

MASTERPLAN UPDATE

A REIMAGINED CEMETERY

NEW SITE AT HARKNESS

OCTOBER 2022



The Greater Metropolitan
Cemeteries Trust
Lasting memories, peaceful places.



Acknowledgement of Country

The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we operate, the Wurundjeri people and the Bunurong people of the Kulin Nation, who have cared for this land since time immemorial. We pay our respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging, and commit ourselves to a future with reconciliation and renewal at its heart and acknowledge that this project is located on Wurundjeri Country.

AN UPDATE FROM OUR CEO

We are pleased to share this update on the Greater Metropolitan Cemetery Trust's (GMCT) masterplan for the new cemetery at Harkness.

In developing the masterplan, GMCT has engaged with Traditional Owners, stakeholders and local communities to develop a masterplan that responds to their expectations and needs. It is reassuring to know that community and stakeholders share GMCT's ambition to reimagine the public cemetery and provide a place that takes care of their needs now, while providing a valuable community asset for the future.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all who participated in the engagement process. We would like to especially thank the Wurundjeri Elders and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation for your willingness to contribute to and guide the design. We would also like to thank our Advisory Group members who have contributed invaluable input on the diverse needs of their communities, and Melton City Council who have contributed their views and connected us with community throughout the masterplan process.

In this update, we will share with you what GMCT has heard during our six-month engagement process, including the seven key themes that have emerged from GMCT's dialogue with community and stakeholders:

1. Celebrating Wurundjeri Culture, and providing opportunities for education and employment
2. Showcasing sustainable practices and restoring the local ecology
3. Inclusive and accessible memorialisation
4. A peaceful, respectful sanctuary
5. A space for community to celebrate life
6. Safety, access, and movement through the site
7. Activating the site through alternative uses

Since September 2021, GMCT has been working with a consortium of experts, including Aurecon, McGregor Coxall, Architectus and Greenshoot Consulting. We're also pleased to share with you an early preview of the key concepts from the masterplan as proposed by the consortium.

GMCT recognises that this is a significant project for Melbourne's Western Growth Corridor. While we look forward to public release of the masterplan in due course, GMCT is taking some time now as an organisation to assess all the opportunities it presents based on a range of factors, including:

- community and stakeholder suggestions collected through our engagement process to determine what can be considered for the Stage 1 development and what needs to be considered across the lifecycle of the project,
- the operational and financial feasibility and viability of the key features and community suggestions proposed in the masterplan, and
- the external approvals required to realise the concepts developed.

We look forward to celebrating the launch of the masterplan with you and to continue this conversation as a community once the scope and design of the first stage of development is determined.



Andrew Eriksen
CEO
Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust

COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Between November 2021 and May 2022 GMCT and the consortium reached over 26,000 households in the Western Growth Corridor and provided over 100 different opportunities for community members and stakeholders to have their say on the masterplan.

Community members and stakeholders were invited to share their priorities and vision for the site across several key stages of the masterplan development, including:

- from the beginning of the design process, prior to the development of the draft masterplan
- during masterplan refinement, including soft testing of early concept designs and site activation opportunities
- nearing draft masterplan completion, including testing specific site features and designs.

A range of different people contributed their ideas including the Traditional Owners of the site, local community members, industry experts, cultural and religious community groups, government bodies, and innovative future thinkers in the deathcare sector.



26,709

houses were sent a postcard with information about the project



133

survey responses received



490

likes, comments and shares on LinkedIn and Facebook



2605

visits to project website



5

Advisory Group meetings were attended by a total of 28 highly engaged participants



4

community pop ups engaged approximately 500 people



Aerial view of existing site.
Photograph.

What we heard

The following key themes were either expanded upon or captured directly through the engagement process with community and stakeholders.

GMCT is now considering all ideas in the context of the masterplan. Further assessment of ideas will also be undertaken at the detailed design stage.

THEME 1 Celebrating Wurundjeri Culture, and providing opportunities for education and employment

The community was passionate about the inclusion of Wurundjeri people and Culture through environmental and cultural education opportunities. Many people who were engaged mentioned the connection of the land and waterways to the Wurundjeri people and questioned if the site could incorporate elements of storytelling.

THEME 2 Showcasing sustainable practices and restoring the local ecology

There was significant community support for:

- more environmentally friendly interment practices
- opportunities for the site to contribute to ecological conservation, particularly the revegetation of native plants
- measures to attract native wildlife.

