

Site Inspection Report of the Conservation and Design Officer

Horton Cemetery

The current condition of Horton Cemetery as of an inspection of the site on 26 October 2020:

Horton Cemetery is located on a rectangular area approximately 300m by 70m wide at the south narrowing to under 60m wide at the north. It has Hook Road on its eastern boundary and Horton Lane to the north with open fields on the other sides and a public footpath to the south.

Access

The site is inaccessible at present with pavements only on the north-east corner at a roundabout junction of Horton Lane and Hook Road. The site is surrounded by steel railings about one metre high and the site can only be accessed via a number of locations where trees have fallen on the railings and created a number of openings.

Within the site the landscape is very heavily overgrown with no evidence of the original planting or landscaping surviving except for a number of very mature trees which were most likely part of the original landscape. The growth of new trees and brambles have reduced the site to an almost impenetrable feral landscape now.

Much of the cemetery also appears to be extensively excavated by badgers with burrows and large soil heaps. This contributes to the hazardous nature of the landscape.

Surviving Heritage.

There is no evidence of any gravestones, which supports what the SR Historic Environment Ltd report says that the last surviving headstones were removed after the sale of the property to Mr Michael Heighes in 1983. The only monument is one erected in 2002 which acts both to commemorate those who were buried in the cemetery and as a war memorial just outside the cemetery to the north.

The chapel was lost in the 1950s and there is no evidence of it at all today. Of the original built fabric of the cemetery only the railings survive, though these have lost the gates and in many places are badly damaged due to being crushed by falling trees.

Trees

With the original planting having been mostly reduced and minimised after the war with no more planting and gravestones, chapel and pathways all reduced to grass and then completely let to go wild in the 1980s, now only the most mature trees survive from the original plantation. Many of these are very

Site Inspection Report of the Conservation and Design Officer

substantial and some have fallen making the landscape even more impenetrable in places. Some of the trees are also now so tall as to be a potential hazard if they were to fall. Though the area is unpopulated, the height of some would easily result in them falling across the full width of Hook Road if they are in as precarious state as the other trees that have already fallen and if they were to fall to the east.

Potential for Preservation and Designation

It has been suggested that the site be designated either as a conservation area or that it be locally listed. The cemetery might become a conservation area, potentially as an extension of the St. Ebba's Hospital Conservation Area and part of the wider The Hospital Cluster Conservation Area. It would be either attached to the St Ebba's Hospital Conservation area or an isolated plot of land. There are however no surviving features of important historic significance.

Local listing is not reserved for buildings alone. Although listing a site such as this would be unusual, the process is not reserved for buildings. Landscapes and other heritage assets are eligible for listing. In terms of protecting the site from development its status in the Green Belt would also aid the protection of the site.

Local listing of the site should encourage improved management of it. Historic England does advise the adoption of Conservation Management Plans for parks and gardens and the landscape of historic buildings but for this site the interest of "restoration" as proposed by The Friend of Horton Cemetery may be contrary to the interest of nature preservation and provision of public amenity.

Recommendation

The present state of the cemetery is so poor that some action should be taken to manage it. Local listing is possibly the simplest way forward to encourage the preparation of a management plan, but this may not be sufficient to encourage the funding required for the renovation of the landscape.

Lance Penman
Conservation and Design Officer