

MASTERPLAN

A REIMAGINED CEMETERY

NEW SITE AT HARKNESS

FEBRUARY 2023



Cover: View of cultural core. Concept image by McGregor Coxall

Inside: Existing site. Photograph by Ismail Aduleela

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.

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FOREWORD

We are proud to present The Greater Metropolitan Cemetery Trust's (GMCT) masterplan for a landmark new cemetery in Melbourne's rapidly growing western corridor.

The new cemetery at Harkness is on Wurundjeri Country, near Melton. It represents the largest cemetery development in Victoria's history and is GMCT's first greenfield site. It will adapt over time to service Melbourne's diverse and evolving community and connect with new ideas about urban Australia for the next 100 years.

Approximately 40 kilometres northwest of Melbourne's CBD, the City of Melton is one of the fastest growing local government areas. The new cemetery is a significant investment in a community asset that responds to environmental change and sustainability demands, creates jobs and social enterprise opportunities, and supports community use.

Our masterplan seeks to reimagine the public cemetery, delivering a space that is first and foremost a sanctuary for families to remember and grieve. As an innovative community space, new public facilities will make the site a welcoming multi-use space to celebrate life. This includes public access to venues, recreational spaces, suitable retail and parklands. .

The scale and significance of the site means careful future planning, new technology and innovative processes will be central to success. At 128 hectares, the site is more than three times the size of Melbourne's Royal Botanic Gardens and is home to remnant woodland of ecological value, along with thriving wildlife.

To help deliver on its ambitious vision for this site, GMCT appointed a qualified consortium to work on engagement and then on the masterplan for the site. The consortium included Aurecon, McGregor Coxall, Architectus and Greenshoot Consulting. We would like to acknowledge their work in delivering this masterplan.

The site will be a showcase of cutting-edge sustainable practices and the first to be designed to meet our new Sustainability Strategy including a target of zero carbon emissions. Changing needs and expectations about how people will use cemeteries in the future require us to show leadership with new technological responses to death and dying.

Harkness presents the most significant cemetery development in Victoria in a century. Over time it will establish itself as the primary Class A cemetery for the rapidly growing western region of Melbourne.

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This masterplan embraces a unique opportunity to recognise the changing nature of the built environment and the communities it serves, to establish a new type of memorial landscape that understands, benefits from, and responds to the social, economic, and environmental challenges.

Meeting these challenges demands an ongoing community engagement process with strong stakeholder and business partnerships to help shape the direction of the development. We would like to acknowledge the valuable input from Traditional Owners, community members, our stakeholders and our advisory groups. We thank them for their time, dedication and shared vision.



Michael Doery,
Chair, GMCT Trust



Andrew Eriksen,
CEO, GMCT

INTRODUCTION

This masterplan is for an environmentally led project that explores the role of the public cemetery for the future. It is driven by the need to secure local burial supply for western Melbourne and the broader metropolitan area. The project represents a significant opportunity to integrate community, environmental, and commercial activities, with a contemporary approach to burial and memorialisation.

Responding to changing needs

As Melbourne continues to rapidly expand, challenges include:

- increased population density
- urban sprawl
- climate change
- lack of sufficient open public space.

As managers of public spaces with long lifespans, our cemeteries and memorial parks have an increasingly important role to play.

By 2035, the majority of Melbourne's interment plots will have depleted. An interment plot is a grave site, or space for cremated remains. GMCT's immediate challenge is to provide burial, cremation and memorialisation space for communities in the city's north and west growth corridors and surrounding areas.

While this new cemetery is an opportunity to benefit from the foresight of land use planning, which has set aside parcels of land for public cemetery use, public expectations about that use are changing.

The experience people expect from cemeteries is evolving. It is moving away from the traditionally solemn, serious spaces we have come to know to less formal, reflective and sometimes celebratory spaces with unconventional memorials, amenities, and features.

Reimagining the public cemetery

Combined with the broader challenges facing cities worldwide, such as the climate crisis, population density, and community demand for more open space, single-use public land is becoming less feasible. These demands, along with changed public values, call for a changed approach, to include broader, more diverse features in the cemetery of the future.

A reimagined cemetery is critical in addressing these challenges for Melbourne's rapid growth and community expectations.

The new cemetery at Harkness will become an icon in Melton, that reflects GMCT's new approach to cemeteries, burials and memorialisation.

Five themes will guide how we reimagine the public cemetery.

- **Sanctuary** - Visitors will experience feelings of warmth, comfort and peace. They will be able to see a living and continually developing place.
- **Inclusivity** - Visitors will feel welcomed into an accessible local park, not just to remember loved ones but as a community centre. Visitors can experience a range of cultural influences that reflect representation and choice. The space will demonstrate the Aboriginal connection to land and the local stories of Traditional Owners.
- **Sustainability** - Visitors will experience beautifully designed environments with native plants, animals and natural water features. Innovative, sustainable practices will contribute to the growth and development of the natural landscape, and sustainable facilities and processes.
- **Innovation** - Visitors will be able to see a combination of traditional and new memorialisation choices. It will be a modern, regional park that inspires people to keep coming back.
- **Trust** - Visitors will be constantly reassured Harkness is organised and administered in a commercially and environmentally sustainable way.