During draft masterplan testing, the community was very pleased to see the inclusion of the revitalisation of Arnolds Creek and nature corridors.



Aerial view of existing site.
Photograph.

THEME 3

Inclusive and accessible memorialisation

There was a significant community interest in:

- facilities that would improve the current funeral service options for different faiths or community groups
- interment land and services that ensure funeral services and interment options are accessible, and affordable for all.

THEME 4

A peaceful, respectful sanctuary

While the overall sentiment for this project has been overwhelmingly positive, a hesitation from some stakeholders was identified relating to the perception that some potential uses for the site may cause disruptions for those in mourning or visiting loved ones. The primary community concerns were regarding noise and disruptive visuals. For many people, areas of peace and quiet are important for the process of reflection, especially when associated with grief.

Key considerations suggested include:

- sightline barriers
- physical distance and separation
- noise barriers
- multiple access points for entry and exit.

THEME 5

A space for community to celebrate life

Community members had many suggestions about how the new cemetery at could provide spaces for celebrating life and acknowledging death including:

- lots of green space
- walking and cycling trails
- native plants and attraction of native animals
- spaces for sitting and reflecting
- picnic areas
- maintenance of views
- controlling waste and litter
- using water in the design wherever possible

Early draft masterplan testing revealed a strong sense of community support for integrating nature with the Cultural Core and the Spine. In particular, the community was pleased to see the inclusion of billabongs and native grasses.



Aerial view of existing site.
Photograph.

THEME 6

Safety, access, and movement through the site

Community members anticipated that many future site users may experience varying levels of grief or emotional burden during their journey to, through and from the cemetery. It was emphasised that adequate security, accessibility and clear wayfinding measures would help relieve safety concerns. Vandalism, rubbish dumping, theft, public transport access and road conditions were of particular concern for community members.

In addition to a general concern for the safety and security of the site, the local community raised specific concerns over the southern border near existing residential properties and how to mitigate any impacts.

It was also noted that future site users will have varying levels of accessibility requirements. Draft concepts were tested with individuals with cognitive, visual, auditory and mobility accessibility requirements. This highlighted important considerations such as walking distances, ample seating and accessible audio/ visual equipment.

THEME 7

Activating the site through alternative uses

We sought feedback on potential inclusions which could be considered for interim uses on the site over the project lifecycle. Key community suggestions included:

- community gardens
- a café/restaurant
- a florist or nursery
- educational facilities
- multipurpose community open space and event space
- a dog park and pet cemetery.

REIMAGINED CEMETERY – A PREVIEW OF THE MASTERPLAN

The masterplan for the new cemetery at Harkness is informed by the regional and local surroundings. This is represented through three key axes. These are physical areas on the site. Each provides a different experience:

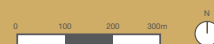
- north-south cultural axis: a series of intimate landscaped spaces creating an other-worldly, inclusive, multicultural journey.
- east-west community axis: the western line is a community space where events and educational experiences can be facilitated. From the east, one moves into the site through the remnant woodlands on the site.
- natural dissecting ecological axis (This means a natural feature which passes through the site): an experience connecting to nature with the restored creek and woodlands.

The three axes meet at a single focal point. This location is called the Core. The Core is a sanctuary for visitors to feel comforted, peaceful, and connected to nature.

Dividing the site using axes is a strong way to plan out which areas would be for interment, and which for events and activities. Clear signage will help visitors navigate easily. This means the site will be set up to enable new types of experiences and activities while respecting cemetery use for memorialisation.

