



# Making space for nature in our burial grounds



## **Local Authority Bereavement Services**

### **Making space for nature in our burial grounds**

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#### **About APSE**

The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is a not-for-profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK.

Promoting excellence in public service, APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority frontline services and operates one of the UK's largest research programmes in local government policy and frontline service delivery matter.

Published August 2023

ISBN: 978-1-907388-89-7

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## Executive Summary

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For a number of years there has been a growing amount of academic research outlining the value of cemeteries and burial grounds as places where a local populations cultural history is stored. It is believed that by gaining a better understanding of the lives of the people who are buried in them, we begin to understand our sense of place and being in the areas we live in.

This appreciation of the cultural heritage has spawned a great deal of work in interpreting the architecture of such places and significant resources have been expended to preserve monuments and create educational experiences linked to burial grounds. As part of this appreciation and greater understanding, there has been a further realisation of the benefits to the natural world such places can bring.

Often relatively undisturbed and less intensively managed than many of our urban greenspaces, burial grounds have developed unique habitats for wildlife, many holding relics from the pre-industrial world.

The world-wide decline in levels of biodiversity has further raised the importance of these spaces as potential refuges for flora and fauna we have lost in such devastating amounts elsewhere across the UK.

Therefore,. many councils are now utilising and enhancing these spaces, in order to reap the benefits, they bring.

This report aims to highlight the actions being taken by local authorities to conserve, preserve and enhance the levels of biodiversity in their cemeteries and burial grounds as well as providing guidance for those considering this approach.

## Introduction

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This document is designed to help local authorities consider how best they can introduce ways to allow nature to thrive and survive in civic cemeteries and other burial grounds such as closed churchyards, which they may have under their responsibilities.

With many local authorities now declaring climate and ecological emergencies, and supporting plans and strategies, these types of managed greenspaces will support the work to meet many of the targets within these documents, such as absorbing carbon emissions, providing flood alleviation and increasing the levels of local biodiversity as well as improving local air quality. These ecosystem services also have considerable benefits to the health and well-being of users of these greenspaces, as often they are the only accessible greenspace for many people, particularly in highly urbanised areas.

Cemeteries and other burial grounds are estimated to make up over 4% of the UK's greenspaces and as such make up vital elements within the wider green and blue infrastructure of a local authorities' area. Yet despite these facts many local authorities do not recognise the multifunctional value of these spaces and rarely consider them in their wider ecological and nature recovery plans.

Cemeteries and other burial grounds are not merely in place to achieve environmental benefits, they are places of remembrance for millions of people within the UK and it is this fact that must be constantly at the forefront of any works carried out in these spaces, particularly when it may consist of reducing maintenance to provide better habitats for wildlife.

Many councils have accepted that softening the maintenance regimes within cemeteries to offer increased opportunities for biodiversity is the right thing to do, indeed there is a legal duty to do so. Yet the manner in which we carry out such works needs to be carefully considered and consulted upon with users and stakeholders before carried out.

This report hopes to show through the use of case studies and academic findings, that there can be a balance struck which will help meet both the needs of cemetery users and the natural world.

It is therefore hoped that the information contained within the report will be of both strategic and operational value for any officer or elected member who has a responsibility for cemeteries and crematoria as well as providing a useful document for those who have wider environmental remits and interests.

But before the current benefits are considered, it may be worth considering how such spaces came into being in the first instance.



# **The Evolution of a Sense of Loss, Mourning and Remembrance**

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No one knows for sure when early humans decided to start intentionally burying their dead. It is believed that the earliest recognised burials date back to around 100,000 years ago and are attributed to the Neanderthals. Evidence shows that a purpose-built grave was dug, and as well as the skeleton being stained with red ochre, there were also grave goods present including remains of animals. The inclusion of such goods begins to suggest humans were expressing compassion and care for the dead, and perhaps feelings of mourning and loss. Often these burials were singular in nature and therefore the idea of special places where the dead could be buried and remembered were still to be developed. It is likely the lack of such places, or 'cemeteries' was probably due to the nomadic lifestyle of these early hunter gatherers and as their constant movement precluded them burying their dead in one spot.

With the advent of agriculture, a more settled lifestyle developed and small permanent settlements were built, and with them areas where the dead were buried. There are many claims as to the locations of these first cemeteries, certainly sites in the Middle East have been found with multiple burials dating back over 16,000 years, and as more excavations take place around the world possibly older sites will come to light.

Regarding the first evidence of European 'cemeteries', many agree that this honour currently goes to Gross Fredenwalde Cemetery located just over an hour north of Berlin dating to around 8,500 years ago.

The reason Gross Fredenwalde is classed as a cemetery is due to the presence of communal burials where the deceased have deliberately been buried together. The date of the cemetery places it in the European Mesolithic period when most people were hunter-gatherers and as previously stated, were known for their nomadic lifestyle, therefore, cemeteries designed for multiple burials to commemorate the dead were likely to have been extremely rare, thus suggesting the significance and deliberate use of this site as a purpose-built cemetery.

A recent discovery in Somerset has dated the UK's oldest open-air cemetery to a similar period. The new findings show that by around 8,300 BC, hunter-gatherers were burying their dead on what was once an island amid the Somerset Levels and was in use for around 200 years.

As with the Middle East, ongoing excavation elsewhere across Europe, are unearthing cemeteries of a similar age which suggests older European cemeteries may yet be waiting to be discovered.

Clearly there is evidence at various sites throughout history that the burial of the dead was an important aspect for many cultures and religions and the presence of grave goods, stone markers and monuments suggest this practice was a sign of respect for the dead, as well as a clear indication of a belief in the afterlife where such items could be used by the deceased. Finally, some writers also see burials as being an important part of a sense of closure for the bereaved.



*Food, pottery, and other grave goods were often buried with the dead for their use in the afterlife.*



# **The Development of Formal Cemeteries**

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In relation to the development of cemeteries as is understood by many people today, then the Greeks are credited with first building large cemeteries, mainly located outside their ancient cities. They were also credited with creating the term "cemetery", originating in the Greek word "koimeterion" meaning a "sleeping place," where land was meant for burial.

Christian Cemeteries are thought to have first been developed in the 7th century when burials were firmly controlled by the church in Europe, the church being the only institution allowed to bury the dead.

As Christianity grew in popularity, people began to bury their dead in or under religious buildings and by the 8th Century churchyards were added as a suitable place for burials. Clear boundaries marked the consecrated area for burials and these areas had to be cared for in perpetuity.

However, over time the space available for churchyard burials came under increasing pressure particularly with the growth of urban areas and this led to concerns about the health implications of burial spaces close to houses particularly as more and more people in the nineteenth century moved to cities to find work, often living in houses abutting churchyards.



*Overcrowded churchyards led to the development of larger municipal cemeteries.*

The beginning of the nineteenth century therefore saw the gradual development of freestanding areas outside the churchyard which allowed for the provision of different types of cemeteries: private (for profit), public (tax supported), religious (Catholic, Jewish, etc.), and military.

However, in the mid 1800's the UK saw two major cholera epidemics which killed tens of thousands of people, causing the problem of spaces for burials to become a major concern. Up to this point the previously mentioned, largely privately run cemeteries, were only catering for the wealthy as burial charges in these locations were high, and out of reach of many ordinary working-class people who were often buried in mass graves with no headstone or lasting memorial.

## **Municipal Cemeteries**

August 1848, saw the passing of the first Public Health Act, This Act laid the foundations for all subsequent public health measures and was the beginning of the legislative process that would establish public cemeteries throughout Britain.

Starting with the Metropolitan Burial Act in 1852, a series of Acts, which became known as the Burial Acts, were passed. Consolidated in 1857, they established a national system of public cemeteries. The Burial Acts resulted in cemeteries being created in both rural and urban areas. Furthermore, once public authorities were given the power to provide decent places of burial, very few private cemeteries were built as burials for all levels of society were now more affordable.

Large numbers of public cemeteries continued to open in England throughout the second half of the nineteenth century. Finally, The Local Government Act of 1894 saw the responsibility of cemeteries being passed to the newly constituted local authorities at district, town, and parish level, a responsibility which continues to this day.

## The changing face of cemetery landscapes

Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, which opened in 1804, provided an early example and prototype for cemetery design which later became influential in England, albeit that the cemetery had itself been influenced by the English naturalistic landscape design of Capability Brown (1716-1783). During the 1820s, 1830s and 1840s, garden cemeteries were founded in most cities in Britain. These garden cemeteries were landscaped with pathways, natural vistas, and winding avenues and provided spaces for monuments for the dead, often depicting the sculptures and nature scenes loved by the Victorians. These places were located on the perimeter of urban areas, providing suitable spaces for visitation and contemplation. These cemeteries began to replace traditional churchyards and family burial grounds being designed to meet the needs of a growing population.



*Père Lachaise Cemetery, Paris*

Therefore, the garden cemetery offered an appealing and appropriate landscape for remembering the dead and mediating the relationship between the dead and the bereaved and the wider cycle of life.

Nature, in contrast to an increasingly urban setting, was idealized and sought out; cemeteries, located close towns and cities were consciously designed to provide sanctuary, solitude, quiet, adornment, and beauty. It was common, especially on Sundays, for full families to picnic in cemeteries, particularly as greenspaces were in short supply in the heavily urbanised towns and cities, indeed it has been argued that many of the UK's municipal parks were created using the lessons and designs from these early cemeteries where the presence of nature converted cemeteries from place of sorrow and foreboding to ones where people could take their ease and remember their loved ones in a landscape of remembrance.

Although providing a beautiful landscape where plantings and monuments worked well together, garden cemeteries had several drawbacks, most notably the amount of space they needed and the cost of burial. In the mid-nineteenth century as many of the original edge of town cemeteries were being absorbed into towns and cities, space was at a premium and was becoming more difficult to find, added to this as previously mentioned, was high burial costs, which, for the burgeoning working classes, meant burial in such places was unaffordable. Therefore, a new style of cemetery was needed. This need was met by the creation of lawned cemeteries, which first began to appear in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century. Gone were the fenced off individual plots, housing grand memorials to the success and social status of the individual, replaced instead by a large, grassed area with uniform individual headstones or plaques to indicate a burial. Here, families were encouraged to have a smaller centrepiece memorial surrounded by matching footstones.

The premise of lawned cemeteries was that the cemetery should be seen as a whole site rather than an area of individual features and to a certain degree, signifying the equality of death. Fencing and hedge barriers were discouraged, in order to provide continuity of the landscape. The resulting clean lines and open spaces of the cemetery were easily maintained which had the benefit for many of lowering the price of the plots.

Many UK cemeteries have evolved into a mixture of garden and lawned cemeteries, particularly as populations and, by association, the number of people dying rose.