Working in partnership

The new cemetery at Harkness lies on the traditional lands of the Woi Wurrung language group of the Kulin Nation. The Traditional Owners of the land are the Wurundjeri People. Wurundjeri culture and inhabitation of the land dates back to time immemorial and continues today.

Given the Victorian State Government commitment to Treaty and reconciliation, GMCT is committed to ensuring that this site is a strong example of working with the Traditional Owners to realise their aspirations.

The site has significant cultural and ecological value. GMCT will work in partnership with local people to preserve these values. Located in the City of Melton, the area has a growing multicultural community, actively promoting and celebrating its cultural diversity.

We are committed to hearing all stakeholders' voices and ensuring First Peoples' rich culture and history are celebrated. We first engaged with the site's Traditional Owners and community members before starting any significant design work. Broader engagement included surveys, factsheets, maps, events and online forums, social media channels, postcard mailouts and pop-up information stalls in the local area. GMCT also attended external events and used our Community Advisory Committee to capture a broader range of voices.

We continue to invest in engagement and consultation processes, ensuring Melbourne's diversity and changing needs are represented.

Taking care of the environment

Since European settlement, the site of the new cemetery at Harkness has been significantly altered. However, Aboriginal Culture endures.

The site had been cleared for farming purposes except for a pocket of remnant woodland. These woodlands are of high ecological value and scarce across the state. They are a reminder of the open woodlands that used to dominate the landscape, along with their thriving wildlife. The site is home to various endangered species and forms a significant biodiversity corridor. A biodiversity corridor means an area of native plant life that links to another area of native plant life, forming a channel or corridor for plants and animals.

Crossing the site is the ephemeral Arnolds Creek West Branch. An ephemeral creek is one which doesn't have surface water for most of the year. This creek, however, does support native wildlife and links to the Werribee River catchment, flowing to Port Philip Bay.

GMCT's newly approved Sustainability Strategy will help to support these features.

GMCT's VISION

The reimagined cemetery at Harkness is a trusted and reassuring sanctuary that evokes feelings of warmth, comfort and peace to connect people, nature and community.

YOU SPOKE

WE LISTENED



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

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

The following key themes were either expanded upon or captured directly through the engagement process with community and stakeholders. In this document, GMCT has outlined how each theme has informed the design of the masterplan to date. All concepts included in the masterplan are subject to further assessment of feasibility and viability, and regulatory compliance as the detailed design of each stage progresses.



THEME 1

Celebrating Wurundjeri Culture, and providing opportunities for education and employment

What we heard

Greenshoot Consulting has supported a strategic engagement process on behalf of GMCT to embed the aspirations of the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri people, into the development of the masterplan, in accordance with the principles of the International Indigenous Design Charter.

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.

How we considered this

Feedback from Wurundjeri Elders has sought to be translated into meaningful design action through a process of iterative engagement with Elders through the design process.

The following key activities have been undertaken to support the master planning process:

- Completion of a Traditional Owners Engagement Plan integrated into Stakeholder and Community Engagement Plan.
- A vision alignment workshop across the design and teams to ensure alignment on the opportunities to respectfully engage and embed First Nations culture and knowledge systems into the project.
- A site mapping process, exploring the history of the site and surroundings to help the design teams understand the significance of the site before meeting with Traditional Owners.

- Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation were engaged from the inception of the project to confirm which Elders would be involved through the project and to explore their aspirations using Greenshoot's Indigenous Design Consultation Pillars.
 - Feedback provided by Elders was documented in a detailed report and mapped to Narrative, Design and Activation domains to inform the development of the project opportunities.
 - During design development all design opportunities that responded to the Traditional Owner Feedback were reviewed with the Traditional Owners.
- All cultural elements will continue to be guided by and validated with Wurundjeri Elders.



THEME 2

Showcasing sustainable practices and restoring the local ecology

What we heard

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.

How we considered this

GMCT is committed to working with partners to revitalise Arnolds Creek and vegetation on site. The use of alternative and sustainable sources will be embedded into the design of the masterplan. This includes water harvesting and reuse, as well as the use of solar panels. Recycled materials and those available from the local area will be used in construction and landscaping.

The masterplan aims to prioritise sustainable burial options by encouraging these to be provided in Stage 1 of the development of the site and by considering accommodations for emerging sustainable burial techniques in the future.



THEME 3

Inclusive and accessible memorialisation

What we heard

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.

