Forestry Commission



Chiltern Woodland Burial Park

The lack of open space in our towns and cities for new burial sites has highlighted the need to adopt a different approach to traditional burials and consider environmentally-friendly alternatives. Woodlands are naturally peaceful locations for 'green burials' and in 2002 Woodland Burial Parks approached the Forestry Commission to find a suitable site close to London. With two burial parks successfully established at Colney Wood and Epping Forest, Woodland Burials Parks were an ideal partner – with aspirations to provide a community space and well-managed woodland in addition to the primary purpose of a natural burial site. Pitlands wood in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, was selected due to its proximity to the capital, and its accessibility to 8 million people within an hour's journey time. The 30 hectare site is largely set in impoverished ancient woodland with pockets of rich biodiversity, while part of the site is a former quarry. In the past the secluded woodland has been a target for anti-social behaviour, vandalism and fly-tipping and has been difficult to manage. The project presented an ideal opportunity to restore the brownfield areas and re-establish the ancient semi-natural woodland. Chiltern Woodland Burial Park opened for funeral services in June 2009. Its attractive buildings and gathering spaces are available to people of all beliefs.



Chiltern Woodland Burial Park features natural materials and unique timber structures which are sympathetic to nature and blend with the woodland setting. The Park offers a tranquil atmosphere at a sad time in people's lives.

The Park complex comprises of a reception centre for administration and sales, a gathering hall for bereaved families and friends, and a spectacular ceremonial hall. The round buildings have been constructed using an award-winning roof design, modelled on naturally occuring spirals such as in shells, pinecones and sunflowers. It creates an intricate but robust structure of interlocking beams, giving height and space to the buildings. The structural beams are made from glue laminated short-section softwood; the timber frame is also softwood held together by traditional oak pegs. The external cladding is heat-treated softwood with western red cedar detailing and shingle roofing. Internal finishes are made of Douglas fir and ash. The large curved windows in the woodland hall create a seamless transition from inside the building to the woodland beyond, providing a real sense of being out in the forest. The whole effect creates a soothing, neutral space for reflection at an emotional time in people's lives.

Insulation and ventilation

The buildings are fully insulated using cellulose fibre made from 100% recycled newspaper which is treated to make it fire resistant. The large argon-filled double-glazed windows minimise heat loss, while allowing warmth from direct sunlight to penetrate the building.

Woodfuel heating

A state-of-the-art 60 kilowatt wood chip boiler provides underfloor heating to the three buildings and hot water to the gathering hall and reception centre. Wood sourced from the surrounding forest and stored onsite provides a low-carbon source of fuel. Logs are processed using a chipper and are automatically fed to the boiler.

Lighting

Natural daylighting has been used to maximum effect, with large windows and skylights minimising the need for artificial lighting.

Park infrastructure

Geotextiles have been used extensively under all roads and paths to minimise excavation depths and prevent damage to tree roots. All spoil was redistributed onsite to reduce transport-related carbon emissions during construction. Exterior roads and pathways have been constructed using recycled aggregates. Burial areas are accessed via a network of paths and every effort has been made to minimise any impacts on the woodland. Burial plots are arranged radially in circles around mature trees, outwith a root protection zone. Sales of plots are limited to only five in any five-year period, to generate a random distribution of the opening of graves to minimise root damage. Memorials are made from native wood, stained with natural oils. Urns used for ashes are biodegrable. There is also the option to sponsor a bird or bat box as a 'living memorial'.

Water and Drainage

All rainwater is returned to the ground via soakaways, low flush toilets feed to a 'biodisc' Klargester system with pure clean water discharged via a soakaway.

Waste Management

All waste from the site is recycled, including batteries, printer cartridges and paper from the administration centre. Staff and visitors are encouraged to separate their waste in the recycling bins provided. All flowers and organic waste are composted on site.

Our advice

- Research the range of renewable technologies available; solar and wind power were considered unsuitable for this woodland environment – woodfuel was the obvious choice.
- Be aware that round buildings have their limitations and can be more time-consuming and costly to construct, with difficulties finding and fitting internal fixtures.
- Use contractors who are experienced in constructing complex structures, and make clever use of the space.

Achievements

- Burial management works in harmony with woodland management recreating a productive landscape. Income from burials can be used for good woodland and wildlife management. The production of fuel and timber makes the woodland self-funding and self-sustaining.
- At the end of the 99 year lease the native woodland will be fully restored with greatly enhanced biodiversity.

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