

## **Submission of the Friends of Avonhead Cemetery to the Fendalton-Waimairi-Harewood Community Board**

The Friends of Avonhead Cemetery are an incorporated charitable trust board under the Incorporated Societies Act 1908. The purpose of the Trust is to benefit the community by preserving and enhancing the historical, natural and other features of the Avonhead Cemetery, including the Earthquake Memorial which commemorates the 185 victims of the 22 February 2011 earthquake. The Trust was formed as a result of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Avonhead Community Group Inc. and the Christchurch City Council signed on 13 September 2016 to enable local residents to have a greater role in the guardianship of the Avonhead Cemetery. The Trust is governed by a Board of Trustees.

At a meeting on 25 January 2017, the Board of Trustees identified three issues that need to be addressed to increase public recognition of the Cemetery and Earthquake Memorial:

1. The name of the Cemetery does not reflect its wider significance as the internment site of the earthquake victims;
2. The frontage of the Cemetery is looking worn down; and
3. The road signage directing people to the Cemetery is inadequate.

### **Issue 1: The name of the Cemetery**

The Cemetery is officially called "Avonhead Park Cemetery". The name does not recognise the special significance of the Cemetery in light of the fact that since February 2012, the Cemetery has also become the site of the Earthquake Memorial. It is the final resting place of the four unidentified victims and many others who lost their lives on that day. The Earthquake Memorial is an integral part of the history of Christchurch. It is of international significance due to the large number of foreign nationals who lost their lives in the quake, who are also commemorated in the Memorial. On the sixth anniversary of the 22 February 2011 earthquake this year, representatives from the Sonoda Women's University in Japan and Japanese exchange students attending St Thomas of Canterbury College and Villa Maria College attended a ceremony at the site, holding a minute's silence and laying flowers at the Memorial and the surrounding plaques. This exemplifies the worldwide respect that the site commands. It is a case in point for giving the Cemetery a name that will better signal its landmark status to visitors.

Accordingly, the Board of Trustees requests the Community Board to approve renaming the Cemetery to "Avonhead Memorial Cemetery".

### **Issue 2: The frontage of the Cemetery**

A further cause of concern is that the frontage of the Cemetery is beginning to look old, tired and neglected. The image below shows the state of the entrance to the Cemetery as of 6 March 2017.



As visible from the image, the frontage does not reflect the reality of a cherished site that is of deep emotional and historical significance to the city of Christchurch. It also does not recognise the existence of the Earthquake Memorial. Further, if the Community Board approves the renaming of the Cemetery, it would only be appropriate for the name on the frontage to be changed from "Avonhead Park Cemetery" to "Avonhead Memorial Cemetery".

As a result, the Board of Trustees requests the Community Board for improved frontage for Avonhead Cemetery that contains the proposed new name, "Avonhead Memorial Cemetery".

### **Issue 3: The road signage for the Cemetery**

Until recently, the road signage for the Cemetery comprised small yellow signs attached to lampposts saying "AA Cemetery". There were two of these; one was at the corner of the Merrin Street-Withells Road roundabout and the second was at the Hawthornden Road-Avonhead Road intersection. The Board of Trustees felt that these signs were inadequate. There was no recognition of the name of the Cemetery. The Cemetery itself is located several hundred metres away from the signs and is not visible from the location of the signs. The feedback from the community is that visitors find the signs unhelpful and often have to rely on local residents to guide them to the Cemetery.

Earlier this year, the Board of Trustees requested the Council to replace the two signs with better signage that read "Avonhead Memorial Cemetery" and are more helpful in pointing visitors to the location of the Cemetery. The Board of Trustees further requested that the signs be replaced prior to 22 February 2017, as there would be many visitors to the Cemetery and the Earthquake Memorial on that day. The Council informed us that it could replace the signs with newer signage reading "Cemetery", but that including "Avonhead Memorial Cemetery" in the signage would not be possible because first, this was not the standard sign for cemeteries, and secondly, the name was too long for a road sign. However, the Council agreed that the location of the signs could be improved to make them more helpful to visitors.

By 28 February 2017, the Council had replaced the old road signage with newer signs simply stating "Cemetery". While the Council's good intention is appreciated, the new signage does not address the problems raised by the Board of Trustees in terms of the location of the signage being unhelpful to visitors and its failure to recognise the existence of the Earthquake Memorial.

It is therefore the Board of Trustees' request that a Confirmation Directional Sign saying "Avonhead Memorial Cemetery and Earthquake Memorial" be added at the intersection of Merrin Street and Hawthornden Road. This is approximately fifty metres away from the entrance of the Cemetery and will be more useful in guiding visitors to the Cemetery. Further, it will have the new name of the Cemetery. In the Board of Trustees' opinion, this will be a more fitting way to highlight the existence of the landmark cemetery than the existing signage.

The Board of Trustees thanks the Community Board once again for extending speaking rights to it to listen to this issue.