

St. Johns Cemetery, Hitchin – Project Brief

Site Description

St. Johns Cemetery is owned and managed by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC). It is located in the centre of Hitchin, with Standhill Road running along the northwestern boundary and St. Johns Road along the southeastern boundary, see Map 1. The cemetery covers approximately 5.64ha in total, divided into three distinct sections based on the age of the graves. To the southwest is the newest area of the cemetery which is separated from the old parts by Cemetery Road. The oldest part is by the old Chapel in the northeastern third of the site (approximately 1.46ha). This area is now predominately closed to future burials and NHDC is seeking to give this area a new future function and community use.

This section is characterised by older graves, those with head stones are generally placed along the edges of these areas by the pathways, with a scattering of memorials and flat tablets marking those within the main part of this area of the cemetery. There are a large proportion of unmarked graves in the main part which are largely thought to be pauper, children and workhouse people graves. Surfaced routes run round the perimeter and through this section of the cemetery. An old brick wall bounds the site on the north, east and west boundaries, along the Standhill and St. Johns Road ornate wrought iron railings are incorporated in the wall along with a tall wrought iron gate on the main vehicle access off St. Johns Road. See Map 2 for full site description.

The area has a large number of planted trees including a line of Lime trees along the access route from St. Johns Road, Silver Birch, Red Oak, Robinia, Blue Cedar and Beech. A large number of Yew and Holly trees are scattered across the area as maidens and also in groups some of which are thought to be self-set. In addition there are a number of Box shrubs across the area some of which are currently maintained as square, round or A-shaped topiary. The main grassland areas have a tight, short mown, grassy sward with a low percentage of herbs for example Yarrow, Daisy, Common Cats Ear and Mouse-eared Hawkweed.

Project Vision and Aims

Vision

To design a series of colourful, attractive spaces, rich in wildlife, within the older area of St. John's Cemetery to provide a place for the public to scatter ashes, for quiet contemplation and remembrance of those they have lost and for the whole local community as areas of additional multi-functional space for quiet enjoyment.

Aims

1. Develop an area of remembrance where people can scatter ashes without the need for memorial structures.
2. Develop a colourful, attractive space, rich in wildlife throughout the year.
3. Provide a quiet and relaxing multi-functional space for the whole of the community.
4. Achieve a modern and contemporary feel whilst drawing on the historic identity of the site.

Proposals Outline

The following proposals will be delivered through a phased, gradual approach giving users the opportunity to adapt to the change of management and maintenance regime of this part of the cemetery. See Map 3 for phase locations. Thumbnail pictures show examples of the aimed outcome of the work proposals.

Current Trees and Bushes

- Remove some of trees to open up areas and vistas e.g. self set Hollies, multi-stem Sallow, Yews within groups

- Reduce clusters of trees in particular groups of Yew so that the retained Yews can be potentially sculpted in geometric topiary shapes
- Select feature trees e.g. Blue Cedar, Robinia, Beech and Red Oak to be retained as focal points within the contemplation areas
- Reduce number of box shrubs and utilise remaining as features sculpting in geometric topiary shapes and potentially into an archway at one point



- Careful tree selection to retain the cemetery feel of seclusion and peacefulness

Open Areas

- Remove some trees (as identified above) and utilise retained trees as focal points and also to guide the eye to vistas (other focal points) for example the Chapel.



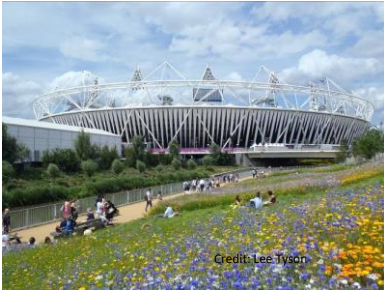
- Reinforce these focal points with areas of colourful perennial flowers of native species supplemented with non-native species to give a longer flowering/colour period which border mown grass paths and intersperse mown areas of grass for quiet contemplation
- Mark outline of mowing areas with spring flowering bulbs e.g. crocus set along edge, this will also provide early colour and at the end of the flowering period the mowing line will have been set



- Relax mowing around grave stones to provide longer grass back drop to shorter areas, block sow seed into these areas to enhance colour, provide narrow mown paths between graves for access as necessary



- Link areas for quiet contemplation with mown paths with views to colourful blocks of wildflowers which guide people through the cemetery areas to other focal points, back to surfaced paths, main entrance and chapel.



