



Community Views on the Future State of Cemeteries: Research Report

Prepared for Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW | 24 November 2025



Acknowledgement of Country

SEC Newgate acknowledges the Custodians of the lands on which our firm operates around the country. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

SEC Newgate is proud to support the Clontarf Foundation and future generations of Indigenous leaders.



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1. Executive Summary

Executive Summary

This document provides a summary of a program of research conducted by SEC Newgate for Cemeteries & Crematoria New South Wales (CCNSW) with the NSW community in May and July 2025. Activities comprised four 2-hour online community focus groups with a total of 33 participants and a 20-minute online survey with n=1,006 NSW adults

The full research program included further interviews with cemetery operators and faith leaders. These results are not included in this report to ensure confidentiality, as some responses from those participants may be identifiable.

Reader note on 'closed' cemeteries: Please note that NSW legislation does not permit the 'closure' of a cemetery and under the Interment Industry Scheme, cemeteries at which interment rights are no longer sold continue to be regulated as 'inactive' facilities. They were referred to as 'closed' cemeteries throughout the research to help community participants better respond to research questions

Community views on cemeteries and maintenance:

- The topics discussed in the research focus groups were something that participants claimed to have never really thought about. The subject of cemeteries, their utility, their maintenance and evolution was an 'under-the-radar' topic for most people, but they were engaged with the topics once raised and wanted to know more.
- Many participants felt that cemeteries were a community asset, valuing the sense of connection and preservation of history they offered.

However, only a minority visited for recreation and most viewed cemeteries only as places to pay their respects to the deceased. Most were neutral or softly negative about the idea of living next to a cemetery.

- Community views are mixed on whether their local cemetery should provide opportunities to engage the community further through activations and events. Those living in cities are more supportive of this.
- The perception of neglect of cemetery sites was of concern to several participants in each focus group, indicating a need for wider public knowledge of the reasons for it and better understanding of the trade-offs that cemetery operators might need to make around perpetual maintenance.

Community views on perpetual maintenance:

Once community participants understood the possible expense of cemetery maintenance, they were broadly aligned on perpetual maintenance priorities and saw a need to:

- target perpetual maintenance activities on higher visitation areas of the cemetery after a period of closure (i.e. after the first 10 years);
- prioritise safe access to plots, through keeping grass mown, holes filled and paths maintained; and
- address hazards posed by falling monuments and tree limbs.

Executive Summary (cont. 1 of 2)

Cemetery maintenance levels: Views from community

Broad views on levels of maintenance for different periods 'post-closure' (once the cemetery is inactive):

- **Up to 10 years post-closure:** Current (open cemetery) maintenance levels.
- **10-29 years:** Monitor visitation levels and target higher-level (open cemetery) maintenance to higher visitation areas – pruning, repairing paths, mowing lawns, leveling ground, weeding beds etc. Consider commencing visitor education at the site entrance to set expectations about maintenance levels and avoid perceptions of neglect as less visited parts start to look less cared for.
- **30-69 years:** Focus on basic path maintenance, soil levelling and hazard reduction to preserve safe access to high visitation areas and allow rewilding of less visited parts. Most think it is okay to minimise access points to a single entry/exit to reduce the maintenance burden, to only open for set hours on set days, and to minimise signage in smaller cemeteries, through not replacing it if damaged. Some suggested operators install QR code signage at the gate to enable visitors to access maps and information.
- **70+ years:** Pare back maintenance to hazard management only (i.e. monuments, trees and holes). General rewilding is acceptable. Only historically significant plots (notable people, founding families etc) need to be maintained.

Views on cemetery space exhaustion and on space-saving interment options

- Most community participants were unaware of the speed at which cemetery space was running out.
- Most felt that family plots and increasing cremation rates were most acceptable to create space.

Renewable tenure plots

- Due to unfamiliarity with the topic, community views on renewable tenure plots were somewhat mixed, and acceptability was linked to the length of tenure, with a longer, 50 years+ tenure considered more acceptable.
- Low acceptability levels seen in the survey may also have been due to a misunderstanding about cost, with some participants thinking that the renewable tenure interment fee would be on top of, instead of replacing, the current burial fees paid. Introduction of the topic of renewable tenure plots to the public would need to be accompanied by clear information about this method, including pricing.

Executive Summary (cont. 2 of 2)

Views on cemetery renewal

- Opinions on cemetery renewal were reasonably mixed among community participants. A few community participants raised the idea of one form of cemetery renewal, 'barrowing' (adding an additional layer of soil to create a new layer of burial space) unprompted as a potential solution to cemetery exhaustion at the start of the focus groups. However, most participants, particularly the survey participants, who had no opportunity to discuss the topic at length, were less accepting.
- Participants who found renewal unacceptable felt that acceptability of infill renewal (where new burial supply was created in between existing graves) could be increased by sensitive placement of the new interment sites. For the barrowing option, it would be important to ensure the identity of those in the plots being barrowed over was preserved through some acknowledgement at the surface.

Views on cemetery activation and reuse

- **Reader note:** Reuse options might also be thought of as 'activations' for active cemeteries. For example, cafes and florists are quite common at larger cemeteries.
- Cultural and historical tours were seen as acceptable activations by most community participants and operators. Ghost tours and larger community events, such as concerts, food events or film screenings, were more polarising and would need to be respectfully handled, with clear rules set for organisers and patrons to build acceptance. Large unruly, high-energy events were generally seen as unacceptable.

- Most community participants were in support of partial reuse (i.e. reuse of lands where graves are not located) of 'closed' cemetery sites for setting up community garden beds or a building for gentle community events like yoga.
- Opinions were mixed around the building of a café or restaurant, with some considering it would add to the visitation experience, while others did not want to see commercial activity in a cemetery.
- Acceptance for total reuse (i.e. reuse of land over graves) was limited to parkland for peaceful recreation, out of a need to continue to respect those interred beneath. **Reader note** – The current legislation enables council operators to convert a cemetery into a public park with ministerial approval.

Views on sustainable interment

- Awareness of the environmental impact of interment and the sustainable interment options available was low among community participants and most wanted more public education to drive appreciation of the issue and to inform decision-making on options. Most viewed cremation as less negatively environmentally impactful than traditional burial due to less space being taken up for interment and fewer inputs (e.g. embalming chemicals, large memorialisation etc.)
- Most community participants found composting and natural burial acceptable, with lower acceptability driven by personal preference and, for composting, beliefs about respectful handling of remains. **Reader note** – composting is not currently a legal option in NSW.
- Ability to have above-ground memorialisation for natural burial would help increase acceptability for some.
- Views on alkaline hydrolysis (also known as aquamation) tested in the survey only - were more mixed, with several participants put off by the idea of being liquidised and becoming 'wastewater'.



2. Research Background

Background and Approach

With cemetery space across NSW, particularly across the Greater Sydney area, potentially nearing exhaustion, Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW (CCNSW), the state regulator for the sector, wishes to develop a framework for the maintenance of inactive cemeteries to guide operators.

CCNSW is publishing a Perpetual Care Framework to ensure public cemeteries are maintained in line with community expectation, and in a way that is supported by operators, into the future.

SEC Newgate was commissioned to conduct research to inform development of the Perpetual Maintenance Framework.

The community research included the following activities:

Qualitative research: Online focus groups

n=4 x 2-hour online focus groups with a cross-section of NSW residents. Nine participants were invited with the expectation 7-8 would attend. A total sample of n=33 participants attended.

- Two groups were conducted with those living in regional areas and two with those in Greater Sydney.
- Two groups were held with younger (25-49-year-olds) and two with older (those aged 50+) participants.

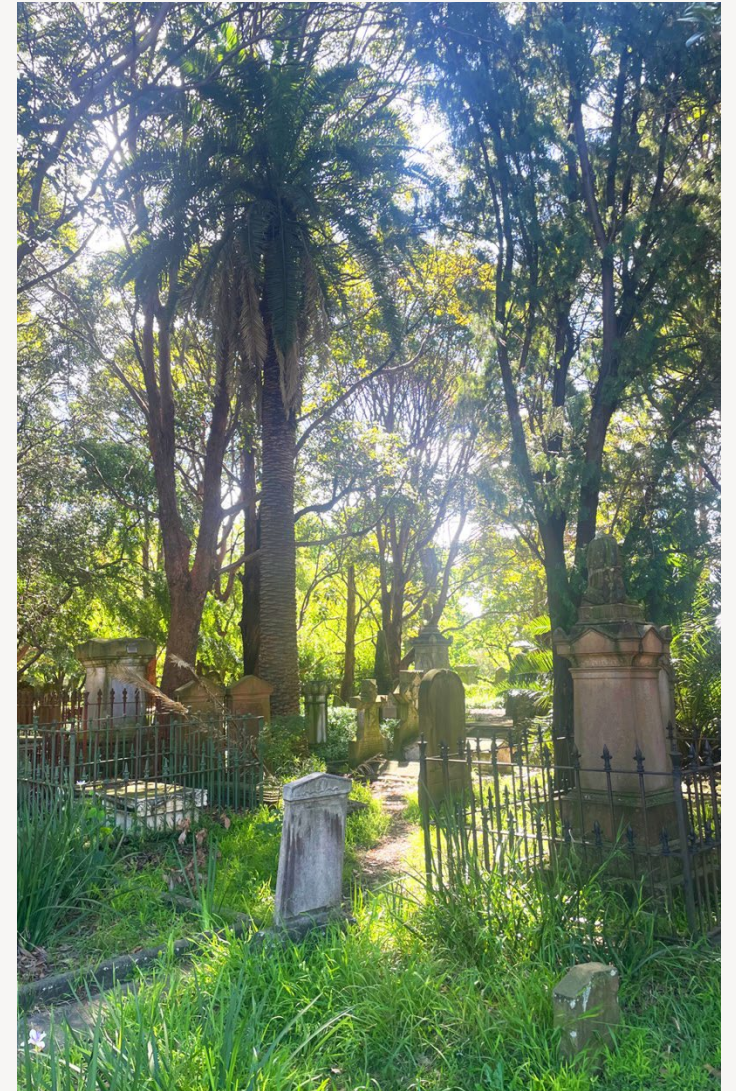
Participants in two groups all lived within 5 kms of a cemetery.

