

## BURIAL GROUNDS

### LOCAL HABITAT ACTION PLAN FOR CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Updated in January 2009

## 1 CURRENT STATUS

### 1.1 Context

There are burial grounds in virtually every settlement in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and for simplicity this HAP uses the collective term “burial ground” when referring to churchyards and cemeteries.

There are two common points linking all burial grounds. First, they are all potential havens for biodiversity. Unlike surrounding farmland these sites have not generally been sprayed with chemical fertilisers and pesticides (although spot weeding with weed killer around bases of headstones and monuments is common), nor have they been drained. In addition, they are relatively undisturbed by people. Although burial grounds are managed differently, the general lack of “agricultural improvements” and the quiet nature of burial grounds often results in them becoming a wildlife sanctuary. Second, most burial grounds are managed by either the local church council or the local authority. As such there is a discreet group of land managers who need to be approached when discussing biodiversity of burial grounds.

Burial grounds comprise a wide range of habitat types from gravestones and church walls to trees, shrubs and grassland. As such they can support a wide range of species from bats to lichen.

When discussing the management of burial grounds for wildlife it is vital that it is made clear to the whole community that this type of management will not result in a site which looks neglected. A burial ground’s principle role is to be a place of commemoration and reflection, and for many a place of religious significance too. However, they can also form important “green oases” within urban areas, and often contain remnants of important old habitats, forming important wildlife sites. Burial grounds are often important open spaces in urban areas for people to enjoy. Without the commitment of churchyard users, enhancing the wildlife value of a site will be extremely difficult and certainly unsustainable in the longer term.

When working with burial ground managers and council bereavement services, it should be remembered that burial grounds’ key role, and the role that should always take priority, is their role as places of commemoration and mourning.

### 1.2 Biological status

The importance of many burial grounds is often as “encapsulated countryside” in villages or urban settings, and as one of the few remnants of unimproved or semi-improved grassland left in such areas, they are increasingly valuable.

Burial grounds also reduce the impacts of habitat fragmentation by forming ‘green corridors’ and linking habitats together, enabling the movement of wildlife.

As a wildlife habitat, burial grounds are becoming increasingly important because of the rarity of the range of species they often contain. They can be a mosaic of habitats where grasses, mosses, lichens, bryophytes (especially on ledges), ferns, fungi, wild flowers, shrubs and trees, including veteran trees, insects, reptiles, birds, and mammals can thrive. This includes protected species such as slow worms and

bats. Due to the rarity of stone outcrops elsewhere in the landscape, churchyards are especially important as hosts for lichen and moss communities.

Priority species under the biodiversity action planning process which are often found in churchyards are spotted flycatcher, song thrush, and bats. Characteristic species such as primroses, wood anemone, cowslip, oxeye daisy as well as bird species such as swifts can be encouraged through appropriate management regimes.

Throughout Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, there are a number of burial grounds that have been designated as City or County Wildlife Sites. These include the Eastfield Road and Broadway cemeteries, in Peterborough. Broadway cemetery is designated due to it having the largest population of meadow saxifrage in Cambridgeshire. Mill Road Cemetery in Cambridge is designated as a County Wildlife Site. For an up to date list of burial grounds designated as city or county wildlife sites, contact the Wildlife Trust.

Most of the ecological data for burial grounds in Cambridgeshire & Peterborough is from occasional surveys and “Ad-hoc” data collection. However, many burial grounds have been surveyed by the Wildlife Trust as part of the phase 1 and 2 habitat surveys.

About 40 lichen surveys have been carried out throughout Cambridgeshire, which the British Lichen Society has details of.

During 2006, a survey of Cambridge City’s burial grounds was carried out by volunteers with the support of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Biological Records Centre.

In 2006, a swift survey was also carried out in some of Cambridgeshire's churches by Ely Diocese Swift Group.

## **2 CURRENT FACTORS AFFECTING BIODIVERSITY IN BURIAL GROUNDS**

- Increasing likelihood that reduced management due to difficulties in recruiting volunteers leads to ecological succession and a loss of biodiversity.
- Contrarily, in some burial grounds there is an increasing expectation of a “neat and tidy” look that also reduces biodiversity.
- Repairs and renovation of church roof and walls can result in damage to lichen and bryophyte communities, as well as fauna, such as bats and swifts.
- Poor public perception of the biodiversity value of burial grounds.
- Lack of understanding of appropriate management regimes
- A problem is that environmental and biodiversity improvement of burial grounds is not a priority for either the church community or local authority and environmental organisations.

## **3 CURRENT ACTION**

In Cambridge, a churchyard survey was carried out in 2006, in cooperation between Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biological Records Centre, Greenbelt Project and The Ely Environment Diocesan Group.

Alison Pearson and Jocelyn Gale carried out a plant survey of Eaton Socon churchyard in 1999 and 2000. The data is available from Alison Pearson, through the Biodiversity Partnership.

Some Parochial Church Councils (PaCCs), Parish Councils and local authorities do actively manage their burial grounds with wildlife in mind.

The Landscape 2000 project in St Neots (although no longer running) has worked in partnership with the town council and church communities to agree and then help implement wildlife friendly management plans for all burial grounds in the town.

In Peterborough, the City Council bereavement services are very supportive of biodiversity and wildlife in churchyards. This department as well as the Wildlife Trust have encouraged the wildlife management of City Council managed burial grounds.

Throughout Cambridgeshire the Wildlife Trust have advised groups wishing to enhance their burial grounds for wildlife.

