

MCLEOD STREET PIONEER CEMETERY GRAVES AND PLAQUES AUDIT REPORT

L&C | 79/5/7 | #7633167

RECOMMENDATION:

That Council:

1. Notes the findings of the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery Graves and Plaques Audit Report;
2. Approves a submission to the Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation's Community Sustainability Action Grant to assist with cemetery restoration works and updating the Conservation Management Plan; and
3. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above application.

INTERESTED PARTIES:

Not applicable

Note: The identification of interested parties is provided on a best endeavours basis by Council Officers and may not be exhaustive.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

A heritage consultant was engaged late 2024 to undertake the *McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery Graves and Plaques Audit Report (Audit Report)*. The audit focused on the 5-acre McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery, which is bordered by McLeod Street, Grove Street, the Cairns Railway line, and the Cairns Ergon Energy distribution depot.

The Cairns and District Family History Society contributed to the audit, drawing on their extensive heritage expertise and in-depth research of the site, which underpins their specialist knowledge of the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery.

The purpose of the audit was to:

- Assess the current condition of gravestones throughout the cemetery.
- Assess the legibility and condition of plaques at each gravesite.
- Identify any plaques installed without approval under the *Queensland Heritage Act*.
- Provide a general cost estimate for conservation, remedial, and removal works.
- Scope compliance with heritage conservation guidelines and industry standards.
- Scope effectiveness of compliance monitoring mechanisms in the Cemetery Conservation Management Plan 2012.

The Audit Report presents a series of short-to-long-term actions, accompanied by a prioritised list of recommended improvements.

By implementing the actions outlined in the Audit Report and continuing Council's partnership with the Cairns and District Family History Society, Council will support the ongoing protection and preservation of this significant heritage site

BACKGROUND:

Established in 1887, McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery is Cairns' oldest surviving cemetery and is listed on the Queensland Heritage Register. Closed to burials since 1949, it contains around 2,500 internments. The cemetery is officially registered as a Pioneer Cemetery and is managed by Council under conditions set by the Department of Environment, Science and Innovation.

While Council maintains the grounds and manages plaque requests, recent attention to the site's heritage elements has been limited, highlighting the need for renewed investment in conservation.

The Audit Report outlines a staged plan of action including immediate minor maintenance works and further improvements such as lighting enhancements which have been included in the 2025/26 capital works program. External grant funding from the State Government of up to \$50,000 is currently available to support Council's implementation of the operational maintenance and conservation management recommendations within the report.

COMMENT:

The following is a synopsis of the prioritised list of recommended actions presented in the Audit Report:

Unauthorised Plaques

There are unauthorised plaques installed without approval under the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992*, compromising the site's heritage values and, in some cases, damaging historic monuments. These will be removed.

Immediate Maintenance (via Council programs):

- Graffiti removal (rotunda)
- Tree root management
- Cleaning of metal plaques
- Installation of improved signage

Priority Works (12–24 months):

- Refixing/replacing plaques
- Repair of damaged monuments and plinths
- Specialist stonework conservation
- Re-identification of blank plinths
- Lighting upgrades

- Conservation Management Plan update

Council will engage both internal teams and specialist contractors for these works.

Grant Funding Opportunity

Council is eligible to apply for up to \$50,000 (ex. GST) through the *Community Sustainability Action Grants – Round Nine: Heritage Conservation*. This funding supports best-practice conservation of Queensland Heritage Register sites that are accessible to the community and visitors in order to:

- Protect the cultural heritage values of the site
- Encourage community and visitor engagement
- Improve physical or interpretive access

The funding criteria also allows for the McLeod Street Pioneer Conservation Management Plan to be updated by a suitably qualified heritage practitioner. A successful grant application, combined with Council's existing budget, would enable delivery of the audit recommendations. The grant application closes 11 June 2025.

OPTIONS:

Option 1: (Recommended)

That Council:

1. Notes the findings of the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery Graves and Plaques Audit Report;
2. Approves a submission to the Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation's Community Sustainability Action Grant to assist with cemetery restoration works and updating the Conservation Management Plan; and
3. Delegates authority to the Chief Executive Officer in accordance with the *Local Government Act 2009* to finalise any and all matters relating to the above application.

Option 2:

That Council requests officers provide further information.