How we considered this

The masterplan includes multifaith and/or secular facilities for ceremony to encourage equity and give comfort. Additionally, the masterplan provides a variety of interment options which align with GMCT's current products.

Further inclusions and options will be considered in the development of a detailed final design and layout. The design of the site will aim to create safe and inclusive spaces for the variety of cultures, religions and groups present in Victoria, such as the LGBTQIA+ community. More specific measures will be considered during a detailed design to ensure the site is inclusive and flexible.



THEME 4

A peaceful, respectful sanctuary

What we heard

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.

Workshop participants also expressed this sentiment when testing the near-final masterplan. They recommended thoughtful consideration of how to avoid 'collisions' between different site users (for example, a funeral attendee and a recreational park user). Key considerations suggested include:

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

How we considered this

GMCT is committed to its vision of a trusted, reassuring sanctuary for families and communities who visit the new cemetery at Harkness. The masterplan explores opportunities to positively contribute to a process of reflection for future users, while also shifting negative perceptions of a 'reimagined cemetery' by maintaining peace and respect on the site through thoughtful design.

The masterplan aims to manage these concerns by separating memorial and casual visitors to the site. Layering of plants and architecture will help achieve this.



THEME 5

A space for community to celebrate life

What we heard

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.

How we considered this

The masterplan seeks to highlight the natural environment and existing landscapes of the site through:

- restoring the Arnolds Creek Corridor
- supporting the establishment of Gilgai ecologies, and
- expanding the Gilgai Woodlands into the site.

The masterplan also includes a range of areas where water can be used for reflective or calming purposes.

Accessible walking trails and cycling trails are also featured to connect people with the landscape, for both recreation and connection to places of ceremony.



THEME 6

Safety, access, and movement through the site

What we heard

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 impacts to these residents.

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.

How we considered this

The masterplan has ensured key paths will be accessible to provide equity of access to destinations and will link directly to the many available parking opportunities throughout the site, which are located to ensure a maximum walking distance of 200 metres to the majority of interment areas.

The masterplan includes ample buffer planting to screen the site from the southern boundary and discourage any movement through to private properties.

Community concerns which will be further considered and resolved during the development of a detailed design include:

- how the site will consider measures to mitigate vandalism, theft and rubbish dumping
- public transport linkages
- the condition and development of surrounding roads.



THEME 7

Activating the site through alternative uses

What we heard

As a key element of our engagement process, 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 garden
- café/ restaurant
- florist or nursery
- educational facilities
- multipurpose community open space and event space
- dog park and pet cemetery

How we considered this

The masterplan has proposed a variety of learning experiences for users of all ages to connect with the environment and, cultural heritage and to provoke a conversation about our relationship with death. The masterplan includes a dedicated area for nature play in the southwestern corner of the site and the opportunity for playful elements to be included in the proposed community space.

The masterplan considers the possibility of a native nursery, florist, multipurpose open space, event space, and a café. It also includes a platform for events and temporary activities, such as farmers markets and community festivals.

Community feedback highlighted the importance of pets to personal wellbeing and raised suggestions about how this might be reflected in the design. These ideas will be further explored and consulted about as the site is developed, although at present a pet cemetery is not permitted by the relevant legislation.



View of cultural smoking ceremony space.
Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

The landscape, buildings and the way visitors can move through the site will encourage them to think about their relationship with the community and themselves. There will be a powerful central point that focuses our attention on the surroundings and our relationship to Country.

The site draws inspiration from the natural environment such as the woodlands and the expansive grassland plains, helping visitors feel a sense of being embraced and of letting go, providing contrast and enhancing individuals' experiences on site.

The design of buildings and structures is inspired by the site itself, and will be suitable for providing moments of calm and harmony.

Feelings and memories are enhanced through being in the natural environment. Light bouncing on walls, the sounds in the space and views help to envelope the visitor and contribute to the healing process of both people and Country.



View of cultural core reflection areas.
Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

A REIMAGINED CEMETERY

Cemeteries have always been about more than placing one to rest. They are social places that celebrate humanity, life and death, and everything in between. They are institutions that reflect the culture that built them.

The following principles guide planning, design, delivery, and operation:

- be an inclusive, memorable experience of international significance
- repair, care for and connect to Country, advancing reconciliation with First Peoples
- celebrate culture
- connect ecology and community
- create a new benchmark for financial models that support sustainability and resilience
- be regionally responsive and locally specific.

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 Link
- 6 Flexible Interment Land
- 7 Eco-interment Land



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



The masterplan

The masterplan for the new cemetery at Harkness combines structure with an understanding of place to achieve the project's vision, themes and principles.

