

Land at Benhall Mill Road Depot, Tunbridge Wells Heritage Statement

Heritage statement in association with the proposed replacement of the council depot and new residential development.

nb. The level of detail submitted in this statement is considered proportionate and enough to understand the potential impact of the proposals on the significance of heritage assets.

It is written to comply with paragraph 189 of the National Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF) which requires applicants to describe the significance of any heritage assets that may be affected by alterations, including any contributions made to their setting stating that the level of detail should be proportionate to the assets importance and no more than is sufficient to understand the potential impact of the proposal on their significance. Also, to enable consideration of the proposals under paragraphs 196, 197 of the NPPF.

Such an approach is also identified as best practice in Historic England's 'Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 2 – Managing Significance in Decision-Taking in the Historic Environment' (March 2015), which notes that the information required in support of applications for planning permission and listed building consent should be no more than is necessary to reach an informed decision'.

This statement has had regard to various guidance, including Historic England's Historic Environment Good Practice Advice in Planning Note 3 – The Setting of Heritage Assets (December 2017)

Description

The site under consideration is located to the southern side of Benhall Mill Road, Tunbridge Wells.

It is currently used as the depot and a maintenance yard for the adjacent cemetery and crematorium.

It has a range of buildings to the north-western end, which are in a poor state of disrepair with an earlier brick workshop set against the wall to the north which forms the boundary to Benhall Mill Road. There are a further series of open sided and dilapidated industrial portal frame buildings to the south-west. The central area consists of hard standing, with areas for soil, skips and parking.

The main access to the site is from Benhall Mill Road via security gates. There is also a secondary entrance on the north western side giving direct access to the cemetery.

The eastern section of the site was previously occupied by green houses and open areas. This is now a clear open area which has been levelled. The site is bounded by walls to the north and east and a high conifer hedge to the south adjacent to the burial ground.

The Kent and Sussex Crematorium and Cemetery is immediately adjacent to the south and west of the site. This consists of extensive cemetery and crematorium grounds and gardens. A Grade II listed cemetery chapel sits within the middle of the grounds, with a network of paths and road connections leading around the cemetery. The crematorium runs along the north west of the grounds and consists of memorial gardens and a crematorium building. Existing trees along the southern and western boundary form a buffer between the site and the cemetery grounds. This provides security to the site and privacy to the cemetery.

There is a mix of existing housing to the north west and immediately adjacent to south east. On the opposite side of Benhall Mill Road, is a new residential development, of approx. 50 dwellings currently nearing completion.



Location Plan

Proposals

The proposals are to construct a new depot building and associated yard to the western section of the site. With the remaining eastern portion to be developed for residential.

These two proposals are being progressed separately however this heritage statement is being presented for both sites.

Depot proposal

The main entrance to the site off Benhall Mill Road will be maintained, accessing a defined yard area. This will accommodate car parking for 4 no. cars and a van. Access for a long-wheel base vehicle is also provided.

Located to the south western part of the site, will be a linked warehouse and staff building. The warehouse will house equipment and maintenance vehicles associated with the cemetery. Vehicular equipment access into the warehouse is proposed via large access doors.

The overall mass of the building is reduced by incorporating a pitched roof on both the warehouse and staff area. The staff area portion of the building is single storey with the larger warehouse element having an asymmetrically pitched roof allowing the eaves level to the rear adjacent to the cemetery to be lower than at the front.

The building will be clad with a mixture of vertical and horizontal black timber boarding, sitting on a stone plinth. The roof will be a dark grey metal cladding.

Residential proposal

This proposal is for 9no. new dwellings on the southern portion of the former cemetery maintenance depot

An old brick and sandstone rubble wall form the north eastern boundary with Benhall Mill Road. There is an existing opening in this wall, flanked with two brick piers which is currently boarded up. This will be retained and widened to afford an acceptable highway access and to allow for refuse vehicles and fire tenders.

Either side of this opening in the wall are some self-set trees. The ones to the east are substantial and have grown through and damaged the stone boundary wall. There are three birch trees to the west of the entrance adjacent to the wall, one of which is dead.

