

Preliminary Mental Health Impact Report – Proposal for new Crown Cemetery in Lidcombe

October 2025

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. Mental Health Risks.....	2
<i>2.1 Psychological associations with cemeteries.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>2.2 Cultural considerations.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>2.3 Implications of ignoring cultural sensitivities.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>2.4 Loss of a community asset and green space.....</i>	<i>3</i>
3. Conclusion.....	4
References.....	5

1. Introduction

In August 2025, The NSW Government's Metropolitan Memorial Parks (MMP) identified Carnarvon Golf Course, located at 65-95 Nottingham Road, Lidcombe, as the preferred site for redevelopment into a new Crown cemetery. In response, Cumberland City Council resolved at the Ordinary Council Meeting of 27 August 2025:

"That the General Manager take necessary action to develop a submission on behalf of Cumberland Council opposing the creation of a cemetery on the site of Carnarvon Golf Course."

This report outlines the potential mental health impacts of the proposal using desktop research, noting the scale of transformation the proposal will have on the surrounding community and context. Key concerns that will be identified include adverse psychological associations with cemeteries, cultural dissonance, and the broader implications of disregarding cultural sensitivities in large scale government projects. These factors collectively risk diminishing social cohesion, increasing stress, and exacerbating mental health disparities among some local groups and the broader community, particularly when engaging with government projects.

2. Mental Health Risks

2.1 *Psychological associations with cemeteries*

Cemeteries are symbolically linked to death and mourning, which can evoke persistent feelings of anxiety, sadness, and existential discomfort among nearby residents. Environmental psychology literature highlights that constant exposure to death-related stimuli can heighten mortality salience, a psychological state associated with increased stress and depressive symptoms (Huang, et al. 2021). For families with children, this proximity may amplify fears and avoidance behaviours around going outdoors, reducing neighbourhood desirability. Further to this, the stigma associated with living near cemeteries often correlates with a perceived decrease in the liveability of the area, creating poor perceptions of the area in which residents call home.

Lidcombe is presently home to Rookwood Cemetery, being the largest cemetery in the southern hemisphere. The suburb and surrounding context have changed considerably since Rookwood Cemetery was established in 1868, with state and local governments continually planning for greater housing, transport and employment opportunities for the growing community. The recent transport-orientated development and low mid-rise housing policies by the NSW government affecting Lidcombe and Berala showcase this, highlighting the scale of transformation the area is set to receive. The proposal for an additional cemetery, in a soon-to-be densely populated area, and in an area home to a well-established existing cemetery, may be considered excessive to residents in the area. The association of living near two large cemeteries may create increased stress and reinforce negative perceptions of the area, contributing to chronic psychological strain and diminished quality of life.

2.2 *Cultural considerations*

The demographic makeup of Lidcombe and Berala consists of a high proportion of those of Asian ancestry, with many others born overseas. An individual's religious values and attitudes influence their burial-site preferences and opinions about ways of using land appropriately to accommodate the deceased (Silva & Ferreira, 2022). Feng shui principles, deeply embedded in Chinese cultural traditions, emphasise spatial harmony and the balance of 'yin' and 'yang' energies. Cemeteries are considered strong sources of yin energy, symbolising stillness and death, which is believed to disrupt the vitality and prosperity of residential environments. Homes situated near cemeteries are perceived as inauspicious, potentially leading to misfortune and ill health. Such beliefs are not merely symbolic as they influence real-world behaviours including housing choices and community engagement. Ignoring these principles risks alienating a significant portion of the population near the proposed cemetery, fostering cultural dissonance, and generating psychological distress rooted in perceived spiritual and environmental disharmony.

2.3 *Implications of ignoring cultural sensitivities*

Strategic planning that does not incorporate cultural sensitivities can have profound broader social and psychological consequences. For communities with strong ancestral traditions, such as those of Asian heritage, burial practices and spatial taboos are integral to identity and well-being. Imposing developments that conflict with these norms may lead to heightened stress, intergroup tension, and reduced social cohesion. These outcomes undermine the principles of inclusive planning and risk perpetuating systemic inequities in mental health outcomes. Research in participatory planning shows that including the public in urban planning decisions can foster a sense of confidence in public institutions, as they feel that their issues are taken seriously and that their opinions are being heard (Kohli, A. 2024). The absence of

this can erode trust in governance, creates feelings of exclusion, and create worsening mental health impacts.

2.4 Loss of a community asset and green space

The proposal entails the removal of an existing golf course—a significant green space that currently supports physical activity, social interaction, and enjoyment in Lidcombe and Berala. Evidence from environmental health research consistently demonstrates that access to green spaces is associated with reduced stress, improved mood, and enhanced community connection. Replacing this amenity with a cemetery not only introduces culturally and psychologically adverse elements into the community but also eliminates a community asset that is critical for promoting resilience and mental well-being in rapidly urbanising areas like Lidcombe and Berala.

3. Conclusion

The proposed redevelopment of Carnarvon Golf Course into a new Crown cemetery presents several risks to mental health and social harmony within the local community. Negative psychological associations with cemeteries, compounded by cultural concerns, are likely to cause distress among residents, particularly those of diverse backgrounds. Furthermore, disregarding cultural sensitivities during the development of the proposal and consultation process undermines trust, fosters exclusion, and may lead to long-term negative mental health impacts. The removal of a valued green space further exacerbates these risks.

REFERENCES

Huang S, Du H, Qu C (2021) Emotional responses to mortality salience: Behavioral and ERPs evidence. PLoS ONE 16(3): e0248699. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0248699>

Silva, R. M., & Ferreira, A. C. (2022). Cemeteries as urban green spaces: Multi-scale analysis of land use and ecosystem services in Lisbon. *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, 74, 127675. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ufug.2022.127675>

Kohli, A. (2024). *Community engagement and participation in planning of a city*. International Journal for Research in Modernization, 3(3), Article 23793. <https://www.ijfmr.com/papers/2024/3/23793.pdf>