Three axes, or areas, within the site

The masterplan is informed by the regional and local surroundings. This is represented through three key axes. These are physical areas on the site. Each axis, or area, provides a different experience, and reassuring sanctuary that is welcoming to all:

- north-south cultural axis: a series of intimate rooms creating an other-worldly, inclusive, multicultural journey.
- east-west community axis: the western line is a community experience where people come together to share knowledge. From the east, one moves into the site through remnant vegetation. Remnant vegetation means what is left of plants that were naturally growing on the site in the past.
- natural dissecting ecological axis (This means a natural feature which passes through the site): Arnolds Creek West Branch an experience connecting to nature with the creek and woodlands.

These axes, or the areas that divide the site, create separate spaces, making it clear what different areas are for. This is a strong way to plan out which areas would be for interment, and which for events and activities. Clear wayfinding and signage will help visitors navigate easily. This means the site will be set up to contain or divide certain experiences and activities while respecting cemetery use for memorialisation and encouraging exploration of areas that have a combination of uses.

The three axes meet at a single focal point. This location is called the Core to reflect this connection of the axes and to place and to Country. The Core becomes a natural sanctuary for visitors to feel comforted, peaceful, and to understand connection to Country.



View of the Cultural Spine. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

PROPOSED SITE FEATURES



Legend

- Major entry
- Information point
- Amenity
- Community gardens, open space and play
- Meeting point
- Parking
- Creek environs
- Wetlands
- Maintenance facilities
- Multi-purpose building
- Ceremonial building Sustainable crematorium
- Flexible interment
- Eco-interment and woodland
- Cultural trail
- Food and fibre
- Shared User Path
- Food and beverage



Site map showing key areas of interest in the masterplan. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

INCLUSIVE MEMORIALISATION

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 and expectations over a substantial period. These strategies include:

- **Flexible interment land** using a simple, cohesive layout to support personalised expressions of culture, religion, and diversity across the site. Flexible interment allows for important religious requirements such as directional interment plots to be met. It also provides a blank canvas for cultural celebrations and acknowledgement to be realised through art, sculpture, landscape and other elements. This concept is explained further in this section.
- **Eco interment land** to accommodate more sustainable interment options, such as natural burial, and memorialisation options that have less visual impact, such as ash scattering. This concept is explained further in the Showcasing Sustainability section of this document.
- **A range of memorialisation options** including vertical cremated remains interment and new forms of mausolea along the exterior of cultural spine walkway.
- **Accommodations on site for a cremator** that allows for future exploration and assessment of more sustainable cremation options and their suitability for this site.

Flexible interment land

The flexible interment land is a series of rooms within rooms, creating a personal and intimate scale. Each interment room has an area for picnics, shade from trees, seating and drinking water. This creates an inviting space and increases visitor comfort, encouraging people to stay longer. A backdrop of trees, plants, and cultural trails enable visitors to easily navigate the site on foot.

Key concepts to explore in the detailed design of this land:

- Smaller, more intimate interment rooms within the larger interment rooms of approximately 50 x 50 metres. Each room can establish a different feeling or theme, recognisable to a returning visitor, providing a several different experiences across the space.
- Gathering and contemplation spaces within each interment room to provide an area for visitors, including small groups, to gather near their loved ones under the comfort of trees, shade, and with amenities at hand.
- Cultural trails with sculpture, art and interpretation to embed Wurundjeri Culture. The trails are bordered by plantings that connect to the Gilgai Woodlands and provide shaded pedestrians walkways to interment areas.



Vertical interment options along Cultural Spine for cremated remains memorialisation or potential mausolea. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.



Aerial view of interment 'rooms' and typical interment area layout. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.



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



Aerial view of cultural core precinct.
Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

CELEBRATING CULTURE

Reconciliation with the First Peoples of Australia

GMCT acknowledges this project is located on the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people and places their experience and knowledge at the heart of the design. This is done as part of GMCT's own reconciliation journey and in support of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These call for education to promote a culture of peace and non-violence, an appreciation of cultural diversity, and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.

The area of Melton has areas of cultural significance, including known songlines, artefact scatters and scar trees.

A songline is an Aboriginal walking route that crosses the country, linking important sites and locations.

An artefact scatter is the material remains of past Aboriginal people's activities.

A scar tree is a tree Aboriginal people caused scars to, by removing bark for various purposes such as making canoes, containers, shields and to build temporary shelters. They are important because they provide valuable clues about the use of perishable materials by Aboriginal people.

All Aboriginal cultural places in Victoria are protected by law. Aboriginal artefacts are also protected. It is against the law to disturb or destroy an Aboriginal place. Artefacts should not be removed from sites.

Embedding Wurundjeri culture

As a project of unity and equity, the masterplan for the new cemetery represents reconciliation and a shared future with Australia's First Peoples and Traditional Owners, specifically Wurundjeri. The design response begins with Country. This includes Wurundjeri Culture, and importantly the site itself in the context of Melbourne's West.

Through the process of engagement and co-design, the masterplan integrates opportunities identified by Traditional Owners for ongoing commitment to caring for Country and the celebration of Wurundjeri culture as a living culture.