A demonstration wildflower garden at St Andrew's the Great Church in Cambridge city centre was opened on 14 May 1999. Wild flowers were sown to remind local people of the variety of plants that can be found in the city. This work was carried out with support from the Wildlife Trust and funding from Cambridge Sustainable City.

As well as carrying out a swift survey of Cambridgeshire's churchyards, Ely diocese swift group have encouraged and provided advice on putting up swift boxes and making churches more swift friendly.

Caring for Gods Acre is a small charity established in the Hereford diocese, who provide advice and support to community groups on churchyard conservation projects. Although they do not work in Cambridgeshire, they have done lots of good work, and can be a source of useful information; their website is: [www.caringforgodsacre.co.uk](http://www.caringforgodsacre.co.uk)

#### 4. Burial grounds TARGETS AND ACTIONS

OBJECTIVES	TARGETS	ACTIONS	Responsible (suggestions) Add your organisation name if you sign up to this action and will contribute to it through your work	Timescale
<b>Assess and monitor existing urban habitats</b>	1. Establish baseline data of burial grounds to understand quality and quantity of the resource	1.1 Collate existing survey data of burial grounds	CPBRC	
		1.2 Carry out surveys of remaining burial grounds	?	
	2. Survey and monitor burial grounds for wildlife	2.1 Regularly survey burial grounds considered to be good /medium quality	?	Every 5 years?
		2.2 Survey poorer quality burial grounds to reassess their status	?	
	3. Have a system in place for regular surveying of burial grounds	3.1 Work with burial ground managers and other partners to establish a suitable system for regular surveying and monitoring	?	
<b>Maintain the extent of our Urban habitat resource</b>	4. Protect burial grounds as important wildlife sites	4.1 Incorporate burial grounds into local development plans and Nature Conservation Strategies	LA's, BAP group to write to ask LAs.	2010
		4.2 Designate suitable burial grounds as County or City Wildlife Sites	WiT and CWS partnership	ongoing
<b>Create new urban habitats</b>	5. Some burial grounds to have features within their boundaries managed for wildlife. (Burial grounds to be identified from survey information from 1 <sup>st</sup> objective)	5.1 Work with burial ground managers to manage areas of burial ground for wildlife, e.g. leaving long grass, log piles etc.	Diocesan group with churches.	2010
<b>Manage and enhance our Urban habitat</b>	6. Some churchyards to have widely agreed wildlife friendly management plans in place,	6.1 Work with burial ground managers and PaCC to develop and implement burial ground management plans.	Diocesan group with churches.	

<b>resource</b>	which have also included the local community and PaCC	6.2 Consult the wider community when developing management plans	Local site groups	
<b>Raise awareness and increase access and involvement</b>	7. Educate public in importance of burial grounds for wildlife and how management for wildlife and people can be complementary	7.1 Erect interpretation boards where possible	Burial ground managers with assistance from WiT and BAP partnership?	
		7.2 Produce materials highlighting the importance of burial grounds for wildlife	WiT	
	8. Celebrate burial grounds as a sanctuary for wildlife	8.1 Organise wildlife events	Burial ground managers?	

**Abbreviations:**

BAP=Biodiversity Action Plan

CPBRC=Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biological Records Centre

CWS=County Wildlife Site

LA=Local Authority

PaCC=Parochial Church Councils

WiT=Wildlife Trust



## 5 LINKS TO OTHER PLANS

Lowland Calcareous and neutral grassland  
Bats  
Song thrush

## 6 REVIEW OF ACTION PLAN

## 7 REFERENCES

*CPBRC Churchyard Survey (2006)*, for more information contact CPBRC, [www.cpbrc.org.uk](http://www.cpbrc.org.uk)  
*Wildlife in Church and Churchyard* (2001, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), Nigel Cooper.  
*Caring for churchyards* (1988), Cambridgeshire countryside advisory working party.  
*Bats in churches* (1994), The Bat Conservation Trust  
*Birds in churchyards* (1994), Peter Goodfellow, Church and Conservation Project  
*Dry stone walls around churchyards*, Church and Conservation Project  
*Discovering butterflies in churchyards* (1994), Butterfly conservation  
*Geology in churchyards* (1994), The Geologists' Association  
*Nature in churchyards*, Church and conservation project  
*Churchyards lichens* (1994), The British Lichen Society  
*The churchyards handbook* (2001, 4<sup>th</sup> edition), Peter Burman and Henry Stapleton  
*God's Acre* (1993), Francesca Greenoak  
*Paradise preserved – An introduction to the assessment, evaluation, conservation and management of historic cemeteries* (2007) Jenifer White and Joan Hodson (eds) Natural England and English Heritage

## 8 LIST OF INDIVIDUALS AND ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED

Ely Diocesan Committee  
Diocese of Ely Environment Committee  
Anglian Water Services Ltd  
Biodiversity Partnership Co-ordinator  
Bat Conservation Officer  
Butterfly Conservation  
Cambridge City Council  
Cambridge Green Belt Project  
Cambridgeshire County Council  
Canon Jack Higham  
Church Monument Society  
East Cambridgeshire District Council  
English Nature  
Environment Agency  
Fenland District Council  
Huntingdonshire District Council  
Landscape 2000  
Lichen Society  
Peterborough City Council  
Peterborough City Council Bereavement services (Brian Armstrong to ask for a comment)  
RSPB - East Anglia  
South Cambridgeshire District Council  
The Wildlife Trust