

CEMETERIES & CREMATORIA

Description of Services Provided

The Waikumete Cemetery was officially opened in the 1886 to serve the burial needs of Auckland City. Since then it has been developed through new roads, footpaths, plantings, burial areas, new buildings and has been reduced in size with small areas taken out for purposes of road widening, the establishment of recreation reserves and the recent Sunhill Park subdivision.

It has considerable cultural heritage and contains the graves of many notable people. It also provides for a wide range of denominational and cultural groups and contains memorials to significant world events and national tragedies. It is the largest public open space within the urban area of Waitakere City and is the largest cemetery on the Auckland Isthmus.

Auckland City retained vested control of the cemetery until 1989 when it was transferred to the then Waitemata City Council and subsequently the Waitakere City Council. The underlying ownership is with the Crown and the land vested in trust with Council. A detailed history of the Waikumete forms part of the Waikumete Cemetery Conservation and Reserve Management Plan.

Council owns the buildings at Waikumete and the land at Swanson. Council's Parks Assets section maintains the grounds in line with Council's Parks Strategy. The cremators and associated equipment are also owned by Council. The Chapel of Faith in the Oaks, situated in the Cemetery grounds, is also owned by Council, but is leased to the Chapel Restoration Trust, who use the Chapel for a variety of uses including weddings and funerals.

The chapel of Waikumete Cemetery provides facilities for upwards of 300 services per year.

Waikumete Cemetery, and the smaller Swanson Cemetery in O'Neill's Road, provide burial services not just for residents of Waitakere City, but also service the wider Auckland community. Approximately 550 burials are carried out annually.

Waikumete is the only cemetery in Auckland providing burial facilities for those of the Jewish faith and is one of only two providing for Muslim burials.

The Urupa provides burial plots for urban Maori who do not wish to be, or are not, affiliated with any particular marae.

The Returned Service persons section of Waikumete Cemetery is the largest such area in New Zealand, and is the last resting place for some 10,000 members of the armed forces, who have died after returning from such service.

A recent addition to burial options available at Waikumete has been the provision of an Eco Burial area. This area provides for remains to be interred in a grave that is unmarked apart from the planting of a native tree. Caskets must be of a biodegradable nature and embalming of the body is not allowed.

With the current interest in genealogy, searches of burial records are becoming more frequent. Staff at Waikumete handle around 5000 to 6000 enquiries annually.

The purpose built crematorium (erected in 1952) services approximately 600 cremations annually. A new "state of the art" computer controlled cremator, which will meet all current and expected emission to air regulations is being installed. The cremated remains of some 300 persons are interred within the cemetery ground each year, in identified plots in a garden setting and marked by bronze or granite plaques.

The Chapel of Faith in the Oaks is a heritage building erected in 1886, which is located in the grounds of Waikumete and is the scene of many weddings or other solemn occasions. It is also used for numerous film location shoots. The Chapel, which is leased from Council, is administered by the Chapel Restoration Trust.

Assessment of Risks to the Community

There are no known risks to the community from the provision of cemetery and crematorium services.

The installation of a new cremator during 2005 will achieve compliance with the Auckland Regional Council's air discharge standards.

Assessment of Quality, Quantity and Adequacy of Services Provided

There has been a historical backlog of maintenance and renewals at the Waikumete Cemetery and Crematorium, but in 2001 Council commenced a 10-year upgrading programme to improve roads, weed management, the cremator and all other facilities.

At present the capacity of the Cemetery and the Cremator is adequate to meet current needs.

As well as the work undertaken in performing cremations and burials, programmes of work for Waikumete include the maintenance of the grounds, upgrading of the roads in the cemetery, extensive remedial tree work and the eradication of invasive weeds. Consideration is also being given to the provision of a receptions lounge and the upgrading of the chapels and office complex. In conjunction with the installation of new cremating equipment, the cremator room is being upgraded and the provision to enable family to watch the initial placing of the casket in the cremator is being provided.

Under stage two of the Waikumete Cemetery Conservation and Reserve Management Plan, the following activities will be actioned:

- Development of heritage design guidelines for the site.
- Development of heritage and ecological interpretation sign.
- Further work on heritage trees.
- Continuation of weed control in the old cemetery heritage areas.

Statement of Current and Estimated Future Demands for Services

Population and death rate projections for Waitakere City up to 2021 are based on the population forecast provided in this document. The population and death rates beyond 2021 has been assumed based on the growth rate up to 2021. A growth rate of 1.2% per annum has been projected out for the remaining 34 years to estimate the 50 year population in Waitakere City.