Feedback has influenced the design as well as providing an opportunity for cultural education, celebration, programming, and business partnerships.

The masterplan helps establish a mutual relationship with Wurundjeri. As a reimagined cemetery it is crucial that it advances reconciliation.

Coming together on Wurundjeri Country

No matter what religion, culture, or belief, a sense of place is common to us all. To show this, the masterplan uses Country as a powerful concept for unity. To help people through the grieving process, journeys through the site allow time and space for people to experience their surroundings, connect and reflect, have conversations, and be in moments of solitude and rest. This variety is important to help meet broad community needs.

Natural and built features will provide both enclosed and open spaces. Drawing on what is in the landscape of the west – the enclosure of woodlands and expanse of grasslands – we use these features to amplify emotions and draw attention to the surroundings, and in particular, Country.



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

CATERING TO A GROWING AND DIVERSE COMMUNITY

Melton is a multicultural city with a large migrant population, a deep source of pride for the community. The 2016 census data shows over 35 per cent of residents were not born in Australia. Melton City Council and its residents are active in celebrating this multiculturalism and diversity. Djerriwarrh Festival is an example of a flagship event that brings together thousands of people to enjoy different multicultural activities and share and learn from each other.

Currently, there are fewer cultural and recreational services in the Melton local government area compared to metropolitan Melbourne. [Creative State 2025](#) is striving to support creative people, ideas and enterprises, and equitable access to and benefits from a rich creative culture. It also recognises the need to look beyond the major cities to ensure remote, regional and outer-metropolitan areas have improved access to cultural experiences, creative expression and rewarding and sustainable careers.

The Southern Precinct: a place for celebrating life and cultures

The Southern Precinct will be the focal point for Stage 1 of the development of the new cemetery. It seeks to establish a vibrant community hub. It is a place for mourners and recreational visitors, and for these visitors to interact. To create conversation, understanding, and break down barriers of the cemetery.

The precinct will draw visitors into site from surrounding residences through clear paths and capitalise on the close proximity of the Arnolds Creek West Branch trails. It is set up to create a powerful yet welcoming experience for visitors and an invitation to understand environmentally conscious burial.

Proposed buildings and structures in this precinct include a multipurpose community and visitor centre, a ceremonial building to cater for diverse needs, pavilions, and other lightweight shade structures.

The precinct will have the capacity to support a range of events and activities including:

- larger scale events in open lawn
- picnic and barbecue facilities for visitors
- areas for active recreation such running, walking and cycling.

Two key features of this precinct are the Cultural Spine and the Core.



Alternate view of cultural spine walkway.
Concept image by McGregor Coxall.



View of multi purpose community and visitors building - Southern Precinct. Concept image by Architectus.

The Cultural Spine

The Cultural Spine is a quiet place for reflection to help visitors feel like they can escape the confines of this world. It provides a personal experience of calm and focus. This beautiful space engages visitors' senses and makes them aware of the environmental and cultural values of our society. It encourages cultural conversations and participation.

The flexible landscapes and lightweight pavilions along the Spine provide places for meeting and gathering, to celebrate and remember, and to find solitude and reflection. Within the Spine there are opportunities for social and cultural events and activities to attract both cemetery and recreational visitors. Examples include art exhibitions, performances, music recitals, educational workshops and memorial service.

The Culture Spine is a key pedestrian connection between the visitor centre and the site's natural sanctuary – the Core.

The Core

The Core is the central space in the site. It is a place to be in peace amongst nature, to rest, a place to leave behind the sight of interment and memorialisation. The Core is also designed to attract wildlife and to ensure habitat corridor access for wildlife. It highlights the importance of our relationship with Country, a celebration of what is common to us all, regardless of culture, religion, age, past, or future.

Here, all major axes of the site's structure converge, adding power and focus to this contemplative, meditative space.

The Core will feature lightweight pavilions and shelters for moments to rest and refecation. In addition, community might choose to use this space for activities such as yoga or art experiences.

There are also opportunities within the Core to create a ceremony and gathering place, and for Indigenous-led cultural education such as star gazing, walks and tours.



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

The climate and biodiversity crisis

GMCT understands the need to truly care for Country. There has been no bigger crisis than the climate and biodiversity crisis facing the world today.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) reinforce the need to focus on ecosystem restoration, “preventing, halting and reversing the degradation of ecosystems worldwide”.

Ecological connectivity, or when people feel a sense of connection to the environment, is one of the most important strategies to safeguard wildlife from the impacts of climate change. People who feel connected are more likely to feel invested in preventing environmental harm.

The sustainable development of the new cemetery will follow circular economy principles – regeneration, resilience, sustainability – to reduce the impact of consumption and production on the environment. This goes hand in hand with GMCT’s Sustainability Strategy.