A mix of faiths, gender, occupation and household type were represented. The majority of participants had to be homeowners rather than renters and to have lived in their area for 2 years or more.

Quantitative research: Community survey

- 20-minute online survey with n=1,006 residents of NSW.
- Quotas were set on broad location, age and gender to provide a representative mix of community opinion.
- The regional component of the sample was boosted to ensure a robust sample for analysis. This was readjusted at the analysis phase to enable reporting at an overall sample level representative of the NSW adult population.
- One-in-four of the nine open-ended (verbatim) question responses have been coded into themes to provide good understanding of prevailing sentiment (a total of n=2,151 responses coded across all questions).

The full research program included further interviews with cemetery operators and faith leaders. These results are not included in this report to ensure confidentiality, as some responses from those participants may be identifiable.



Community Research Sample

Qualitative Research (Online Focus Groups)

	Greater Sydney	Regional NSW
Aged 25-49	n=9 participants All living within 5 kms of a cemetery	n=8 participants
Aged 50+	n=9 participants	n=7 participants All living within 5 kms of a cemetery

Quantitative Research (Survey)

		Sample size
Total sample		n=1,006
Age	18-34	n=355
	35-54	n=376
	55+	n=275
Gender	Male	n=502
	Female	n=504
Location 1	Greater Sydney	n=652
	Northern NSW	n=88
	Central & West NSW	n=150
	Southern NSW	n=116
Location 2	Metropolitan	n=762
	Regional	n=244

3. Community Views on Cemeteries



Cemeteries, Interment & Maintenance Are 'Under the Radar' Topics

Focus group participants claimed to have never really thought about these topics before.

But they were engaged with the topics once raised and wanted to know more. There was a sense that greater public education was needed on:

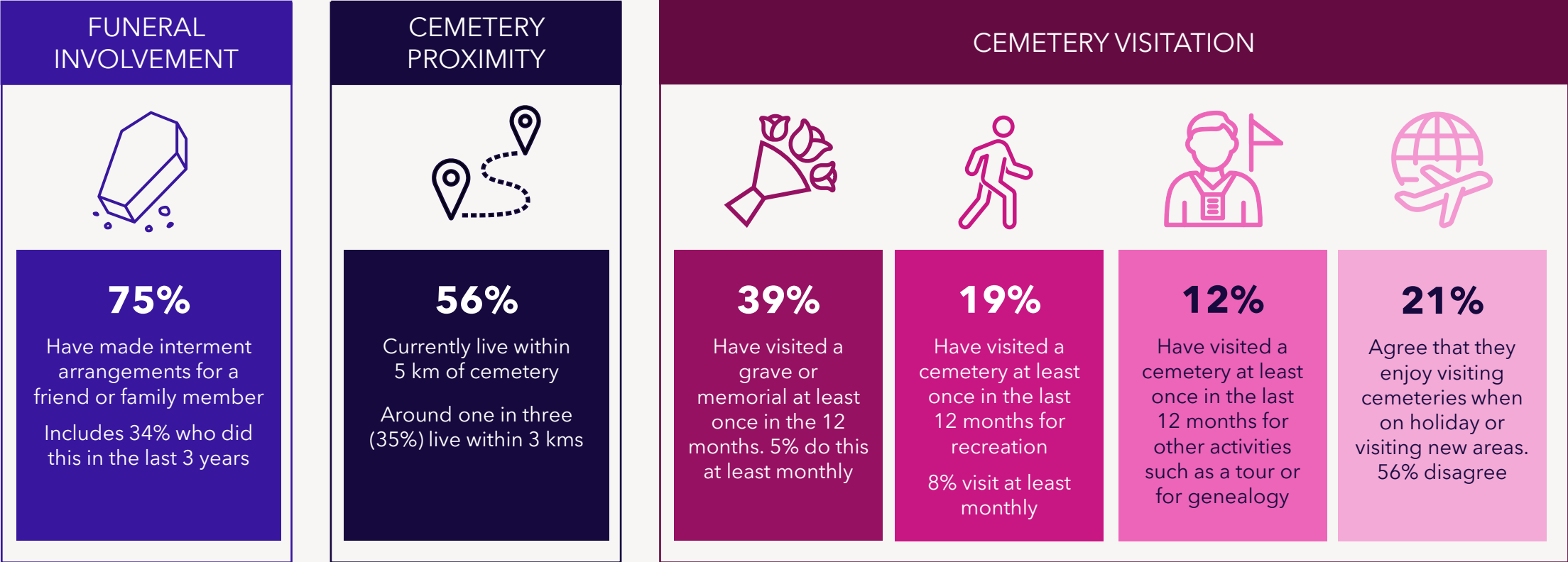
- The need to create more cemetery space in metro Sydney;
- Sustainable and space-saving interment options; and
- Reasons for perceptions of neglect of cemeteries.

The power of information at shifting community perspectives was clear:

- **The importance of perpetual maintenance:** At the start of the focus groups, engagement in this topic was somewhat low. Most had no concept of perpetual maintenance and had never really thought about what happened to closed cemeteries. However, once the cost of cemetery maintenance was understood, the concept of perpetual maintenance introduced and the idea of operators - or ratepayers for council run cemeteries - being potentially liable for perpetual maintenance fees, most participants claimed to be engaged in the topic. This was reflected in the survey results, where 86% considered the topic to be important (48% very important) after reading the same information.
- **Acceptability of renewable tenure plots:** In the survey, when participants were presented only with a brief description of renewable tenure, acceptance of this interment method was mixed. However, in the focus groups, where the idea was explained in more depth, participants began to understand the space-saving and potential cost saving implications of the approach and were far more positive.
- **The importance of environmental considerations in interment:** Once the topic is brought to participants' attention, its importance increased for them, with around half of survey participants considering it important.
- **The acceptability of events held at cemeteries:** Once participants in the focus groups were provided the opportunity to talk further about the parameters around events - that they should be held away from newer plots, that only a small number of people should be invited and that the energy of the event should match the respectful tone of the cemetery, acceptability increased.

Community Engagement with Cemeteries and Interment

Most survey participants have been involved with making funeral arrangements. Around half live within 5 kms of a cemetery, however, only a minority visit cemeteries.



Community Perceptions of Cemeteries

Cemeteries are valued by many as beautiful, peaceful places that preserve history and connection. Negative perceptions were driven by 'bad vibes' and perceptions of a depressing atmosphere. Concerns around perceptions of neglect were also raised in the focus groups.

Cemetery positives

- **Beauty and quietness.** Most participants considered cemeteries to be a pleasant place for peaceful reflection and remembrance. This was mentioned by both focus group and survey participants. In the focus groups, a few participants also mentioned that their local cemetery was a place where they enjoyed exercising and where they took artistic inspiration from the sculptures.
- After further discussion in the focus groups the following positives also emerged with cemeteries seen as a place of:
 - **Connection.** Where family and friends, both alive and deceased, could come together through individual and group visits to gravesites.
 - **Belonging.** A place where, particularly in regional communities, participants knew many in the graveyard and felt part of the community.
 - **Historical record.** A place where visitors and locals alike could see the history of the area told through the memorials there.

Cemetery negatives

- **Bad 'vibes'.** Many participants (in the focus groups and survey) mentioned that cemeteries were spooky, sad places.
- **Perceived neglect.** After focus group participants were asked to comment on the negative aspects of cemeteries, most focused on long grass, broken monuments and trees with loose branches creating poor perceptions:
 - A feeling those interred were forgotten;
 - A sense of danger caused by holes, sunken plots, snakes in long grass and the risk of bumping into dangerous characters; and
 - For regional participants, a poor reflection on their community, because cemeteries tended to be visited by tourists to the area and were typically visible from the road.
- Other negatives pointed out by focus group participants were issues with **flooding, homeless encampments, limited parking and rural cemetery vandalism.**

Community Perceptions of Cemeteries (cont.)

Participant feedback from the focus group discussions.

Positives

"It's just like a place of reflection. It's a place where obviously, if you've got a loved one or friend, or whatever that's died, it's somewhere you can go back to remember them, I guess."

25-49 years old, Sydney

"I love walking in Waverley Cemetery - it's part of the Bondi walk and is beautifully situated. Intriguing to have a look and see who is laid to rest there."

25-49 years old, Sydney

"It's in the bush, lots of big trees, a little creek running through it, native flowers you can pick to put on graves and you can hear the birds chirping - beautiful setting."

25-49 years old, regional

"I'm an artist - I paint angels and Waverley Cemetery is stunning for that."

50+ years old, Sydney

"I use it as a history teacher to teach local history. I take the students up there to look at the founding families of the area."

25-49 years old, regional

"My house literally borders the cemetery and so we often go and stretch our legs there after dinner in the summer."

50+ years old, Sydney

"When we go on country drives, we'll often pull up at the country cemetery, wander round and have a read."

50+ years old, Sydney

"The one on one side of me is quite new and lovely, and the other one's an older one, so it's it needs a lot of upkeep sort of thing. It's quite run down and very old, and doesn't get looked after very well, whereas the newer one is lovely and fresh and green, and flowers and trees, and it's really manicured."

50+ years old, regional

Negatives

"The location is nice, and it's not too far from the river, but the maintenance of the cemetery is disgusting. So, it's got that sort of spooky unmaintained 'why would you want to go there' vibe. And at the moment it's become temporary housing for the homeless."

25-49 years old, regional

"It's on the main road into town and I do find it looks pretty run down as opposed to other cemeteries, and particularly those in the UK - Ireland and Scotland. It doesn't have the upkeep that I feel it should have."

50+ years old, regional

"We've had quite a bit of crime recently, with a lot of damage to headstones and grave sites and that sort of thing, and my husband passed away eight years ago, and I have chosen not to have him buried in the cemetery. I'd rather have an urn near me than have his plot vandalised."

25-49 years old, regional

"They are a waste of space - taking up valuable land. People don't bother visiting graves after a generation or so and so then the plots just get neglected."

50+ years old, Sydney

"Some of the plots that are still visited by older locals are on a steep path that is slippery and uneven and hasn't been cared for - it's risky for them to visit."