To the south east is an original brick boundary wall with 1980s housing beyond. Adjacent to the cemetery grounds is a dense conifer hedge with a further group of trees in the southern corner of the site.

The proposed layout has been developed in relation to various constraints and opportunities provided by the site, This includes maintaining a reasonable distance from the back of the existing properties on Cypress Grove to the south east. The Leylandii on the south west

boundary are well established and produce significant overshadowing to any development placed along this edge, so the proposed dwellings have been moved as far north away from them as possible, creating back gardens with a southerly orientation. Also providing more space next to the cemetery.

The semi-mature trees along the roadside boundary wall and in the southern tip of the site will be retained and the new development will be kept outside of their root protection zones, where possible.

The outline proposals consist of 4no. 3 bed semi-detached town houses with integral garages, 2no. 4 bed detached and 3no. 5 bed detached dwellings again with integral garages.

Although in outline it is envisaged that the design of the dwellings will be self-effacing and sensitive to the context. Materials will be recessive.

The indicative layout is shown on the plan below. (See also application drawings)



Proposed elevations of depot building



Depot layout



Indicative residential layout

The significance of each of the heritage assets and any impact from the proposals is set out below.

NATURE OF THE HERITAGE ASSETS

Feature - Nearby Listed Building

- **Mortuary Chapel to Tunbridge Wells Cemetery, Benhall Mill Road (South East Side)**

Listed Grade II NGR: TQ 59199 37667

Description

'Later C19 built of Tunbridge Wells ashlar. This consists of a central stone tower with spire above and carriage archway below flanked by 2 chapels having traceried windows, buttresses and tiled roofs.'



View from burial grounds to the south east



View from main approach

Tunbridge Wells Town Corporation procured lands on the northern edge of Frant Forest and on the then southern edge of the town. Initially named Frant Forest Cemetery at Hawkenbury, it opened in 1873. The chapel and grounds were designed by William Brentnall, who was the town surveyor, who had originally been recruited to rebuild the drainage system around the town. At the time, it was described as "one of the most beautiful cemeteries in England". The coursed rough-faced sandstone of the chapel was apparently quarried on the site itself. Brentnall was later buried in the same grounds.

It was laid out over an initial 23 acres (9.3 ha), to serve local people of all denominations and none. Subsequently enlarged twice and now covering over 28 acres (11 ha), today the grounds house over 44,000 burials.

The cemetery contains the war graves of 72 Commonwealth service personnel of World War I and 63 of World War II. Notable burials include, John Duncan Grant, a British Army officer who was awarded the Victoria Cross, William Hartnell, actor, the first Doctor Who and Mantovani, the musician and conductor.

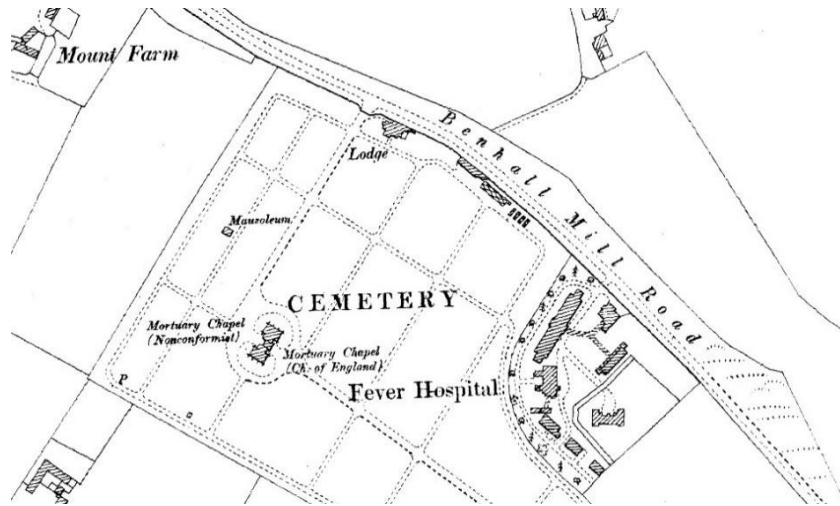
The co-located crematorium was opened in 1959.



