



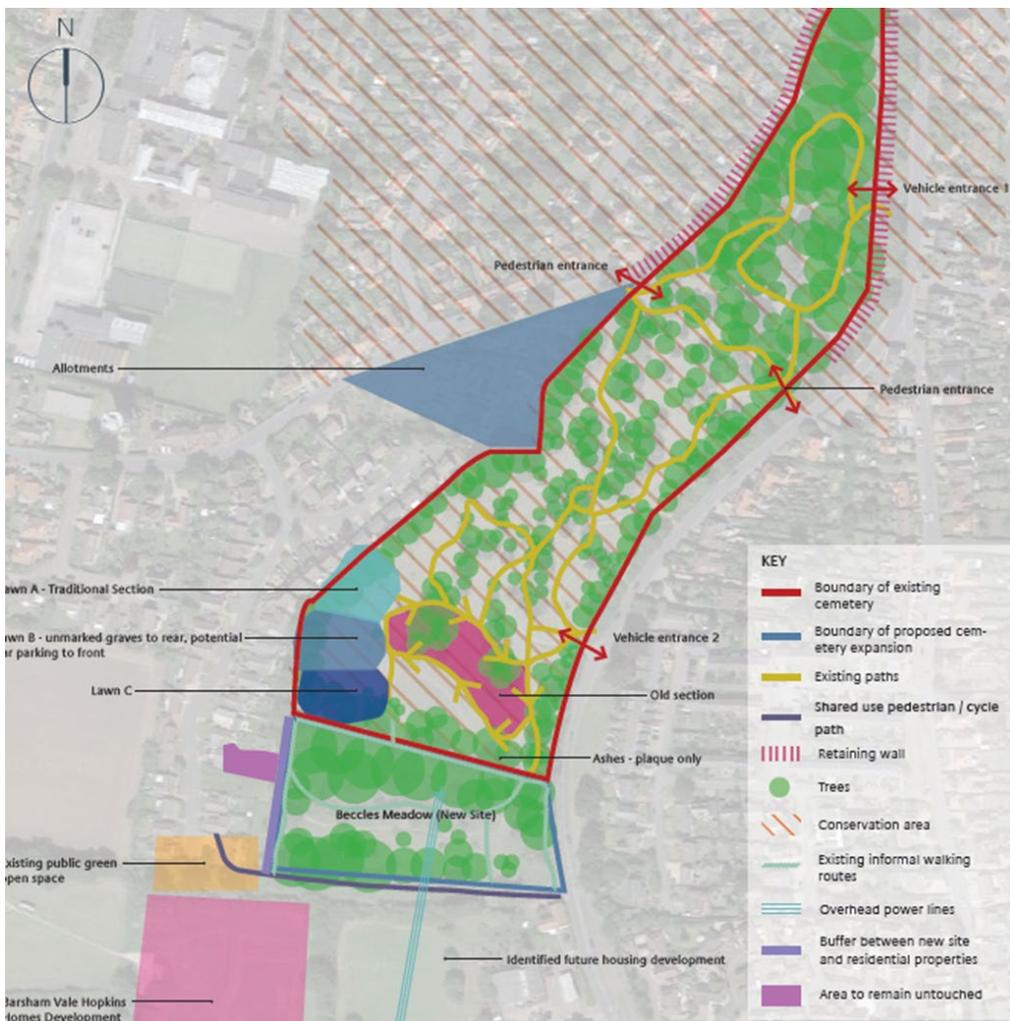
## **CONSULTATION - PROPOSED EXTENSION TO BECCLES CEMETERY**

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1. East Suffolk Council undertook a recent review of its management of the Cemetery and Closed Churchyard service. Part of this review sought to understand the capacity of council-owned cemeteries and where additional space could be found, to provide ongoing burial facilities that will meet the needs of the bereaved.
- 1.2. The review identified that there were areas within the district that had limited capacity left for burials (under 15 years at existing levels), Beccles was identified as one of these, along with Bungay.
- 1.3. An exploration of providing additional land at Bungay has shown that there is no suitable space available within the town's footprint. However, there is a council-owned piece of land adjacent to Beccles Cemetery that is proposed as an extension, currently managed as a woodland and meadow site.

