

Newtown Road Cemetery, Newbury

Wildlife Management Plan



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the study

The Wildlife Survey Unit were commissioned by Newbury Town Council in January 2010 to produce a Wildlife Management Plan for the Newtown Road Cemetery in Newbury, Berkshire.

The production of the plan follows the baseline ecological surveys undertaken in 2009, these included a Phase 1 Habitat Survey, Protected Species Scoping Survey and a Bat Inspection and Emergence Survey (TWSU 2009).

This plan solely relates to the management of the flora and fauna found within the Newtown Road Cemetery site.

1.2 Recent and current management

Following the closure of the site, there has been very little in the way of management. There has been no public access to the site, with access restricted to those undertaking grass cutting, tree works and upkeep of the chapel and built structures.

The grassland component of the cemetery including the path areas and grass between headstones has been subject to an intensive cutting regime by strimming up to eight cuts per year. No artificial fertilizer has been used on the sward.

1.3 Ecological potential and constraints

The site is relatively small, being approximately 1.75ha, this constrains what populations of species can actually feasibly be present. Perhaps more importantly, the site is completely surrounded by housing and development. This effectively restricts the ecology on the site, narrowing it down to the species that were present when the site first became a cemetery and were able to survive the management up to the current day. The only other species, which could have appeared during this period, were those transferred by man, or those that can disperse by air or fly or those that thrive in an urban area.

Although the site is not an active cemetery, its previous use does have constraints on any future management. There are several War Graves within the cemetery and these have to be well maintained and cannot be neglected. The headstones of the graves themselves prevent machinery working between them, such as mechanical grass cutters and the narrow paths between the headstones prevent vehicle access.

2. MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

2.1 Target habitats and species

The Phase 1 Habitat Survey of Newtown Road Cemetery undertaken during 2009 identified the following habitat of conservation importance present within the site:

- **Neutral Grassland** – A Berkshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan broad habitat

This grassland forms the majority of the site and a total of 67 species were recorded during the survey. However the survey was undertaken late in the season, in September, so early flowering species may have been under recorded. The species diversity is the product of the continuous length of time it has been grassland and the lack of fertiliser applied, features such as anthills are only found in mature grasslands. The area of this habitat is approximately 1.75ha and this habitat is the single most important feature of the cemetery site.

The Protected Species Scoping Survey and Bat Survey, again undertaken during 2009, identified the following species of conservation importance present on the site:

- **Common Pipistrelle** - protected as a 'European Protected Species' under Schedule 2 of the Habitats Regulations.
- **Soprano Pipistrelle** - protected as a 'European Protected Species' under Schedule 2 of the Habitats Regulations and a UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) priority species.
- **Brown Long-eared** - protected as a 'European Protected Species' under Schedule 2 of the Habitats Regulations and a UKBAP priority species.
- **Song Thrush** – A UKBAP priority species.

The three bat species were recorded during the nocturnal bat surveys, one of the species, Common Pipistrelle, was recorded roosting on the site in the Cedar of Lebanon directly adjacent to the chapel. The two other species were recorded commuting or foraging on the site. The amount of roosting habitat on the site is very limited as the trees that are on site are well maintained and any dead wood or rot is removed as part of the management of the site. The dark vegetated areas of the site provide foraging potential, however the edges of the site suffer from light pollution from adjacent residential areas.

The Song Thrush was recorded during the Protected Species Scoping Survey, although this actual individual may have been a migrant, it is thought likely that Song Thrush would breed on the site. Potential nesting habitat would include the evergreen trees on the site, such as Yew, and the hedge with trees in the central section of the cemetery.

Other species of conservation concern, which could be feasibly be encouraged on the site would include:

- **Stag Beetle** *Lucanus cervus* - A UKBAP priority species, Appendix 2 of the Habitats Directive.

2.2 Management Objectives

The following management objectives are recommended:

Objective 1: Maintain and increase the biodiversity present within the Newtown Road Cemetery.

Objective 2: Maintain and improve the conservation value of the Neutral Grassland habitat.

Objective 3: Maintain and increase the population of the four species of conservation importance present, Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared and Song Thrush and provide habitat for other species of conservation concern that aren't present, to encourage their colonisation of the site.

Objective 4: Provide public access to and information about the biodiversity present within the cemetery.

