

History

Highgate Cemetery was opened in 1839, and the enterprise was an immediate success; so much so that within 15 years the East Cemetery was opened on land across Swain's Lane, doubling the size of the cemetery.

To take coffins across to the East Cemetery without leaving consecrated land, a tunnel was dug beneath Swain's Lane and an extension was added to the Anglican Chapel which incorporated an hydraulic lift by means of which coffins could be lowered to the Undercroft and taken through the tunnel to the East side.

The fortunes of the London Cemetery Company which owned Highgate Cemetery went through a series of ups and downs, but the steady decline from the 1950s led to its closure in 1975. By this time the whole cemetery including the Chapels building was derelict.

The Friends of Highgate Cemetery, taking responsibility for looking after Highgate Cemetery from 1975, now successfully look after the Cemetery which once again thrives, both as a working cemetery, and as a visitor attraction of national importance.

Highgate Cemetery is a Grade I Listed Park, and is located within the Highgate Village Conservation Area. The Staff Accommodation building itself is not listed.

The Need

There are two public toilets in the West Cemetery, but access to this part of the Cemetery is restricted to a limited number of pre-booked tours – hence these toilets have only limited availability.

There are currently no toilets in the East Cemetery, neither for staff nor visitors. Staff are able to use the toilets in the Western cemetery. The nearest public toilets are at the top of adjacent Waterlow Park, some 10 to 15 minutes walk away. This situation is felt to be inappropriate in the twenty-first century for a national amenity attracting 60,000 visitors annually.

The Proposal

Space in the Cemetery is severely limited, but a small plot has been identified which is considered suitable to locate two public toilets, being discretely located, yet close to the main entrance, so easily found. As it is next to the Staff Accommodation building, which is regularly visited by staff, it would also be well supervised.

The details of the proposal are described in the accompanying drawings.

The Impact

The proposed toilets will be visible from close to when standing to the south. From elsewhere within the Cemetery the toilets will be invisible, either screened by the staff accommodation building itself, or by dense vegetation.

From outside the Cemetery, the proposed toilets will be visible very locally through the railings on Swain's Lane, but will be seen against the staff accommodation building which rises above it, the thick laurel screen beyond that, and the background of large trees on the edge of Waterlow Park.

The visual impact of the proposed new toilets will be minimal. The positive impact on visitors by virtue of providing currently unavailable facilities will be significant.