### **2. PROPOSAL FOR EXTENSION**

- 2.1. The Council commissioned AREA Landscape Architects to investigate options for sensitively expanding the existing cemetery into the area of land to the south of the site, known as Beccles Meadow.
- 2.2. The new site forms a very attractive area of woodland and meadow, with high biodiversity value which also contributes to Public Open Space. There is a shortfall of Public Open Space in this part of Beccles (Open Space Needs Assessment July 2015), therefore this site provides a valuable amenity to the local community.



- 2.3. As the site is valuable to both the Beccles community and as ecological habitat, the landscape architects were asked to look at a more sensitive approach to converting the area for burials than would traditionally have been considered.
- 2.4. The study was carried out using five key principles:
- Increase the provision of burial and cremation plots for the Beccles Community
  - Improve the green credentials of burials on the site, in keeping with the Council's green agenda and policies
  - Continue to provide a choice of burials/ cremations for the Beccles Community
  - Maintain the tranquillity and biodiversity of the site as much as possible
  - Continue to provide the accessible green space that the public currently enjoys
- 2.5. Beccles cemetery site within the boundary of the new Beccles Conservation Area, however, the boundary stops at the line of trees to the north of Beccles Meadow, meaning the new site is not within the conservation area. Any changes to the new site would need to consider the impact on the Conservation Area, for example, tree removals, which will need to be sensitively considered.
- 2.6. The north of the site connects with the existing cemetery, with newer burial plots closest to the new site and plots getting progressively older, towards the north.
- 2.7. To the West of the site, is a line of residential properties, predominantly single-story bungalows, with a number of dormer windows present. The rear gardens are facing the site with 1.8m high closeboard fence forming the boundary. A buffer will be provided between burial plots and the residential properties.
- 2.8. The cemetery service currently provides five options at Beccles:
- Traditional burial plot

- Lawn burial plot
- Cremation plot
- Scattering of ashes
- Biodegradable casket burial plot

2.9. The new proposals take these options and develop them towards greener credentials, as follows:

- A number of traditional plots will be provided
- Meadow burial plots instead of lawn burials. Grasses will be left to grow in the summer months, rather than on strict cutting regimes
- Cremation plots will remain similar to existing ones, but strict rules on ornamentation and memorials will be enforced to aid with maintenance and improve the environment. Grass between the plots will be left to grow in the summer months.
- Ash scattering
- Green burials - that follow guidance on green burials to limit environmental impact, with no-embalming and only biodegradable materials.

2.10. The new proposals offer circa 1045 new plots for burials and a further 1000 locations for interment of ashes. This will provide approximately 81 years of additional space at current levels