Today this mixture can cause different problems ranging from conservation and safety of large memorials and headstones to the need to ensure unauthorised memorials do not cause maintenance problems in areas given over to the lawned style. Most people still wanting burials tend to have single headstones and very few large memorials are now either requested or allowed.

Added to this change in memorialisation has been the growing popularity of cremation in the UK which has meant that many people no longer actually require burial plots, often taking cremated remains away for private disposal or burying them in existing graves or scattered in memorial gardens.

However, whether a garden cemetery or a lawned cemetery, since these cemeteries were established, there has been a growing realisation that the initial purpose of a cemetery being a place to bury and remember the dead, is not only intrinsically linked with the needs of the living to have a place to visit the departed, but also a place where the natural world fits in. Initially these spaces were conceived as being a 'natural' but well-manicured landscape, where trees and flowering plants were chosen for their symbolism and beauty, but this view is now beginning to change to recognise that cemeteries also provide habitats for a wide variety of flora and fauna. We now are beginning to accept that cemeteries can create more opportunities for our rapidly shrinking levels of biodiversity and as such attempts are being made to make space for nature within our cemeteries and burial grounds.





## Government Recognition

This realisation has been reflected in a guidance document produced by Government entitled 'Guide for Burial Ground Managers' (2005).

The purpose of this guide is to draw together in one place, general but relevant advice for all burial ground managers, including the 'promotion, appreciation of, and commitment to, the wider role of burial grounds in the environmental, historical and cultural life of the community'.

The guide states that:

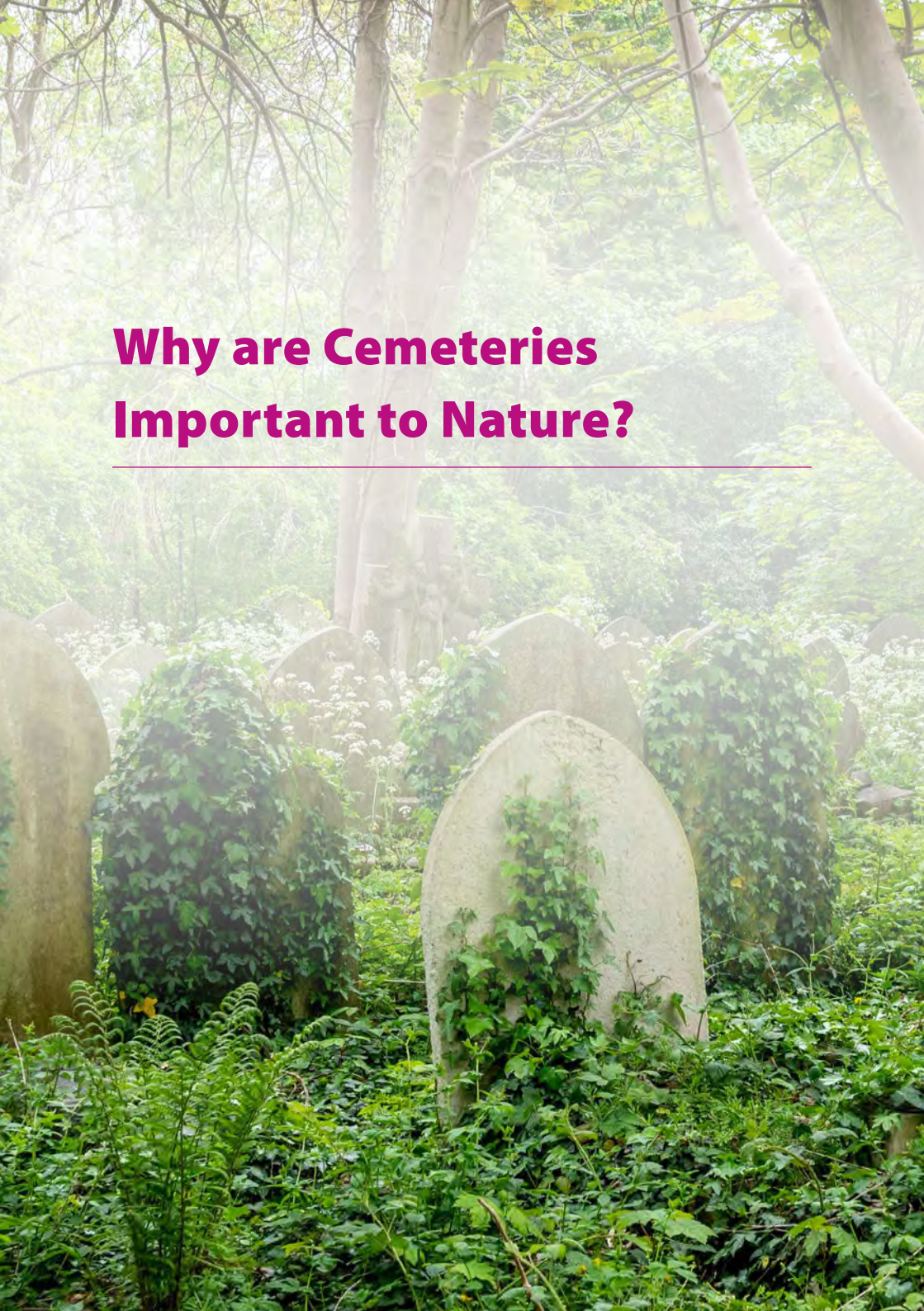
*"Burial grounds are not simply places for the burial of the dead. They provide areas for the living to commemorate those who have died, a focal point to record and appreciate the life, aesthetics, and ethos of previous generations, and, by default or design, a lightly used **largely unbuilt environment offering an open space refuge for local flora and fauna, as well as for human recreation and enjoyment**. The interest and appeal of burial grounds is to an audience much wider than those who have a friend or relative buried in the site.*

*Burial grounds which seek to provide a haven for wildlife should be cultivated with this in mind, although managers will need to decide the balance to be struck between the needs of mourners and other visitors, and the practicalities of continuing to provide burial facilities (where this is the case). It is important to emphasise that an environmentally sensitive burial ground is not an over-grown or unkempt one, and that the maintenance efforts required may be just as challenging as for a lawn cemetery. Although a different type of mowing regime will be required, (less grass cutting, and horticultural maintenance can be expected) the need to maintain hard structures remains and there will still be a need to provide for proper litter and rubbish disposal."*

Although dated, this document clearly identifies cemeteries and burial grounds as having a clear value for nature.

# **Why are Cemeteries Important to Nature?**

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Researchers at the University of the West of England (UWE Bristol) found that cemeteries provide four per cent of accessible green space in England and are particularly important in high-density urban areas where space is limited, in fact, cemeteries provide the only access to doorstep green space for more than a million people in England and offer many of the same benefits as parks. Using Ordnance Survey green space data, they found that out of the 120,876 green spaces in England, 4,992 were cemeteries (4.1 per cent). And that the amount of cemetery space in each local authority varies across England, from less than 5 hectares in some areas to 183.5 hectares in Birmingham. The proportion of green spaces that are cemetery space range from 0.24 per cent in West Lancashire to 31.4 per cent in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

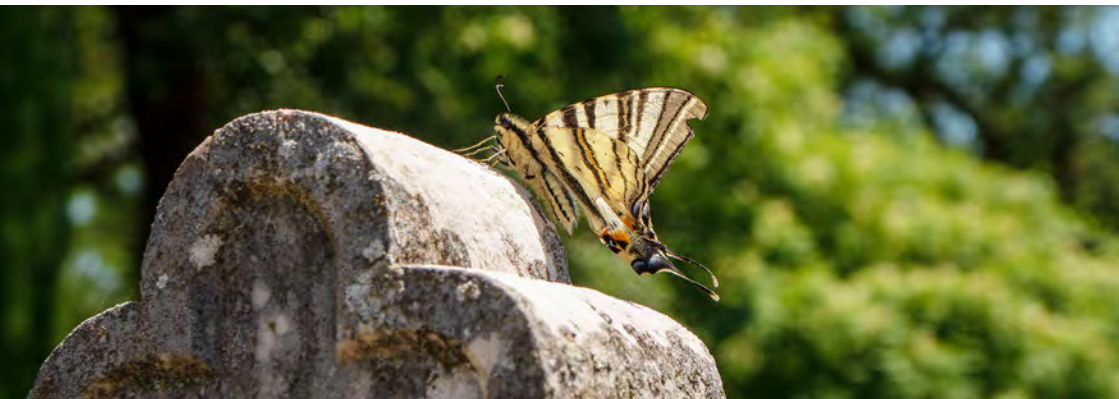


*Cemeteries often provide areas of greenspace in urban areas*

As sacred spaces, cemetery land is often left alone and many areas, due to their age, are now left undisturbed due to a lack of visitors to sections with older graves. Reduced pesticide use, and low frequency maintenance as compared to parks, gardens, manicured flower beds, has led to older parts of cemeteries becoming reminiscent of natural habitats which were present before urbanisation took hold. As such, cemeteries can contain a wide variety of plants and animals, and although some of these may be exotic from earlier Victorian or Edwardian planting schemes when the cemetery was first laid out, collectively they can provide a varied and substantive ecosystem.

But it is not only the carbon-based constituents of the cemetery which provides opportunities for biodiversity, but the rock and stones which make up the monuments and gravestones also provide important habitats for mosses, ferns, and lichens, thus providing a tangible link between nature and the remembrance value of the cemetery. The fact the land has remained very much undisturbed means ecosystems can develop and sustain themselves in the longer term and protect the myriad of different species which are part of their structure.

It is the value of cemeteries and closed churchyards as potential boltholes for nature which is being increasingly recognised. A recent study carried out by Sussex University shows that flying insect populations had declined by more than 75% in study areas suggesting this could be the case across wider areas. It appears that the way we manage our greenspaces and gardens, previously the homes of many of these insects have caused them to become uninhabitable for insects either because of reducing food sources caused by inappropriate plants or due to the increased use of pesticides and herbicides. Therefore, the importance of cemeteries and closed churchyards to pollinators and other winged insects should not be underestimated.



However, some people argue that by allowing cemetery areas to become 'wilder' this is a sign of disrespect, therefore there is a need to choose carefully, the area to be 'naturalised' and fully communicate any projects which do allow nature a greater presence in certain areas of the cemetery.

A recent study of Berlin cemeteries looking at why people visited, and their tolerance to more naturalised spaces within cemeteries concluded that, 'instead of a 'one size fits all' strategy for the entire cemetery area, findings supported an approach to meet different needs by developing differently maintained sections for people, which in turn supports different components of biodiversity. The report concluded that considering people with different preferences and reasons to visit is a promising way to promote urban cemeteries as shared habitats for people and nature.'