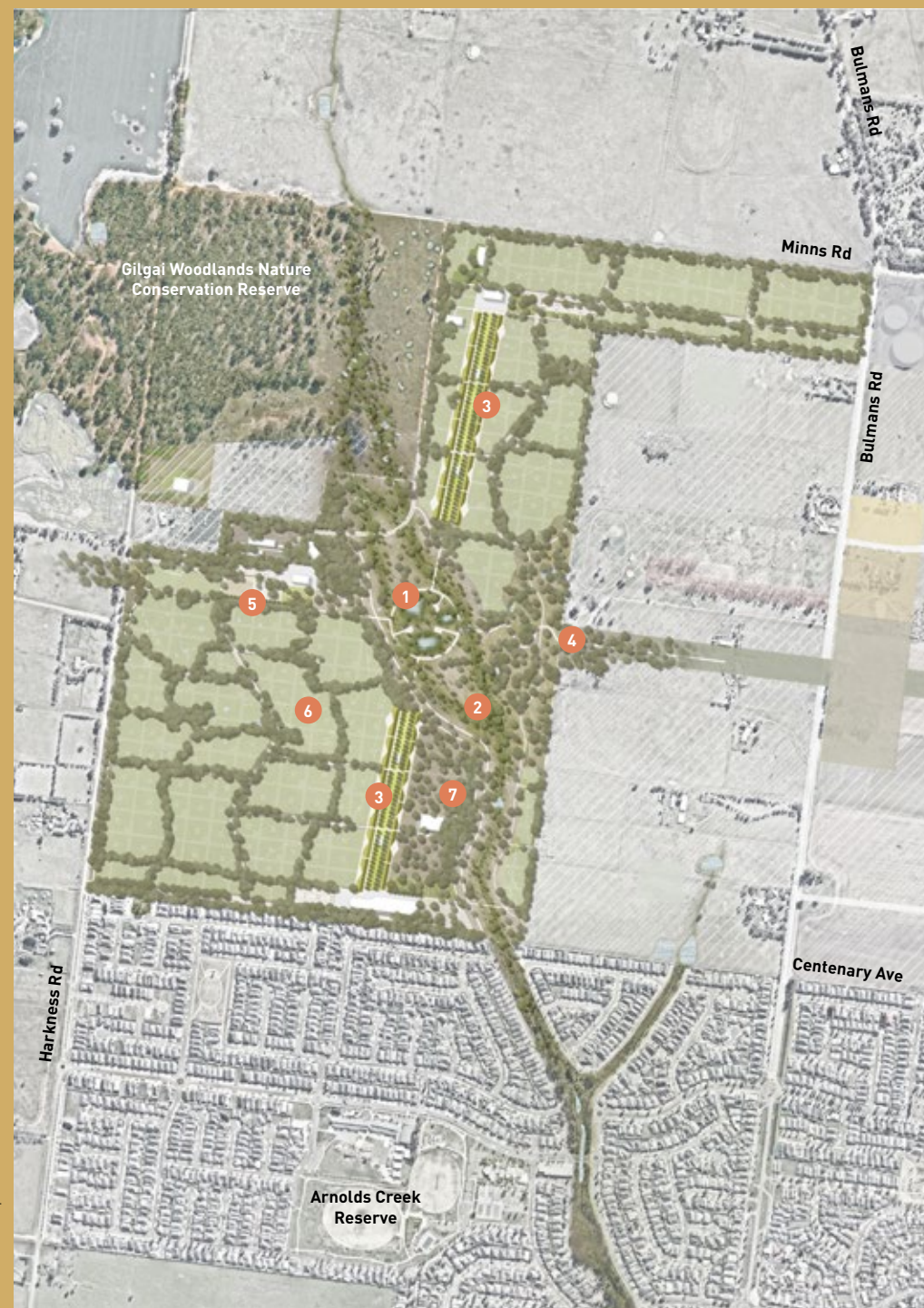
Key Master Plan Areas

- 1 The Core
- 2 Natural Axis – Arnolds Creek West
- 3 North South Axis and Cultural Spine
- 4 East Community Link
- 5 West Community Link¹
- 6 Flexible Interment Land
- 7 Eco-interment Land



Site plan showing key precincts. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

¹ Extension of link across non-GMCT land will be subject to further negotiation as part of future precinct structure planning





Aerial view of cultural spine walkway - Southern Precinct. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

Flexible precincts to cater for current and future needs

The site will be divided into three precincts for vehicles and people, each to be developed at different stages over the next 100 years.

Each precinct will provide a diverse range of features and amenities for visitors. From here, visitors can access interment areas, the Core and Arnolds Creek West Branch corridor.

The Southern Precinct which will be the focus of Stage 1 of this development includes:

- multi-purpose building
- café ,community lawn and play
- Ceremonial building
- Cultural Spine
- Contemplation Gardens
- Arnolds Creek Trail shared user path
- flexible interment
- eco-interment and woodlands
- car park
- gatehouse.

Aerial view of flexible interment area and cultural trails. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.