50+ years old, regional

Community Views on the Value of Cemeteries

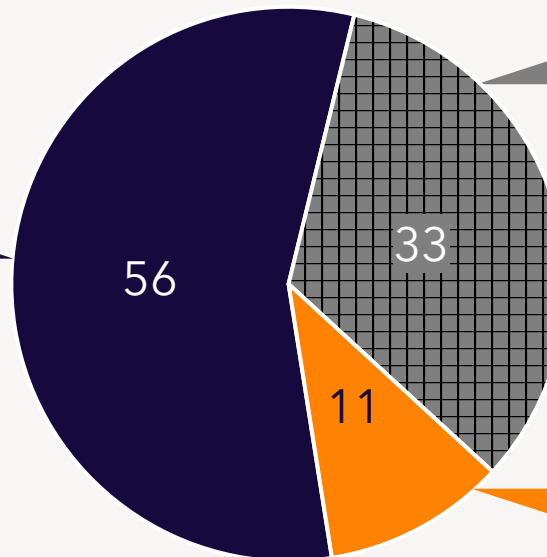
Most participants agree that their local cemetery is a valuable asset to the community, but perceptions are lightly held.

My local cemetery is a valuable asset for the community (%)

Key skews: Those most likely to agree their local cemetery is a valuable asset:

- Live in Southern areas of NSW (71% vs. those living in other areas 56%)
- Those who visit the grave of loved ones at least a few times a year (68% vs. 49% of those who visit less often or not at all)
- Those who hold positive or neutral attitudes towards cemeteries (63% vs. 39% of those who are negative)
- Those who view Perpetual Maintenance as very important (63% vs. 50% of those saying it is less important)

Just 17% of all participants strongly agree, 39% agree somewhat



Key skews: Those most likely to be neutral about their local cemetery being a valuable asset:

- Have never visited a cemetery for purpose of gravesite visitation (45% vs. 26% of those who visit a few times a year)
- Those who view Perpetual Maintenance as less important (45% vs. 27% of those saying it is very important)

Key skews: Those most likely to be disagree their local cemetery being a valuable asset:

- Those who hold a negative attitude towards cemeteries (18% vs. 5% who were positive or neutral)

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

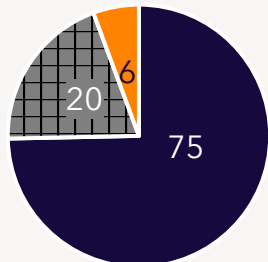
Community Views on the Role of Cemeteries

For most, a cemetery is a place of historical record, paying respects and valuable green space. Only a minority agree it is a pleasant place to spend time or to relax.

Cemetery role: Level of agreement with cemeteries as providing ... (%)



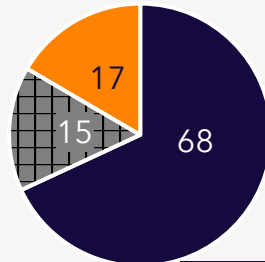
Important local and state heritage value



33% of all participants strongly agree



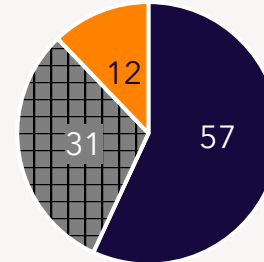
A place for paying respects, nothing more



30% of all participants strongly agree



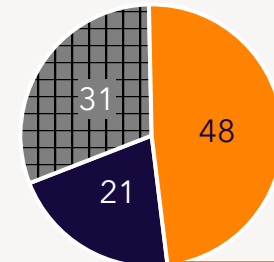
Green space with biodiversity and environmental value



17% of all participants strongly agree



Valuable space for recreation and relaxation



20% of all participants strongly disagree

■ Agree ■ Neutral ■ Disagree

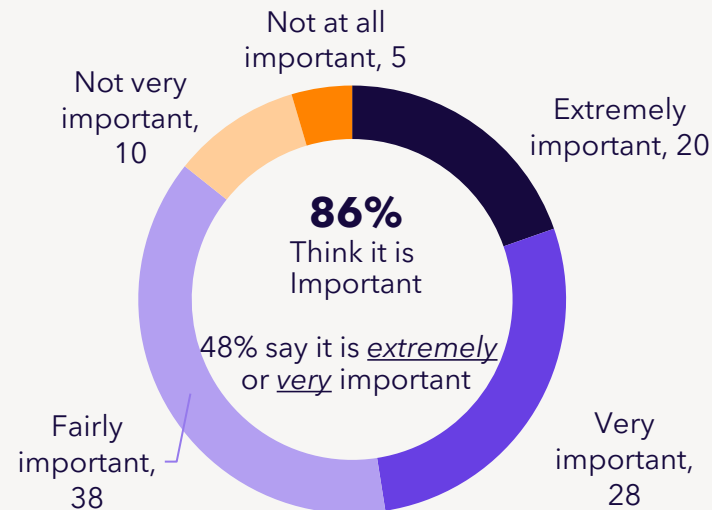
A large, leafy tree dominates the left side of the frame, casting a shadow over a grassy area. In the foreground, a wooden bench with dark metal legs sits on a paved path. To the left of the bench, several dark, rectangular gravestones are visible. In the background, a cemetery with many more gravestones stretches out under a clear blue sky. The text "4. Perpetual Maintenance: Community Perspectives" is overlaid on the left side of the image.

4. Perpetual Maintenance: Community Perspectives

Community Views on Perpetual Maintenance

Maintenance of 'closed'* cemeteries is topic that is 'under-the-radar', but once participants are aware that the financial burden could fall to operators, many consider it an important topic and they want input. Safe access for visitors to plots and preservation of plots with historical significance is key for them.

QC5. Importance of cemeteries being maintained in perpetuity (%)



Key skews: More likely to think it is very important

- Those of the Catholic faith (57% vs. 45% of non-Catholics)
- Those who visit a grave a few times a year or more (63% vs. 38% of those who visit less often or never)
- Females (51% vs. 44% of males)

Overall views from the focus groups

Participants were shown information about perpetual maintenance, the cost of cemetery maintenance and, that the burden for paying for perpetual maintenance could fall to the public, for example, through increased council rates for council cemeteries.

Many participants said they had never really considered the topic before and felt that, with a potential financial burden for ratepayers (for council operated cemeteries), how cemeteries were managed in perpetuity was of importance to them.

When prompted on the topic, feedback about perpetual maintenance priorities included (in descending order of frequency of mention):

- **Ensuring safe access to plots for visitors** by keeping lawns cut, filling in holes and pruning trees.
- **Stopping vandalism in regional cemeteries.**
- **Preserving historically significant monuments,** such as those belonging to founding families and historical figures. Most were happy for interment right holders to continue to maintain their own

plots, rather than place this burden onto the cemetery operator.

- A desire for local communities to be consulted about their own cemeteries.
- Ways to lessen maintenance fees, such as operators utilising volunteer labour and making interment right holders responsible for the area around their plot(s).

It was clear from feedback that most participants felt that maintenance activities should be adjusted based on the amount of visitation to plots and/or historical significance of plots.

Beyond this, most felt comfortable with maintenance efforts being pared back on plots that were 2-3+ generations old (70+ years).

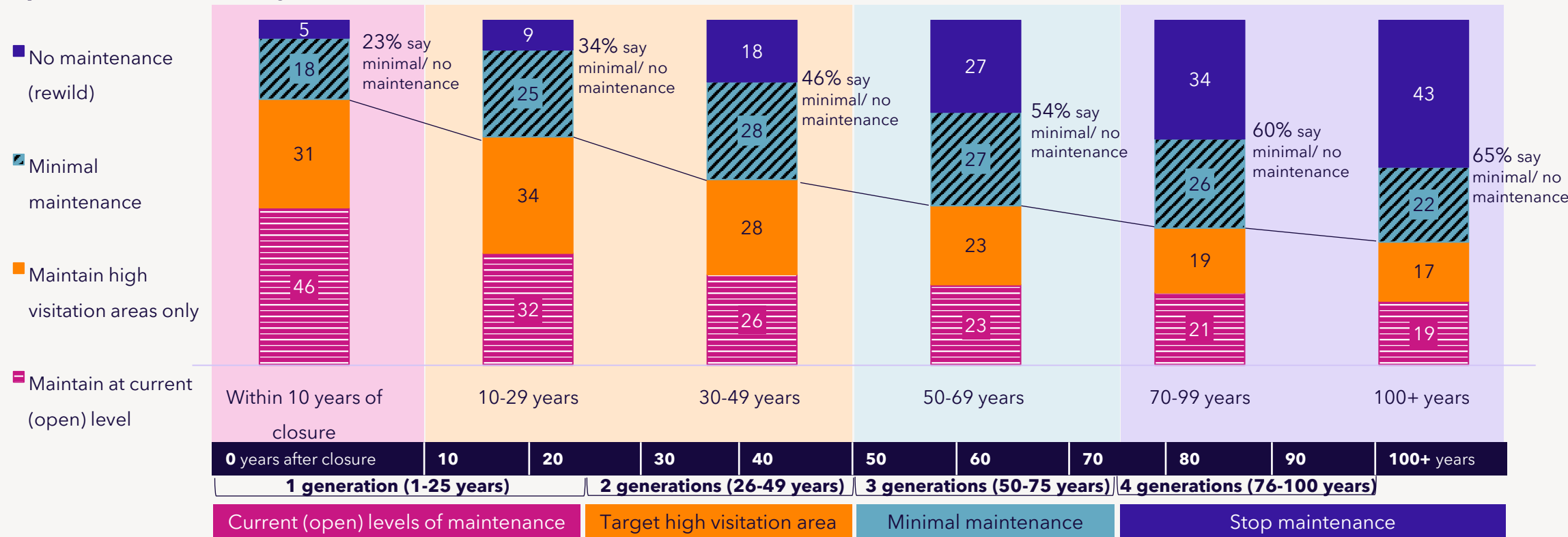
"I don't want to pay for other peoples' people, if they have left the area."
50+ years old, Sydney

"I never thought of that side of it - the need to pay for upkeep of a cemetery once it is closed."
25-49 years old, regional

Community Views on Maintenance Levels in a 'Closed'* Cemetery

General expectations are that the cemetery should be maintained at current levels in the first 10 years after it becomes inactive, with maintenance levels then increasingly focused on high visitation areas for 10-49 years after 'closure' (2 generations), before being pared right back at around 70 years after 'closure' (3 generations). This aligns with feedback from the focus groups.