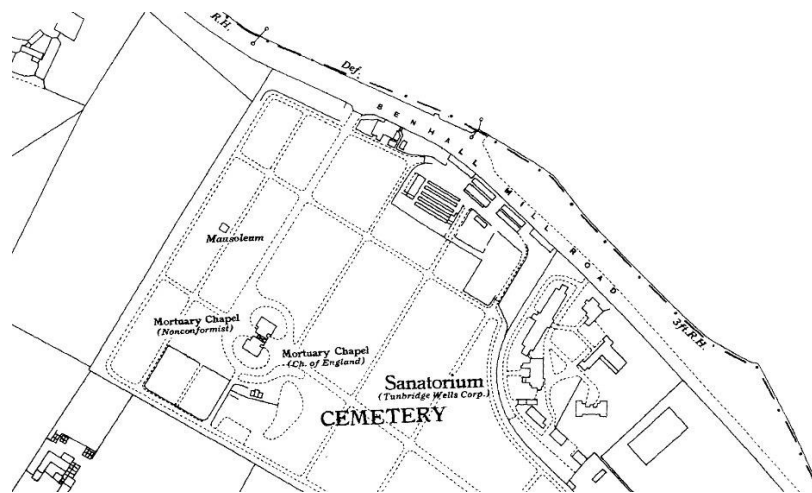
Interior of one of the chapels

The land which is subject to the applications has been within the grounds of the cemetery since at least the 1867 OS map (the grade II listed mortuary chapel was in existence by then) and was at first within the layout of the regular plots of burial land with paths defining the space.

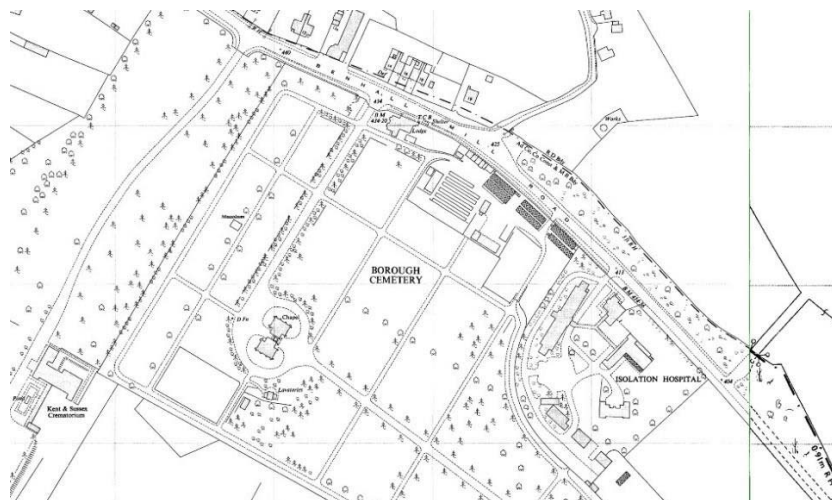
Over time the historic maps then show its evolving use as a works area, with greenhouses against the wall from the 1897 map and when a more defined boundary was created to separate the depot from the burial grounds. These are obviously meant to be ancillary workspaces serving the cemetery. There was no significant built form on the site until the 1939 map when buildings start to appear.



OS from 1867-1895, showing chapel and lodge



OS from 1897- 99, showing development of greenhouses and defined depot boundary



OS from 1931-39

Significance

Architecturally the chapel is a very competent and not unpleasant piece of design. Its aesthetic is bold and strong and would have reflected the confidence of Tunbridge Wells in the early 19th century.

It is a simple, yet dramatic gothic composition with good articulation and an easily understood form, with a pair of chapels joined by a central porte cochère which is then surmounted by the multi staged spire.

The judicious location of the building at the high point in the local topography adds to the drama and would have dominated its siting originally, particularly when viewed from the south east. Its setting would have been designed to enhance its presence and visual interest and to create experiences of drama or surprise.

The chapel is still the focal point of its immediate setting of burials plots and regular path network and then punctuated by the various memorials. The immediate setting and views back to the chapel are less apparent and more intimate, being surrounded by a group of trees which are funerary in character.

It is as much about the setting in the grounds as well as the building, that is important.

