

LANCASHIRE BAP TEMPLATE FOR HABITAT ACTION PLANS

CHURCHYARDS & CEMETERIES

(Line Drawing of Habitat)

Summary

All burial grounds are potential havens for biodiversity, usually remaining relatively undisturbed by people, even in urban locations. Comprising a wide range of habitat types from gravestones and church walls to trees, shrubs and grassland they are becoming increasingly important because of the rarity of the range of species they may contain.

Current factors affecting this habitat include conflicts between management approaches and poor public perception of the biodiversity value of burial grounds. Often a low priority is accorded to burial grounds by biodiversity organisations.

Action Plan Aim

To assess, manage and promote biodiversity in churchyards and cemeteries throughout Lancashire.

Habitat Description

For simplicity this HAP uses the collective term "burial ground" when referring to churchyards, cemeteries and other repositories for the remains of the dead. Some burial grounds are closed so no more burials take place there.

All burial grounds are potential havens for biodiversity. They are rarely developed for housing or industry as settlements spread and, unlike most lowland agricultural land, they have not been widely and intensively treated with fertilisers and pesticides (although spot weeding with weed killer around bases of headstones and monuments may be common). In addition, they are usually relatively undisturbed by people, even in urban locations. Of course, burial grounds are managed in a very wide range of styles. However, the general lack of built development or "agricultural improvements" and the quiet nature of burial grounds often result in them becoming wildlife sanctuaries in an otherwise hostile environment.

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A religious body or a local authority usually manages burial grounds. Consequently, there is a relatively small group of land managers who need to be approached when discussing action for burial ground biodiversity; however, a few redundant Anglican churchyards may be managed by the Churches Conservation Trust <http://www.visitchurches.org.uk/>. Those associated with other Christian denominations may be managed by the Historic Chapels Trust <http://www.hct.org.uk/chapels.html>. Historic municipal cemeteries may be managed by, or in association with a "Friends" group affiliated to the National Federation of Cemetery Friends <http://www.cemeteryfriends.fsnet.co.uk/>.

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

When discussing management of burial grounds for wildlife it is vital it is made clear to the whole local community that this type of management will not result in a site which looks neglected. A burial ground is perceived by many people as a sanctified and spiritual place and this always needs to be borne in mind. However, a new management regime should improve the quality of the burial ground's environment for all concerned – wildlife and people. If it does not then it will be unsuccessful. Enhancing the wildlife value of a site will be extremely difficult, and certainly unsustainable in the longer term, without the commitment of burial ground users.

The importance of many burial grounds is often as "encapsulated countryside" in larger 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.

As a wildlife habitat, burial grounds are becoming increasingly important because of the rarity of the range of species they may contain. They can be a mosaic of habitats where grasses, mosses, lichens, ferns, fungi, wild flowers, insects, reptiles, birds and mammals can thrive. They may be significant as hosts for lichen communities in the Lancashire Plain because of the rarity of stone outcrops elsewhere in that landscape.

The two species of Pipistrelle bat are priority species under the biodiversity action planning process that may be found often in burial grounds.

Characteristic plant species such as primrose, wood anemone, cowslip and oxeye daisy can easily be encouraged through appropriate management regimes.

Though the Wildlife Trust, in the early 1990s, has surveyed some burial grounds in Blackburn with Darwen Borough and in urban Preston as an incidental part of enhanced Phase One surveys, there appears to be little site-specific ecological data for burial grounds within Lancashire as a whole. (Burial grounds were omitted from the Burnley Borough enhanced Phase One Survey and no other districts within the county have been surveyed at this level of detail.)

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National Status

No burial grounds in Lancashire are subject to national or international nature conservation designations.

Local Status

There is no collated data on the total number or area of burial grounds in the county.

Only three burial grounds in Lancashire are currently known to meet criteria identifying them as Biological Heritage Sites.

Current factors affecting the habitat

Conflicts between management for biodiversity and a very "neat and tidy" approach.

Conflicts between management for biodiversity and a "no management" approach in derelict burial grounds.

The risk that repairs and renovation of monuments and buildings might inadvertently result in damage to lichen communities and bat roosts.

Poor public perception of the biodiversity value of burial grounds.

Lack of understanding of appropriate management regimes

Low priority accorded to enhancement of biodiversity by the relevant religious community/local authority/charity.

Low priority accorded to burial grounds by biodiversity organisations, or by biodiversity staff in local authorities.

Important Sites:

Goodshaw Baptist Chapel Grounds BHS, Rossendale Borough;
Melling Church of England Churchyard BHS, Ribble Valley Borough;
Southport (Municipal) Crematorium Grounds BHS, West Lancashire District;
Tosside Church of England Churchyard BHS, Ribble Valley Borough

Current Action / Mechanisms

- *Policy*

The *Alliance of Religions & Conservation (ARC)* is a secular body, founded in 1995, that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programmes, based on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices. It helps the religions to link with key environmental organisations.

