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Managing Cemeteries for Nature – A step too far?





Why are cemeteries attractive to wildlife?

- Burial grounds can be rich in biodiversity, supporting a large number of different species of fauna and flora.
- Whilst some plants and animals may move into a well-managed burial ground it is more likely that most have been there for a long time.
- Burial grounds were never set up to be havens for wildlife so why have they become so?
- Intensification in farming practices and urban sprawl have reduced wildlife habitats and because of these factors and the nature of our cemeteries, they are finding refuges in these places.
- It is a combination of all the features that make burial grounds so special. Stonework with its nooks and crannies, grasslands with the rich array of species, food sources and often tree cover etc. As such there are growing, feeding, nesting, roosting and hibernating places for all sorts of plants and animals.



Recognition of greenspace value.

- Cemeteries now seen as more than places to bury and remember the deceased.
- Increasingly seen as spaces which provide multiple benefits for recreation and nature conservation.
- They also importantly contribute to an areas ecosystem services, by improved health and wellbeing, flood risk management, improvements in soil, water and air quality, pollination opportunities and climate adaptation.
- 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.
- A recent survey showed cemeteries made up nearly 4% of local authority greenspaces area in English authorities and this figure was even higher (almost 5%) in major conurbations.
- A Norwegian Study demonstrated that only 25% of visitors entering a cemetery were visiting graves, the other 75% of visitors, were using the site for recreation or as a green corridor.



But!



What can we do to strike the right balance?

- Look at the possibilities – successful case studies.
- Assess and record the biodiversity already present.
- Consult with users, Friends Groups, Wildlife groups etc.
- Identify what and where you could increase the opportunities for biodiversity (large to small scale)
- Consider where cemeteries fit in the wider corporate context (Local Plans, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, Biodiversity Action Plans)
- Opportunities under Biodiversity Net Gain and other funding e.g. tree planting.)
- Planning for nature in new cemetery developments.
- Accept and celebrate nature, it will not go away.

APSE RESEARCH

- Identifying most common types of biodiversity present in cemeteries and any management required.
- Identify **case studies** of successful integration and promotion of nature in cemeteries taking into account:
 - *Age, Size, Rural/Urban, Visitor Numbers - together with reasons for visit, % Maintained Space, Level of maturity, horticultural practices etc.*
- List types of nature friendly activities;
 - *Types, location and percentages of deliberately unmaintained 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
- Establish status/profile of cemeteries in corporate documents.
- Identify wider value of cemeteries in relation to addressing biodiversity losses.
- Develop guidance on how to accept and promote nature in cemeteries.
- Consider wider green space infrastructure and ecosystem services values

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