CONSIDERATIONS:

Risk Management:

Through the implementation of Audit Report actions and updating the Conservation Management Plan, Council will safeguard the cemetery's historical integrity, enhance public access and improve the visitor experience, ensuring the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery remains a valued and accessible element of Cairns' cultural heritage for future generations.

Council Finance and the Local Economy:

Provision exists in the DRAFT 2025/2026 Capital Budget of \$50,000 to deliver restoration and renewal works at the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery.

Opportunity exists to seek external operational grant funding to deliver urgent maintenance (such as specialist stonemasonry) and conservation management requirements for this important heritage listed site.

The audit report provides cost estimates which are indicative only. Some contingency and allowance has been made for escalation based on recent stonemasonry works undertaken elsewhere. A breakdown of funding and expenditure for work arising from the audit is provided below:

OPEX Budget Implications	\$
Grant Funding (Department of Environment, Tourism, Science and Innovation's Community Sustainability Action Grant)	50,000
Restoration works (Audit Report estimate)	(33,000)
Conservation Management Plan update	(17,000)

CAPEX Budget Implications	\$
25/26 Capital Works Program	50,000
Capital works (lighting and infrastructure renewal/replacement)	(50,000)

Quotes are currently being sought to ensure accuracy of works required and to meet the grant application deadline. Processes will be put in place to ensure project works are aligned to budget parameters. Should Council be unsuccessful with its funding application, consideration will be given to how priority works can occur inside broader directorate budget parameters.

The project will support the local economy by engaging local heritage consultants, skilled trades, and community expertise through the Cairns and District Family History Society.

Ongoing investment and local engagement will help preserve the site as a valued heritage and tourism asset.

Community and Cultural Heritage:

McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery offers rare insights into Cairns' early social, economic, and political history from the late 19th to early 20th centuries. Among its 2,500 interments are prominent figures such as Cairns' first Mayor Richard Ash Kingsford, medical pioneer Dr Edward Koch, and workers from the Cairns to Herberton Railway.

Since 2014, Council has supported *Shadows from the Past*, a popular annual evening tour by the Cairns & District Family History Society that connects the community to the site's heritage. These activities support Council's Strategy for Culture and the Arts and the site's Conservation Management Plan.

Planned restorations will align with Cairns' 150th anniversary in 2026, offering a timely opportunity to showcase and invest in the city's heritage.

Natural Environment:

Weed control will be delivered in accordance with Council's Pest Management Strategy to restore biodiversity values of the affected area.

Required environmental approvals will be obtained through application to the Department of Environment and Heritage Protection.

Corporate and Operational Plans:

Corporate Plan 2021-26

Robust Economy:

- Optimising visitation and tourism opportunities

Community & Culture:

- Promote Cairns as the arts and cultural hub of Northern Australia.
- Providing spaces and programs for the wellbeing of the community.

Continued care and revitalisation of the Pioneer Cemetery supports the cultural, heritage and place aspirations of Council's Strategy for Culture and the Arts 2022, as below:

Strategy for Culture and the Arts 2022

Priority Two Outcomes:

- Preservation initiatives that protect and value the region's built and natural cultural heritage, as well as historic and contemporary collections.
- Advocacy and promotion of local heritage assets and the diverse multicultural character of our community as a source of identity and belonging.
- Evidence-based research to support and guide future decision-making and investment in the preservation and promotion of our shared cultural heritage and regional identity.

Statutory:

All works to be carried out will be in accordance with Department of Environment & Science statutory requirements and the *Queensland Heritage Act 1992*.

Policy:

The McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery Conservation Management Plan provides a best practice guide to ongoing management of the cemetery.

The Audit has recommended that the Conservation Management Plan 2012 be updated every five years and is included in the financial plan as part of the grant application.

CONSULTATION:

The Cairns and District Family History Society has been a long-standing partner to Council, supporting tasks such as verifying public submissions for new plaques, reporting maintenance issues, developing educational resources, and researching early pioneers.

The Society also contributed to the Audit Report and is widely recognised for their genealogical and heritage expertise.

Council will continue to work closely with the Society and other heritage experts to preserve and maintain the McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery.

ATTACHMENTS:

McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery Graves and Plaques Audit DM #7557017
McLeod Street Pioneer Cemetery Conservation Plan DM #5305731
Cemetery Policy DM #7115917v4



Kim Jameson
Executive Manager Creative Life



Tim Dendle
Acting Director Lifestyle & Community