

**Cemetery Graves Extension at
Reading Crematorium and Cemetery
All Hallows Road Caversham Reading**

Introduction

Information about the site and local area

The proposed development site is situated in Henley Road Cemetery & Crematorium, which is located in Caversham (Peppard Ward), a suburb to the north-east of Reading town centre. Caversham has a population of 23,885 (2011 census) and covers an area of 6.64 km². With the exception of the centre of Caversham and Emmer Green, which were traditional villages, most of the development occurred during the 20th century.

The Cemetery site is at the end of All Hallows Road, which is off of the A4155 Henley Road. The land and buildings are Freehold and owned by Reading Borough Council, which also manages the Cemetery and Crematorium.

Prior to the First World War, before the present cemetery was established, the site was part of the landscaped grounds of the Caversham Park Estate, which can trace its history back to Norman times, when it was laid out and fenced as a park for the hunting of deer and other game. The park was around 300 acres, oval in shape, and covered the area occupied today by the BBC Monitoring site and the residential area of Caversham Park Village. The park remained essentially the same size and shape for over 700 years and was owned by numerous aristocratic and military families until the Victorian times, when the freehold was purchased by a rich Industrialist called William Crawshay in 1844. It remained in the ownership of the Crawshay family until the First World War.

After the First World War, Caversham Park passed out of individual ownership and in 1921 the estate was sold privately to local investors and split up.

The current cemetery site was used as farm land up until 1924 when it was purchased by the Reading Corporation “for the purposes of a cemetery or burial ground”. Henley Road Cemetery was opened in 1927 and is the current burial site for the Borough of Reading but also accepts burials from the wider area. There are currently 25,000 graves for full/coffin burials and 3,000 cremation plots for burial of cremated remains, covering an area of 50 Acres. Large areas of the site consist of traditional style graves with headstones and kerbsets.

The application site forms part of land originally acquired in 1924 for cemetery purposes. However in 1937 the Council gave temporary permission for the plot to be used for recreational uses until the site was needed for cemetery purposes.

The Cemetery also contains 118 Second World War burials, about half of them forming a war graves plot immediately inside the main gates.

Relevant Planning History

The Cemetery site has the following planning history:

- 171021 - New reception and administration building - Granted.
- 031357 - Extension to provide 3,256 additional grave spaces car parking and boundary railings, on land to the west of the current crematorium - Granted.
- 030010 - Extension to crematorium to provide 3,344 additional grave spaces and erection of boundary railings - Granted.
- 930318 - Extension to the office and reception area in the Lodge - Granted.
- 900397 - Construction of a glazed entrance canopy for the main chapel of the Crematorium - Granted.

Reading Borough Local Development Framework

Core Strategy, Adopted January 2008

The Core Strategy for Reading was adopted by Reading Borough Council on 29th January 2008. This document sets out the overall planning strategy and broad principles for development in Reading.

The following policies are considered relevant to the determination of this planning application.

The Reading Borough Local Plan classifies the location of the Development site as Zone 4, Wider Urban Area.

The development site is not within a Conservation Area and the only notable feature in the surrounding area is Caversham Park, a Grade II Listed Victorian stately home (rebuilt after a fire in 1850) with parkland directly to the north of the cemetery.

None of the buildings on the cemetery site have Listed Status and the site is not within the flood plain of the River Thames.

Relevant Planning Policies

The following policies are considered relevant to the determination of this planning application.

National Planning Guidance

National Planning Policy Framework

Reading Borough LDF Core Strategy (Adopted January 2008, 2015)

CS7 Design and the Public Realm

CS20 Implementation of the Reading Transport Strategy

CS24 Car /Cycle Parking

CS28 Loss of Open Space

CS31 Additional and Existing Community Facilities

CS34 Pollution and Water Resources

CS36 Biodiversity and Geology

CS37 Major Landscape Features and Strategic Open Space

CS38 Trees, Hedges and Woodlands

Sites and Detailed Policies Document (Adopted October 2012, 2015)

DM1 Adaptation to Climate Change

DM4 Safeguarding Amenity

DM12 Access, Traffic and Highway-Related Matters

SA16 Public and Strategic Open Space

SA17 Major Landscape Features

Why is the Proposed Development Necessary?

