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Cemeteries and Crematoria Seminar

Thursday 17 November



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Creating space for Nature



What is the current situation?

- Over two-thirds of the UK is now used for agriculture.
- 8% is built on.
- Between 1970 and 2013, 56% of species in the UK declined.
- Public spending in 2018/19 on improving biodiversity accounted for 0.022% of the UK GDP
- Future threats include: climate change, habitat loss, pollution, the rise in pests and other invasive species



Why is this a Bereavement Services Issue?

- 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.
- 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.



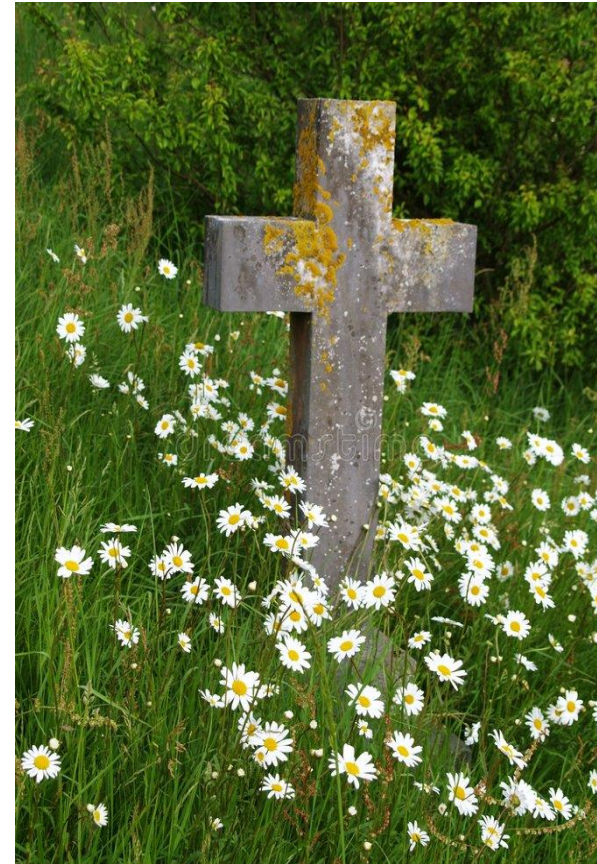
Why are cemeteries attractive to wildlife?

- 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.



APSE RESEARCH

- 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 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.



The Findings of the Survey

PRACTICAL ACTIONS

- **84% of respondents** have made a conscious decision to allow certain areas of cemeteries to be less intensively managed to promote wildflowers and wildlife.
- **71% of decisions** 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%**.
- Older parts of cemeteries, land set aside for new burials, woodland burial areas, ashes scattering areas and edges of cemeteries most common areas used.
- **Newer cemeteries** building 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 (biodiversity, pollinators)
- **Encouraging nature** – most common actions include wildflower planting, less mowing, reducing use of chemicals, bird/bat boxes, log piles, extra tree and hedgerow planting.

SUPPORT AND ACCEPTANCE

- **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.

COMMUNICATION

- **53%** advertise the fact cemetery grounds are being managed for biodiversity.
- **46%** have received **positive responses** to nature enhancement, 36% neutral, 18% negative.
- Social media, information boards, local magazines, QR code recognition trails.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Choice of Wildflowers – annuals versus perennials, native species.
- Natural regeneration.
- Weeds – common hogweed and creeping thistle
- Dog fouling
- Changing staff and elected members mindsets
- Dealing with the *'neat and tidy brigade'*
- 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.



Future Proposals

- Develop guidance on how to accept and promote nature in cemeteries, based on research and APSE member case studies
- Consider wider green space infrastructure and ecosystem services values of cemeteries
- Identify wider value of cemeteries in relation to addressing biodiversity losses and their health and well being values
- Raising the profile of cemeteries and their corporate worth
- Promoting and gaining support for the promotion of biodiversity in cemetery and associated grounds



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