Objective 5: Annually monitor the biodiversity present in the cemetery and review the success of the management of the cemetery, implement changes to the management plan where needed.

3 MANAGEMENT ACTIONS

3.1 Objective 1

“Maintain and increase the biodiversity present within the Newtown Road Cemetery”

The management of trees and shrubs within the cemetery should encourage biodiversity whilst still meeting the requirements of health and safety. Regular tree inspections will occur therefore it is vital that all trees can be inspected for rot and fungus especially near the base. The epicormic growth around the base of the lime avenue provides good nesting bird opportunities and this should be maintained on a three year cycle, with a third of the epicormic growth cut back each winter. All tree works must occur outside the breeding bird season (March to August inclusive).

The perimeter wall of the cemetery holds many plants, mosses and lichens, the management of this must be sympathetic whilst taking into account the need to maintain it's structural soundness. All plants, mosses and lichens should remain on the wall, with the exception of large woody specimens of Buddleja *Buddleja davidii* and Ivy *Hedera helix*. These should be removed during the winter; removal of the ivy should be firstly by cutting of the main stem, then removal in several weeks when the rest of the material has died back. No Ivy should be allowed to grow over the wall of the cemetery.

There is a very limited amount of habitat for nesting birds on the site, the provision of habitat for Song Thrush will be detailed in Section 3.3. Species of Conservation Concern, which could benefit from nestbox provision, would include House Sparrows and Starlings and Swifts. Suitable nestboxes are for House Sparrows Box 3SV with predator protection entrance hole 34mm and the same box for Starlings with a 45mm entrance hole (both available at <http://www.envisage-wildcare.co.uk/index.php>) . These are specially protected to prevent Grey Squirrel damage which is likely to happen on this site. Tawny Owls could also be encouraged to nest on the site, a suitable box is available from The Nestbox Company (<http://www.nestbox.co.uk/tawnyowl.shtml>). It is recommended that 10 House Sparrow boxes, 4 Starling boxes and 2 Tawny Owl boxes are purchased. The boxes should be fitted by an ecologist at a height of 3m on a tree facing northwest, north or northeast.

Provision of habitat for invertebrates could be achieved by placing these along the south facing wall on the site. These are commercially available, such as the Mason Bee Nest (both available at <http://www.envisage-wildcare.co.uk/index.php>), it would also make a great project for local school children or the friends group to create their own using the instructions for a

bee hotel at

<http://www.buglife.org.uk/Resources/Buglife/Create%20a%20bee%20hotel%20.pdf>.

3.2 Objective 2

“Maintain and improve the conservation value of the Neutral Grassland habitat”

The current cutting regime is replicating an extreme grazing regime, with eight cuts per year, with the cuttings maintained within the sward, this predominates a grassland community dominated by those plants that can thrive under such grazing pressure. A reduction in cutting and careful timing would allow those plant species within the sward that are susceptible to intensive cutting to flower and set seed.

It is not feasible to change the cutting regime for the whole site, the map in Section 5 details three areas which have little in the way of headstones within them and could be easily managed. These areas would need to be fenced or demarcated somehow and then signposted to allow the public information on the management changes.

A hay cutting regime should be implemented with a first cut undertaken late June/ early July, with a second cut in September. Cutting should be undertaken by strimmer/brushcutter, as it is unfeasible to use a mowing machine amongst headstones, all cutting should be left for 1-2 weeks then raked and removed. Compost heaps could be created along the south-facing wall to create invertebrate habitat and also to act as a feature.

Removing the cuttings will restrict nutrient input into grassland, especially with no fertilizers being used on the sward. Any woody species growing within the sward should be removed.

3.3 Objective 3

“Maintain and increase the population of the four species of conservation importance present, Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle, Brown Long-eared and Song Thrush and provide habitat for other species of conservation concern that aren't present, to encourage their colonisation of the site”

It is recommended that roosting opportunities for bats are created on site as currently the only roosting habitat is the Chapel or the limited dead wood and splits in the existing trees. Suitable boxes for the species present would include Schwegler 2FN box (available at <http://www.envisage-wildcare.co.uk/index.php>), the provision of 9 boxes would provide a start

to roosting provision on the site. The boxes should be fitted by an ecologist at a height of 3m facing south with a clear area beneath and not in direct illumination from streetlights.

