**SITE LOCATION**

The site is within South Hill Parish boundaries and at the northern extremity of the town of Callington, South-east Cornwall. It is part of agricultural land that is on the north side of South Hill Road. It is just west of Callington Town. Kelly Bray lies at distance to the northeast and Maders lies at distance to the west.

The proposed application site comprises of three agricultural fields and a connecting track. The three fields are interconnected by non-gated entrances. The site occupies an estimated area of approximately 41,303m (10.34 acres). The site will be accessed through a secure gate replacing the existing access gate off South Hill Road. Any recommendations made by Highways Agency regarding the access will be implemented in full.

 **DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL**

**DESIGN STATEMENT**

**This application seeks to change of use of land from agricultural grazing to a green burial ground, associated with site appropriate soft landscaping including green pathways and green parking area plus re-erecting the existing shed and enhancing the existing access.**

**Details of the aims of the proposal and method of achieving them are provided in accompanying attachments listed below:**

1. **Description of the proposal**
2. **Ecology Management**
3. **Biodiversity Enhancements**
4. **Details about Burial Spaces and Burial**
5. **Redevelopment of Existing Shed**
6. **Additional Site Description**
7. **Preliminary Ecological Assessment Report**
8. **Tier 1 Risk Assessment for cemeteries report**
9. **DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSAL**

Gardens of Mercy’s (Charity No: 1207113 ) application seeks full planning permission to change the use of the land from agricultural grazing to a natural green burial ground. As chairperson of Gardens of Mercy, Dr Salim Mahadik, is applying on behalf of the charity.

The vision for the proposal is to provide burial space meeting the needs of the Muslim faith. This complies with the main objective of Gardens of Mercy, which is to provide a separate burial space for the Muslims of Devon and Cornwall. At present, the community is unable to bury the deceased according to proper religious traditions as there in no Muslim burial ground in the region. Muslim cemeteries are present in almost all other regions of the country but none in Devon and Cornwall.

Following community consultation it was accepted that a part of the site, separate from the Muslim burial area, could be alloted for the internment of non-muslims. This is conditional to acceptance of Gardens of Mercy’s burial guidelines and appropriate financial contribution towards the maintenance cost.

The burial site will strictly follow naturalistic green principles. As members of the Association of Natural Burial Grounds we will comply with their Code of Conduct. Expert advice on the planting of appropriate native trees and creating wild flower meadows will be sought from the owners of a natural burial site nearby, in Pensilva. They are also members of the Association of Natural Burial Grounds and have a background in management of woodlands. We will encourage people to donate trees in the memory of their loved ones. The planting of native trees and other environmental enhancements will be used to provide additional screening of the burial area from the public.

Except for redeveloping the collapsed shed existing on site, no buildings or structures will be built on the land. As per the Code of Conduct of natural green burials, construction of tombs or any other structures at the gravesite will not be permitted. A stone name plate will be placed flat on the grave. The graves, will eventually be covered by grass.

Neighbouring farmers can continue to use the land for grazing and hay. If planning permission is granted we will also consider letting out part of the land to neighbouring farmers to use for horticulture or arable crops. This is in response to suggestions made by the local community during the public consultation process. The charity will endeavour to pursue good relationships with neighbouring farmers and residents.

1. **ECOLOGY MANAGEMENT**

The burial ground will attempt to retain the countryside and rural character of the land and all development on site will be subservient to the existing landscape.

An ecological survey was conducted on 18th March 2024 in preparation of a Preliminary Ecological Assessment report. The report was produced by qualified ecologists from Western Ecology, based in Liskeard. It has been prepared in accordance with British Standard 42020:2013 Biodiversity, Code of practice for planning and development. It has also been prepared in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Code of Professional Conduct. The validity of the report is for 12 months from the date of survey.

The ecological appraisal did not identify any features of conservation importance that could constitute a constraint to change the use to a green burial ground. The appraisal includes recommendations for impact avoidance and mitigation. The post-development environmental enhancements recommended to ensure compliance with wildlife legislation and planning policy will be adhered to in our plans for the site.

The ecological survey did not identify any known ‘Site Specific Ecological Considerations’ and no Statutory Nature Conservation Sites (SNCS) are

 located within 1km of the site. The site is not within an area identified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) Impact Risk Zone for the purpose of using the land as a burial ground.

 The Ecological Assessment report, in support of the planning application, has recommendations to mitigate any potential impact on the environment, including natural habitats and local wildlife. All the recommendations are based on the mitigation hierarchy suggested in National Planning Practice Guidance. All mitigation measures will be implemented in full.

The report states, that the design of the burial ground will be avoiding harm to wildlife species and habitats. The recommendations made in the report and any conditions proposed by planning officers will be fully implemented. Environmental harm will also be properly compensated for by measures providing equivalent value of biodiversity.