Expected level of cemetery maintenance after closure (%)

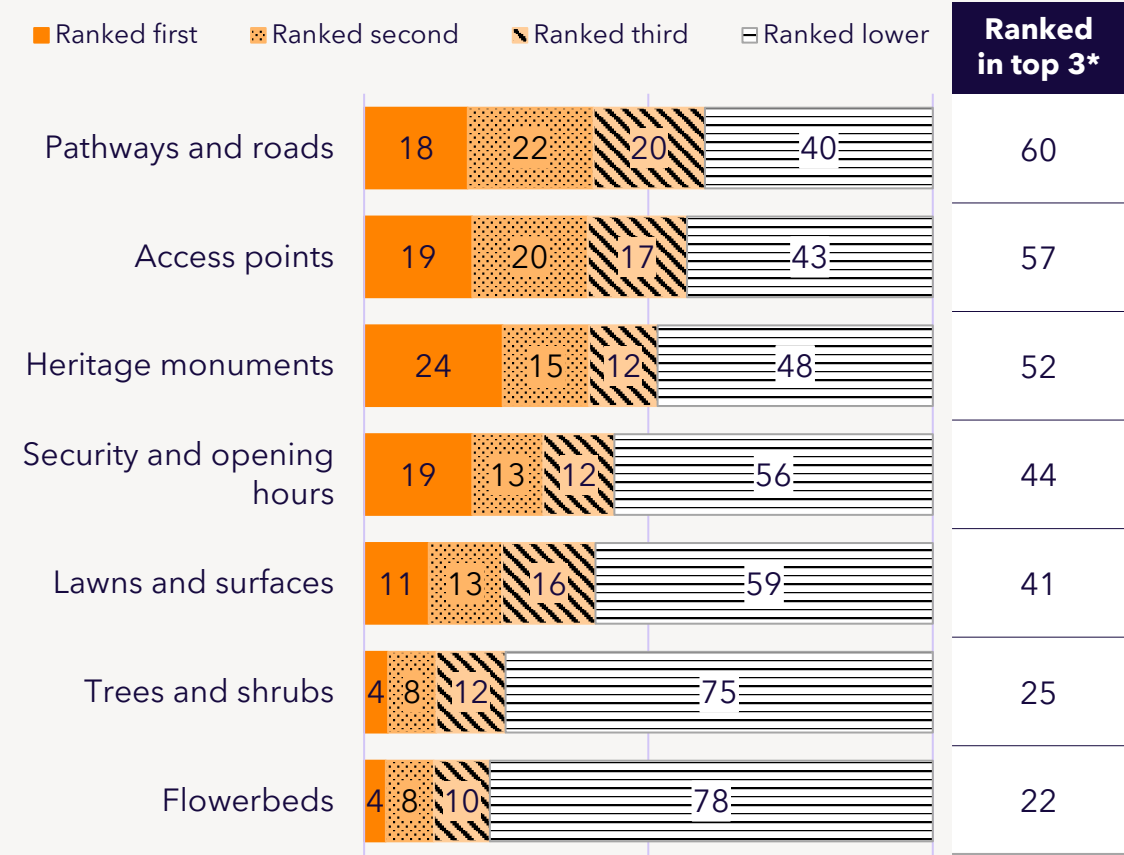


This is not a one-size-fits all timeframe for a roll-back of maintenance activities. It would be very dependent on visitation levels at the cemetery and at specific plots.

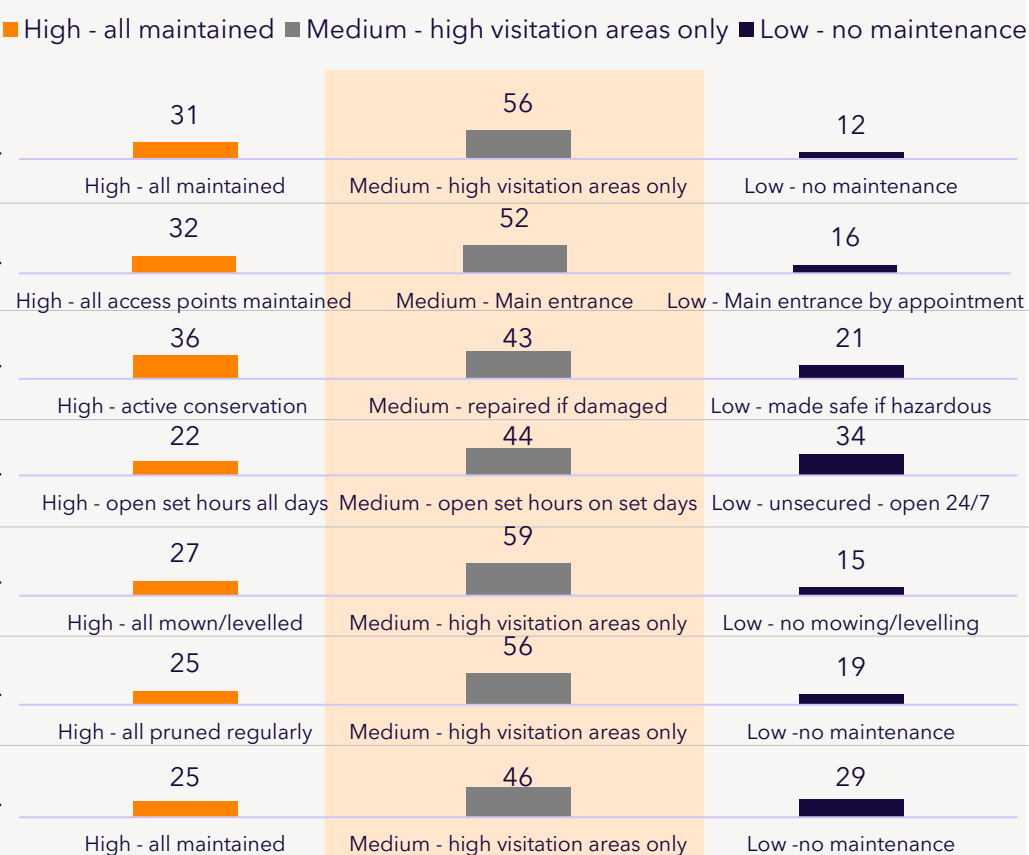
Maintenance Priorities for a Cemetery Inactive for 30-50 Years

Survey participants prioritised maintaining safe access to higher visitation areas within the cemetery through upkeep of pathways and roads, access points, and heritage monuments. Flowerbeds and pruning of trees and shrubs were lower priorities.

Ranking exercise for maintenance priorities (%)



Preferred level of maintenance for each aspect (%)



Further Detail on Perpetual Maintenance Expectations

Focus group participants were asked about their priorities for maintenance of a 'closed' (inactive) cemetery. Ensuring safe access to gravesites through maintenance of paths and grounds was most key, and most were happy to have just one entrance to the cemetery to save on costs. Discussion about wayfinding and boundary walls was more nuanced.

Paths, roads & wayfinding

Most participants felt that roads and pathways should be maintained to ensure safe access to plots in high visitation areas.

A timeframe for paring back maintenance was nominated at 70+ years, as long as plots were no longer visited.

Opinions were divided around the preservation of wayfinding. Most participants felt signage should be maintained for at least 30-50 years post closure and then removed. Others felt that signage in large sites which attracted a lot of casual visitors should be maintained for longer. A few participants suggested signage be replaced with a QR code sign at the gate, from which visitors could access a map.

Access points & security

Most participants were satisfied with only **one entry point into the cemetery being maintained** from point of closure to reduce maintenance costs.

Opinions were more divided around boundary wall maintenance. Those in regional areas considered a wall to be less of a priority than those in more built-up areas, where delineation from the surrounding area was more important.

A few participants wanted to see the cemetery locked at night and others suggested provision of a QR code at the gate to report damage.

"There's less of an expectation in country cemeteries for there to be walls and it's a bit more natural for it to be overgrown - not as disrespectful as in a built-up area."
50+ years old, regional

Lawns, soil & landscaping

The maintenance of short grass and soil without holes was considered a priority by most, particularly in areas receiving higher rates of visitation (either to newer plots or to historically significant monuments).

A suitable timeframe for allowing rewilding to occur was considered to be two or three generations (70 -100+ years), in areas where visitation was low. A few participants could see the benefits of allowing a natural ecosystem to establish.

"You need safe access to graves and long grass can hide holes and snakes."
25-49 years old, regional

"We get flooding here, the graves can sink and the ground becomes very uneven. That would need to be put right."
50+ years old, regional

Further Detail on Perpetual Maintenance Expectations (cont'd)

Aligning with survey feedback, ongoing maintenance of significant monuments was seen as important, while maintenance of flowerbeds after the first 10 years of closure was more secondary. Focus group participants placed more importance on maintenance of trees and bushes than in the survey, but more as a means of hazard reduction.



Monuments

It was explained that interment right holders are responsible for monument maintenance, with cemetery operators having obligations only to ensure public safety.

When asked for their views on this, most participants said they would expect to see ongoing active conservation of historically significant monuments to preserve the historical record, although they were not clear on whose responsibility this should be.

However, few felt that the maintenance of monuments in general should be the responsibility of the operator, particularly in light of the financial burden it could place on operators.

"We can't lose the historical record of an area. We need to be able to read important inscriptions."
25-49 years old, Sydney



Trees & bushes

Ongoing maintenance of trees and bushes in high visitation areas was considered important by participants to reduce hazards posed by falling branches.

While a suitable timeframe was not specifically mentioned by participants for paring this aspect of maintenance back, some participants said it would depend upon the site and where visitation was occurring. For some, after 2-3 generations, potentially this maintenance aspect could be pared back across the site.

"It would be important to assess the state of old trees around the site, particularly in areas that are visited."

25-49 years old, regional



Flower beds

Maintenance of flower beds was considered a lower order priority if trade-offs needed to be made.