View of cultural spine walkway. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

Preview of the key masterplan concepts **Celebrating Culture**

As a project of unity and equity, the masterplan for the new cemetery at Harkness represents Reconciliation and a shared future with Australia's First Peoples and Traditional Owners, specifically the Wurundjeri people. The design centres Country as a unifier of Wurundjeri Culture, and the site's context in Melbourne's West.

No matter what religion, culture, or belief, Country is acknowledged through the masterplan as the element common to us all.

The new cemetery prioritises inclusion and flexibility in its approach to burial and memorialisation. It incorporates a range of strategies that aim to accommodate diverse and changing community needs. Some of these strategies include:

- Flexible interment land using a simple layout allowing personalised expressions of culture, religion and diversity
- Eco interment land to accommodate more sustainable interment options
- Accommodations for a future, more sustainably operated crematorium on site.

The masterplan explores opportunities for the celebration and inclusion of all cultures through key concepts such as the Cultural Spine within the North-South Axis – a generously scaled linear park with pavilions and performances spaces flanked by earthen mounds that can accommodate memorialisation.

The Cultural Spine leads visitors on a journey from the northern and southern entries to the focal point of the site – the Core – a natural sanctuary of cultural and ecological significance and place of peace and comfort to connect people with nature and community.



View of eco interment and woodland area. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

Showcasing Environmental Sustainability

Championing more sustainable interment options, the masterplan features eco-interment land nestled amongst endemic woodlands, providing peace, and establishing a feeling of being within the wilds. As a minimalist landscape, the eco-interment land will have no obvious or intrusive interment products. Mown paths, that change to provide new routes and desire lines, offer intrigue, and invite visitors to ramble and explore.

These open woodlands provide habitat for bird species as well as important insects such as butterflies and honeybees. The dense woodlands have thick low and mid understory, perfect for small birds.

Creating a thriving and diverse environment at the new cemetery at Harkness is a foundational part of the master plan and establishing a reimaged cemetery. The natural axis, Arnold Creek West Branch, plays an important role in conveying catchment flows, connecting the surrounding community to nature, and an ecological corridor. The ambition is to protect and enhance the ecological values of the site locally and regionally, expanding and stitching together ecologies to combat the biodiversity crisis.



View of cultural core. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

The masterplan recognises water as one of our most valuable resources and acknowledges importance of our local waterways to Wurundjeri Culture. The masterplan will adopt an Integrated Water Management approach to the planning and management of all elements of the water cycle. This includes protecting and enhancing the health and community custodianship of our waterways, which aligns with the Melbourne Water [*Healthy Waterways Strategy*](#) vision for the Werribee major catchment. The approach considers both stormwater quality and quantity across the site, while maximising stormwater capture for reuse.



Interior of cafe with views to woodland. Concept image by Architectus.

Catering to a growing and diverse community

Melton is a multicultural city with a large migrant population, and this multiculturalism is a deep source of pride for the community. Melton City Council and its residents are active in celebrating this multiculturalism and diversity through events like Djerriwarrh Festival.

The Southern Precinct aims to establish a vibrant new community hub. Here visitors will experience a range of moments created through the arts as they move through the Cultural Spine.

The new cemetery will also provide facilities to ensure greater comfort to those who are interring a loved one or returning to visit through its flexible interment land. The interment land is set up as a series of 'rooms'. Each interment room has an area for picnic, tree canopy and understory for cooling and visual calming, shade, seating and drinking water. This creates an inviting space and increases user comfort to encourage visitors to stay longer. A place for retreat and peace. A backdrop of trees, plants, and cultural trails enable visitors to easily navigate the site on foot.

The masterplan enables flexible burial and memorialisation options to accommodate changing needs as demographics, community and customer expectations and sentiment shift. This includes accommodating the transition to future technologies and sustainable practices.

HOW TO GET INVOLVED

There are several ways to stay involved as this plan progresses into the detailed design phase.



Connect with us online

- Our [YourSay website](#) has the latest news and updates. You can also post questions, and subscribe to our project newsletter at YourSay.
- Connect with us on [Facebook](#) and [LinkedIn](#) where we will update our progress and announce future engagement opportunities.



Become a Reference Panel member

We reach out to our Reference Panel at key moments for their input as this work progresses. Existing Advisory Group members will have an opportunity to opt in to the Reference Panel. Expressions of interest for new members will open in late 2022 on our YourSay website at <https://yoursay.gmct.com.au/harkness>.



Speak to someone in our Community and Communications team

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