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Pioneer Park Heritage Wall and excavation of past burials

The Town of Gawler Council is currently working towards stabilizing the Pioneer Park Heritage Wall on Murray Street. After it was deemed to be unsafe due to deterioration, investigations have taken place on how to remediate the damage with the least impact on the heritage site.

Key points:

- Excavations behind the wall are occurring for structural stabilization
- Excavations may impact trees behind the wall including past burials on site
- Supervision by a Forensic Anthropologist are required to conduct the excavations

Preliminary design options have indicated that excavations behind the wall for the full depth of the wall will need to occur for structural stabilization. An arborist report has indicated that these excavations will potentially impact the four trees behind the wall. Excavations are also expected to impact past burials on site with the area being used as an active cemetery from 1847 to 1870.

Due to the known presence of at least one past burial in the proposed excavation area, all excavations require a Section 27 permit from Heritage SA and supervision by a Forensic Anthropologist. Council has engaged the services of Emeritus Wood Jones Professor Maciej Henneberg from the University of Adelaide to oversee excavations.

Initially in April 2023, a shallow investigation trench will be excavated on site to attempt to locate the position of past burials by assessing previously disturbed ground. This will enable a plan to be developed for the excavation of past burials that will be impacted by the wall stabilization works.

"Unfortunately, Council does not have any historical documents which map where individual graves were at the cemetery, so it is not possible to identify those buried in any of the gravesites" said Mayor Karen Redman, "The scope of the restoration works is not yet known but Council is seeking to have the works done, while working to ensure the historical site and graves are treated with the upmost respect into the future."

Any recovered human remains will be relocated to an offsite mausoleum to be reinterred at a later date either as close as practicable to their original location or at Willaston Cemetery where the original head stones from Pioneer Park are now located.

Whilst offsite, any remains will be in the care of Emeritus Professor Henneberg and the University of Adelaide team. The University will take this opportunity to study the recovered bones in the hope of gaining increased understanding of the lifestyles, diets and diseases of the earliest colonists living in our region.

"Whilst it is unfortunate that further excavation works are necessary, this is a rare opportunity for academic teams to increase their knowledge of the early townspeople of Gawler, as only 2 or 3 cemeteries of this era have been excavated previously across Australia" said Town of Gawler CEO, Henry Inat.

For more information on the planned works please contact Council on 8522 9211 or at council@gawler.sa.gov.au

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The media may make contact with Mayor Karen Redman on 0421 839 359