Site Infrastructure

- Site benches at key points to supplement areas where people can sit on the grass, utilise grave stones, chapel and surrounds to inspire bench design.



- Interpretation panel at the chapel informing visitors of the change of management, with links to graveyard history, type of grave stones and wildlife. Metal supports for panel to be in a style in keeping with current wrought iron work.
- Restoration of old Baldock Town bins for use in the cemetery.

Potential Species for Inclusion

Seed Mix for general application: Yellow Rattle, Bulbous and Meadows Buttercups, Black Knapweed, Oxeye Daisy, Cowslip, Field Scabious, Agrimony, Meadow Cranesbill, Harebell, Musk Mallow, Perforate St. Johns Wort, Common Toadflax, Verbena, Lady's Bedstraw, Common Bird's Foot Trefoil, Meadow Vetchling, Wild Carrot, Selfheal, Yarrow, Lionsear (Leonotic leonurus), Calendula and Cosmos

Bulbs for mowing line marking: Crocus

Phase 1 Timetable

Timing	Led	Action	Estimated Volunteer Days	Estimated Staff Days
04/2013	CMS	Mark out new cutting regime	-	2
04/2013	NHDC	Meet with J. O'Connors to discuss and agree above	-	0.5
05/2013	NHDC	Amenity mow pathways and short grass areas as identified on map and on ground marking	-	0.5
05/2013	CMS	Employ contractor and liaise on design and fabrication of interpretation panel	-	1
05/2013	CMS	Employ topiary consultant to advise on feasibility of topiary proposals	-	0.75
06/2013	NHDC	Amenity mow pathways and short grass areas as identified on map and on ground marking	-	-
06/2013	CMS	If feasible, run topiary consultant led training courses on site for volunteers	1	1
06/2013	CMS	Manufacture and install benches as suitable locations	1	1
07/2013	NHDC	Amenity mow pathways and short grass areas as identified on map and on ground marking	-	-
07/2013	CMS	Install interpretation panel	0.5	0.5
08/2013	NHDC	Amenity mow pathways and short grass areas as identified on map and on ground marking	-	-
08/2013	NHDC CMS	Cut and lift long grass areas to be carried out annually in following years	-	0.5
08/2013	NHDC CMS	Meet with Tree and Cemetery Officers to discuss and mark up trees for removal and crown lifting	-	1
09/2013	CMS	Volunteer topiary trimming	3	1
09/2013 to 02/2014	CMS/ NHDC	Carry out selective tree removal and crown lifting following consultation with Tree and Cemetery Officers	1	1.5
09/2013 to 10/2013	CMS	Wildflower Establishment:		
	CMS	1) Lightly harrow areas to prepare ground	-	0.5
	CMS	2) Apply seed to prepared areas with identified seed mix	1	1
	CMS	3) Roll seeded areas to bring seed into contact with soil	-	0.5
	CMS	4) Plug plant into long sward areas with identified species	1	1
10/2013 to 12/2013	CMS	Plant spring flowering bulbs with identified species before the first frost	3	3
01/2014	NHDC	Restore old Baldock Town bins and install	1	0.5
02/2014	CMS	Plan for Phase 2 Delivery	-	2
04/2014	CMS	Wildflower Establishment:		
	CMS	1) Lightly harrow areas to prepare ground	-	0.5
	CMS	2) Apply seed to prepared areas with identified seed mix	1	1
	CMS	3) Roll seeded areas to bring seed into contact with soil	1	0.5
	CMS	4) Plug plant into long sward areas with identified species	-	1