Again, it is worth noting that the benefits of naturalising areas of a cemetery also reinforce the original human well-being benefits cemeteries were meant to provide which was the opportunity to enjoy areas of greenspace for leisure and connecting with nature, as well as remembering loved ones.



## Ecological Emergencies and the Duty to Promote Opportunities for Biodiversity

Many councils have declared climate emergency action plans, some have also declared separate ecological emergency plans which set out actions which will be taken by a council to include nature into all decisions. These actions may be able to be implemented quickly, whilst others could take years to achieve. Nevertheless, the fact such plans are being developed, some in tandem with climate emergency plans, bodes well for any intentions regarding making space for nature in cemeteries and burial grounds.

Glasgow was the first Scottish City to declare an ecological emergency in May of 2019. In the plan its stated as one of its aims:

“to take immediate action to enable parks and greenspaces, cemeteries, former landfill sites, as well as vacant and derelict land to be further enhanced for biodiversity, providing increased space for nature, across Glasgow.”

Other councils across the UK are similarly recognising the value cemeteries bring to addressing the needs of biodiversity.

Indeed, the need to promote biodiversity for local authorities is not a voluntary option, for the Environment Act 2021 clearly states that all public authorities who operate in England must consider what they can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Similar duties apply in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The strengthened ‘biodiversity duty’ that the Environment Act 2021 introduces means that, as a public authority, you must:

- Consider what you can do to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Agree policies and specific objectives based on your considerations.
- Act to deliver your policies and achieve your objectives.

Completed consideration of what action to take for biodiversity is required by 1 January 2024 and agreed policies and objectives as soon as possible after this. These policies must identify action to be taken in the next 5 years and these can be done more often, for example, you could reconsider your actions quarterly, annually, or every 5 years.

There is clearly a need to consider how these actions tie in or affect other strategies such as local nature recovery strategies, but the crux of the matter is, there is a need to promote biodiversity on council managed or owned land and within the types of land defined as being covered by this duty, are cemeteries.

## **How Realistic is it to Balance the Needs of the Bereaved and Biodiversity?**

Woodland burials and green/meadow burials have grown in popularity over the past few decades, as people are becoming growingly concerned about the impact traditional burials and cremations have on the environment. These areas are being designed to provide a more natural and peaceful environment for loved ones to be buried. Some sites even promote the planting of native trees or bulbs, but almost all do not allow any visible monuments, fencing or grave borders. Therefore, if this natural approach is adopted on these sites, then why not also develop a similar approach to closed churchyards and areas of cemeteries which lend themselves to being managed in this more nature-friendly manner.

But, despite the evidence as to the benefits, both to nature and human health and well-being, there is still a degree of scepticism, and on occasion vociferous objection, to naturalising cemetery grounds, particularly as some would argue there are better opportunities in our parks and greenspaces. But as previously mentioned, with over 4% of the UK's greenspaces being found in cemeteries, together with the fact large areas are unvisited and therefore undisturbed, this makes them the perfect places for this approach.

The issue which needs to be addressed, as was again found in the previously mentioned Berlin cemetery study, is in identifying the correct area to naturalise, and then gaining public support before any action is taken, even if the area has a low footfall of visitors. Equally important is the need to provide straightforward evidence that any naturalising is a managed decision, either by some clear evidence of maintenance or providing information boards/social media explaining the species being encouraged and the benefits being gained by this approach. Ideally developing a publicly accessible management plan to support the work would also be beneficial.

As mentioned previously, by involving the community when considering naturalising cemetery grounds, cemetery managers can be sensitive to public views and clearly explain that 'naturalising' does not mean abandonment, but rather a way of managing cemetery grounds that creates greater opportunities for biodiversity, whilst still respecting families wishes that their loved ones resting places will be cared for. Also, by involving local schools and Local Wildlife Trusts, in helping maintain and monitor flora and fauna present in the cemetery, then this will provide added support to any naturalisation of cemetery grounds.

There has been a great deal of academic research in naturalising cemetery grounds but has there been much evidence, as to whether naturalisation is actually taking place.

In 2022 The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) carried out a brief survey amongst its members as to whether any of its local authority members had adopted or were considering this approach.

The questions posed included:

- Identifying most common types of biodiversity present in cemeteries and any management required.
- Identify wider value of cemeteries in relation to addressing biodiversity losses.
- List types of nature friendly activities being undertaken:
  - » Types, location, and percentages of deliberately unmaintained or low-maintenance areas.
  - » habitat creation,
  - » wildflower planting,
  - » reduced herbicide use,
  - » ecological surveys,
  - » nature related policies and strategies,
  - » use of Friends groups and volunteers,
  - » awareness raising programmes.
- Identify potential areas of conflict and practicable solutions.
- Identify case studies of successful integration and promotion of nature in cemeteries.



- Establish status/profile of cemeteries in corporate documents.
- Public acceptance
- Develop guidance on how to accept and promote nature in cemeteries.

All the responses showed local authorities to different degrees, are naturalising parts of their cemeteries.

In terms of practical actions:

- *84% of respondents had made a conscious decision to allow certain areas of cemeteries to be less intensively managed to promote wildflowers and wildlife*
- *71% of decisions to naturalise parts of cemeteries were driven by cemetery management team.*
- *Only 29% consulted beforehand and only 41% took external advice.*
- *Average percentage of area given over to wildlife/wildflower promotion was 14%.*
- *Regarding the areas of cemeteries given over to naturalisation, the most common responses were older parts of cemeteries, land set aside for new burials but not yet being used, woodland burial areas, ashes scattering areas and edges of cemeteries.*
- *Newer cemeteries were designing in wildflower and wildlife considerations into initial designs as well as replacing existing bedding schemes and areas of turf with wildflower planting – linked to promotion campaigns around increasing opportunities for biodiversity and protecting pollinators.*
- *Encouraging nature – most common actions included wildflower planting, less mowing, reducing use of chemicals, bird/bat boxes, log piles, extra tree and hedgerow planting.*

When questioned about the support they were receiving in their naturalisation approach:

- 42% of respondents say actions are supported by Friends of Groups.
- 40% carried out Ecological Surveys to identify flora and fauna present.
- Only 30% stated cemetery grounds were recognised as being important in council Biodiversity Action Plans.
- Only 37% recognised value of ecosystem services cemetery grounds offered.
- Most funding for biodiversity improvements comes from internal budgets.

As stated previously a key element of getting a more naturalised approach within cemeteries is to communicate why this is happening. The responses concerning communication were that:

- *53% advertise the fact cemetery grounds are being managed for biodiversity.*
- *46% have received positive responses to nature enhancement, 36% neutral, 18% negative.*
- *Other techniques included: the use of social media, on-site information boards, articles in local magazines and QR code recognition trails.*

The survey concluded by asking respondents what were their key learning points from adopting a naturalisation approach. The main points were:

- *Choice of Wildflowers – annuals versus perennials, native species.*
- *Natural regeneration.*
- *Problem Weeds – common hogweed and creeping thistle*
- *Dog fouling*
- *Changing staff and elected members mindsets*
- *Dealing with the ‘neat and tidy brigade’*
- *Managing Burrowing species – badgers and rabbits.*
- *Gathering external support – e.g., Wildlife Trusts*
- *Promoting successes – presence or re-appearance of rare species, creating social media page.*
- *Public open days - biodiversity/family history/themed.*

From the findings of the survey, it was clear that across the UK there is a great deal of excellent work taking place to increase the biodiversity value of cemetery land, and much of this is down to cemetery managers themselves and their staff, and where this is properly communicated to cemetery users and residents there is also a growing level of support in this area also.

It is difficult to identify every local authority which took part in the survey but what follows are just a few examples of good practice in naturalising areas within cemetery grounds.



## **How practical is it to introduce more nature friendly areas within active cemeteries?**

APSE has seen a growing interest in making cemetery grounds more nature friendly over the past few years, much of this has been linked to the recognition that there is a growing crisis regarding the loss of biodiversity in the UK. The UK has lost almost half of its biodiversity since the 1970's. 15% of the UK's 8431 species are threatened and 2% have become extinct and these are just the species we know about (RSPB State of Nature Report 2019). Many of the remaining species not threatened or extinct, are in decline. Because of these findings, national and local government are beginning to take more proactive action to improve opportunities for biodiversity through legislation, local policies, and strategies and on the ground improvements.

APSE is supporting local authorities in the drive to increase opportunities for increasing biodiversity through not only providing information on government legislation, briefings on promoting spaces for nature, inclusion in seminars and advisory groups, but also by gathering information as to how local authority members are practically addressing this need.

As has been previously stated, cemeteries provide a diverse range of habitats for wide range of flora and fauna and have resisted the encroachment of developments and high maintenance regimes which often include the widespread use of pesticides and herbicides.

To show how some local authorities are making more space for nature in their existing municipal cemeteries APSE has gathered a number of case studies which it hopes councils will find useful when considering how to increase their cemeteries biodiversity levels.

# Case Studies

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## Glasgow City Council

The Glasgow Necropolis is an impressive example of a Victorian garden cemetery, it is the second largest greenspace in the centre of Glasgow. In addition to being a major tourist attraction, the cemetery has a wide range of wildlife habitats including, rock faces and slopes, wooded areas, and unmown grass areas where long grass and wildflowers grow.

The Friends of Glasgow Necropolis are a group of volunteers dedicated to the conservation of the cemetery. One of their key tasks is to support the cemetery's role as a space for nature through the recording and monitoring of the flora and fauna within the cemetery. Over 400 species of animals have been recorded, some of which are extremely rare. In addition, 180 species of flowering plants and trees and 15 species of lichen have also been recorded.

They have also been involved in creating wildflower meadows with the help of local school children.

They are also developing a tree map for the cemetery identifying all the different tree species present.



*Glasgow Necropolis - a classic example of a Victorian garden cemetery*

## Wigan Council

One of the few positives to come out of the COVID pandemic was the reconnection many people had with the natural environment.

Wigan Council has used this 'reconnection', to further promote their intentions to naturalise the borough area, by increasing the area of species rich grassland, increasing tree planting, restoring peatland and heath land, creating new habitats, and reducing the use of herbicides. As well as improving opportunities for biodiversity, these actions also play a significant part in addressing the negative impacts of climate change. In achieving these aims, the council is actively involving community groups and other organisations in the works.

Already over 30,000 trees have been planted and nearly 60,000m<sup>2</sup> of wildflower meadows have been created.

Some of the improvements for biodiversity have been introduced into the town's cemeteries as a result of surveys carried out by the council's Biodiversity Officer. Work undertaken has allowed the creation of species rich wildflower meadows, increased tree planting and hedgerow planting particularly where it has been used to replace damaged or missing walls. They have also created wildlife habitats by utilising piles of tree logs following arboriculture work as well as allowing deadwood to stand in situ. Some of the land being used, is cemetery land which is not currently required for burial.