Although the site and its setting are tightly defined by walls and hedges to the north-east, the elevated location of the chapel does still afford wider views to the south east over the countryside. The defined boundaries of the cemetery still form part of the significance of the chapel and apart from the formation of the works space which forms the depot site, it has not materially changed from the initial layout of the burial ground.

Architecturally and aesthetically it is of considerable significance.

Although a relatively 'recent' building in historic terms being from the mid-19th century, the historic significance of the chapel is high but more particularly it is its associated burial ground area being a record and a connection to the history and the past of Tunbridge Wells. Containing burials and memorials of people associated with the town and its history. With the famous, notable, local associations and families, and a continuing history. It must be regarded as of substantial significance and by default the chapel as the focal point and main representation of that.

In addition, the chapel and its setting are considered to be a high communal value- the meanings of a place for the people who relate to it, or for whom it figures in their collective experience or memory. The meaning of death and memory, individually and collectively. It is a place of tranquillity and reflection and the chapel is appreciated as part of that. It is still probably one of the most beautiful cemeteries in England

Whilst the character of the application site in terms of its visual link with the rest of the cemetery has altered and was separated in the late 19th / 20th century, through its linked use it has meant that it maintains a connection with the cemetery and therefore the listed chapel as well.

Possible Impact

At the closest point the chapel is 120 metres away from the site. There is then a dense coniferous boundary to the site.

There will therefore be no inter-visibility between the heritage asset and the site, nor any impact on the setting. It is considered that the tranquil setting of the chapel will therefore be maintained, and that the significance of the heritage asset will not be compromised.

Furthermore, the scale and form of the depot building has been carefully designed to be in keeping with the surrounding context and its materiality selected to be self-effacing. Also, the siting of residential proposals, are even further away from the boundary and also retaining the hedge and will therefore not be readily visible

Overall in terms of possible impact on the chapel and its setting, it is considered that the new depot and the change of use and outline proposals for the residential development will cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the chapel. This is at the lower end.

Justification/ Mitigation

The current site comprises an unsightly and outdated depot and an area of vacant land. The proposals will replace this situation with appropriate and up to date facilities which will enable the continued and proper maintenance of the cemetery grounds including the listed chapel.

The surplus land, which is being made available for residential, will go toward funding that.

The depot buildings are a self-effacing design and use dark neutral materials which are intended not to be visible nor seen behind the retained boundary hedge.

The residential, similarly is behind the substantial conifer hedge and some other further retained trees. As the residential is related to an outline planning application, final design and materiality would be something that could be controlled through reserved matters and appropriate planning conditions

No other mitigation measures are considered to be necessary regarding this heritage asset.

Feature – Non designated heritage assets

Descriptions

- **Lodge to Tunbridge Wells Cemetery, Benhall Mill Road (South West Side)**

Later C19th, probably c1873. Entrance lodge to cemetery

2 storeys built of Tunbridge Wells coursed rough sandstone
Two, parapetted gables facing onto entrance drive with a larger gable to Benhall Mill Road. A square entrance tower sits in the angle between these elevations with a trefoil detail to its parapet. Gothick, square-headed windows with paired 'lancet' windows to the first floor. Clay tiled roof. Main chimney rising from the central valley with tall chimney pots.

Built at a similar time as the nearby chapel, its sandstone walls, are the same as the chapel but are laid as a squared, random pattern. Also probably quarried on the site itself.

There is a later extension to the rear and adjacent to Benhall Mill Road built against the boundary wall.



Exterior of the lodge



The history of the lodge is as for the cemetery chapel, above.

Significance

Architecturally it is a typical lodge design similar to a number of cemeteries which were being laid out in this period. It is competent and not unpleasant.

Its significance is mainly derived from its association with the cemetery and the nearby listed chapel

Visually and historically it is part of curtilage and part of the setting of the whole location.

Possible Impact

As there is no inter-visibility with the depot site there is minimal impact on setting.

The high conifer hedge around the depot is only punctuated by the existing service gate to the depot.

