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Making Space for Nature in our Burial Grounds



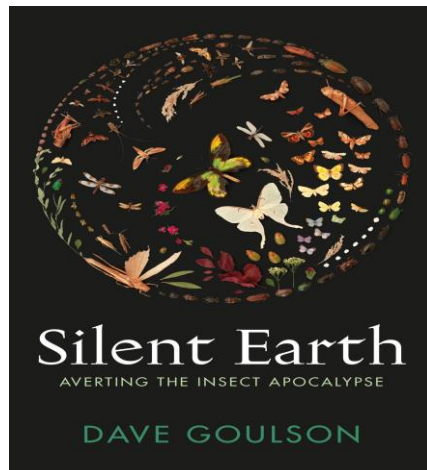
**Making space for nature in
our burial grounds**



Origins of the Research



'Our statistics demonstrate that the abundance and distribution of the UK's species has, on average, declined since 1970 and many metrics suggest this decline has continued in the most recent decade. There has been no let-up in the net loss of nature in the UK'

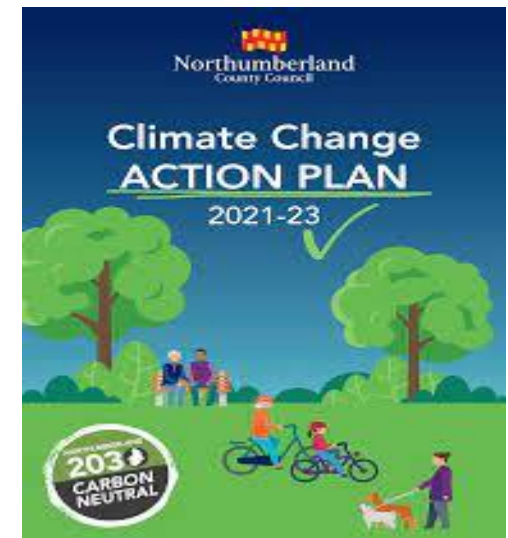


"If all mankind were to disappear, the world would regenerate back to the rich state of equilibrium that existed ten thousand years ago.

If insects were to vanish, the environment would collapse into chaos."

Local Authority Plans and strategies.

- Climate Change
- Ecological Emergencies
- Biodiversity
- Pollinator
- Wildflowers



Concern amongst members

- Network queries
- Parks and cemeteries
- Requests for speakers
- Briefing notes
- Advisory Groups
- Seminars

Averting the Insect Apocalypse”

- Global evidence suggesting that insects are in rapid decline
 - Understanding the importance of insects to ecosystems
 - Identifying the causes of decline
 - The need to make urban areas more insect-friendly
- Dave Goulson, Professor of Biology (Evolution, Behaviour and Environment) Sussex University**

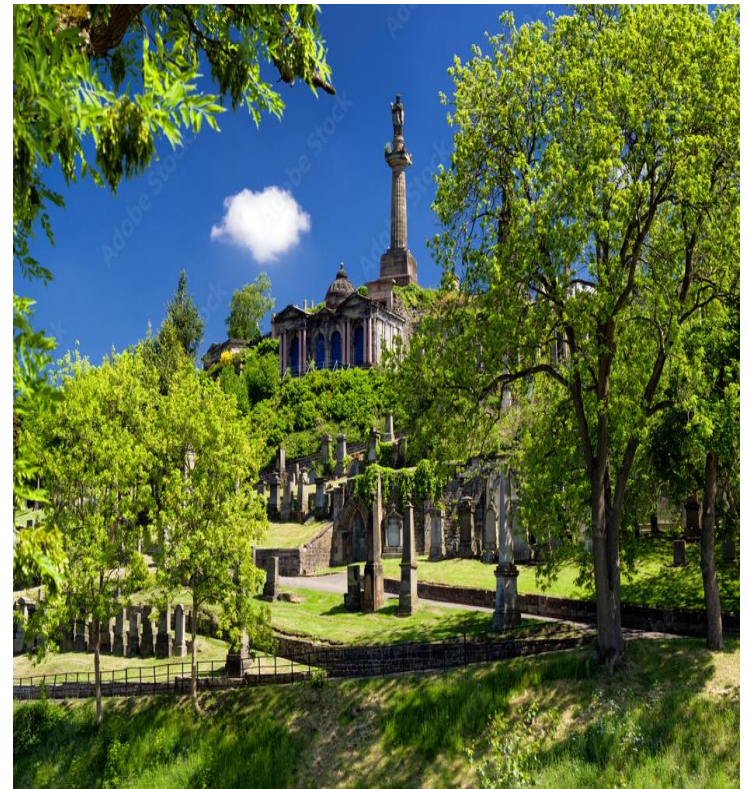
Bringing Nature and Biodiversity back Into Cemeteries