A few participants suggested cemeteries establish beds of hardy, slow-growing and drought resistant native plants ahead of closure, rather than have to keep maintaining beds of roses.

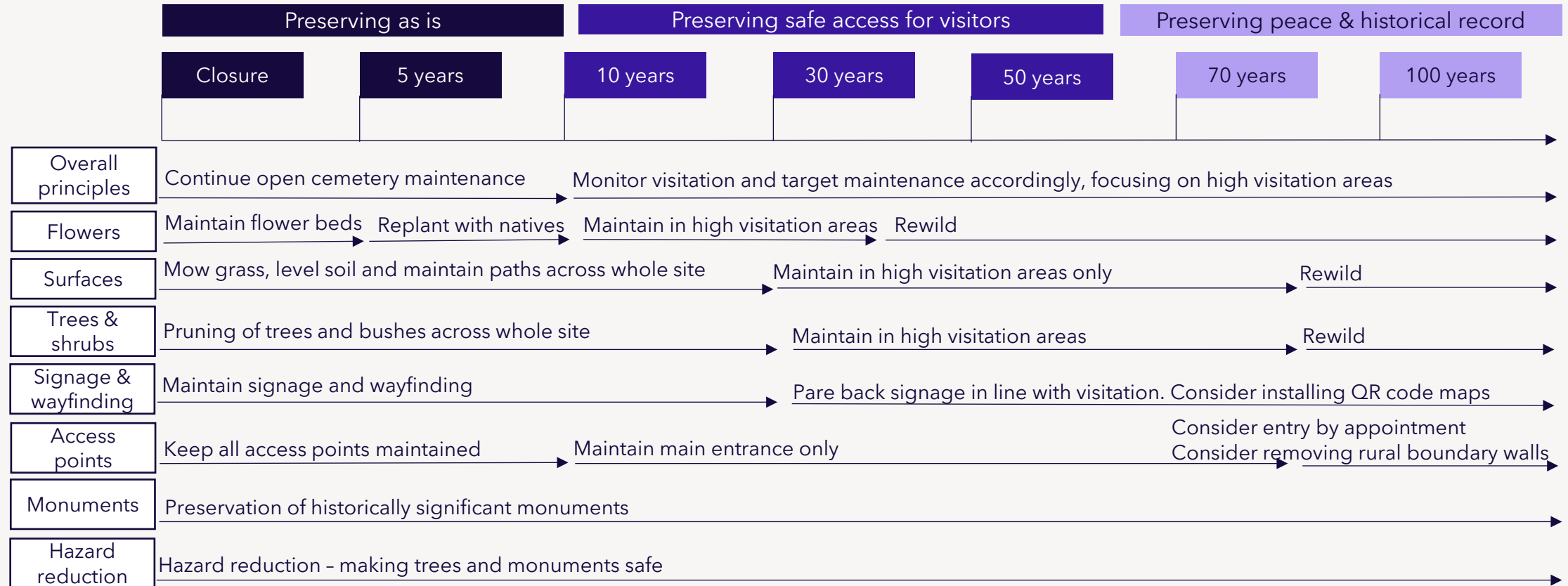
The period of time that most would expect maintenance of flowerbeds to drop back was after closure, with efforts then focused potentially only on beds around the cemetery entrance.

"Put a native garden in ahead of time so it is low maintenance - rose bushes are high maintenance."

50+ years old, regional

Community Views on Perpetual Maintenance - Key Takeouts

Pulling all the community research learnings together, the following timeline and priorities for cemetery maintenance post-closure emerge.





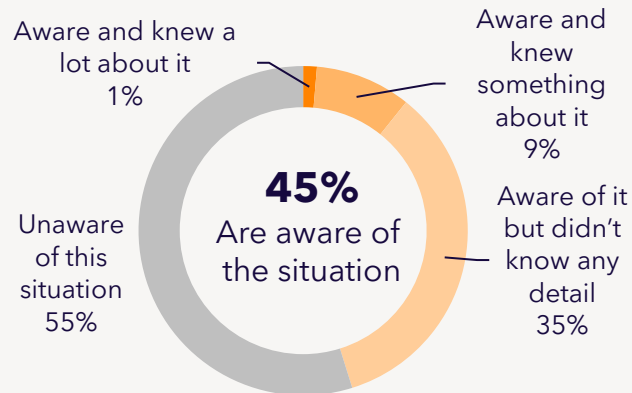
5. Community Views on Specific Topics

5.1 Views on Space Exhaustion, Renewal and Space-saving Interment Options

Community Views on Cemetery Space Exhaustion & Solutions

Awareness of the space exhaustion situation was mixed, and knowledge was poor. Most felt that family plots* and increasing cremation rates were most acceptable to create space. Lack of familiarity with cemetery renewal and renewable tenure plots positioned those options of lower appeal.

QC1: Awareness of the cemetery space exhaustion situation (%)



- **Key skews: Those most likely to be aware of the cemetery space exhaustion situation:**
- Are aged 65+ (61% vs. 41% aged 64 or under)
- Live in the middle of a city or large town (54% vs. 43% of those living in other areas)
- Hold a positive or neutral attitude towards cemeteries (53% vs. 35% of those who are negative)
- Those who view Perpetual Maintenance as very important (50% vs. 41% of those saying it is less important)
- Those who have arranged a funeral in the past (48% vs. 36% who have not)
- Those who have visited a gravesite at least a few times in the last year (52% vs. 41% who have done this less often)

Community acceptance of solutions to increase cemetery space (%)

In the survey, the following levels of acceptance were obtained for each option tested:

% finding each space-saving interment option acceptable:

Family plots*: 74%

Increasing cremation rates: 61%

Renewable plots: 39%

% finding cemetery renewal acceptable:

Infilling: 52%

Renewal (through earth on top of old plots): 44%

In the focus groups, after hearing about cemetery space potentially running out, most stated that **cremation rates should be increased** to save space, and a few participants suggested:

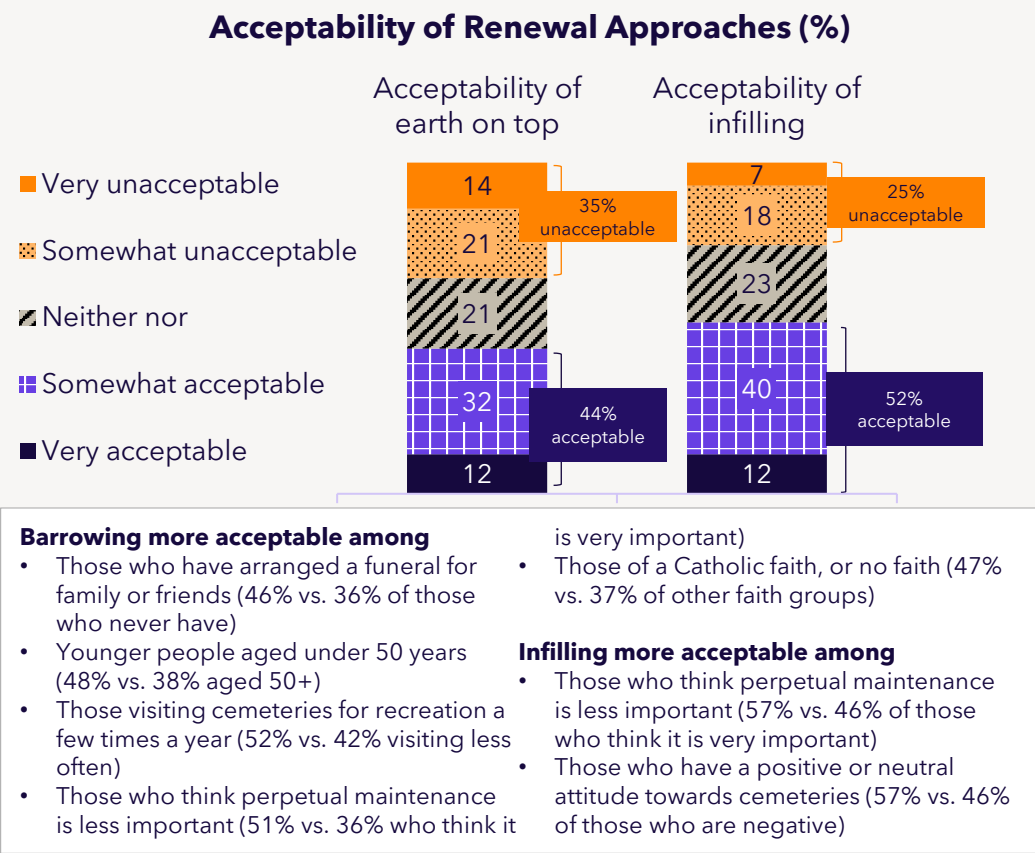
- **Reinterring bodies over old plots (barrowing).** Old defined as 70-100+ year old plots.
- **Reusing old plots.** A few participants had seen renewable tenure plots in Europe.

Most were unaware of the concept of renewal and renewable tenure plots and felt public education of the exhaustion situation and space-saving interment options would be needed to build support.

Community Views on Cemetery Renewal*



Acceptability of cemetery renewal was mixed among survey participants. However, this may be due to low levels of awareness (as discovered in the focus groups). Once explained, most in the groups said it made practical sense as long as infilling was sensitively handled and those on the bottom level in barrowed plots continued to be acknowledged.



Views from the focus groups

Participants were presented with short explanations of renewal, including barrowing and infilling and asked for their views.

Few participants had any awareness or knowledge about renewal. On hearing the information about it, **most found it acceptable**. They said it made sense from a space-creation perspective and most felt that it would help more people to be interred locally. Barrowing was felt by many to be acceptable for plots 100+ years old with low/no visitation and no historical significance.

Issues and concerns raised about cemetery renewal related to:

- Discomfort with strangers’ bodies being interred close to loved ones;
- Discomfort with old and new plots being mixed together with infilling; and
- Lack of access to/acknowledgement of those in barrowed plots underneath.