This application seeks approval relating to the change of use of land (referred to as Chiltern Recreational Grounds) to burial plots to extend the existing cemetery.

The existing cemetery, without using any adjoining land would last for circa. 10 years.

Chiltern Recreational Grounds forms part of the land originally acquired in 1924 for cemetery purposes, but until now, there has been no need to use this land for burial plots. This area of land has been used for recreational activities for circa. 70 years. This land, comprises 1 ha and if brought back into use, would increase the cemetery's life by 10 years. The site would provide 1376 burial plots.

Site Location & Description

Site description

The cemetery and crematorium is located at the north end of All Hallows Road in Caversham. The application site relates to an area of land which comprise of 1 ha currently referred to as Chiltern Recreational Grounds located southwest of the cemetery. This land comprises 1 ha and if brought back into the cemetery would increase the life by 10 years

The site is located within a defined 'Major Landscape Area' as defined by Policy SA17 of the Sites and Detailed Policies Document (2012, 2015) and the area in which it is proposed to extend the cemetery is an area of Public and Designated Open Space as defined by Policy SA16. The cemetery is also designated as a 'habitat area'.

The Proposed Extension, Design Objectives and Layout

The proposal is to extend the cemetery with additional 1376 graves spaces created to the southwest into the recreation area. The extension will be accessed via the rationalisation of existing Mayfields cemetery car park access road and new hearse access at gap along the avenue of mature trees; this will allow hearse access to all areas of the cemetery extension. The proposal will also be augmented by a network of footpaths to ensure easy access to all areas of the site. The proposed layout is shown in Figure 3. The development will retain as much existing grass land and trees as possible. In addition to this, landscaping and the creation of new wild flower meadow located to north east of the Cemetery will be undertaken at the same time to enhance the public open space for visitors.

The National Planning Framework defines open space as 'all open space of public value, including not just land, but also areas of water (such as rivers, canals, lakes and reservoirs) which offer important opportunities for sport and recreation and can act as a visual amenity'.

Policy SA16 informed by the Council's Open Spaces Strategy (2007) defines cemeteries as 'Green Space' and a subset of 'Open Space'. Therefore in policy

terms we consider the use of land for burial plots as part of the existing cemetery compliant with policy and would not conflict with Policies SA16 or CS28.

We also consider that the extension of the cemetery would comply with Policy CS31 which encourages the provision of new, extended and improved community facilities.

Site Analysis

Site Description and Setting

The site will be accessed through the existing cemetery with the current cemetery access and parking layout rationalised to serve both the existing Mayfields cemetery and the new extension. We believe that the additional 1376 graves, will not significantly increase peak hour vehicle movements and we are able to confirm that there will be spare capacity within the proposed car park to accommodate additional visitors to the cemetery and is in accordance with Policies CS20, CS24 and DM12

Impact of Neighbouring Housing.

The site is overlooked from the houses beyond the boundary of the site to the west, but it is screened by a mixture boundary treatments and mature trees. Subsequently, we do not consider our proposal will affect the amenity of these properties and complies with DM4.

General Design Statement

The proposed site would be converted into a cemetery taking inspiration from the shape of the available land and desired layout orientation; juxtaposed with the current cemetery design and layout.

The extension would provide additional capacity for traditional burials and landscaping and focal point would be created in key positions within the burial site.

The main objective of the development will be as follows:

- To mitigate any impact resulting from the development of this site, specifically relating to the construction of any footpaths
- To enhance the biodiversity within the site by protecting and managing the trees and creating new wild flower meadow within the cemetery.

The concept of the design is to create a sustainable and aesthetically pleasing open space working with the existing landscape to maintain its setting and provide a range of burial options sensitive to modern, formal and multicultural burial practice. We believe the proposals therefore comply with SA17 and CS37 and will not detract from a Major Landscape Area.

