrict Council's ability to provide inclusive access to all parts of the cemetery.

ACTIONS:

- Develop a site access plan that caters for pedestrians and vehicles.
- Update burial records and make available to the public, including locations of gravesites.
- Develop information and wayfinding signage within the cemetery in accordance with the Signage Strategy.
- Review maintenance and customer service levels (landscaping, road maintenance etc.)



A site access plan would improve access and movement for pedestrians and vehicles

4.3 Enhancing the Cemetery Experience

The cemetery is visited foremostly by people coming to the burial grounds of the deceased (75.3% of survey respondents). However, this group is expected to decline long term. Other visitors also visit the site to see, understand and research heritage and historical elements, as well as the design/architecture. These are the groups that the site must cater for in the future. While no specific actions fall under this principle, undertaking the above actions will assist to meet these community needs.

4.4 Delivery of Actions

Delivery of the 7 actions is anticipated to require a variety of delivery methods and funding sources. Community involvement is a key resource, which based on the level of engagement to date, shows potential. Council will be required to contribute funding allocations of around \$85,000 over the 10-year period, although some is already nominally committed in asset renewal programs. External funding through relevant grant programs is also required.

5 Appendices

Action Plan

Action Plan

Don Congregational Cemetery Master Plan

No	Action:	Year Planned					Priority: H,M,L	Resources: A-OPEX F-OPEX F-CAPEX	Cost Estimate (\$)	Responsible Department
		2022/24	2024/26	2026/28	2028/30	2030/32				
Principle 1: Conserving Heritage Values										
1.1	Develop and promote information regarding plot restoration and maintenance						H	A-OPEX	2,000	Infrastructure & Works
1.2	Encourage the community to be involved in the cemetery's maintenance and development						M	A-OPEX	TBC	Infrastructure & Works Community Services
1.3	Promote historical significance and Improve interpretive elements of the cemetery						M	External funds	TBC	Infrastructure & Works Community Services
Principle 2: Improving Access										
2.1	Develop a site access plan that caters for pedestrians and vehicles						H	F-CAPEX	30-50,000	Infrastructure & Works
2.2	Update burial records and make available to the public, including locations of gravesites						H	A-OPEX	5,000	Infrastructure & Works
2.3	Develop information and wayfinding signage within the cemetery in accordance with the Signage Strategy						M	F-CAPEX	10-20,000	Infrastructure & Works
2.4	Review maintenance and customer service levels						M	A-OPEX	10,000	Infrastructure & Works