Suggestions for ways to increase acceptance for barrowing were to:

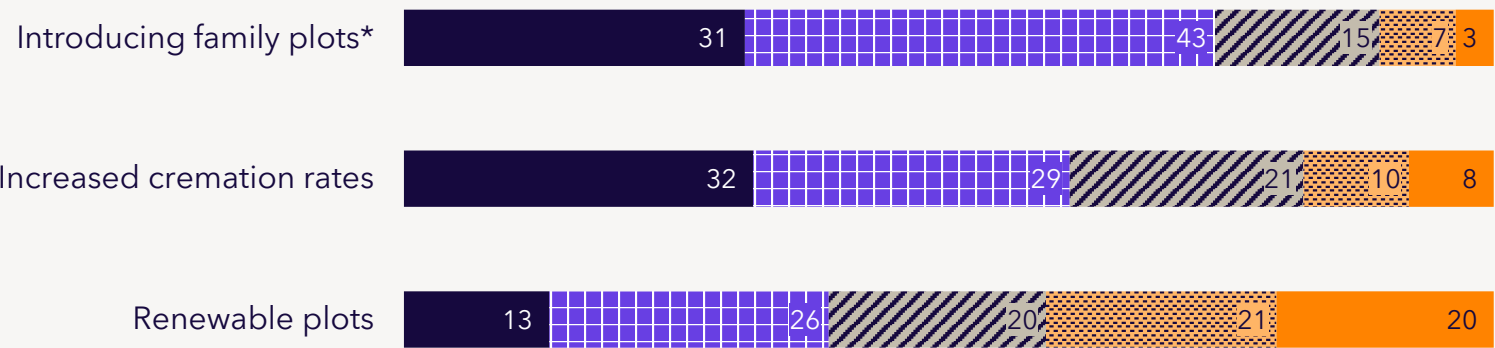
- Focus this activity on old plots (100+ years old);
- Preserve a record of those interred underneath; and
- Provide reassurance that the barrowed earth would remain sacred, e.g. that the land would remain consecrated or blessed following landscaping.

Increasing acceptance for infilling came with the knowledge that interment siting would be handled sensitively and families would not be split up.

Overall Community Views on Space-Saving Interment Options

Family plots* and increased cremation rates were seen as most acceptable, with the acceptability of renewable plots far more mixed, but higher among those who are younger or who have arranged a funeral.

Acceptability of space-saving interment options (%)



% Acceptable	% Unacceptable
74	10
61	17
39	41

■ Very acceptable
■ Somewhat acceptable
■ Neither nor
■ Somewhat unacceptable
■ Very unacceptable

Key skews: More likely to find introducing family plots* acceptable:

- Those who hold positive or neutral attitudes towards cemeteries (78% vs. 70% of those who are negative)
- Arranged a funeral over 3 years ago (78% vs. 71% who had done this more recently)
- Females (77% vs. 71% males)
- Christian faith groups (75% vs. 64% of those from other faiths), or those with no faith (79% vs. 71% with faith)

Key skews: More likely to find increased cremation rates acceptable

- Those with no religious faith (e.g. Atheist / Agnostic) (71% vs. 54% of other faith groups)
- Those who find perpetual maintenance less important (66% vs. 56% who find it very important)
- Live in regional NSW locations (67% vs. 57% in the Greater Sydney Area)

Key skews: More likely to find renewable tenure plots acceptable

- Aged 18-34 (49% vs. 34% of those aged 65+)
- Those with no religious faith (e.g. Atheist / Agnostic) (48% vs. 41% of other faith groups)
- Those who have arranged a funeral (46% vs. 36% who never have)
- Those who have visited a cemetery a few times a year for recreational purposes (57% vs. 33% of those who have never visited for this reason)

Views on Space-Saving Interment Options

All options tested are considered to make practical sense and the benefits of family plots* in keeping families together are valued, but there is a clear need for community education to build support for renewable tenure as an option.

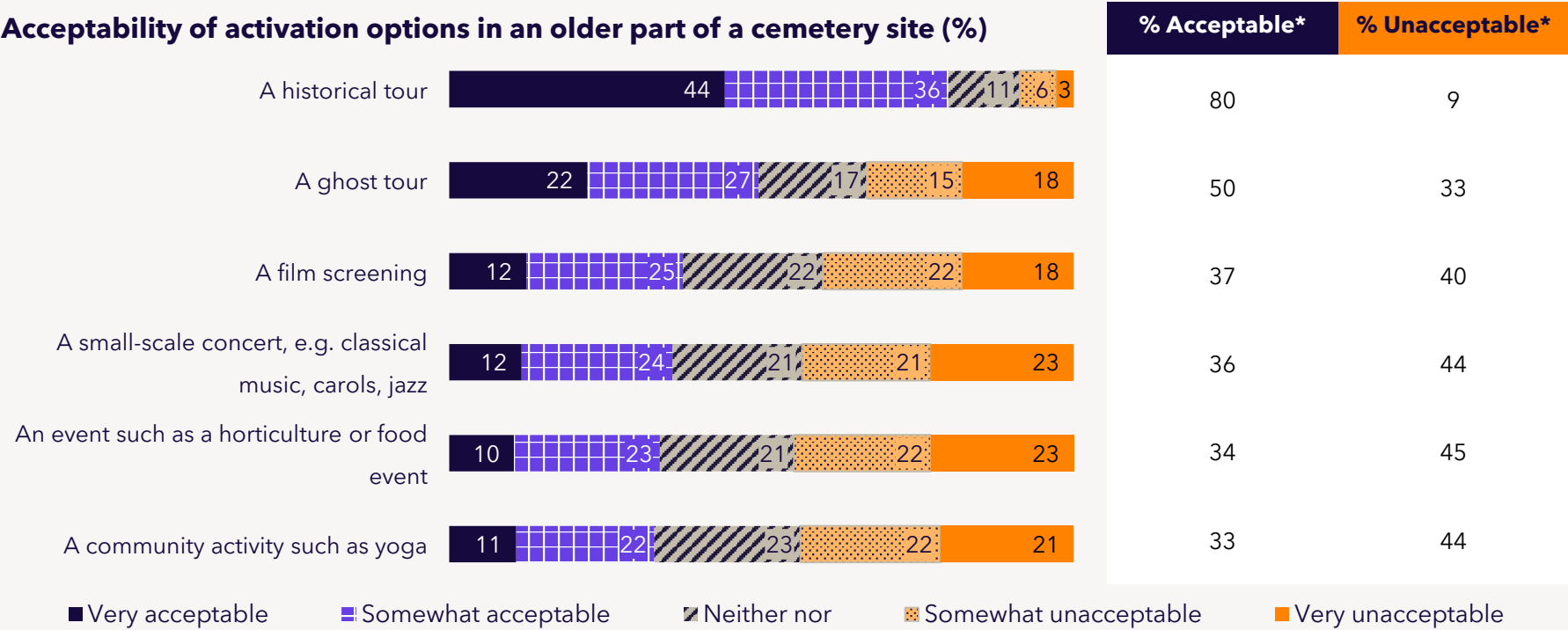
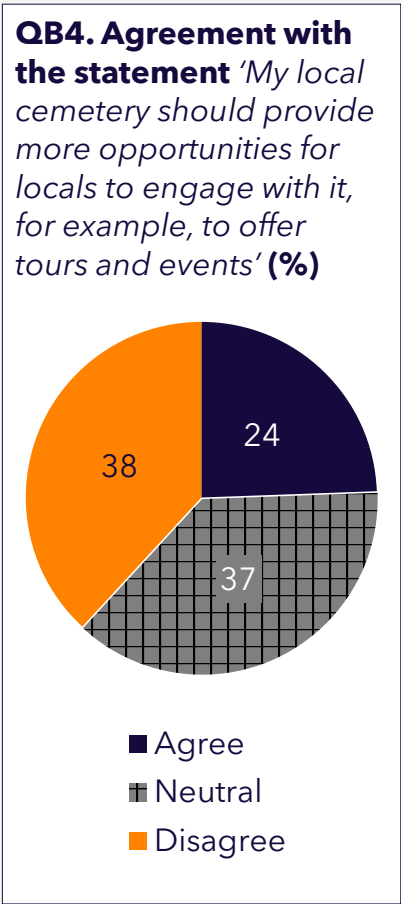
	Renewable tenure plots	Family plots	Increased cremation rates
Top reasons for acceptability (if rated as acceptable) (coded feedback from participants)	- Generally positive/ practical/ makes sense - Good for the environment - Okay, as long as remains are interred for 50+ years (25 years is considered too short)	- A good space saving idea - Helps keep families together and is respectful - Enables traditions to be maintained (e.g. a family buried in the same cemetery)	- A good, practical idea to save space and reduces demand for space - Makes sense for those who would prefer to keep an urn at home/ scatter ashes elsewhere
Ways to improve acceptability (if rated as unacceptable) (coded feedback from participants)	- Nothing would (one-in-five say this) - Misunderstanding of the concept - some feel it will be an additional charge on what they currently pay for a burial plot - More education on this method - Set the duration for tenure at 50+ years, not 25 years	- Unsure/don't know (one-in-four say this) - Provide more education on this method	- Unsure/don't know (two-in-five say this) - Nothing would (one-in-five say this) - doesn't fit with their preferences



5.2 Views on Cemetery Activation and Reuse

Overall Community Views on Cemetery Activation

Views on the acceptability of increased engagement with cemeteries were mixed and skewed to those living in built up areas. Historical tours were most acceptable, followed by ghost tours, other options were more polarising.



Key skews: Those most likely to agree their local cemetery should provide more opportunities for locals to engage with it include:

- Those living in the middle of a city or large town (30% vs. 23% living elsewhere)
- Those who visit gravesites recreationally at least monthly (36% vs. 23% who visit less often or never)
- Have a positive / neutral attitude towards cemeteries (30% vs. 18% who have a negative attitude)

Community Views on Cemetery Activation

Participants were broadly accepting of cultural or historical education, such as a tour or ghostly story telling in an old part of the cemetery. Views on events were far more mixed, with preference for smaller, refined, low-key events.

Focus group feedback

Most acceptable	Mixed acceptance	Least acceptable
Most participants were accepting of history tours and cultural experiences as a respectful way to activate a cemetery site.	Views on ghost tours were more mixed among participants. Some thought would be a great idea, while others saw it as disrespectful, at least for cemeteries with newer plots.	Few resonated with the idea of the cemetery being used for a large scale event e.g. a concert or food festival , seeing it as creating litter, disruption and vandalism. Small-scale, low-key events were of more appeal.