The use of colour is an essential part of the design brief and would be achieved through the use of low maintenance tree and shrub species to provide seasonal colour variation that is complementary to the existing boundary features.

The development of the site is deemed to very much enhance rather than detract from the local ecology and provide new habitats.

The resultant cemetery will provide its visitors with an experience of beauty and tranquillity that is easily accessed by all and will be sufficiently welcoming to attract members of the public who wish to walk through its grounds as a place of contemplation and reflection, to enjoy the range of planting and landscape design and explore the wildlife enhanced areas.

It is important that all phases of design take into account the practical management issues associated with grounds maintenance and grave site access on both the formal and informal areas without creating an overly clinical perspective.

On the areas where grass cutting and turf maintenance is required, it would be undertaken quickly and tidily with minimal staff requirement. Roadways and pathways will be durable, porous paving surfaces with coloured gravel incorporated in the mix for use on pathways.

Movement and Connections

The approach embraces formal and informal movement routes to integrate and connect the facility more widely to the landscape.

Vehicle movement has been designed to access from the existing cemetery but minimise the amount of roadway in contrast to the existing cemetery, allowing access for burials and especially hearses but not acting as borders to plots. This allows the site to blend more naturally into the surrounding areas rather than isolate burial areas within a border of hardstanding. Vehicular access to the burial lawns is provided along a series of spokes with a vehicle turning area at strategic locations. This not only reduces the visual impact of the development, it also offers a more efficient use of the land available

Landscape Setting and Treatment

The existing qualities of the site, including the topography, trees, hedges, views and vistas have been exploited to provide an attractive and mature setting. The existing vegetation provide a mature boundary to the site whilst the small trees and shrubs already within the site serve to break up the boundary lines softening the site and creating a more natural feel. Shrubs and tree planting within the planned cemetery will seek to compliment these existing trees and further soften the lines of the boundary fencing and road ways.

Neutrality and Inclusion

The need for the proposed development to be inclusive was a key principle of the design concept. An inclusive development is one which creates a place that everyone can use with comfort, dignity and convenience regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, disabilities, beliefs or circumstances. The site shall act as a permanent green space and buffer from any future proposed development. The development will complement the surrounding green spaces areas and will provide a respectful recreational open space.

Hard Landscaping

A cemetery should not be considered as a public park with a large expanse of green space and little hard landscaping. The design of the cemetery is therefore a compromise between maintaining a green open space ethos and delivering “unhindered access” to the point of burial by funeral car and pedestrians for all members of the community.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) together with Health & Safety legislation with respect to the manual handling of a coffin from the funeral car to the grave side has led to the current cemetery recommendation that a burial plot should not be more than twenty five metres from a roadway or major footpath and five metres from a minor footpath.

Parking and Existing Access

As previously stated the cemetery extension will use the existing cemetery entrance and rationalised parking area to Mayfields cemetery.

Constraints

To preserve the avenue of mature trees amenity, the grass land under the canopy will be left undeveloped apart from a vehicular and pedestrian links, the former to be constructed at a gap in the canopy and the latter under the canopy; these links to be formed using porous paving and grass grid. Existing metal railing and wire mesh fencing to be removed to integrate the cemetery extension with the greater cemetery.

Landscape and general maintenance access borders have been included in the design for householder access to their rear boundary and horticultural access by plant and machinery.

Wheelchair accessible routes provided from car park to the whole of the cemetery extension.

Burial vehicular access to burial plots, achieved by means of grass grid verges to pathways to form a single track access.

Conclusion

The proposed development seeks to optimise useful burial space whilst preserving and enhancing the particular wildlife and habitat value of the site as it is at present. The access to the site is via the existing cemetery and will have little impact on current highway traffic flow. By rationalising the existing car parking access is maintained for all members of the community.

A separate Ground investigation and Tree Survey have been submitted as part of the planning application.