All habitats of nature conservation importance such as Cornish hedgebank will be fully protected and maintained. The hedge bank will be protected from accidental damage by maintaining a minimum 2m buffer zone.

1. **BIODIVERSITY ENHANCEMENT**

The requirement of biodiversity net gain (BNG) of 10% for the site will be achieved by implementing all the ecological measures suggested in the report. The measures will be in compliance with the Environment Act 2021 and recommendations made by Cornwall Council’s Local Planning Authorities (LPA) with the aim of securing net gain. Measures recommended for enhancements of wildlife including provision of bat box/brick/tubes, bird box/bricks and bee bricks will be incorporated in the redeveloped shed.

The new habitats, providing new wildlife features, which can all contribute towards biodiversity enhancement are illustrated in the Ecology report.

The planning proposal includes environmental enhancements as additional measures to increase biodiversity and enhance the green environment. The charity will use these opportunities to provide more biodiversity than is legally required as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

1. **DETAILS ABOUT BURIAL SPACES AND BURIALS**

The need of the proposal is provision of a separate burial space for Muslims living in Devon and Cornwall. This need is provided for in almost all other regions in England and the primary objective of Gardens of Mercy is to provide for this need for Muslim community living in this area. This site should be able to fulfil this need locally for over 200 years.

According to most recent information obtained from Muslims residing in the region there are about ten to fifteen deaths occurring annually. At present all the deceased persons are not buried in Devon and Cornwall as relatives of some of the deceased choose to bury their loved ones in a Muslim cemetery located far away from the region.

The design for the burial site will result in enhancing the existing ‘countryside’ character of the site, recognising its location within the Green Belt and comply with environmental legislation. The proposed burial area will be in Lots 1 and 2. Burials will commence from the northern most border of Lots 1 and 2. This would be the furthest in distance from the nearest residential dwellings on South Hill Road and people using the road. There will be no burials in Lot 3, which borders South Hill Road.

The cemetery design will accommodate about 600 burial plots per acre. The dimensions of each grave will be 3m in length,1.5m in width and 1.3m deep. According to Muslim traditions the deceased will be buried in a shroud. This is also in keeping with natural green burials. If legally required, coffins can also be used for interment.

Burials will take place on weekdays and weekends but only during daylight hours.

1. **REDEVELOPMENT OF EXISTING SHED**

A collapsed shed exists towards the centre of the site and on the tractor access pathway. The planning proposal includes redeveloping this existing collapsed shed.

The shed will be used to provide shelter for people attending burials.

1. **ADDITIONAL SITE DESCRIPTION**

Satellite imagery from circa 2001 shows the site as comprising of three agricultural fields. An outbuilding has been identified to lie on the western boundary within the narrowest part of the site area.

The proposed application site comprises of three agricultural fields and a connecting track. The fields are interconnected by non gated entrances. The site occupies an estimated area of approximately 41,3sqm (10.34 acres). Although the three fields are similar in nature, at the time of purchase, they were named as Lots 1 – 3. It was advertised as land suitable for grazing and keeping horses. It is known that the land has a history of being used for growing grass for grazing or mowing for hay and silage.

The proposal is for burials in Lots 1 and 2 only.

Lot 3 will be used to:

1. Provide access to the burial area in Lots 1 and 2. An access track currently exists extending from Lots 1 and 2 southwards towards the nearby road network; South Hill Road.
2. Accommodate a green car parking area.
3. Incorporate measures to enhance the green field environment and increase biodiversity. These measures include a large retention and wildlife pond, new hedgerow, native trees and wild flower meadow.

Other site information:

According to the Tier 1 Risk Assessment for cemeteries report, which was produced by Mr Jeremy Williamson of Approved Site Investigations Ltd, based in Redruth, there are no site specific risks. It reports that, like the whole of Cornwall and West of Devon, the soil would contain heavy metals. This soil feature is applicable to all burial sites and cemeteries in Cornwall and West Devon and we are not aware of burials in the region being prevented due to the environmental impact of the presence of heavy metals in the region’s soil. To minimise potential risk from any excess soil, which should be a very small amount, will be disposed properly, adhering to the disposal methods used by local council cemeteries.

The report has not identified any present or past industrial use of the site. No land fill sites have been identified within 250m of the site. The report has not identified any water abstraction licences within 250m of the site locality. BGS mapping records do not indicate any water borehole/wells within 250m of the site and risk to groundwater is low. The site is not indicated to be affected by any type of flooding and The British Geological Survey has identified the site as having ‘no hazard to very low’ potential for natural ground instability.

According to DEFRA online magic map the site is not in any SPZ for ground water. On Cornwall Council’s online interactive maps there are no archaeological sites on the land. Cornwall Council’s interactive maps also do not identify the site as part of a statutory designated site of nature for conservation interest and it’s not been recognised at a local level as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).