2.11. The proposed plan and key are shown below:

Proposed Site Plan



## Proposal Plan Key

<p> 7.0 Existing trees - Selective removal to open up space and allow for better tree health and establishment. At a future stage, the trees will be surveyed and trees identified for removal. Current positions of existing trees are indicative.</p>	<p> <b>Woodland burials</b> - Approx. 240 plots 1,520m<sup>2</sup> The intention for this area, is for it to always primarily look like a woodland, rather than a burial site. This area could be used for natural burials. To qualify as a "natural burial" a funeral must have no impact on the environment. Cremation (which uses fossil fuels) and embalming (which uses chemicals) of the body is not acceptable. The grave must be hand dug to a single depth, and the coffin must be made of biodegradable material such as recycled paper, cardboard, wicker, willow, banana leaf or bamboo. However, shroud burials are also encouraged. The graves are not marked with a headstone, but in many woodland cemeteries a tree sapling can be planted over the grave. There is the possibility of the burial plots to be marked using a map or gps system, so that people can return to the site in years to come. It is possible to do a form of green burial instead, which does not follow all of these strict principals, it just won't be considered a natural burial and would not benefit from being advertised on natural burial websites. The trend seems to be that green and natural burials are becoming ever more popular, especially as people become more aware of them. This area could also be used for scattering of ashes, however a separate scattering site is also provided for those who would prefer not to scatter ashes over the graves of others. The potential number of plots will be impacted by the nature of the area, with large tree roots etc, so the final number of plots is likely to differ to that shown on plan.</p>
<p> New trees - These are currently shown in indicative locations. At a future stage, these will be carefully positioned to aid screening, mitigate for tree loss and enhance the site character</p>	<p> <b>Buffer/ screening vegetation</b> - plots. 3,120m<sup>2</sup> The planting is to provide a buffer and visual screening from boundaries and walks around the site. The planting type will fit with the existing habitats on the site, to continue the naturalistic feel. Maintenance and plant height will be carefully considered, to avoid shadowing.</p>
<p> Areas of existing vegetation to remain</p>	<p> <b>Traditional graves</b> - Approx. 250 plots 1,610m<sup>2</sup> Traditional graves will appear the same as within the original cemetery site, with the full plot able to be marked out and the spaces between the graves maintained whilst the plot is leased. These are the most manicured plots on the site and are therefore positioned close to the road, as the road will be the biggest change the site will see. This enables the rest of the site to be kept as natural as possible. It is also thought that those wanting a traditional plot, are also most likely to want the hearse as close to the burial plot as possible, where as those wishing for a meadow or woodland plot, will appreciate the greener credentials of walking the coffin to the burial site. The trend in burials indicates that this type of plot is losing popularity. As such, the design allows for flexibility, so that this area can grow, or phase out over the coming years, as per the requirements of the cemetery.</p>
<p> <b>Meadow graves</b> - Approx. 545 plots 3,780m<sup>2</sup> The meadow graves are a replacement for the lawn graves in the original cemetery. Instead of close-mown lawns, this area will be left to naturalise with local meadow species. The meadow will be left uncut between May and late July. Grave markers in this area will need to be carefully considered, possibly natural markers only e.g. wood, natural stone. The idea of this space is for it to appear as a meadow. Grave markers can add an interesting aesthetic in meadows, such as the original cemetery site, where the grave markers rise above the meadow grasses. During late autumn, winter and spring, the site will look more like a traditional lawncemetery. It would help to explain the concept of the site to people during plot selection, to have lots of photos of the site in summer with the meadow. The meadow will provide naturally occurring grasses and flowers, which will serve as a memorial to the deceased. It could be encouraged that flowers are left on graves during the spring, autumn and winter, rather than the summer. No artificial flowers or ornamentation, which contradicts the nature of the site and can impede maintenance.</p>	<p> <b>Ashes memorial garden</b> - Approx. 1000 plots 560m<sup>2</sup> This area allows for urn plots with plaques. With the increase in the popularity of cremations, this area is likely to grow. In order to give this area a naturalistic feel, we would recommend strict rules are enforced in terms of the type of memorial that is placed here, with no artificial flowers or non-natural materials. The type of memorial plaque should also be carefully considered to be in-keeping with the site. A grey granite, rather than polished black, as an example.</p>
<p> <b>Scattering garden</b> - This area is a woodland walk free of burials. It will be a quiet and tranquil space within which to scatter the ashes of loved ones. No memorials or markers in this space.</p>	

- 2.12. Areas have been identified on the plan proposals, to show where the different allocations work with the existing character of the site, however, these are flexible to enable the site to develop as per the choices of people through the lifetime of the site. For example, if traditional plots become less popular, these can be used as meadow plots instead.
- 2.13. The cremation plot area can expand into the meadow, and green burials in the woodland could become more traditional woodland burials if need be.
- 2.14. Meadow burials could also be used for green burials too.
- 2.15. Selective removal of trees within the woodland, will improve the health and establishment of existing trees and provide space for burials.
- 2.16. The existing footpath network is proposed to remain largely as is, to continue to provide walking routes through the site. The circular route around the outside will feel set aside from the burials, with buffer planting to ensure the site remains attractive to the local community, without walkers feeling like they may be intruding on the grief of others.

The Council is now seeking views on the proposals, which can be given by emailing [leisure@eastsoffolk.gov.uk](mailto:leisure@eastsoffolk.gov.uk) by 31 December 2021.