These areas will act as important wildlife stepping stones, providing opportunities for species connectivity across the wider landscape.

It is hoped that this work will improve visitor experience by providing a colourful and natural space for quiet reflection.

The Council, working with the Lancashire Wildlife Trust, is now actively looking for locations within its cemeteries to create meadows and woodlands and will be providing interpretation boards to help visitors understand the benefits being achieved by this approach.



*Creation of wildflower meadows on land not currently being used for burials.*

## **Worcester City Council**

Worcester Council recognises that healthy levels of biodiversity are at the very fabric of our planet and must be protected. With the ever-diminishing levels of biodiversity nationally it is incumbent on local authorities who often have large swathes of open space within their portfolios to lead from the front with re-wilding and other initiatives that will help stabilise and in time regrow biodiversity levels.

As with most bereavement services Worcester City Council has large areas of older grave sections and other surrounding areas that lend themselves to this type of thinking, but the challenge is one of communicating with the public and managing tight budgetary pressures.

Worcester's focus started with seeking advice and guidance from a local charity, the Worcester Environmental Group (WEG) who suggested also working with the local branch of the RSPB.

Suitable areas across cemeteries were identified and with WEGs help, the



service had recycled signage made up with location and rewilding information for the public. This action was supported by the council communications team who sent out several press releases in digital and paper form to raise awareness. Councillors were also brought up to speed to help lend gravitas to the reasoning behind the change in thinking and land management.

Other supporting initiatives included introducing 3 beehives into Worcester's natural burial area to promote pollination and in addition, bat, bird and mammal boxes were placed across the site, which were also made by WEG. The culmination of the first year of this initiative, 2022 enabled the site to secure a Green Flag award for the first time, and this has been retained in 2023.

Elected members, officers and the public alike, now realise that the variety of plants, animals and microorganisms are critical in providing a wide range of benefits, including clean air and water, producing food, and even contributing to help make the raw materials for our clothing and medicines and it's a sad fact that this web of life is being decimated under our watch. We cannot mitigate climate change without halting the extinction of species: the two are interwoven.

Therefore, we need to show ingenuity in working with nature, and initiative in working for nature, in order for our ecosystems to survive as well as being effective in tackling climate change.

Therefore, Worcester City Council Bereavement Services recognises that with over 80 hectares of cemetery space spread across two sites it has an opportunity through careful land management and strong partnerships to do its part towards supporting the national push to save and enhance the nations biodiversity by carrying out the following series of actions:

- Sections for rewilding identified.
- Signage made up with costs kept very low due to local charity making signs out of recycled materials.
- Free internal communications and local media launch.
- Invited local beekeepers to site hives to promote pollination. Free with majority of the honey produced donated back to the keepers to help them generate income.

- Site visit from RSPB to help with types of bird and bat boxes required and the locations.
- Boxes then made by same local charity out of recycled materials.



*Information boards made from recycled materials.*

Following this work the following benefits have been achieved:

- High levels of honey production from the start indicates that the area has been well populated with varieties of flora.
- Species diversity in terms of flora have been deemed 'good' by WEG volunteers.
- Bird species identified by visual inspection and through bird call checks carried out by RSPB volunteers suggest plentiful and varied species present.
- Overall feedback from visiting members of public has been good but there still work to be done on education for some.
- Green Flag secured.
- ICCM Gold standard for outdoor works secured.

As a result of these successes future work is planned to include:

- Extending the number of sections under the re-wilding scheme with additional signage

- A more formal species counts for both flora and fauna to give a benchmark for future developments.
- Further ongoing promotional work to help raise of awareness of how important this is.



*Astwood Cemetery, Worcester City*

## **Mid and East Antrim Borough Council**

The Council is responsible for 23 cemeteries and recognises the value of cemeteries as important greenspaces.

Through the parks and open spaces development team, they have engaged with local communities to identify how these spaces can deliver greater benefits whilst recognising the sanctity of the sites. These sites, through appropriate management, can provide important sites for biodiversity and this management can add to the peaceful nature when families visit to remember their loved ones.

They have introduced a number of projects designed to make space for nature in their cemeteries, such as nest box installations, monitoring of species,

adoption of specific areas for wildlife by local schools and the delivery of educational programmes for different ages, including nature walks and 'forest schools'. There have also been several ecological surveys carried out and reports produced as to how further opportunities can be taken to improve biodiversity levels.

Physical improvements to enhance biodiversity have seen the planting of trees, sowing of wildflower meadows, reduction of herbicide usage and hedgerow planting on cemetery boundaries.

It has been recognised that the fact cemeteries are not as intensely managed as other urban green spaces provides a calmer environment for wildlife to thrive.



*Ballee Cemetery, Ballymena*

## Cemeteries as Local Nature Reserves

The 2000-01 Select Committee Report on Cemeteries observed:

“Cemeteries support a wide range of habitats, including relict grasslands, heath, ancient and secondary woodland, scrub, hedges, ponds, and flushes, as well as more artificial features such as high maintenance lawns, stands of trees, ornamental flower beds, and shrubberies. In addition, buildings, monuments, tombs, and headstones, made from a variety of rocks, can provide support for lichens, mosses and ferns, as well as providing geological interest. A large number of rare species of trees, plants, fungi, invertebrates, reptiles, birds and mammals are found in cemeteries.

Cemeteries are often designated as local Wildlife Sites, and sometimes as Nature Reserves.”

It is with this comment in mind that many local authorities have gone down the path of creating local nature reserves within their cemeteries.

### Sheffield City Council

Sheffield General Cemetery is a grade II\* Garden Cemetery, local nature reserve and park in the final year of a £3.8m National Lottery funded conservation and audience development project.

Emblematic of Sheffield's northern industrial heritage, rich in biodiversity and social value, the cemetery nevertheless suffered fragmentation and underinvestment in the 20th century, which has thankfully been halted by the commitment of Sheffield General Cemetery Trust which champions its significance and began its restoration journey.

The grade II\* Gardenesque Cemetery, includes the imposing catacombs, sinuous paths and striking Egyptian Revival buildings. Creeping decline over the latter half of the 20th century allowed nature to soften the hard edges of its monuments, providing a green oasis near the city centre.

Sheffield City Council has been awarded £3 million from the joint National Lottery Heritage Fund/National Lottery Community Fund Parks for People programme.

The project aims to protect the future of Sheffield General Cemetery Heritage Park the Cemetery as a heritage rich, biodiverse, public park.

Sheffield General Cemetery is an important wildlife sanctuary and designated Local Nature Reserve and Local Wildlife Site. The mature trees, regenerating woodland, old structures and dense areas of bramble and other shrubs mean that it is an important refuge and stepping-stone for wildlife close to the heart of the city. The River Porter both connects the Cemetery to the city and is a corridor out to the wider landscape of the Porter Valley and Peak District beyond. Many of the wilder areas will continue to be managed for biodiversity. The new 10-year management plan will create a rolling programme of management to minimise the impact of habitat management work on any one section of the site. Sheffield City Council has worked closely with their project ecologist to minimise the impact and to build in wildlife enhancements into the works wherever possible such as installing low-level lighting to reduce the impact on wildlife.



*Sandford Avenue Sheffield General Cemetery*

## Middlesbrough Council

There has been a growing consciousness of how even death can impact the environment, something that has been on Middlesbrough Council's conscience for over 20 years.

In the early 90's a small group of volunteers who cared and valued Linthorpe cemetery, which is situated within Middlesbrough, one mile southwest of the town centre and is surrounded by residential and other urban land use, took it upon themselves to preserve and enhance it, which led to the forming of the Friends of Linthorpe Cemetery group.

The site is a working cemetery and is steeped in history, first being used in 1668 by the Quakers Society and then the Jewish community for burials. As a result of the growing population of the town the cemetery was enlarged and improved and became a municipal cemetery in December 1869.

The cemetery reflects the history of Middlesbrough the Town, from its industrial routes and includes including features such as an historic fever hospital, a baby memorial section, and the final resting place of many famous residents of Middlesbrough, including the resting place of a visiting Native American/Mohawk Moses Carpenter who regularly visited Middlesbrough to sell his medicinal cures.

Working in partnership with the Friends group, the Council has looked to preserve the heritage of the cemetery and ensure dignity of the deceased, but also to consider the value of the environment, which from a natural history point of view, this 52-acre cemetery, has the largest area of mature, urban woodland in the town and is an island rich in wildlife despite being situated in a densely populated urban landscape.

Therefore, Linthorpe Cemetery provides an ideal situation for schools and natural history groups to study Middlesbrough's local park and wildlife right in the town centre. The issue was how to effectively balance and manage this within a historic cemetery.

In order to achieve this, a balance was struck with members of the public being consulted, historic records reviewed regarding exclusive rights of burial, and consideration of nature and wildlife.

Areas where burial rights that had expired on graves for more than 20 years, largely in the oldest parts of the cemetery were considered as the most appropriate for rewilding, whereas areas where purchases are recent, are still being maintained in accordance with regular maintenance cycles.

Some key achievements in relation to providing more opportunities for biodiversity include:

- The cemetery has been designated as a local nature reserve and has for the past 25 years received Green Flag status.
- A summer meadow has been established encompassing approx. 5 acres including approximately 5000 graves. This section was planted with over 2000 cowslips and is maintained once a year. A 2m Border around the section and through it has been created which acts as a nature walkway and is cut and maintained fortnightly, with the rest of the section strimmed once a year, with the resultant cuttings used for composting.
- 9 flower beds have been established and maintained with varying plants, including herbs and sensory plants.
- A Woodland Meadow area has been developed utilising existing trees with additional trees planted over the last 15 years This area covers approximately 15 acres and includes 14,000 graves. Fallen or unhealthy trees are left in place to act as natural habitats, although it is important that any which affect memorials or walkways are removed. Some are cut back to trunk, with many carved into sculptures.
- A Woodland Burial section has been established encompassing over 180 natural burials only graves, whereby a tree and other horticultural items are planted instead with no memorials allowed, as well as strict control measures on embalming, natural fibres, natural coffins etc. Of the small numbers of burials that still take place within the cemetery, 80-90% of these burials are natural woodland burials.
- Over 20 habitat boxes for owls, birds, bats, hedgehogs have been created together with the instillation of a beehive.
- 5,000 daffodils planted to give spring colour and opportunities for early pollinators.



- 10,000 snowdrops have been planted as part of child bereavement memorial service.
- Hedgerow planted and established.
- Annual tree planting & memorial tree planting activities for commemorative events such as a holocaust memorial in dedication of the Jewish burial section, the Queen's Green Canopy project and other such initiatives.