The proposed depot building will not be apparent and in any event is an unassuming recessive design. Nevertheless, any impact will be at the lower end of less than significant

The housing element of the development proposals are further distant from the lodge. There may be a glimpse through open depot gate of the upper gable of the nearest dwelling. The impact will again therefore be at the lower end of less than significant

Justification/ Mitigation

The current site is a range of dilapidated buildings and detracts from the locality and the setting of the nearby lodge. The proposals will replace this outdated depot with appropriate and up to date facilities which will enable the continued maintenance of the cemetery grounds and the chapel. The surplus land, which is being made available for residential, will go toward funding that.

As the residential is related to an outline planning application, final design and materiality would be something that could be controlled through reserved matters and appropriate planning conditions

No other direct mitigation measures are considered to be necessary.

- **Wall and Gate Piers to Tunbridge Wells Cemetery Benhall Mill Road (South West Side)**

Gated entrance to cemetery late 19th

Vehicular and personnel entrance flanked by massive sandstone piers with gabled caps. Carrying metal railing gates

The use of sandstone is the same as on the chapel and the adjacent lodge. The laying though is lesser, with the western section in random coursed stonework, leading to random uncoursed in the central sections and at the eastern end, relapsing to polygonal stonework and surmounted by brown stock brick. Beyond a pair of brick piers, the wall then peters out and has suffered damaged from tree growth.

Only the main gate piers adjacent to the lodge, have large, more dressed stones with its metal gates.



Western section



Gate Piers



Mid- section central





Depot building with wall



Eastern section, with 2nd entrance

Eastern, damaged section

The walls and gate piers have been integral with the grounds of the cemetery since it was laid out from at least 1867 (the grade II listed mortuary chapel was in existence by then as well) They contained the layout of the regular plots of burial land and paths by defining the space.

In terms of the application site the historic maps then show the gradual use of the area as a small works area, with, interestingly, greenhouses against the wall from the 1897 map onwards. There was no real built form on the site until the 1931 map.

This is borne out by the fact that the brick workshop appears to have a straight joint indicating a later building against the back of the original sandstone boundary wall.

Significance

As stated earlier the clearly defined boundaries of the cemetery form part of the chapel and its grounds and this has not really changed from the initial layout of the

burial ground. The chapel, lodge as well as the wall and gate piers, should be viewed as a series of assets within the same overall setting.

Whilst the character of the application site in terms of its visual link with the rest of the cemetery has altered in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the use maintained the its links with the cemetery and therefore the listed chapel the lodge and the boundary walls as well.

The sandstone wall is quite extensive in its length exhibiting variations in its detailing and quality. Some sections are now in poor condition

In itself, it probably has some aesthetic significance however its real significance derives from its association with the listed chapel, and its historical and communal value of enclosing burial ground.

Possible Impact

The external boundary wall is to be retained. There is no impact on the gates and entrance, which are possibly more significant than the eastern and depot sections.

Within the site the various dilapidated buildings are to be removed, including the later brick workshop against the wall.

On the residential section there will be a widened entrance for access, otherwise the wall will be retained. Repairs will be carried out to the collapsed and missing areas.

Overall the proposals will cause less than substantial harm to the significance of the wall. Indeed, in the area of the application site the fabric of the wall will be repaired, and the setting improved. This should be regarded as a positive impact.

Justification/ Mitigation

The current site contains dilapidated buildings and a derelict site which detracts from the locality and the setting of the wall. The proposals will replace the outdated depot with more appropriate and up to date facilities which will enable the continued maintenance of the cemetery grounds including the wall. The surplus land, which is being made available for residential, will go toward funding that.

Enabling the residential use including the access, will also support the retention, repointing and the repair of the collapsed wall at the eastern end.

No mitigation measures are therefore considered to be necessary.

Conclusion

For the reasons set out in this heritage statement the proposed developments at the depot on Benhall Mill Road are both totally compatible with the preservation of heritage assets including the listed building and the associated non-designated heritage assets.

The effect of the proposals on the significance of the assets is varied, however overall it is considered that they will not cause harm to the significance of the various heritage assets. Indeed, it is considered that the proposals would positively contribute to the character, appearance and setting of the non-designated heritage assets.

As such the proposals comply with policies aimed at conserving and enhancing the historic environment contained in the NPPF

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On behalf of Tunbridge Wells Borough Council
16 /12 /2020