Eco-interment land and woodland

Grasslands and tall stands of native trees make up the open woodlands of the eco-interment land. The ambition is for interment options that fit in with the landscape and don’t have a strong visual impact. It will be a place to showcase eco-interment innovations and test the viability of new technologies as they emerge.

Eco-interment land would provide peace and a feeling of being within wilderness while also providing habitat for birds and insects such as butterflies and honeybees. As a minimalist landscape, the grassy plain and woodlands would provide areas for ash scattering and other low impact interment products. Mown paths, that change direction and provide new routes, will invite visitors to ramble, explore and interact playfully with the natural environment

The Eco-interment Land will feature areas with seating, shelter and drinking fountains for visitor groups to come together near an interment area to celebrate or memorialise.

As part of the detailed design, the masterplan encourages the exploration of educational opportunities with Traditional Owners to help people understand the relationship between sustainable interment and caring for Country.

Safeguarding the environment

Creating a thriving and diverse environment at the new cemetery is a foundational part of the masterplan.

The natural axis, Arnold Creek West Branch, is an important waterway and ecological corridor, connecting the surrounding community to nature. The ambition is to protect and enhance the ecological values of the site land combat the biodiversity crisis.

Melton City Council, named as Sustainable City of the Year and Sustainable Council of the Year in 2018, is recognised as one of the most environmentally unique areas in Victoria.

The Council is committed to a sustainable future and the protection of natural values, partnering on initiatives such as the [Werribee River Biolink project](#), which has large community support, and includes Arnolds Creek West Branch.

The new cemetery falls within the Victorian Volcanic Plain bioregion. This means an area with many volcanic deposits. It forms a large area of flats to undulating plains containing basalt, which is a type of rock. It has stony rises and is dotted with shallow salt and freshwater lakes. The Victorian Volcanic Plain is listed by Australian Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water as a National Biodiversity Hotspot. A biodiversity hotspot means an area that is home to a large number of irreplaceable species that are facing multiple, urgent threats.

Arnolds Creek West Branch corridor

Occupying 20 per cent of the site, this expansive corridor provides connectivity and tranquillity for visitors, along with critical habitat and water quality improvements. Restoring the natural ecology in this corridor will connect fragmented habitat, rehabilitate the local waterway and establish biodiversity.

The restoration of the Arnolds Creek West Branch corridor provides an opportunity to showcase and connect to Traditional Owner cultural values, provide personal connection to Country, celebrate and interpret culturally significant onsite artefacts and provide education on natural and cultural values.

The natural environment in this part of the site will facilitate an experience for all senses. Visitors can connect to the creek, water bodies and fauna, providing opportunities to rest, engage and learn.

Some of the events and activities that could be activated through partnerships with others in this area of the site include:

- walk on Country tours
- bush foods walk
- birdwatching
- ecological tours
- educational/school tours.

Through the detailed design stages of this project, opportunities to facilitate Indigenous cultural practices such as storytelling, ceremony, land management and cultural burning will be explored with Traditional Owners.



View of Arnold's Creek West walking and cycling trails. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

Integrated water management

Water is one of our most valuable resources. Water and our local waterways are also an important part of Wurundjeri Culture.

Integrated water management (IWM) is a collaborative approach to planning and managing all elements of the water cycle. This includes involving the community in protecting and enhancing the health of our waterways. This aligns with the [Melbourne Water Healthy Waterways Strategy](#) vision for the Werribee major catchment; a catchment where the community actively

participates in managing the health of its rivers, estuaries, and wetlands. The purpose is to re-establish natural systems and the water cycle of the site. This will allow for connection to, caring for, and regeneration of the site and its environment through established water principles and design.

The IWM strategy considers both stormwater quality and quantity across the site, while maximising stormwater capture for reuse.

Sustainable materials

The materials for the landscape and architecture must align to the project principle of sustainability, but also contribute to the intended character, experience, and emotion of the site.

PRECINCTS FOR THE FUTURE

The design vision for the site allows for change and development accommodating needs both now and into the future.

The site will be a cultural expression of our changing society. It will adapt to changing community needs,, but the structure will remain intact and mature into a superb open space destination.

Key factors and considerations shaping this staging plan are:

- the user experience
- site functionality
- accessibility of stages once open to the public,
- Interfaces with urban development. This means the way the site interacts with the surrounding urban landscape. For example, footpaths built for the site will connect seamlessly to existing urban footpaths.