The success in this one cemetery has been replicated in other cemeteries, with dedicated sections for wild/meadow flower planting in all cemeteries. Including Woodland and Meadowland graves being used for interments in Middlesbrough's main cemetery & crematorium site (Acklam).

Wildflower planting has been introduced in Thorntree Cemeteries, St Joseph's, North Ormesby, with current consultations taking place to turn two adjacent cemeteries at St Joseph's Roman catholic cemetery & North Ormesby Cemetery into a nature reserve covering over 15 acres, given their historic status and the fact both are now closed cemeteries. This proposal, if successful, will deliver wider opportunities for biodiversity in the area and bring significant benefits to the aims of Middlesbrough's green agenda.

Importantly this work would also result in the town holding two local nature reserves within the urban centre of the town, an achievement to be justifiably proud of and one that will bring significant benefits to local residents and the flora and fauna of the areas.



**FRIENDS OF  
LINTHORPE  
CEMETERY  
& NATURE  
RESERVE**



## Creating New Areas for Nature Within Cemeteries

There is a growing realisation that there are tangible benefits to managing cemetery grounds with nature in mind. As has been shown, many local authorities are now designating closed cemeteries as local nature reserves. This realisation that a balance can be struck between the needs of people, and the importance of cemeteries to nature, needs to be more widely understood, and that the aim of naturalisation isn't simply about neglecting these spaces, but managing them differently.

In addition to taking advantage of those cemeteries where there are already existing opportunities to cater for nature, some councils are now creating new areas specifically designed with nature in mind. One such example is the work being carried out by Rotherham Council.

### Rotherham Council

If planned thoughtfully, cemeteries can be deliberately multifunctional spaces; designed to provide benefits and functions for people and wildlife, in addition to remembrance.

Rotherham Council is working towards improving biodiversity in all their cemetery grounds, both existing and new. By working collaboratively with their contractor, and through the creation of specific targets within their service improvement plan. One such target is the provision of an environmentally friendly burial option.

Following a public consultation exercise, it was shown there was an appetite for the provision of an environmentally friendly burial option within their municipal cemeteries.

It was decided that by creating and combining a natural meadow environment, with a wooded area, this would be the ideal environment for a natural burial ground. One of the council's most popular cemeteries is Greasbrough Lane Cemetery located in Rawmarsh, Rotherham

Rawmarsh, presented itself as an ideal location to carry out a pilot scheme, by both being on the edge of the surrounding countryside with beautiful views, and by having the suitable space available for development.



As shown in the pictures above, the area identified for development, already had an established hedgerow and mature trees to two sides of the site, and open fields beyond, which provides an excellent starting point for wildlife, and can be improved upon over time.

A new hedgerow has been planted along the remaining side of the site and the turf has been removed in sections to allow for the creation of a wildflower meadow, with native flowering species.

Specific paths will be mown into the remaining grass areas to allow access, and will be maintained throughout the year, but the remaining areas of the site will be allowed to naturalise and develop without intervention. This will allow a large area of the cemetery to go from being regularly mown and maintained, to slowly reverting to a “wilder” and more natural environment.



The next stage of development will be to plant several native tree species in and around the area, to not only provide visual impact and a calming environment, but to provide a haven for local wildlife.

The inclusion of some carefully selected, native flowering shrubs, will also be considered, for their attractiveness to insects and birds.

Burials in this area will be carefully restricted, to minimise the impact on the surrounding wildlife.

Only natural materials will be allowed for burials, simple natural grave markers, and only natural materials will be allowed for any floral tributes.

It will be important for biodiversity surveys to be carried out in this early stage, to establish a baseline of the flora and fauna present on site, and periodically throughout the year to hopefully monitor any increase in diversity or quantity. Rotherham Council will also encourage the public to get involved in these surveys and hopefully become involved in creating events to support the work proposed.

Additional small-scale projects will also be undertaken in the early stages of development, by officers, the cemetery friends' group, and hopefully local schools, to improve wildlife, through the inclusion of bird and bat boxes, bug hotels and other wildlife friendly improvements.

Municipal cemeteries are not the only burial grounds where there are opportunities to increase biodiversity levels. Closed churchyards also offer spaces where nature can thrive.

A vibrant field of wildflowers, including white daisies, yellow buttercups, and purple thistles, grows in front of a stone building with a large window featuring a diamond-patterned lattice. The scene is bathed in soft, natural light, creating a peaceful and colorful atmosphere.

# **Closed Churchyards**

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Naturalisation as a land management option is now widely accepted in closed churchyards.

Closed churchyards are created when a diocese has decided that the churchyard is full, and no more burials can take place.

Parish and town councils are initially served with a parochial council's notice of closure. They have the option of passing on the notice to district councils. Consequently, most district level authorities, at some point in time, inherit the legal obligation to assume maintenance. The transfer is compulsory. It does not depend on the condition of the churchyard or the local authority's ability to pay for the maintenance costs.

There are limitations to what a council can do with a closed churchyard. There may be planning restrictions appertaining to buildings and trees etc. Wildlife such as bats and owls may also be protected.

The biodiversity found in a closed churchyard can actively be encouraged and conserving it is often the default standard for many grounds maintenance schedules.

Grassland found in closed churchyards is often unlikely to have been fertilised or reseeded. Indeed, up to the 18th century before the move to erecting permanent headstones, many churchyards would have been managed by allowing animals to graze the land. Even when grazing was no longer possible because of headstones, the grass in the churchyards would have been managed as a hay crop, allowing the vegetation to grow tall and plants to flower and set seed. Many churchyards are therefore often rich in wildflowers which are now scarce elsewhere.

Careful management of all or part of the churchyard to favour these wildflowers, offers a unique opportunity to safeguard them and similarly other flora and fauna present along with their valuable habitats. This consideration for nature, will allow opportunities for biodiversity to flourish in a place where it can be enjoyed by parishioners and visitors alike.

It is estimated there may be over 19,000 Church of England churchyards with burials and approximately 30% of these are no longer accepting new burials.

Where local authorities are responsible for these closed churchyards many are now managing these spaces as 'nature reserves', in fact the Church of England, supports such an approach stating -

*'Churchyards are important for their habitats and as refuges for wildlife and plant life.*

*...in some urban areas they are the only green 'breathing' space available for both wildlife and people.'*

The Church of England also provides advice on how to manage churchyards to encourage wildlife:

However, The Church of England makes the point that churchyards are not solely nature refuges, they are still places of burial and remembrance and therefore good management is essential, as has been previously recognised in larger cemeteries.

There is a great deal of useful advice on how to manage closed churchyards and one of the best sources of information is provided by Caring for God's Acre Established in 2000 as a national charity, to promote the conservation of burial sites and support the volunteers who look after and maintain them, the charity provides a wealth of guidance and educational resources which highlight the value of closed churchyards as habitats for flora and fauna, many of which are rare and endangered.

APSE has also promoted Caring for God's Acre and other organisations who carry out similar work, at its Cemeteries and Crematoria seminars in the past. The most recent initiative being the Wilder Churches project.

Wilder Churches began in March 2021 as a partnership initiative between Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Diocese of Bath and Wells. The initiative again aims to support communities to get to know the wildlife in their local churchyard, other church land or burial ground and work together to find ways to increase the value of these special places for wildlife. The partnership offers free online training sessions to support communities to take positive action in churchyards and other burial grounds at a pivotal time for nature.

The importance of understanding the wildlife and plant life that is present in churchyards and burial grounds is clearly shown in the survey work carried out as part of the annual Churches Count on Nature, where people visit churchyards and record the plant and animal species they encounter.

In the last two years, 900 counting events have taken place across churches in England and Wales, and over 27,000 wildlife records were submitted to Caring for God's Acre. Churches across all denominations take part in the count each year.

The data collected is used to determine where rare and endangered species are in the country and to aid churches of all denominations to increase biodiversity on their land for the enrichment of the environment and local communities. In 2023, species on some of the 17,500 acres of churchyards in England alone will be mapped, with a further 1,282 acres of churchyards in Wales. The records will be included as part of the National Biodiversity Network which holds site by site data on levels of biodiversity and allows users to analyse data nationally. Churches are encouraged to connect with local schools, wildlife groups, and those who may not have visited before to discover their churchyards.

The count can serve not only to raise awareness and encourage care of the wildlife in churchyards but to provide local communities with a shared activity that can bring people together through the reconnection with nature.

Many local authorities are also taking greater responsibility for managing their own closed churchyards as well as offering advice to community groups who may wish to become involved in closed and wider churchyard management.

Within Council Local Biodiversity Action Plans cemeteries and closed churchyards are increasingly becoming identified as being of significant importance for nature. Although not a national BAP habitat, churchyards may well harbour national BAP species. Churches and churchyards can also provide habitats for a number of statutorily protected species such as bats, badgers and reptiles. Churchyards are now widely recognised as vital wildlife stepping-stones across the landscape and an important integral part of an area's wider green infrastructure.

A good example of how cemeteries and churchyards have been built into a council's Biodiversity Action Plan can be found in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan

Nationally a few churchyards have been legally designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and some churchyards have also become local nature reserves.



## Managing Volunteers

Many closed churchyards, because of their relatively small size and historical and familial connections with local communities, often attract the interest of local volunteers who wish to take on the management of these sites. However, if not managed properly these intentions can cause significant damage from a biodiversity perspective. The following case study looks at such a scenario and the process both volunteers and the local council had to go through to ensure a local closed churchyard was managed in the most appropriate manner for both wildlife and local residents.

### Dudley Council

All Saints Closed Graveyard sits across a busy main road, just a short walk from the busy centre of Sedgley in Dudley. The churchyard contains 4,000 graves including 19 war graves maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC).

The site has been described as 'overgrown' since the 1990's when it consisted of grassland and tall herbs, but since that time, dense scrub has developed across most of the site.

The Church closed the site in 2011 and handed responsibility of maintenance to Dudley MBC.

The site at this time was heavily overgrown and such was the poor condition of the site that this was raised with the Church. The maintenance schedule of the site reflected the overgrown nature, being reduced to maintaining the open aspect of the main pathways for access, the perimeter hedge and targeted spraying of war graves.

Since the 1970's the site had slowly disappeared under a blanket of vegetation. The photograph from 1980, although black and white, shows the churchyard when many of the graves were still visible across the whole site. The adjoining photograph from 1996 shows how nature was reclaiming the site, and as a consequence the site (recorded as Gospel End Street Cemetery) was recognised for its contribution to wildlife and biodiversity and was designated a Site of Local Importance to Nature Conservation (SLINC).