- A vision for our 40 acres of cemeteries
- External funding and internal funding challenges/opportunities
- Successes to date and lessons learned
- Plans for the future

**Adrian Pickersgill Bereavement Services Manager,
Doncaster Council & Andy Harbon Chair of
of the Friends of Hyde Park Cemetery group**

Increasing opportunities for biodiversity

- UK-wide duty for local authorities to consider and enhance opportunities for biodiversity.
- Historically burial land has been less intensively managed and by association relatively undisturbed and as such has become important habitats for flora and fauna.
- Burial grounds are now recognised by many to be important stepping stones within an area's green and blue infrastructures in allowing wildlife to spread and flourish.
- The wider benefits have also been documented with regards to reducing flooding, improving air quality as well as providing a host of other '*ecosystem services*'.
- In areas where greenspace is at a premium burial grounds can provide important areas to allow people to access nature and take leisure time.



Developing a survey

- Cemeteries as well as parks and greenspaces were being seen by local authorities as important habitats for biodiversity.
- Report identifies 4% of UK's greenspaces are cemeteries and burial grounds.
- Survey developed to identify whether member authorities were adopting biodiversity-friendly practices in their cemeteries and closed churchyards.
- Results of the survey showed 84% of respondents were making conscious efforts to increase/attract biodiversity into their burial grounds.
- Majority of such practices were driven by the management teams themselves.
- Wide range of revised grounds maintenance practices and additional facilities/habitats being provided to attract wildlife



Balancing the needs of the bereaved with biodiversity

- Not all attempts to naturalise burial grounds are popular.
- It is not 'abandonment' but managing cemetery grounds in a way that creates greater opportunities for nature whilst respecting the wishes of the bereaved.
- Communication is key, as is involvement.
- Identifying and celebrating nature is critical if any changes to traditional cemetery maintenance are to be accepted.
- Social and traditional media, involvement of Wildlife Trusts, Friends Groups, public open days, school visits, signage etc.
- Changing skill sets and knowledge of grounds maintenance staff to understand needs of biodiversity.



The Report

- Due to the growing interest, it was felt it would be worthwhile for APSE to produce a report highlighting the issue around this subject as well as highlighting best practice and innovation amongst its members.
- Rather than a straight-forward academic-style report it was felt a more wide-ranging report would be helpful, highlighting the long history between cemeteries and their links to nature which would help justify why introducing biodiversity into our burial grounds is a worthwhile aim in the modern world.
- The report therefore covers areas such as
 - the evolution of cemeteries and how the links to the natural world was a key part of their planning.
 - The growing recognition of the value of burial grounds to wider environmental issues.
 - Why are burial grounds important habitats for biodiversity ?
 - Case studies of formal cemeteries and closed churchyards being adapted to allow biodiversity to thrive.
 - The 10 steps necessary to ensure biodiversity can be sustained and enhanced in our burial grounds.

Case Studies.

- Cemeteries and closed churchyards.
- Large scale to individual actions.
- Creation of local nature reserves.
- Inclusion of historical and cultural features and stories to enhance overall works.
- Involvement of local wildlife trusts, Friends of Groups and volunteers.
- Challenges and solutions to problems encountered.
- Creation of new habitats.
- Linking to the circular economy
- Addressing budgetary constraints



The 10-point plan

1. Consultation.
2. Surveying the current levels of biodiversity.
3. Creating a visual picture.
4. Identifying the types of habitats present.
5. Recording the fauna and flora.
6. Creating a photographic record to show change over time.
7. Developing a Management Plan.
8. Site Preparation.
9. Set targets and goals
10. Consistent and regular monitoring and remedial works.



Conclusions

- Growing concern about the state of the UK's declining biodiversity levels.
- Burial grounds seen as important habitats for flora and fauna.
- Local authorities recognising value of burial grounds as part of wider green infrastructure and the benefits these areas bring.
- Burial grounds need to be managed in a way which meets both the needs of the bereaved and biodiversity.
- Need to change how we perceive and manage our burial grounds from staff to users.
- Consider how case studies have approached a more naturalised approach to managing their burial grounds
- Appreciate the multiple benefits burial grounds bring to wider ecosystem services and helping to meet the requirements of corporate plans and strategies.
- APSE hopes in producing this report that more local authorities will consider increasing opportunities for biodiversity in their burial grounds thereby helping to conserve and increase the UK's biodiversity levels.

NEW MUNICIPALISM

Delivering for local people and local economies

Contact details

Wayne Priestley, Principal Advisor

Email: wpriestley@apse.org.uk

Association for Public Service Excellence

3rd floor, Trafford House, Chester Road,
Old Trafford, Manchester M32 0RS.

telephone: 0161 772 1810

web: www.apse.org.uk



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