Top coded survey responses

Reasons for activities being most preferred		Ways to improve acceptability for activations considered unacceptable		
Historical tour (n=142)	Ghost tour (n=28)	Ghost tour (n=49)	Small-scale concert (n=67)	Horticulture or food event (n=46)
- Keeps the history and stories of people of the area alive - Is in keeping with the cemetery (respectful)	- In keeping with the idea of a cemetery - Unique and interesting - Would be a useful way to tell historical tales of the area	Three-quarters say they don't know what would increase acceptability. Others suggest focusing on an old part of the cemetery and on historical tales.	- Three-quarters say they don't know what would increase acceptability - A few suggested increasing acceptability by making events low-key, holding them away from graves to avoid damage/ litter, and having clear rules for guests.	

"A ghost tour would be OK in a cemetery where no-one has been buried for 100 years."
25-49 years old, Sydney

"I'm not sure people would be keen for their family member to be part of a ghost tour."
50+ years old, regional

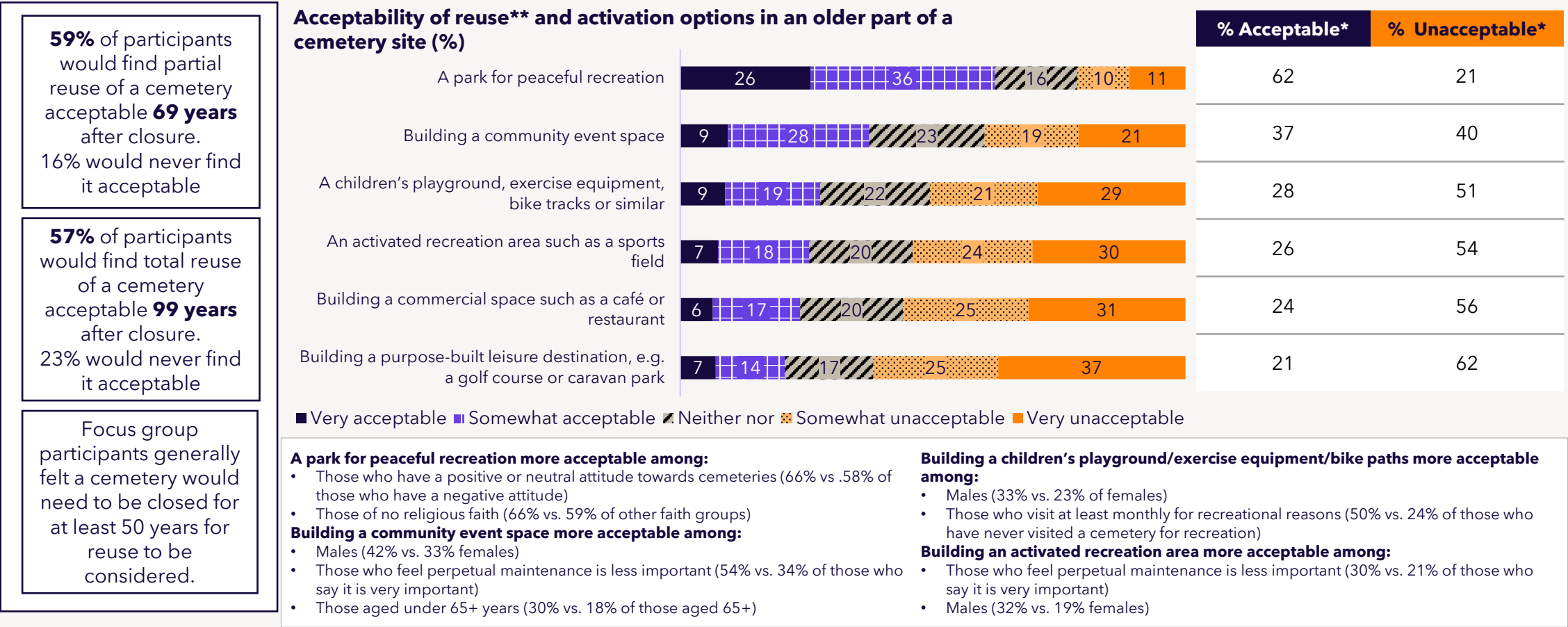
"Maybe small classical, carols or a jazz event for 50 people or less?"
50+ years old, regional

"I don't think you'd want people trampling over things, bringing chairs, sitting on graves, leaving rubbish."
50+ years old, regional

Community Acceptance of Different Reuses** and Activations



Generally, at least 50 years would need to pass ‘post-closure’ (inactivation) for any type of reuse or activation to be acceptable and even then, only a park for peaceful recreation was acceptable for most (which is enabled under current legislation).



Community Views on Cemetery Reuses** and Activations

Partial reuse for community activities such as gardening, yoga or cycling were most accepted. Total reuse for a leisure activity or sport was seen as completely unacceptable, due to a sense it was disrespectful to the interred.

Focus group feedback

Opinions were mixed on the topic of cemetery reuse and activation. Some participants questioned why this was being considered at all if cemetery space was running out and renewal was a potential option. Participants in Sydney, where space was at more of a premium, were more accepting of cemetery reuse and activation than those in regional areas. Others were concerned about what would happen to the monuments and how they would be handled. Several participants said they would want the monuments kept at the site to keep a record of who was interred there.

Most acceptable	Mixed acceptance	Least acceptable
Most participants found the idea of partial reuse to create a community space acceptable, such as a community garden to expose city-based children to gardening, a yoga space or cycle path.	Some supported the idea of a cafe to enable people to sit and contemplate the cemetery. Others felt it would compromise the dignity of the site. Some were supportive of a playground to 'normalise death'. Others felt it was disrespectful.	No one in the focus groups found a wholesale change of use for leisure (e.g. golf course, caravan park etc) acceptable, feeling it was disrespectful to those interred there.

Top coded survey responses

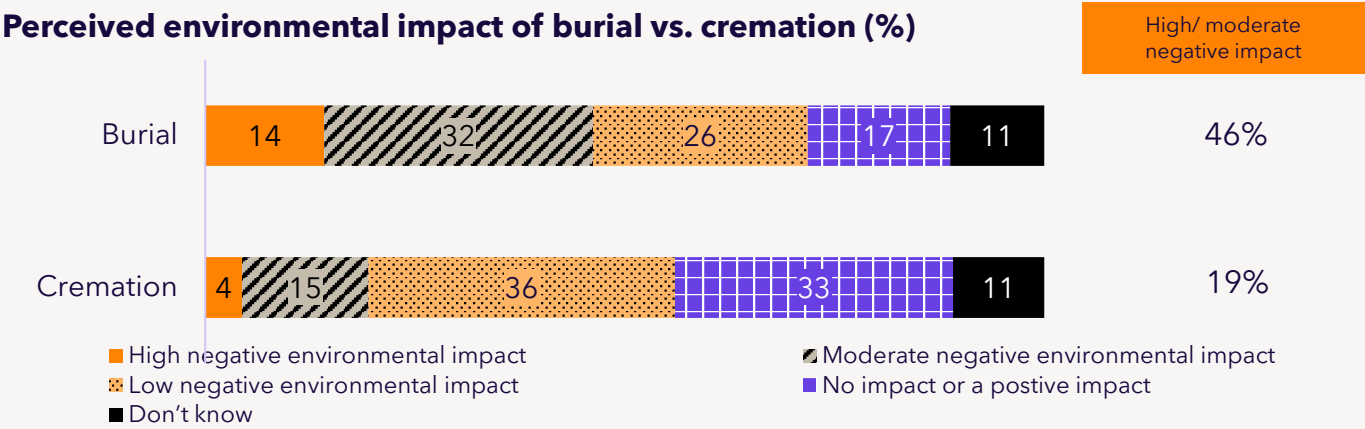
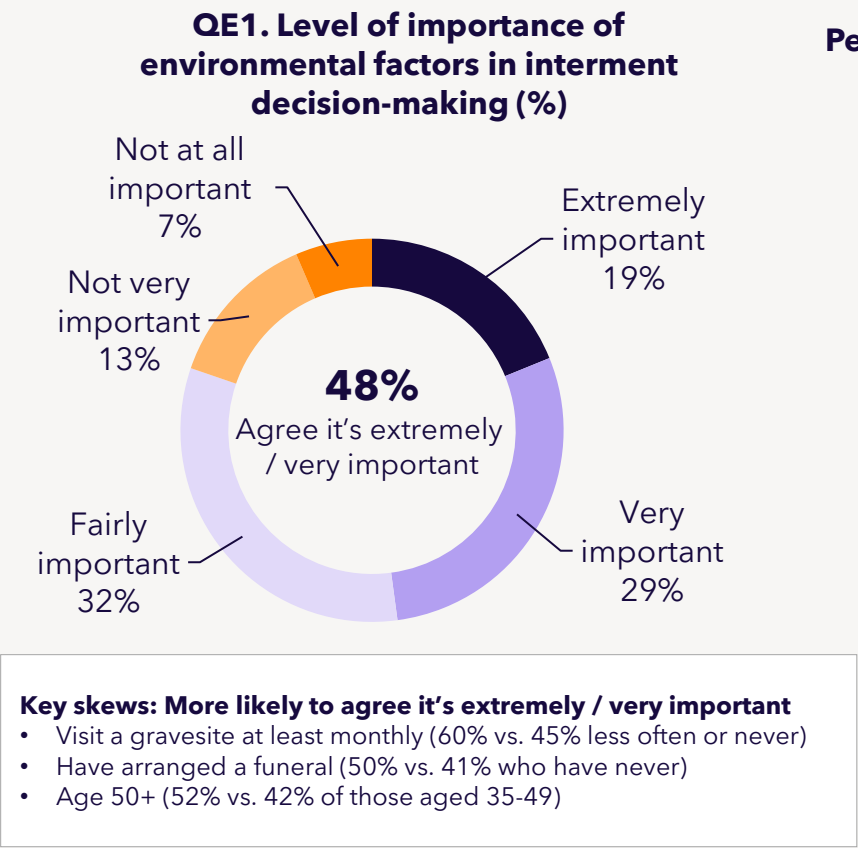
Reasons for reuses and activations being most preferred		Ways to improve acceptability for reuses/activations considered unacceptable	
A peaceful park (n=144)	Building a community space (n=19)	A commercial space (café, restaurant (n=71)	A purpose-built leisure destination (n=73)
It is in keeping with the respectful tone of a cemetery, more parkland is needed in cities and it would benefit the community	- It would be a place for community connection and would benefit locals Gentle activities would be respectful and therefore acceptable	- Two-thirds say they do not know what would improve acceptability for them - Others suggested making it a social enterprise for the benefit of the community (e.g. creating jobs)	- Two-thirds say they do not know what would improve acceptability for them - Others suggested appropriate acknowledgement of those interred below

5.3 Sustainable Interment

Community Views on the Environmental Impact of Interment



In the focus groups, few participants had thought about the environmental impact of interment. However, when raised as an issue in the survey, almost half claimed it was important. Several were unsure which method was better for the environment - but most chose cremation. Most focus group participants said they wanted more education on this topic.