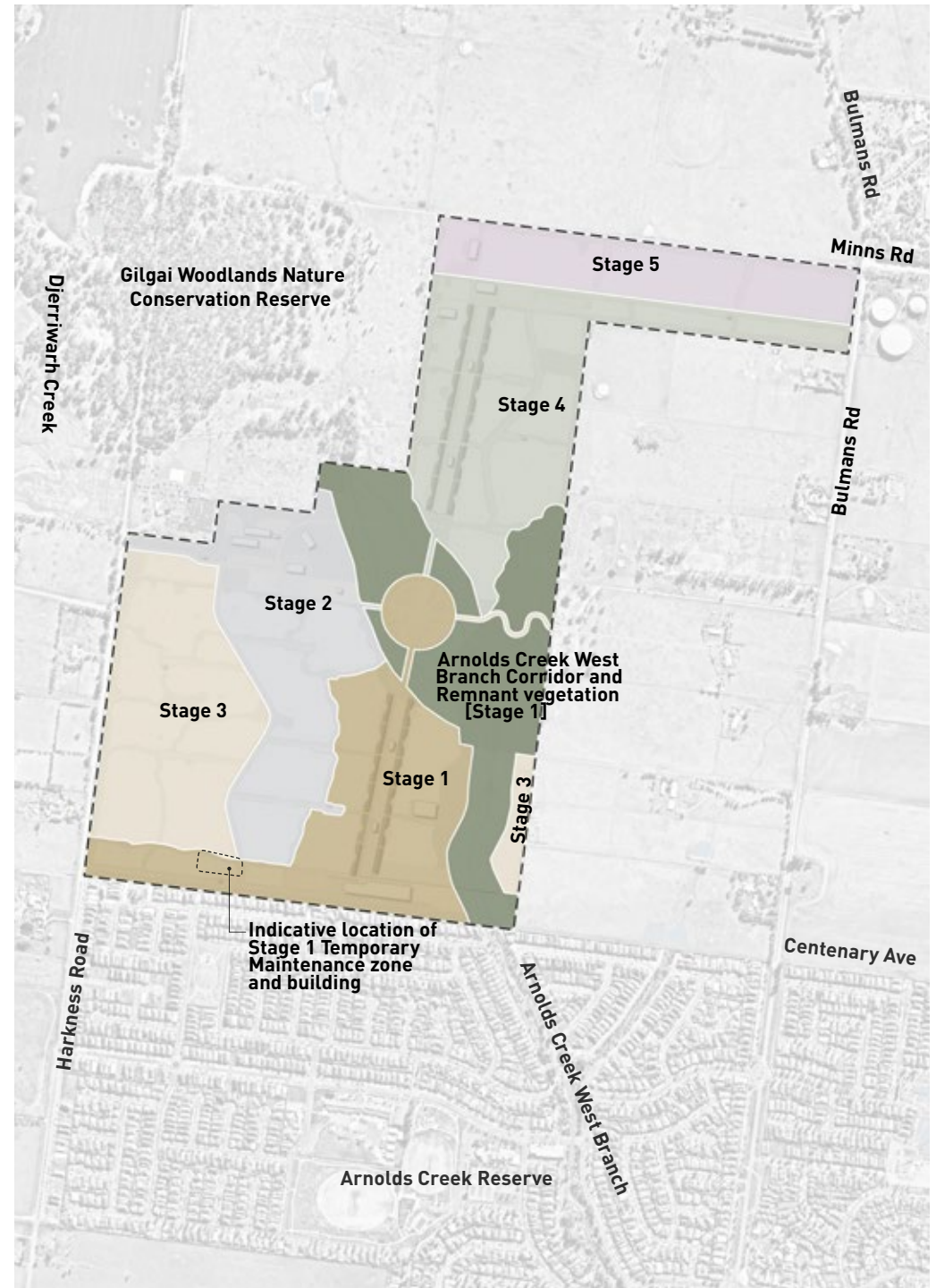
Development is planned to begin in the south and move across the creek to the north when interment demand rises. This enables the northern half of the site to be used for long-term interim uses such as events, or agriculture, for example crops or space for horses.

While the Southern Precinct will be the focus of the Stage 1 development, the future precincts will guide our ambition over time.

Site plan showing proposed staging of masterplan design development. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

Legend

- Site Boundary
- Stage 1
- Arnolds Creek West Branch corridor and remnant vegetation [Stage 1]
- Stage 2
- Stage 3
- Stage 4
- Stage 5





View of Western Community Link with cemetery operations building in background. Concept image by Architectus.

This masterplan is subject to a 100-year development period, so there will be a need to be flexible and adapt the plan over time. Viability and risk will be key considerations in how each stage is developed over time.

Northern Precinct

The Northern Precinct is a place for mourners, small scale recreational visitors, and for visitors to interact.

Located at the quieter end of the site, the Northern Precinct has a private and secluded setting that connects with the Gilgai Woodland. It has rural landscape views extending out to Long Forest, Mount Sugarloaf and the Lerderderg State Park

The Northern Precinct, is expected to be the last of the precincts to be developed. It has flexible space to cater for future needs but will be a continuation of the Southern Precinct in the feel of the design. The precinct could support additional ceremonial or multipurpose buildings. There is accommodation in this precinct for a future crematorium that uses more sustainable energy sources, or to support sustainable cremation alternatives.