*Aerial photo 1980 Sedgley (All Saints) Churchyard West Extension*

*Aerial photo 1996 Sedgley (All Saints) Churchyard West Extension*

The rewilding of the churchyard continued throughout the next ten years, allowing the site to remain undisturbed and consequently of growing value to nature. The aerial photo from September 2011, the year the site was closed to burials by the church, shows 80% coverage of the site by vegetation, mainly consisting of brambles with ivy and bindweed, grass tussocks, thistle species and some small flowering plants such as Groundsel.

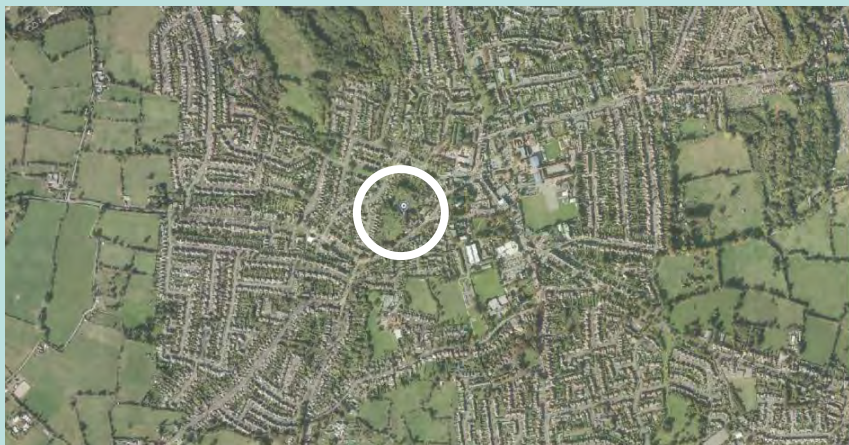


*Aerial photo 2001 Sedgley (All Saints) Churchyard West Extension*

*Aerial photo September 2011 Sedgley (All Saints) Churchyard West Extension*

The undisturbed nature of the site over decades created a haven for wildlife particularly birds, foxes and badgers.

On two sides of the site are residential properties with back gardens adjoining and views from the properties out over the graveyard. The site's central location provides a link for wildlife in an urban setting that lies between a network of other Green Spaces and Local Nature Reserves.



### *All Saints central location in surrounding green space network*

2020 saw the Friends of All Saints Graveyard formed as a group of willing volunteers determined to act to clear graves and restore the graveyard. The volunteers set up a Face Book group stating:

*"We were very distressed to have discovered that this graveyard has been left to become extremely overgrown with brambles ivy and weeds. Even more distressing is the fact that there are approximately 19 war graves in this graveyard. The war graves are maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves commission in line with its maintenance. This group has been formed to ensure that All Saints graveyard is cleared and maintained in respect of the people who are rest there and also our fallen heroes commemorated there."*

The volunteers gained positive comments for the work they proposed and there was a general sense of shock as to the condition of the site. In a short space of time, they had gathered much momentum and community support for the work of the group.

Initially the group had no formal recognition and no constitution. Equally worryingly was that they had no communications with Dudley Council to discuss their intentions or plans due to the ill feeling towards the Council, which group members felt was at fault for not maintaining the churchyard.

The management of the graveyard by the volunteers also had no clear parameters or aims other than to clear the vegetation present.

With an emotive subject and a passionate group of volunteers who had support from elements of the community, the group felt that this created the catalyst for change and a new era in the management of the graveyard.

However, the problem was that there was no direction or working plan to determine what the ongoing maintenance would look like, agreement on volunteer working practices, or a clear understanding of the wildlife value of the site, particularly with regards to those species protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981).

Many of these issues came to the fore when in 2021 Dudley Council began receiving complaints from local residents about noise, changing scenic views from properties and disturbances to wildlife due to the works and clearance being carried out by the Friends Group. As stated previously, because the group had no structure or governance and therefore no clear routes to the Council to discuss their actions and the complaints being received about their work, changes needed to be made. Therefore, in the same year, to enable the group to source funding, and to ensure proper governance was in place, the voluntary group became constituted, insured, and undertook formal risk assessments.

But, whilst the group continued to receive much support from the wider community, neighbouring residents became increasingly vocal about disturbances to wildlife, reporting incidents to the Police and contacting organisations such as Natural England and the Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and Black Country for advice.



*An area cleared of scrub*

With conflicting visions for the graveyard and rapport between the group and council remaining poor, the management of the site reached an impasse in 2022. Therefore, Dudley Council temporarily closed the graveyard following communications with West Midlands Police and the Health and Safety Executive in August 2022 to review health and safety, make safe dangerous memorials, undertake a badger survey, and review the position and future plan with the Friends of All Saints Graveyard voluntary management committee.

Following a meeting between Council officers and the Friends group, a new approach and way forward was agreed upon. The volunteers on site provided a co-ordinator who would have direct contact with a dedicated council officer and an early agreement was that work areas were to be agreed in accordance with badger survey recommendations to ensure the protected species were not inadvertently impacted by on site work.

As both the group and local residents had contacted the local Wildlife Trust for advice previously, it was agreed the Wildlife Trust would be commissioned to write a management plan for the graveyard to guide volunteers work plans.

In the interim, areas that could or could not be cleared were agreed and any works would be sympathetic to wildlife and in line with regulations. Regular site visits and checks would be undertaken with regular communication between the site representatives for groups and council.

The information was fed back to residents who remained concerned and watchful of site works in relation to the impacts on wildlife.

The management plan when completed will be shared with local residents to provide reassurance that works the group undertake will not have a negative impact as the changes in the aesthetics of the site and the impacts on habitats which are still concerns for many.

It has been the work of the dedicated council officer to reassure residents that some management is necessary to create a mosaic of beneficial habitat types both for resident species but also to diversify the wildlife visiting or using the site. For example, having areas of grassland with nectar rich flowers will encourage butterflies and support vital pollinators and provide more potential foodplants for caterpillars and foraging opportunities for birds.

Having a plan for post clearance of areas is a key way forward to enhancing biodiversity, but also aesthetics and allowing for a clearer future maintenance plan.

Future management prescriptions to direct the sites maintenance, as advised by the Wildlife Trusts are as follows:

- Re-establishing the grassland sward will be one of the main priorities of site management going forward, but the value of habitat and structural heterogeneity for biodiversity cannot be understated. Therefore, it is important that some limited areas of dense scrub are retained and managed. Remaining parcels of woodland on site will also be retained and enhanced.
- An integral part of re-establishing grassland on site will be to prevent scrub re-establishment/ encroachment in early years. This will require regular monitoring in the growing season (April – October) and cutting back of scrub with hand tools as it occurs. Extant pockets of scrub will be retained but must be cut back at regular intervals to prevent encroachment into other habitats.
- Grassland will be left to establish naturally in areas that have been recently cleared. Again, composition should be monitored closely in the first couple of years and undesirable species (bindweeds, hogweed, invasives) will need to be identified and controlled manually as they appear.
- Once established, grassland will need to be cut periodically to keep memorials accessible for visitors. Paths through the site will be established and regularly maintained to a short sward length for the purpose of access.
- In order to promote biodiversity, grasslands should remain uncut between March – August in order to allow flowers to bloom and set seed. Subsequent cuts should then aim to keep grassland short over the remaining season, and to remove arisings from the site (to remove nutrients from the soil and discourage vigorous weeds and grasses).

- This regime will need to be balanced with the need to access memorials. Recommendation will be to divide the site into different management parcels, which will then be maintained in the above manner on a rotational basis. This should allow the grasslands the opportunity to establish properly, whilst still allowing a proportion of the memorials to be accessed easily.
- Due to the nature of the site (being densely taken up with memorials), more industrial methods for cutting grassland will be unsuitable. We would recommend that where cutting does occur, this should be done with hand-tools (such as strimmers).
- With regard woodland management, firstly all mature trees should be assessed by a qualified Arboriculturist for their safety (if they have not already). Any recommendations made by this professional to make trees safe should be carried out before any more works near trees take place.
- Mature trees will then be thinned as appropriate, in order to allow light to penetrate the canopy more readily. Scrub will be reduced in these parcels, where required. Underplanting of bulbs, wildflower seed and young trees will also be undertaken. In order to promote structural diversity in these woodland parcels.
- One of the main considerations for long-term management of the site going forward, will be balancing management prescriptions with legal obligations relating to badgers. At time of writing, badger excavations and setts can be found across most of the site and any management will need to be strictly regulated, to adhere to this species' protection under the Badger Act 1992.
- As such, we recommend that a schedule of regular monitoring is implemented at the site, so that badger activity is mapped frequently, and management tasks can be tailored appropriately.
- From this, 30, 20 and 10m buffer zones from individual setts will be established (and revised where required), with each zone having certain restrictions on what activities can be undertaken therein (this will be detailed in the full management plan report).

- We envisage that most of the management prescriptions (both short and long-term) can be community-led with little need for professional intervention. Encouraging a variety of habitats to flourish in the churchyard will also provide a great opportunity for the monitoring of biodiversity, which will help local groups feel a sense of ownership and responsibility for the site.

Under the new agreement the last eight months has seen a much-improved rapport between group and council. The site management plan once released will be delivered in partnership with the group with the church and residents fully informed. Site actions will be agreed along with plans for funding whether that be from internal council budgets or external funding dependent upon the scope and particular aim of the action/project.

The Council will take responsibility of its actions for example around trees and continue to work with the group to support where possible to continue to improve the working partnership. Site visits and monitoring will continue.

Finding a balance to appease and satisfy all parties has been challenging and biodiversity has been at the heart of it. It is the wildlife value of the site that has set the boundaries and limitations and as protected species these red lines are stipulated in law. This may appear at odds with the group aim to clear but they accept they can clear what is possible. While the initial clearances were lauded by many, others were horrified due to the disturbance to nature and angry at a perceived loss of habitat. Changing the conversation to management and some clearance in a beneficial context has calmed attitudes and provides reassurance wildlife is being considered.

The management plan sets site prescriptions to enhance opportunities for biodiversity, whilst still allowing access to graves and the continued work the dedicated volunteers of the Friends of All Saints Graveyard wish to pursue.



## **Scouse Flowerhouse : Making wildflower planting a community event.**

Scouse Flowerhouse ([www.scouseflowerhouse.com](http://www.scouseflowerhouse.com)) is a Community Benefit Society in Liverpool, seeking to establish a mosaic of enriched grassland habitat and a circular economy for wildflower seed and construction waste across Liverpool City Region. As part of this work, they have carried out works in a number of closed and active cemeteries and closed churchyards across the city.

## **Anfield Cemetery, Liverpool**

Anfield Cemetery holds significant heritage value, with its Chapel and Crypt and is still a working cemetery and crematorium. The cemetery has an active Friend's group which has helped work towards developing wildflower sites across the cemetery.

