



Proposed natural burial site at Churchtown Farm, Saltash and proposal for shared facilities

1. Summary

The following is provided for the consideration of the members of Saltash Town Council. The purpose is to explain the proposal for a natural burial ground and to seek an agreement with the Town Council, subject to contract and subject to planning permission, for a shared arrangement for parking and for a site for a hut.

2. What is natural burial

The concept of natural burial started in the 1990's and is increasingly popular, with over sites 270 in the UK currently. It is popular with people of all religions and none.

Natural burial means being buried in a natural environment in a manner that does not inhibit decomposition but allows the body to be naturally recycled. Bodies are buried at a shallow depth of 2 to 2½ feet in a biodegradable casket made of a material such as willow or cardboard. Graves are dug by hand to ensure minimum impact upon the environment.

A natural burial site creates habitat for wildlife or preserves existing habitats which are rich in flora and fauna. These habitats include woodland, species-rich meadows, orchards, and sustainably managed farmland.

There are no standing headstones but sites provide a variety of ways of remembrance, including smaller flat stones laid flush with the ground (so as not to inhibit mowing), memorial tree planting and planting of wildflower mixes. The location of all burial plots is accurately recorded by GPS.

Families may employ the services of a funeral director but there is no compulsion to do so. A warm, welcoming and organised manager is essential however, as is well controlled management, for instance the provision of approved trees and wildflower mixes and arrangements for their establishment and future management.

Further information is available from the Natural Death Centre with whom we have consulted closely. See <http://www.naturaldeath.org.uk>

3. The proposed site

The proposed site is shown below and in more detail on the plan in the appendix.



The site is ideally situated:

- It is exceptionally beautiful, with views over the River Lynher which are already enjoyed by many, who may in the future wish for themselves or their loved ones to be buried here.
- It is adjacent to the existing cemetery.
- It is easily accessible for people in Saltash.
- It is within an area already managed for conservation and Cornwall Wildlife Trust (as the farm tenant) have said they would be in favour of the proposal because it complementary to the conservation management of the site.

We recognise that Churchtown Farm is a popular and much-loved place for local people to walk. The proposed site will take only part of one field which avoids the most used path which runs diagonally over the field.

There is no landscape impact because the only visible change will be a wildflower meadow and a hedge and fence (see landscape pan in the appendix).

4. How it will operate

The area totals 1.8 acres, with the area available for natural burial plots being approximately 1.4 acres. It allows eventually for about 1,000 natural burial plots of 3.0 x 1.7 metres.

Burial plots will be planted with a wildflower mix to be supplied by the manager of the site to ensure consistency, so that the whole site gradually becomes a wildflower area. It will continue to be maintained as such, and as the site gradually fills the mowing regime will encourage existing wildflowers in the soil to grow here.

A small stone memorial may also be laid on each plot. This will be flush with the ground (1" below turf level to avoid mower damage) rather than being upright. The stones, which will be locally sourced, will be provided as part of the service and this will ensure consistency and quality.

A low, circular Cornish hedge with pedestrian gaps on each side will provide an entrance. Otherwise the boundary with the remainder of the field will consist of a short section of planted hedgerow (which will help provide a sense of enclosure when first entering the site) and a stockproof fence, probably post and rail, for the remainder of the length. This will help maintain the open aspect of the burial ground.

A small number of wooden benches will be provided near the top boundary. The existing hedge/tree boundary will be supplemented with additional planting but otherwise the intention is retain the open nature of the site, the views from which are its main attraction.

Access to the site will for the most part be pedestrian, with the caskets being carried on a funeral bier from the hearse or possibly from the church for church funerals. Access to the field entrance will be needed for hearses, close family members and those with limited mobility.

The natural burial site will either be managed by Antony Estate directly or via a lease or joint venture agreement with a suitable operator.

5. Current position

We have:

- Progressed our plans as far as shown on the attached.
- Spoken to Cornwall Wildlife Trust who are positive about the proposal.

- Had a preliminary site investigation from an environmental consultant who has advised there are unlikely to be any groundwater issues. The next step will be an on-site investigation with trial holes.
- Taken initial advice from an ecologist, with an ecological appraisal to follow.
- We will be engaging with Friends of Churchtown Farm.

Our next step beyond this will be to apply for planning permission, but before doing so there are the following matters which we seek to discuss with Saltash Town Council.

6. What do we seek from Saltash Town Council?

- a. The one essential thing the site lacks is parking. We seek an agreement with the Town Council for a shared parking arrangement in the existing cemetery carpark.