Eastern Community Link

The Eastern Community Link is a large parkland for recreation. It contributes to the open space and will connect to transport networks into the Harkness area. It aims to encourage pedestrian and active transport use to the site. The masterplan proposes strategic connections in to the broader urban surrounds (beyond the

site boundaries), to ensure it becomes a valuable connection to the wider community of Melton.

The link physically connects open space and water courses for community use through a series of pathways without damaging their ecological value.

Western Precinct

The Western Precinct Community Hub is a key zone for creating alternative experiences. While facilitating future cemetery operations, the area also focuses on other uses for the community. As the extension of the proposed Community Link, the Western Precinct will be inviting for casual visitors and lead to healthier interactions between death, memorialisation, and life.

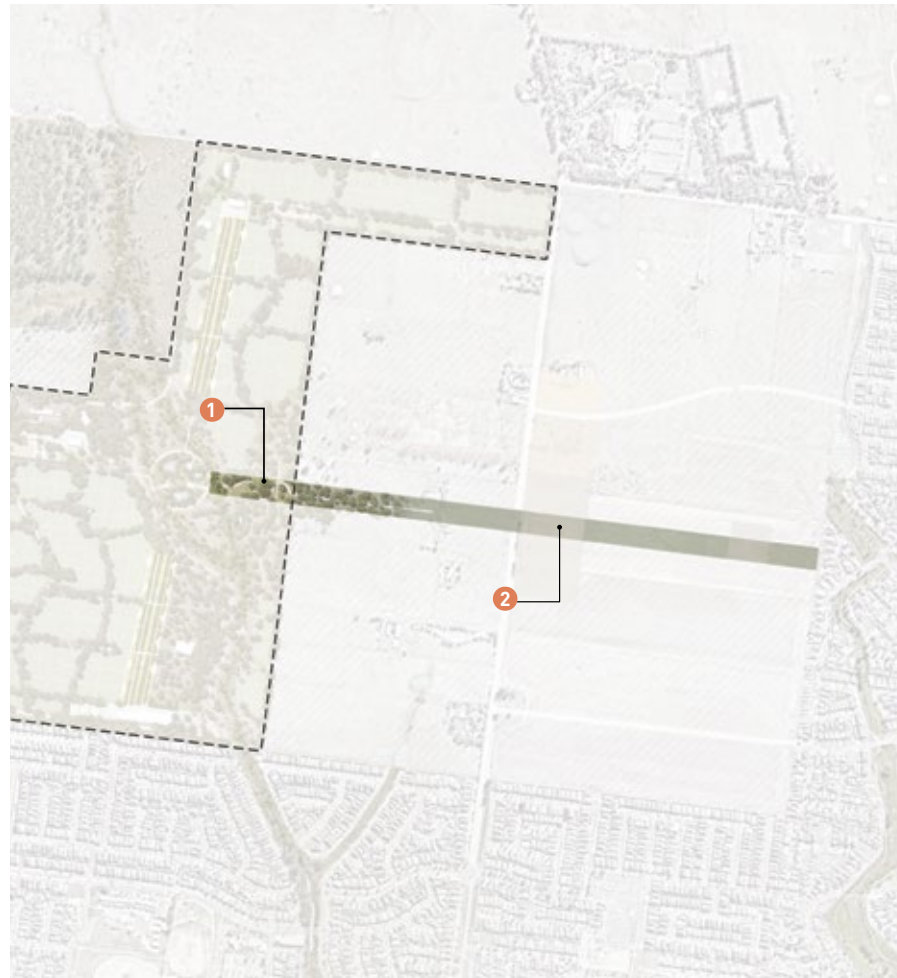
Buildings and structures that could be incorporated into this precinct include a cemetery operations building, a pavilion for community and cultural events, and a restaurant and function space.

The precinct is designed to facilitate a range of activities and events such as:

- community gardens
- Indigenous agriculture and food preparation education
- running, walking and cycling.

During the detailed design development stage for this precinct we will explore opportunities with Traditional Owners to provide education/Cultural experiences of Indigenous agriculture, food preparation and land management within dedicated food and fibre growing areas. We will also seek to understand opportunities for the expression of cultural themes in the design of park and play areas in this precinct.

Use of recycled material or available material within site depot for community parks and play is encouraged through the masterplan. Other sustainability practices such as onsite composting for community garden/nursery and the sharing of resources across all facilities in this area will be explored in the detailed design stages.



Site plan highlighting suggested extent of Eastern Community Link. Concept image by McGregor Coxall.

Key Elements

- 1 Connection through remnant vegetation
- 2 Linear parkland outside site boundary (subject to precinct structure planning).



Aerial view of the eastern boundary of existing site. Photograph.

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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