



New Cemetery with Wider Community Benefits

A unique, modern cemetery designed to tackle the increasingly urgent problem of lack of burial space as well as providing valuable community facilities, has been granted planning permission by Mid Bedfordshire District Council. Designed by Mæ Architects, Wilbury Hills Cemetery and Chapel will offer a completely modern approach to burial, providing contemporary burial facilities, valuable amenity space for the local community and a non-denominational chapel that can be utilised for community activities as well as prayer.



Entrance

Located near the border of North Hertfordshire District Council, the client for the scheme, Wilbury Hills Cemetery will primarily serve Letchworth Garden City. Aimed at incorporating burial into the community as well as providing much needed public space, the flagship design will combine a number of burial options, including eco plots, child graves, family plots and spaces for niche interments, with park land designed for public use. Similarly, the chapel will be used as a classroom for local children as well as space for funeral services, prayer and celebration. The main hall is orientated for Christians and Muslims, to Jerusalem and Mecca, whilst mausoleums in the surrounding courtyard will meet the needs of the local Italian community. At a cost of £900,000 this, the first of 4 intended phases, will establish an 11-acre site with burial provision for the next 25 years. A further 3 phases, each covering 7 acres, are planned.

The cemetery was designed following a review by CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) who stated, 'We applaud the recognition by the client that a high quality landscape approach to the provision of a new cemetery will give the local community a lasting asset commensurate with its significance to them'. The report went on to say, 'We believe that the scheme has the potential to be an exemplary new cemetery in the UK'. Mæ Partner Alex Ely said, 'Wilbury Hills Cemetery and Chapel provide a real solution to a problem affecting councils throughout the UK. As a culture we have become distanced from our dead and in England particularly there has been little fresh thinking on the subject of burial since Victorian times. We need to start viewing cemeteries as part of the wider community and making the most of their space. In designing Wilbury Hills we wanted to create a new model for a cemetery in much the same way that Letchworth Garden City created a new model for town planning when it was built. We approached the project by considering the broader potential of a cemetery as a public space. By doing so we have provided valuable amenity space, contributing positive social, economic and environmental benefits to the community.'



Courtyard

Councillor Bill Davidson, North Hertfordshire D.C.'s Portfolio Holder for Environment, added 'This new cemetery is intended to become the best practice management flagship for other cemeteries within North Hertfordshire. The Wilbury Hills Cemetery will now provide the people of Letchworth with an appropriate place of remembrance for at least the next 25 years.' Work started in January and is scheduled for completion in September 2006 – follow its progress in TJ, or come to Cranfield, see page 13.