Song Thrushes typically nest in areas of dense cover, on this site this is likely to be any of the conifers, such as the Yew *Taxus baccata* or areas of Bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. It is recommended that current Bramble areas are allowed to expand, these are currently surrounding the cemetery building in the centre of the site and surrounding a Yew tree adjacent to the south-facing wall. Any reduction of Bramble cover should be undertaken during winter only to prevent any disturbance to nesting birds. The flowering and fruiting of Bramble would also benefit invertebrates such as Butterflies and birds feeding on the berries in the autumn. Maintenance of short turf in the Neutral Grassland would also benefit Song Thrushes.

Habitat for Stag Beetles could easily be created from left over wood from tree works, the creation of log piles along the south-facing wall would provide excellent habitat for this species. It would also create a range of conditions for other invertebrates even if it is unsuccessful at bringing Stag Beetles onto the site. It is important that these log piles are left for a long period of time until they are rotted and replaced. Ideally some log piles should be in the shade where possible, and areas along the western wall are suitable. The number of log piles that can be created will depend on the amount of wood available from year to year.

3.4 Objective 4

“Provide public access to and information about the biodiversity present within the cemetery”

Currently the cemetery has no public access, there is ongoing works to make the cemetery safe by filling in vaults beneath the grave, once this process has been completed the cemetery will be opened up to the public. A network of paths is present but has not been maintained apart from intensive grass cutting.

It is important to have a system of main routes around the cemetery, which are accessible to all, including those in wheelchairs. The main path network is highlighted in the map in Section 5, this must be kept clear and well maintained at all times. It is recommended that:

- ❑ Where possible wood chippings created from branch removal/tree works on the site are used as a path lining, this may require rolling to create an even surface.
- ❑ Areas which are not covered in wood chips should be strimmed as is currently done, 8 times a year.

- All overhanging branches should be removed, such that there is a 2.5m high corridor above the path network in all areas. Any branches removed should be chipped or added to wood piles (see Section 3.3)

To provide interpretation and increase public knowledge of the wildlife management plan and its objectives, it is recommended that:

- A series of information boards are erected at location along the main path network, in areas of interest. These boards should involve the friends group or local schools to create artwork or pictures for them.

3.5 Objective 5

“Annually monitor the biodiversity present in the cemetery and review the success of the management of the cemetery, implement changes to the management plan where needed”

It is crucial for the success of the management plan that changes to the key target habitats and species are recorded, in order that the management can be maintained or changed if the desired outcome is not occurring. It is also desirable that monitoring is undertaken by voluntary groups or the friends group where possible.

It is recommended that the following surveys are undertaken:

- A detailed botanical survey using the National Vegetation Classification methodology, to assess the change in vegetation community within both the Neutral Grassland area and the area managed under a hay-cutting regime. This needs to be undertaken in May or June prior to any cutting being undertaken.
- Monitoring of the bat boxes placed on the site should occur during April, May, August, September and October. This needs to be undertaken by a licenced batworker.
- A breeding bird survey using the Common Birds Census survey methodology (<http://www.bto.org/birdtrends2000/cbc.htm>). This would provide information on the species present within the site, their breeding status and distribution and number of territories. This would be especially relevant for Species of conservation Concern such as Song Thrush, Starling and House Sparrow.

The original baseline surveys were limited in extent and time and therefore further surveys are recommended to find out what other species are present within the cemetery. Ideally

these surveys where possible should be undertaken by members of the friends groups or by local volunteer organizations. The following surveys could be undertaken:

- Invertebrates – Local groups such as the Berkshire Network for Invertebrate Conservation should be contacted to see if they are interested in undertaking surveys of the site to provide baseline data and to see if any Species of Conservation Concern exist on the site (<http://www.chrisraper.org.uk/BNIC/index.htm>).

- Lichens – as above, contact TVERC.

All results should be compiled and held at a central source, such as Newbury Town Council and a member of the Friends Group. The records should also be made available to the Thames Valley Environmental Records centre (<http://www.tverc.org/>).

A meeting should be undertaken at the end of each year in December with all interested parties to discuss the successes and failures of the management during preceding year and to develop the current Wildlife Management Plan accordingly.

