

Pihama memorial on the move

By LAIRD HARPER
and KELLY LONEY

PIHAMA'S cenotaph has found a final resting place worthy of its status, local residents say.

The monument to the town's fallen soldiers was caught between the dilapidated background of the town's now defunct school and the busy Surf Highway 45, Doug Campbell said.

Last week, Pihama residents were given the thumbs up by the South Taranaki District Council to move their memorial to the town's cemetery.

Mr Campbell said long before the school closed, the community had discussed moving the monument because of its closeness to the road. The school's demise was the final straw.

At a full council meeting on Monday Pihama resident Paul Bourke told councillors the site had become derelict and was intimidating for some people.

"The cenotaph has lost its appeal but not its respect," he said.

Mr Bourke said the Lizzie Bell

cemetery on Puketapu Rd would be ideal for the monument.

"(The school) doesn't have the feel or character it once did. The cemetery has people who can give it tender loving care."

Opunake-based councillor Ian Armstrong said Mr Bourke had underestimated the state of the school.

"There's been squatters, the school's been trashed. It's gone beyond a feeling of indifference to a feeling against it. The community would prefer not to go there and have their noses rubbed in it."

At that same meeting Mayor Ross Dunlop said it was "a little frustrating" to find the community had changed its mind and no longer wanted it at the school.

The council had paid the Crown \$5000 for 4sqm of land surrounding the cenotaph in 2005.

The Pihama community wanted to protect the cenotaph from passing into possible private ownership when the school went into the Crown land bank process after closing.

"Maybe we could have saved ourselves some effort there. There was discussion with the community to make sure they were getting it right," Mr Dunlop said.

Councillor Kirsty Bourke said she was "not actually very comfortable with it being moved".

She didn't want the council to spend \$7000 transferring the land ownership back to the Crown.

"What are we going to be left with, a scrubby bit of land in the middle of nowhere with a plaque?"

Mr Campbell said he understood some council members were concerned about the proposed move but said it was the right decision.

Deputy mayor Debbie Packer recommended moving the monument quickly before it was caught up in internal politics.

"Endorse moving it so it's in safe hands."

The council approved the recommendation to relocate the cenotaph and the land it currently sits on will stay in council hands.



Moving home: Pihama resident Doug Campbell is pleased with the decision to move the cenotaph to the cemetery. Photo: LAIRD HARPER