



# Churchyards and Cemeteries

**Scottish Biodiversity List habitat:** No  
**UK Biodiversity List of Priority Habitats:** No

## Summary

This Action Plan covers churchyards and cemeteries. Both are burial grounds, churchyards found within the grounds of a church and cemeteries outside the boundaries of a church. These burial grounds include ornamental trees and shrubs and areas of regularly mown grass. They may also contain rough unmanaged areas of grasses, scrub and woodland, a pond or a wetland area. Burial grounds may be bordered by hedgerows or stone walls. Many of these features are valuable wildlife habitats.

## Current Status

The kinds of wildlife that you may find in North Lanarkshire's churchyards and cemeteries include flowering plants, ferns, mosses and liverworts, lichens, fungi, small mammals, birds, insects, amphibians and reptiles. The quiet nature of churchyards and cemeteries in urban and rural areas often results in them becoming havens for biodiversity in what might otherwise be a hostile environment. Due to the antiquity of many burial grounds they may support rare or uncommon plant species, which were formerly much more widely distributed.

In most burial grounds areas of grassland are kept closely mown, and such areas may provide a suitable habitat for a variety of fungi if they have been left unfertilised for many years. A diversity of wildflowers may also occur, which in turn attracts butterflies and moths. Reptiles and amphibians find shelter under stones, and compost heaps may serve as breeding sites. Church buildings, boundary walls and trees can provide roost and nest sites for bats and birds, including many species characteristic of open woodland and woodland edge.

In previous years North Lanarkshire Council Landscape Architects have undertaken several biodiversity enhancements within existing cemeteries including planting young native trees and shrubs at both Bothwellpark and Benhar cemetery. At Cambusnethan cemetery they created a wildflower meadow, planted several hedgerows and carried out landscape planting using plants with a rich nectar source. A new cemetery was created at Bothwellhaugh, biodiversity enhancements incorporated within this include wildflower meadows, landscape planting using plants with a rich nectar source, wet and dry swales, these are very shallow channels that are used to collect and/or move water and also remove pollution from it. They can be covered by grass or other vegetation



and have shallow side slopes and a flat bottom which means that for most of the time the water flows in a thin layer through the grass or other vegetation. Two sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS) ponds were created. SUDS are a natural approach to managing drainage in and around properties and other developments.

The benefits of SUDS are:

- preventing water pollution
- slowing down surface water run-off and reducing the risk of flooding
- reducing the risk of sewer flooding during heavy rain
- recharging groundwater to help prevent drought
- providing valuable habitats for wildlife in urban areas
- creating green spaces for people in urban areas.

SUDS work by slowing and holding back the water that runs off from a site, allowing natural processes to break down pollutants.

A green roof was also incorporated into the amenity building on site. Green roofs have a layer of vegetation or patches of vegetation as part of the roof cover and can:

- reduce or eliminate run-off from roof areas
- extend the life of your roof
- add insulation to your building during the winter months
- cool your building during the summer by evaporation
- provide sound insulation
- reduce the heat island effect in cities
- provide a habitat for wildlife.

Most recently (April 2020) cemetery staff at Bothwellhaugh have worked alongside the Countryside Ranger Service (CRS) to place boxes in woodland borders for both passerines and barn owl. The use of which, will be surveyed by the CRS as part of 'Strathclyde Park Woods' site reports.

## **Distribution**

There are 32 Cemeteries and Churchyards in North Lanarkshire and 1 operational crematorium. Ten of which are operational cemeteries, seven closed cemeteries and fifteen closed churchyards. Cumulatively they cover approximately 120 ha of ground.

## **Legislation and site designation**

Nationally a few churchyards have been legally designated as SSSIs and some Churches and churchyards can also provide habitats for a number of statutorily protected species such as bats, badgers and reptiles.



## **Current Factors Affecting the Habitat**

- Decline in church attendance leading to many smaller churches and chapels being closed, followed often by sale for residential or commercial use / development.
- Lack of resources to meet the costs of maintenance as a whole.
- Poor perception by the public and local authorities of the biodiversity value of burial grounds.
- The need to maintain a “neat and tidy” appearance expected by relatives of the interred.
- Lack of biological records for burial grounds.
- Increasing fragmentation of connected greenspaces with churchyards and cemeteries increasingly becoming ‘islands’ in the face of continual surrounding development.
- Due to recent changes in grass-cutting on NLC cemeteries, some members of the public are taking cutting of family graves into their own hands to trim grass around family graves and apply herbicides in places.

## **Current Actions**

- Our Cemeteries and Churchyards are maintained by cemetery staff. Maintenance within cemeteries includes grass cutting, litter collection, interments, re-instatement, shrub beds, flower beds, trees and weed control.
- Grass is cut throughout the months of April to September inclusive, weather permitting. Litter is collected weekly or when required. Employees also plant-out and maintain soil borders and flower beds/shrub beds as required, which includes weeding, feeding and pruning.
- Advise our Cemetery Staff and other organisations that deal with cemeteries, graveyards and crematoriums as to the potential benefits of these grounds to biodiversity.

## **Proposed objectives Targets and Actions**



1. To increase awareness of the biodiversity value of churchyards and cemeteries.
2. To work with those responsible for managing churchyards and cemeteries to conserve and enhance biodiversity.
3. To work towards linking urban cemeteries with nearby greenspaces to tackle habitat fragmentation, making use of resources such as Buglife's Bee-lines map for Scotland.

Actions	Meets objective number	Action by	Target
<b>Policy and legislation</b>			
1.1 Encourage the incorporation of biodiversity objectives within management contracts for churchyards and cemeteries.	2	NLC	New biodiversity objectives incorporated within management contracts for 2 cemeteries annually.
<b>Site safeguard and management</b>			
2.1 Designate sites as SINCS where the site meets criteria and designation would be beneficial.	2	NLC	Assess cemeteries annually against SINC criteria.
2.2 Develop habitat corridors around cemeteries. Potential routes could be through the likes of Buglife's National Bee-line's project for insect pollinators.	3	NLC and Biodiversity Partners.	Identify potential partners and corridors by 2023. Take forward 3 habitat improvement projects by 2025.
<b>Advisory</b>			
3.1 Advise and support managers and workers of burial grounds wishing to conserve and enhance biodiversity.	1	NLC	Provide Habitat Action Plan to managers and other general information.
<b>Future research and monitoring</b>			
4.1 Where sites meet SINC criteria ask experts along to survey grounds for specific species	1,2	NLC	Buglife, Glasgow NATS, Plantlife, Butterfly Conservation ect. To be invited to survey 1 site per year.
<b>Communication and publicity</b>			
5.1 Improve public understanding of biodiversity within graveyards	1	NLC	Organise walks and talks, plus annual open days at 1 site per annum. Could be taken forward through the Open Doors Day event.

Plan updated by Paul Gunn Countryside Ranger and Laura McCrorie Conservation and Biodiversity Manager 2022.

#### Sources of Information

1. Jackson, D.L. 2000. Guidance on the interpretation of the Biodiversity Broad Habitat Classification (terrestrial and freshwater types): Definitions and the relationship with other habitat classifications. JNCC Report No. 307  
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