Focus group feedback

Almost all participants claim never to have previously thought about the environmental impacts of interment.

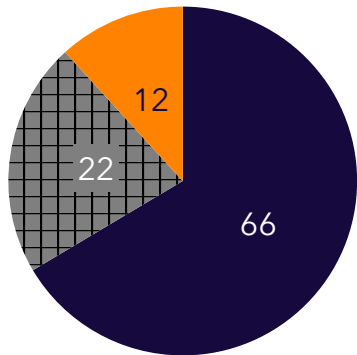
When asked to pick the interment method most environmentally impactful, most picked burial over cremation, due to the space burial takes up, the chemicals used in embalming and the materials that were used in the coffin and memorial.

A few participants felt that the intense burst of heat used in cremation may be less environmentally sustainable, due to perceptions of emissions, and the power needed.

Community Views on Natural Burial (After Prompting with Definition)

Most participants find this acceptable, but some do assume it will be cheaper than traditional burial. More information, and reassurance about how remains would be handled and acknowledged would help increase acceptability.

QE3. Acceptability of Natural Burial after seeing a brief description (%)



■ Acceptable
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Unacceptable

Focus group feedback

Based on the description shown, most found it acceptable. There was a sense that this was the 'traditional way' people used to be buried and was considered environmentally friendly due to the lack of embalming chemicals and non-biodegradable materials used.

A few struggled with the fact that above ground memorialisation may not be included to acknowledge the person interred below. However, they were not necessarily requiring a monument – a plaque on a tree would suffice for most of those with this concern.

"It's more like how we used to bury people in history."

25-49 years old, Sydney

"I don't like that there is no way of telling they are buried underneath – you could be walking over the top and they are forgotten."

50+ years old, regional

Top coded survey participant feedback:

Top reasons for finding it acceptable:

- It is natural, with no chemicals used
- It is respectful and dignified
- It is more like traditional methods

Top suggestions for improving acceptability:

- More information or education around the process and environmental benefit
- Reassure people about respectful handling of remains
- Enable a memorial/acknowledgement of those buried below

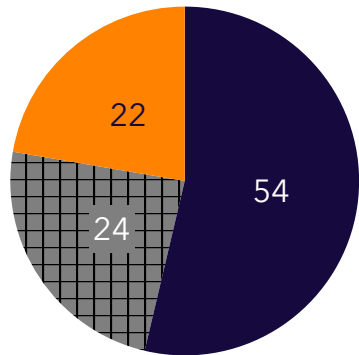
Feedback from a few participants:

- Consider vertical plots
- Keep costs low
- Keep burials in the main cemetery (not round the edge)

Community Views on Composting (After Prompting with Definition)

Composting is not currently legal in NSW and is of mixed appeal. Some valued the sense of 'completing the cycle' and returning to the soil, others disliked that remains might not be handled respectfully and would not be left in perpetual rest in soil.

QE3. Acceptability of Composting after seeing a brief description (%)



- Acceptable
- Neutral
- Unacceptable

Focus group feedback

Based on the description shown, most found composting acceptable. It made sense from a 'return to earth', recycling perspective.

Most considered it to be more environmentally friendly than traditional burial. A few found it unacceptable due to the lack of a permanent memorial for the person, a feeling that it was disrespectful to the body and a general sense of unease with having someone's remains in their garden bed. Others felt unease that the bones would be 'picked out' and ground-up after composting and/or that the composting process means the body would not be left in peace in the ground.

"We all return to the earth and we are all made of stuff that comes from the earth - we could help improve the soil."

25-49 years old, Sydney

"Putting my loved one on the garden beds just seems not the fitting thing to do."

50+ years old, regional

Top coded survey participant feedback:

Top reasons for finding it acceptable:

- Remains are returned to the earth for the benefit of the soil
- It is low impact and environmentally friendly
- It is natural with no chemicals

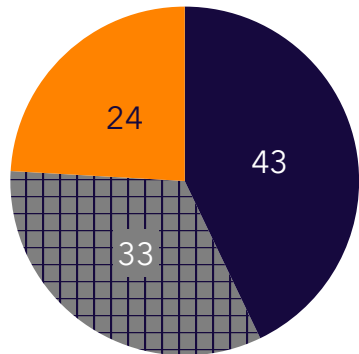
Top suggestions for improving acceptability:

- Half said nothing would improve acceptability
- More information or education on the process and what happens to the remains - how they are respectfully handled

Community Views on Alkaline Hydrolysis (After Prompting with Definition)

Views were mixed, however, only one-in-four found it unacceptable. Most who found it unacceptable said nothing would improve acceptability, but more information or a low cost would help increase acceptability for others.

QE3. Acceptability of Alkaline Hydrolysis after seeing a brief description (%)



■ Acceptable
■ Neutral
■ Unacceptable

Focus group feedback

This interment approach was not tested in the focus groups.

Top coded survey participant feedback:

Top reasons for finding it acceptable:

- It appears to be environmentally friendly – e.g. it is cremation without the need for a flame, so there is less smoke
- It's similar to traditional interment methods
- It's simple / more practical

Top suggestions for improving acceptability:

- Nothing would improve acceptability for two-thirds
- More information or education would improve acceptability for some, particularly around respectful handling of the remains and how the remains would be returned to loved ones
- Others felt that a low cost would help with acceptability

What Stuck in the Minds of Community Participants

Participants were asked at the end of the focus groups what stuck in their minds most from the session. Their feedback is provided below. Shock at the speed of cemetery space exhaustion, interest in the sustainable methods of interment and a desire to preserve the history in cemeteries were key themes in feedback.

"Something I have not thought about and now will spend time thinking about while I am in good health - planning ahead."

50+ years old, regional

"I've been reminded to think about these things - actually thinking about them. Because up until today this never really was something that I have never spoken out loud about."

50+ years old, regional

"People don't know about space running out, and they don't know about the options available - they need to be educated."

25-49 years old, regional

"More options for burial - alternative styles"

50+ years old, regional

"The speed with which space is running out and the high cost of maintenance - I didn't know this."

25-49 years old, Sydney

"I think the future of cemetery stuck in my mind. I'll be thinking about it more than I ever have before about what will happen to what is the cemetery of the future?"

50+ years old, regional

"Who will make the decisions on the historical ones? Will they go double stacking? Will they wipe them out and make them a parkland? Who will make the decisions?"

25-49 years old, Sydney

"It's really important we don't lose track of who is buried in a cemetery - we need to preserve that history - maybe QR codes on headstones so you can scan it and see who is in the plot even if you can't read the inscription."

25-49 years old, regional



Appendix

Demographic Profile - Survey Sample

		Sample size
Total sample		n=1,006
Cultural background	First Nations	n=29
	Prefer to speak a language other than English at home or with close family members	n=203
	Was born in a predominately non-English speaking country	n=183
Faith	No religious faith (e.g. Atheist / Agnostic)	n=429
	Catholicism	n=247
	Anglicism	n=124
	Other faith groups	n=206

		Sample size
Total sample		n=1,006
Working status	Working full-time	n=478
	Working part-time/casual	n=241
	Not working	n=262
Household type	No children	n=377
	Children at home	n=394
	Children living out of home	n=133
Arranged funeral	Within last 3 years	n=349
	Longer ago	n=388
	Never	n=269

Qualitative Tally of Maintenance Priorities

Each participant in the focus groups participated in an online exercise where they were given 10 'coins' to invest across 16 decision buckets and told to allocate them how they saw fit. This table shows the findings from this exercise.

Findings reflected survey feedback, where lawn, path and wayfinding maintenance in high traffic areas, and focus on the main entrance were prioritised. Lower fees, monuments and pruning in high traffic areas are important to some.

	Group 1: Young, Sydney	Group 2: Young, Regional	Group 3: Older, Sydney	Group 4: Older, Regional	TOTAL
Participants	9	8	9	7	33
Maintaining the main entrance	11	7	8	14	40
Maintaining other entrances	1	0	4	4	9
Maintaining the boundary fence/wall	6	7	8	3	24
Mowing lawns, filling holes in high traffic areas	13	11	11	6	41
Mowing lawns & filling in holes in less used areas	3	4	3	0	10
Pruning trees & bushes in high traffic areas only	6	5	10	6	27
Pruning trees & bushes in less visited areas	1	1	2	2	6
Maintaining flower beds in high traffic areas only	4	5	4	5	18
Maintaining flower beds in less visited areas	2	0	0	2	4
Actively managed opening hours, not just locked up	5	4	1	1	11
Maintaining pathways in high traffic areas only	11	10	12	9	42
Maintaining pathways in less visited areas	4	4	4	1	13
Maintaining signage & wayfinding in high traffic areas	12	6	8	9	35
Maintain signage, wayfinding in less visited areas	1	3	0	1	5
Actively maintained monuments, not just made safe when hazardous	10	2	1	7	20
No investment - lower burial fees/council rates	0	9	14	0	23



This report has been prepared by SEC Newgate for Cemeteries & Crematoria NSW.

For further inquiries or to discuss the details of this report, please contact SEC Newgate Research (heather.jones@secnewgate.com.au).

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