To allow the establishment of wildflower spaces on the site, Liverpool City Council's Cemeteries and Crematoria Development Officer, marked out the footprint of paths originally designed by Edward Kemp, which had been lost as a result of modern-day management. This helped reflect the cohesion of the Cemetery site and bring back the original historical design. Over 2000 square meters of wildflower verges were established across the site, and although a lengthy process, the initial show of annuals has been a great success. It is hoped to add more perennial species from neighboring sites where wildflowers are grown to lengthen the flowering period.

So successful has the scheme been that great potential for wild flowering further cemeteries across the city has been recognised.



*Anfield Cemetery*

*Photograph courtesy of Richard Scott, Director of the National Wildflower Centre, the Eden Project.*

## **St James' Gardens, Liverpool**

St James' Gardens lies close to Liverpool's Anglican Cathedral. The site was once a quarry for Liverpool before the construction of landmark Cathedral. The Grade I listed Gardens, formerly a graveyard, contains graves of famous people who played a significant part in the history of Liverpool. There is an active Friends Group who have played a pivotal role in helping to reclaim the cemetery after it fell into decline following its closure in 1936.

Studies showed that there was an incredible mix of plant species present across the site representing a wide cultural mix of species deliberately planted as remembrance tokens such as trees and shrubs, as well as historical horticultural features such as rose gardens. However, the decline of the

cemetery also meant that there had been a great deal of colonisation by nature. Therefore, it was important to establish the levels of biodiversity already present such as grasses, herbs trees, birds, insects etc. which would then allow their management, as well as looking at the opportunities to increase further opportunities for increasing biodiversity. By using the opportunity of accessing locally sourced seed and plants material from other sites then the sustainability of the wildflower planting could be assured. This work was communicated to local people to ensure they understood why this work was being carried out.

Simple wildflower seed mixtures were planted across zones within the cemetery and included species such as Cow parsley, red campion, and Primrose. Later, over 50,000 snowdrops were planted as a tribute to Professor Tony Bradshaw, one of the founders of the scheme.

Every year bulbs from existing plants are separated and spread across other local sites. As an additional feature and due to the shaded nature of the gardens, wild garlic was planted in large numbers, which has proved popular with foragers and flower enthusiasts alike. Indeed, many people think the colony has been there for over a century when in fact it has only been growing for around 10 years, being established by incremental effort.

The success of the wildflower planting within the garden is an example of the helping hand and good stewardship achieved from working with both the local authority, the Cathedral, and the local community.



*Anfield Cemetery*

*Photograph courtesy of Richard Scott, Director of the National Wildflower Centre, the Eden Project.*

## **The Wesleyan Chapel: Upper Stanhope Street.**

In 2022, Toxteth Black Men's Group started meeting monthly on Sundays to care for the green space in their area, part of which was previously the site of the Wesleyan Chapel and graveyard. This Chapel is still a feature in the living memory of many residents who have lived through large-scale demolition leading to the loss of much of the area's heritage. To improve the quality of the greenspace, the group's coordinator brought in Scouse Flowerhouse to discuss the potential for wildflowers.

In May 2023 the site was sown with wildflowers along the central pathway, and as part of the sowing, several cultural activities also took place to add an extra dimension to the community inspired event. There are also plans to include noticeboards explaining the history of this site as a burial ground as well as identifying the wildflowers now growing there.

The work and aims of Scouse Flowerhouse is perhaps best described in their own words:

It is a 'Joyous celebration of flowers and creative ecology. It's about imagining what is possible with wildflowers as a starting point... 'and brings' infectious ways of bringing wildflowers back to the people'.

A photograph of a cemetery with numerous grey stone headstones of various shapes and sizes. The headstones are set in a field of vibrant green grass interspersed with many small purple flowers. The background shows more trees and a bright sky, suggesting a sunny day. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

# **What Do Councils Need to Do to Make Space for Nature In Their Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards? A 10-point Plan**

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## **1. Consult, consult, and then consult some more.**

Even with the best intentions it must be remembered that cemeteries and churchyards were never created to be nature reserves, but places for burial and remembrance. Therefore, there is a need to consider what the users and the local community expect to see in their burial ground, such as having access to visit graves, read memorial inscriptions, and be convinced that the area is being managed in a respectful manner. Without the support of such groups any attempts to naturalise grounds will create a great deal of resistance,

Clear intentions as to how the grounds will be managed to be more nature-friendly need to be drawn up showing the advantages of such intentions. Often starting with any Friends Groups or other volunteers helping to maintain the grounds is a good idea as they will be advocates for the naturalisation proposals and help maintain and monitor such areas after they have been introduced. However, it should be noted that before volunteers can be used, they need to have the requisite ecological awareness necessary, as without this, although management and maintenance carried out by them can be well intentioned, it can also be inappropriate or damaging.

Often running in tandem with the consultation is explaining to cemetery users and the wider community, the changes to grounds maintenance works which will show how it will add value to wildlife and flora by adopting a more relaxed, but nevertheless clearly managed approach. Importantly, by identifying what is present, or what could be attracted, will help justify why this approach is being taken.

Unfortunately, on some occasions, public or political objection will be a barrier to naturalising cemetery and burial grounds, therefore it is important to choose carefully when considering such a move. From a number of experiences reported to APSE, it is highly recommended not to undertake any naturalisation work before full and comprehensive consultation has taken place and as a result works agreed.

## **2. Identify the levels of biodiversity already present.**

The starting point of any decision to make cemeteries and churchyards more nature friendly, is to identify what species of flora and fauna already exists in your grounds. Therefore, it is worthwhile undertaking an ecological survey to identify the species present before proceeding to develop a management plan for the cemetery or churchyard grounds.

Although a qualified ecologist is recommended to carry out the survey, the supporting data provided by volunteers and local Wildlife Groups will add significantly to the final report.

This piece of work is an ideal opportunity to get the local community and school groups on board.

## **3. Create a sketch map of the cemetery or churchyard.**

This will help in identifying features such as buildings, paths, walls, in-use burial areas and areas such as compost heaps and most importantly provide a better understanding of where the most effective areas are for any works to improve biodiversity.

## **4. Identify the different types of habitats present.**

Outline the different types of habitats present (e.g., areas of scrub, regularly cut grassland, shady areas, and existing biodiverse areas).

## **5. Record the birds, animals, and insects present**

Record where they were found and ideally in which of the habitats identified. The provision of identity cards for birds and plants will help significantly and will help monitor their health and development overtime. Ideally, this type of work should be carried out between March and September when plants are in flower and wildlife are at their most active. This will allow you to conserve and protect specific flora and fauna and identify any new species which appear.

## **6. Support data gathering by creating a photographic record**

Noting the directions of the photographs and the date of the different areas of the cemetery or closed churchyard This will allow pictorial records to be created against which changes over time can be monitored.

## **7. Draw up a Management Plan**

Once a clear understanding of what is present has been established then a management plan can be developed which can as part of its purpose, establish some key priorities. Drawing up a list of key requirements of cemetery and churchyard users is critical, as they may differ significantly between an active cemetery and a closed churchyard. With regards to the biodiversity element of the plan it may be worth speaking to your local wildlife trust for advice on how best to protect any important flora and fauna present on the site.

The plan should include/identify those areas which have the highest footfall and therefore will prove the most disturbing for wildlife.

## **8. Site preparation**

Having a good understanding of the sites soil characteristics is vital, as many wildflowers need low fertility soil to survive and thrive. Plantlife, a national wildlife charity has excellent guidance information on this issue, and although the information is designed to promote flora and fauna in meadows, it is relevant to any officer intending to increase opportunities for biodiversity in burial grounds.

## **9. Set targets and goals**

Identify some early wins in relation to conserving or improving opportunities for biodiversity such as wildflower seeding or erecting bird and bat boxes, building insect 'hotels or homes for hedgehogs.

Develop a greater understanding with council officers and volunteers as to how to protect and enhance habitats, e.g., reducing mowing regimes to allow wildflowers to grow and seed, reducing chemical use to protect pollinators and



identifying which areas wildflower and biodiversity habitat can be introduced into.

Discuss and agree what elements need to be introduced to allow access or signify that areas being less intensively managed are nevertheless still being cared for, e.g., mowing paths through wildflower areas and putting up information boards explaining what flora and fauna can be seen in the grounds. Identify any future actions, such as replacing fencing with hedgerows as hedgerows are important habitats for wildlife. One in nine of the UK's most vulnerable species are often found in hedgerows, including the hazel dormouse and the ever-popular hedgehog.

Increase nesting and habitat opportunities, for example. old boundary walls can be assessed for their habitat value for ferns and lichens.

Ensure any future planting of trees will be of native species. However, that does not mean any non-native trees should be looked upon as being less important as many will have been growing for decades, even hundreds of years, and will be part of the burial ground's environment, indeed many will have cultural and historical significance.

Consideration needs to be given to any new planting to promote wildlife as not all flowers are suitable. For instance, it is not appropriate to introduce certain plants into the grass of a traditional churchyard, or cemetery as it may destroy its botanical integrity and threaten the survival of native plants. Many cultivated flowers are good sources of nectar and pollen, but generally double flowers and modern varieties are not of much use. Cottage garden plants are often the most useful, such as Aubretia, Candytuft, Hollyhocks, Lavender, Michaelmas Daisy, Pinks, Polyanthus, Primrose, Scabious, Sedum spectabile (Ice plant), Sunflower, Thyme, Verbena. Shrubs Buddleia davidii (not dark red and purple varieties), Cotoneaster, Holly, Honeysuckle, Lilac, Rosemary.

Some flowers found in churchyards and burial grounds are not typical of traditional meadows and are thought to have sprung from other activities associated with the church. They may have spread from grave decorations, posies or wreaths, or have been planted for celebrations or in memory of loved ones. Snowdrops are often planted for Candlemas, primroses for spring displays,

and forget-me-nots and rosemary for remembrance. These unexpected plants are part of the rich history of burial grounds and do not detract from their importance or from their value for wildlife.

Care for your lichens. They take many years to grow and may be the only example in the county so need to be conserved. Only clean those parts of gravestones and memorials with inscriptions, with water and a soft brush. Leave lichens on dry stone walls, church buildings, old gate posts and fences. If replacing woodwork, retain some old sections from which recolonisation to the new wood can occur.

## **10. Consistent and regular monitoring and remedial works**

Throughout all this work, there is a need for constant monitoring and recording of any successes or problems, for instance dealing with invasive or competitive species such as bracken, Himalayan Balsam, thistle, and Japanese knotweed. Also, the move to improving the biodiversity value of a burial ground needs to be carefully managed to ensure that the architectural integrity and by association the safety of headstones and monuments is not compromised.

