



**The Greater Metropolitan
Cemeteries Trust**

Lasting memories, peaceful places.

MEDIA RELEASE

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NEW HARKNESS MEMORIAL SITE ENTERS NEXT STAGE

The development of a master plan for a new cemetery and parklands in western Melbourne will move ahead with a consortium of expert designers and architects.

The Chair of the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust, Michael Doery said: 'I am pleased to announce that the team of Aurecon, Architectus, McGregor Coxall and Greenshoot Consulting has been chosen as the successful consortium to work with us to develop a master plan for the greenfield site at Harkness'.

'The state of Victoria has a once-in-a-100-year opportunity to work with the community to build a world-class asset that provides comfort to families', said GMCT Chair Michael Doery.

GMCT embarked on an international search for a multi-disciplinary consortium that could respond to the challenge of reimagining the public cemetery for the Victorian community.

GMCT CEO Deb Ganderton explained that: 'Even in these challenging times, we have gone through a rigorous process to attract 24 comprehensive submissions, which were shortlisted to progress to a detailed design stage'.

'The successful consortium team has demonstrated innovation and expertise in other major projects across Australia and will bring their collective ideas to this memorial park development'.

The consortium lead Alistair Adams from Aurecon said: 'The Harkness Memorial Park site presents a significant and timely opportunity to reimagine traditional cemetery design. Our team seeks to set a new benchmark for sustainability, restoration and repair, engagement, honouring memorialisation and enhancing the public realm, whilst celebrating First People's knowledge and culture and honouring the Wurundjeri people as the site's Traditional Owners'.

Alistair Adams expressed the view of the consortium: 'We share in the Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust's compelling vision and look forward to working in collaboration with the wider community to create a world-class memorial park for many generations'.

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Through this process, GMCT is responding to the challenge to develop a new interment space to meet Melbourne's long-term needs.

The greenfield site at Harkness is 128 hectares and will be the largest cemetery to be established in Melbourne for more than 100 years.

ABOUT GMCT

Established in 2010, GMCT is a self-funding Class A Cemetery Trust regulated under the Cemeteries and Crematoria Act 2003 (Vic). We report to the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and are governed by a Trust appointed by the Minister for Health.

Our operations cover the north, west and east regions of metropolitan Melbourne, and we manage 19 cemeteries plus two greenfield sites, including the greenfield site at Harkness.

We are a trusted partner supporting Victorian families through their experiences of life, death and grieving. We provide burial, cremation, and memorialisation services to meet the needs of our diverse communities, and we encourage families to plan ahead.

BACKGROUND

Cemeteries play an important role in our society; they are mirrors of communities and culture, reflections of both the individual and greater community, our ideas of nature and of social norms.

The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust (GMCT) is responding to the challenge to find new burial space to meet Melbourne's long-term needs. That challenge is particularly acute in Melbourne's high growth population corridors such as the north-west.

- Harkness is one of Victoria's newest suburbs, located between Melton West and Toolern Vale adjoining the West Growth Corridor about 40km northwest of the CBD. It is part of the City of Melton that spans 265.9 km² and is home to 135,443 people (2016 census).
- The Melton area has been serviced by the approximately 2.5-hectare Melton Public Cemetery since 1861, which is expected to reach full capacity within two years.

Occupying a 128-hectare site zoned for use as a cemetery, the greenfield site at Harkness will be the largest new cemetery developed in Melbourne for more than 100 years and will be three and half times the size of the Royal Botanic Gardens.

- With residential areas to one side and green wedge zones on the other, the site is located near the edge of Melbourne's growth zone boundary.

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- The site is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri people. Around 100 mature grey box trees on the eastern side of the site are several hundred years old, and some are 'scarred' trees.
- The Melton Gilgai Woodlands Nature Conservation Reserve, at the north-west corner of the site is the last remnant of a larger woodland and is subject to an Environmental Significance Overlay. It is home to various endangered species.

In recognition of the state significance of the opportunity, GMCT embarked upon an international search for a multi-discipline consortium that could respond to the challenge of reimagining the public cemetery of the future for Victorian communities.

- This process sought to elevate the opportunity to create a master plan design that responded to the uniquely Australian context and considered site specific challenges and prospects for now and for next generations.

The Greater Metropolitan Cemeteries Trust is pleased to announce that a consortium comprising Aurecon, Architectus, McGregor Coxall and Greenshoot Consulting (the Consortium) have been chosen to lead the development of a master plan.

- The Consortium will deliver GMCT's bold aspirations to undertake a broad, social values-based approach to the development of a master plan through a thorough engagement strategy that ensures the needs and aspirations of the site's Traditional Owners, communities and stakeholders are listened to, understood, and reflected.
- The master plan will consider multi-use purposes: treating the site as a valued community open space with a multitude of potential uses (in addition to a public cemetery), as well as transition over time to fulfil its potential to meet the burial and cremation needs of Victorians for the next 100 years.
- The master plan development will also undertake a formal naming process.
- The master plan design phases will commence in September 2021 with a deadline for completion in June 2022.

Construction of Stage 1 will commence in line with GMCT's agreed needs and following funding and approval decisions.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why is it important to invest in cemeteries at this time?

A: With Governments looking to an infrastructure-led recovery from the global pandemic and resulting recession, investing in community assets in growth areas is a key lever to stimulate economic development. Urban open space assets like cemeteries are critical for providing healthy places for people, wildlife, trees, and plants.

They provide many functions including improved physical and mental health and wellbeing, improved community and social connectedness, opportunities for sport and recreation activities, preservation of natural environments, climate change adaptation benefits, and urban stormwater management.

Q: What are the different options currently available for memorialisation?

A: Our research partnership with Melbourne University's DeathTech team, 'The Future Cemeteries Project', investigates emerging and future uses for cemeteries. In addition to traditional uses, other emerging uses may include:

- Grief and bereavement support
- Research, education and 'death literacy'
- Events that reflect the diversity of communities who use the site
- Exercise and recreational activities
- Conservation, habitat, and local ecology.

Q: Is this cemetery being developed to create more burial space due to COVID-19?

A: No, the parcel of land has been allocated for cemetery use since before the turn of the century with GMCT becoming custodians of the green field site at Harkness in 2011. In 2013 GMCT commenced further geotechnical studies of the land, flora and fauna studies and a Cultural Heritage management plan that was completed early in 2020. Master planning the site is the next step in the process in the development of the new cemetery.

GMCT has a key role in planning to meet needs of current communities, and there are a number of initiatives already underway to meet those needs in the north and the west, such as our development of Northern Memorial Park and new Keilor and Fawkner Mausolea.

Q: What has the current pandemic taught us about death and dying and the role of the public cemetery?

A: The pandemic has increased the awareness and conversation around death and dying, and the role of compassion and care in protecting the most vulnerable in our communities. With local restrictions around cemetery and funeral attendance juxtaposed against overseas stories of mass public burials, the role of cemeteries is currently in the minds of many Victorians who may not have otherwise thought of the topic previously.

Coupled with the need to find outdoor spaces to safely meet with family and friends and the desire for open green spaces we believe that community interest in their urban open spaces is at an all-time high and will provide a rich source of insights and information through the community engagement phases of the master plan.

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