The actual number of burials at Waikumete Cemetery has been supplied and the percentage of burials to cremation and this information is as follows:

Table 20: Future demand for burials and cremations

	2000/2001	2001/2002	2002/2003	2003/2004
Burials	432 (37.18%)	492 (46.12%)	441 (45.18%)	463 (44.3%)
Cremations	730 (62.82%)	575 (53.88%)	535 (54.82%)	582 (55.7%)

Based on the above actual burial figures and population and death rate projections for Waitakere City, it has been assumed that Waikumete Cemetery takes approximately 55% of the total deaths in Waitakere as burials. It has been assumed that the demand for burials as opposed to cremation will gradually decrease at a steady rate from 55% in 2006 to 25% in 2026 and should remain at 25% for each year after. This assumption has been used to estimate the 50 year demand of 24,900.

Statement of Options Available to Meet Current and Future Demands

The Burial and Cremation Act 1964 does not enable the reuse of space which has been used for burial purposes. New legislation would be required to enable the reuse of burial plots.

Assuming no ecological constraints there would be approximately 40.73 hectares remaining for burial purposes. Using the traditional burial method and assuming 1770 burials per hectare (a conservative assumption) there is room for approximately 72,092 traditional burials. This would mean there is sufficient land at Waikumete to meet the estimated 50 year demand.

Alternatively, if ecologically significant land cannot be used (as well as land subject to other constraints) then there is approximately 4.3 hectares of land remaining for general burial purposes (this estimate does not include exclusive Jewish Liberal, Muslim, Hebrew and Maori areas). Assuming 1770 burials per hectare there is sufficient room for approximately 7,611 traditional burials. Using Statistics New Zealand population projection figures there is enough room for the next 16 years to continue with traditional burials.

There is approximately 36.4 hectare differential between using and not using ecologically significant land. Assuming another 36.4 hectares would have to be purchased for burial purposes and a cost of \$151,000 per hectare (based on current investigations into land purchase) then the cost would be approximately \$5,500,930.

If Council decided to develop the parts of Waikumete that are considered ecologically significant then resource consents or a plan change would be required, because although the site is designated the Natural Area & Heritage Rules of the District Plan still apply. These rules would facilitate the need for resource consents to use these areas for burial purposes. Alternatively, a plan change could be promulgated so that the District Plan requirement for the designation to comply with the Natural Area & Heritage Rules could be changed.

If it were possible to introduce the modern (modular) burial system at Waikumete then burials could continue until 2038 (assuming protection of environmental values). However, further research would need to be undertaken on the ability to use the modern system on steeper gradients and on the 'up front' costs associated with establishing this system.

Consultation with recreational users of the Waikumete Cemetery was of limited success. Those people who were surveyed were evenly split with 50% of the people interviewed saying they would prefer the existing open space to remain "as is", with the remaining stating they were happy to see it used for cemetery purposes.

Statement of Council's Intended Role

The Burial and Cremation Act 1964 requires that:

"It shall be the duty of every local authority, where sufficient provision is not otherwise made for the burial of the bodies of persons dying within its district, to establish and maintain a suitable cemetery."

Thus it is not proposed to exit this service. Council will continue to provide and enhance burial and cremation services, as well as the recreational and cultural dimensions of Waikumete.

Council will carry out detailed planning to ensure the provision of burial services beyond 2021 and will include detailed proposals in the 2006-2016 Long Term Council Community Plan for public consultation.

Statement of Councils Proposals for Meeting Current and Future Demand

This Assessment has identified that there is only sufficient capacity at the Waikumete Cemetery for the next 16 years and the Council will investigate a number of options for further consideration through the 2006-2016 Long Term Council Community Plan, as follows:

- Closure of the Waikumete Cemetery when capacity runs out;
- Purchasing land now elsewhere in the city to secure future cemetery capacity, at an estimated cost of \$5.5m;
- A variation to the Waikumete Cemetery Management Plan and District Plan provisions to enable additional development on the site. This could provide capacity until 2055.
- Implementation of new burial technologies such as modular systems or the establishment of mausoleums. This could provide capacity until 2038 without variations to the currently approved plans; and
- Exiting the service, but this could not happen unless Council can provide alternative arrangements, such as private enterprise providing a suitable cemetery in the city.