It should be remembered that even if the cemetery or closed churchyard does not identify any particularly rare species, cemeteries and churchyards still play a vital part as wildlife stepping stones in the wider green infrastructure of an area. In addition, by adopting less-intensive grounds management in the future, particularly reducing the use of chemicals and reduced intrusive grounds maintenance practices such as mowing, then this may lead to the gradual recolonisation of a wider range of species leading to a much richer natural ecosystem benefitting an increased variety of flora and fauna, and by association, leading to greater health and well-being benefits to visitors. Therefore, it is important to find a manageable balance between allowing biodiversity to thrive whilst ensuring that burial grounds remain accessible and fit for purpose.

# Conclusion

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The creation and use of burial grounds dates back millennia. The importance of such places as means of remembrance and reflection has remained throughout the centuries and across a wide range of different cultures and religious and secular beliefs. Many people see any move away from the strict management of such place as unacceptable, particularly their aesthetic appearance.

However, many burial grounds, particularly closed churchyards and Victorian cemeteries are no longer actively accommodating new burials and visitor numbers are falling away as generational gaps increase. As such some burial grounds have become less visited and provide opportunities for the managed re-introduction of a more natural appearance, which in many cases was their original intent.

The UK like many countries around the world has lost significant numbers of both flora and fauna species as their habitats have been destroyed either by agricultural practices, resource extraction, road building or the growth of urbanisation. Burial grounds remain some of the final vestiges of greenspaces in densely populated areas and as such their value to the natural world has increased significantly. Burial grounds in the past and particularly over the last 100 years have often been seen as places of death and decay when in fact they are now being recognised for their wider environmental benefits, so crucial to the fight against climate change and the ecological crisis the world is now facing.

Danielle Sinnett, Professor in Sustainable Built Environments at UWE Bristol, commented: "Cemeteries can contribute to the network of green spaces in our towns and cities, as places for recreation and nature conservation providing multiple benefits, or ecosystem services, including improved health and wellbeing, flood risk management, improvements in soil, water and air quality, pollination and climate adaptation. Often historically planned to sit on the outskirts of cities, older cemeteries now offer accessible spaces in the neighbourhoods that have grown up around them, where there may be little or no other greenspace, and limited possibilities to provide more."

Whilst it is acknowledged that burial grounds alone are not enough to combat these issues, they are nevertheless important element within a broader range of green infrastructure and the linkages they provide to wildlife corridors within this infrastructure.

But in order to gain the most benefits from these areas, then a different management regime is needed, one which balances the needs of the bereaved and wider burial ground users together with the natural world.

As noted previously, many local authorities, Wildlife Trusts and community groups are now designating and managing many burial grounds as local nature reserves with their own biodiversity action plans. Indeed, many are now calling for cemeteries to be included as officially recognised Biodiversity Action Plan Habitats considering so many statutorily protected species are regularly found in these places.

This report contains many examples, at different scales, which show how local authorities are using existing cemeteries and burial grounds to increase opportunities for biodiversity.

But biodiversity considerations are not just confined to closed churchyards and older parts of cemeteries, for if planned thoughtfully, new cemeteries could be deliberately multifunctional spaces; designed from the outset to provide benefits and functions for people and wildlife, in addition to remembrance.

It is clear that the value of cemeteries and closed churchyards are being increasingly seen and used as areas where greater opportunities for biodiversity can be introduced. But as stated earlier the will to do this, and having the skills required to achieve this, are two different things. In order to open up cemeteries and burial grounds for nature, there is a set of actions which need to be taken. Firstly clear communications with cemetery users about the intended actions is critical, as is an ecological survey to identify the current levels of biodiversity. Writing a management plan for the works proposed both now and, in the future is vital, and finally the infrastructure to monitor, maintain and report on the works undertaken or required, including the recognition that those involved have the requisite knowledge and skills to manage the burial ground with nature in mind.

The case studies in this report shows that there is significant success in creating space for nature in the UK's burial grounds, and together with the guidance notes via the 10-point action plan, it is hoped that these examples of best practice and innovation will help many other councils to embark on this approach.

The management of burial grounds for nature also has the added benefit of creating much needed green spaces for local people particularly in areas of densely populated housing where the level of other greenspaces may be low. Nationally this is important for people who may not have the finances or transport to travel to access green spaces elsewhere.

APSE in producing this report hopes to show that cemeteries although being recognised for their value to communities as places to bury the deceased and provide respectful environments for remembrance, now have an important role in addressing the triple global issues of climate change, biodiversity loss and air quality. As such, cemeteries and burial grounds collectively need to be factored in as important elements of a council's greenspace infrastructure and potential contributors towards corporate environmental targets and objectives.

Therefore, cemeteries and burial grounds need to be recognised, not only as places we have traditionally buried our loved-ones, but also as places which provide welcoming and safe habitats for the flora and fauna we share our lives with, and plans put in place to ensure they will continue to do so, for the benefit of our future generations.

# Index

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## **Page 9**

Regarding the first evidence of European ‘cemeteries’, many agree that this honour currently goes to Gross Fredenwalde Cemetery

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/adventure/article/160211-oldest-cemetery-burial-europe-baby-upright-germany-hunter-gatherer>

## **Page 9**

A recent discovery in Somerset has now dated the UK’s oldest open-air cemetery to a similar period. The new findings show that by around 8,300 BC, hunter-gatherers were burying their dead on what was once an island amid the Somerset Levels and was in use for around 200 years.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-14239742>

## **Page 17**

This realisation has been reflected in a guidance document produced by Government entitled ‘Guide for Burial Ground Managers’ (2005).

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/326370/burial-ground-managers.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/326370/burial-ground-managers.pdf)

## **Page 19**

Using Ordnance Survey green space data, they found that out of the 120,876 green spaces in England, 4,992 were cemeteries (4.1 per cent). And that the amount of cemetery space in each local authority varies across England, from less than 5 hectares in some areas to 183.5 hectares in Birmingham. The proportion of green spaces that are cemetery space range from 0.24 per cent in West Lancashire to 31.4 per cent in the London Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

<https://info.uwe.ac.uk/news/uwenews/news.aspx?id=4222#:~:text=Researchers%20found%20that%20cemeteries%20provide,areas%20where%20space%20is%20limited>

## **Page 20**

It is the value of cemeteries and closed churchyards as potential boltholes for nature which is being increasingly recognised. A recent study carried out by Sussex University

<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/broadcast/read/50282#:~:text=New%20report%20reveals%20true%20impact%20of%20insect%20apocalypse%20and%20calls%20for%20urgent%20action,-By%3A%20Stephanie%20Allen&text=A%20new%20report%20by%20a>

## **Page 21**

A recent study of Berlin cemeteries looking at why people visited cemeteries and their tolerance to more naturalised spaces within cemeteries concluded that, 'instead of a 'one size fits all' strategy for the entire cemetery area, our study supports an approach to meet different needs by developing differently maintained sections for people, which in turn supports different components of biodiversity. We conclude that considering people with different preferences and reasons to visit is a promising way to promote urban cemeteries as shared habitats for people and nature.'

<https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/11/8/1237>

## **Page 22**

Completed consideration of what action to take for biodiversity is required by 1 January 2024 and agreed policies and objectives as soon as possible after this. These policies must identify action to be taken in the next 5 years and these can be done more often, for example, you could reconsider your actions quarterly, annually, or every 5 years. There is a need to consider how these action tie in or affect other strategies such as local nature recovery strategies, but the crux of the matter is, there is a need to promote biodiversity on council managed or owned land and within the types of land defined as being covered by this duty, are cemeteries.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/complying-with-the-biodiversity-duty#contents>



## **Page 28**

APSE has seen a growing interest in making cemetery grounds more nature friendly over the past few years, much of this has been linked to the recognition that there is a growing crisis regarding the loss of biodiversity in the UK. The UK has lost almost half of its biodiversity since the 1970's. 15% of the UK's 8431 species are threatened and 2% have become extinct and these are just the species we know about (RSPB State of Nature Report 2019).

<https://nbn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/State-of-Nature-2019-UK-full-report.pdf>

## **Page 30**

They are also developing a tree map for the cemetery identifying all the different tree species present.

<https://www.glasgowncropolis.org/wildlife/>

## **Page 47**

The Church of England also provides advice on how to manage churchyards to encourage wildlife:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/churchcare/advice-and-guidance-church-buildings/biodiversity>

## **Page 47**

There is a great deal of useful advice on how to manage closed churchyards and one of the best sources of information is provided by Caring for God's Acre Established in 2000 as a national charity, to promote the conservation of burial sites and support the volunteers who look after and maintain them, the charity provides a wealth of guidance and educational resources which highlight the value of closed churchyards as habitats for flora and fauna, many of which are rare and endangered.

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/about-us/>

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/>

**Page 47**

APSE has also promoted Caring for God's Acre and other organisations who carry out similar work, at its Cemeteries and Crematoria Seminars in the past. The most recent initiative being the Wilder Churches project

<https://www.somersetwildlife.org/events/wilder-churches>

**Page 47**

Wilder Churches began in March 2021 as a partnership initiative between Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Diocese of Bath and Wells. The initiative again aims to support communities to get to know the wildlife in their local churchyard, other church land or burial ground and work together to find ways to increase the value of these special places for wildlife. The partnership offers free online training sessions to support communities to take positive action in churchyards and other burial grounds at a pivotal time for nature.

<https://nbn.org.uk/>

**Page 48**

A good example of how cemeteries and churchyards have been built into a council's Biodiversity Action Plan can be found in Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull Local Biodiversity Action Plan

<https://www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-05/Churchyards%20%26%20Cemeteries.November%202021.pdf>

**Page 64**

Having a good understanding of the sites soil characteristics is vital, as many wildflowers need low fertility soil to survive and thrive. Plantlife, a national wildlife charity has excellent guidance information on this issue, and although the information is designed to promote flora and fauna in meadows, it is relevant to any officer intending to increase opportunities for biodiversity in burial grounds.

<https://www.plantlife.org.uk/>

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<https://meadows.plantlife.org.uk/about-meadows/>

## **Page 65**

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<https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/wp-content/uploads/Managing-churchyards-for-wildlife-Leaflet-38.pdf>

## **Page 68**

“Cemeteries can contribute to the network of green spaces in our towns and cities, as places for recreation and nature conservation providing multiple benefits, or ecosystem services, including improved health and wellbeing, flood risk management, improvements in soil, water and air quality, pollination and climate adaptation. Often historically planned to sit on the outskirts of cities, older cemeteries now offer accessible spaces in the neighbourhoods that have grown up around them, where there may be little or no other greenspace, and limited possibilities to provide more.”

<https://uwe-repository.worktribe.com/output/8268069>

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