It is anticipated that there is likely to be around one funeral per fortnight. This is based on advice from the Natural Death Association who are the main body of expertise and have a wealth of experienced. We would envisage the use of the car park being via a booking system to ensure there is no overlap in use. We propose that the Town Council is paid an agreed sum per use.

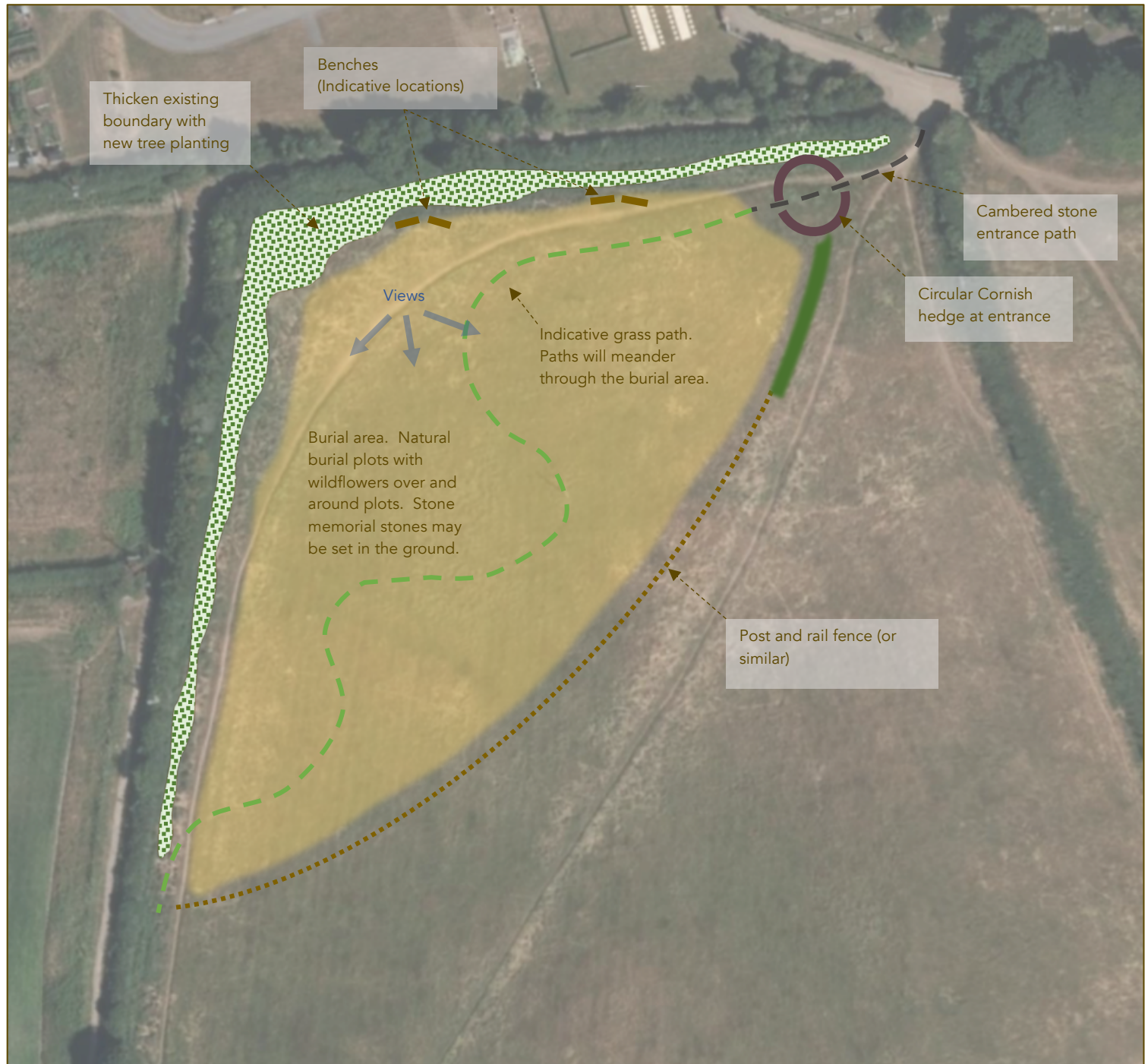
- b. We also seek a lease of a site for a small storage shed (approx. 500 sq ft) somewhere within the cemetery grounds where a funeral bier could be stored, together with small machinery and equipment. We understand that space is limited but we would like to explore this with you.

When we met with councillors and officers on site previously it was agreed that we would provide further details for a presentation once we had considered our plans further. We have now done so and remain willing to give a presentation and/or meet again. We would be grateful if you could give this your consideration and look forward to hearing from you.

William Trinick
Estate Manager

August 2023

Churchtown Farm Natural Burial Ground Indicative design



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