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Under the remit of the *Living Churchyards* projects, more than 6,000 British churchyards run their small plots of land as “sacred eco-systems” – without pesticides, and mowing the grass only once a year – ensuring that birds, reptiles, insects and bats can thrive.

Sacred Land is the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF)’s major religious undertaking in Britain and has the backing of the principal churches, conservation and environmental organisations, and the major faiths practised in Britain. It has the aim of reviving and creating sacred sites in Britain and overseas.

- *Site Safeguard*

No sites have been subject to statutory nature conservation designations.

Sites identified as BHS are afforded additional protection in Local Plans.

The Biological Heritage Sites Project seeks to identify and notify all owners and managers of the importance of their BHS for wildlife. Three churchyards and one municipal cemetery are currently identified as BHS.

Identification as a BHS improves chances of successful awards of grant aid for biodiversity projects.

- *Land Management*

The Productive Landscapes in Preston project (PLIP) is a partnership between Preston City Council and The Wildlife Trust. Amongst other initiatives, it is seeking to create a formal wildlife garden in the City Council’s Preston Old Cemetery and to integrate the needs of biodiversity into the overall management of this historic site.

Other religious bodies and local authorities may actively manage their burial grounds in Lancashire with wildlife in mind, but this information has not been collated.

- *Advisory*

The Living Churchyards Project is a national initiative not represented in Lancashire. The nearest project is that for Yorkshire. (See web sites below).

The Eco-congregations Project (ENCAMS) is a Christian initiative designed to promote environmental issues and facilitate practical conservation activities at a local church level. This includes stewardship of churchyards and burial grounds. In Lancashire, the project is covered by ENCAMS’s Wigan office. (See web sites below).

In the Church of England Diocese of Blackburn, the Ecology & Environment Group of the Diocesan Board of Social Responsibility is

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engaging with the management of churches in that diocese, which covers most of Lancashire. (The remainder of the county is in the Anglican Dioceses of Liverpool and Bradford.)

- *Research and Monitoring*

The Women's Institute carried out a nationwide survey during the 1970s. This does not appear to have been repeated.

- *Public Relations*

Indicators of Habitat Quality

(Bullet Points with indicators)

Variable.

Objectives, targets and proposed actions for churchyards & cemeteries in Lancashire

The potential of burial grounds as important wildlife habitats to be recognised in local development plans and nature conservation strategies.

All burial grounds to be regularly surveyed.

All burial grounds to have widely agreed management plans that are being implemented by the site manager in partnership with the local community.

Burial grounds identified as Biological Heritage Sites to be monitored regularly.

Burial grounds to be celebrated as sanctuaries for wildlife.

The public to be educated about the ways in which management of burial grounds for wildlife and for people can be complementary.

Proposed Actions

Action (priority: H, M, L)	Area	Measure / Milestone	Partners	Timescale
Research and monitoring				
Develop and implement individual survey project in cooperation with site managers (H)		50% of churchyard and cemetery sites surveyed	TWT, EN, LCC	2010
Develop system of evaluation of new burial grounds		100% new burial grounds evaluated	???	2010
Site safeguard and management				
Secure resources to monitor burial grounds		100% BHS burial grounds	TWT, EN, LCC	2010

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identified as Biological Heritage Sites regularly (H)		monitored		
Secure resources to establish and maintain database as part of BRN (H)		Habitat database established	TWT, EN, LCC	2010
Work in partnership with managers of burial grounds to start the process of integrating biodiversity action into existing and new management plans with the local community (M)		100% of burial site managers to be advised of practises beneficial to biodiversity	LCC, LAs, FCs, TWT	2010
Design and manage new burial grounds to integrate biodiversity action into management plans in partnership with the local community (M)		100% of new burial grounds to be designed and managed in favour of biodiversity	LCC, LAs, FCs, TWT	2010
Habitat protection and management				
All burial grounds to have widely agreed management plans that integrate biodiversity action and are being implemented by the site manager in partnership with the local community		100% management plans to incorporate practises beneficial to biodiversity	TWT	2010
Burial grounds to be celebrated for sanctuaries for wildlife and secure resources (H)		Guidance to be produced that highlights importance of burial grounds for wildlife	TWT, LCC, EN	2008
Advisory				
Develop training days for managers wishing to manage burial grounds for biodiversity		Appropriate training programme developed	TWT	2008
Promote ways in which management of burial grounds for wildlife and for people can be complementary (H)		Leaflet produced to raise public awareness of wildlife benefits of burial grounds	TWT, LCC, LAs, FCs	2008
Publicity				
A web site similar to that of the Yorkshire Living Churchyard Project to be established for Lancashire, but with a remit to include all burial grounds (H)		Website developed	LCC, TWT	2008

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Organise an annual 'wildlife in churchyards' day to celebrate the work done and identify and promote good practice		Annual wildlife day implemented	TWT, LCC, LAs, FCs	2008
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Related Action Plans

Species-rich Neutral Grassland; Calcareous Grassland; Urban Bumblebees; Pipistrelle; House Sparrow

References and additional reading

Web Sites

The Alliance of Religions & Conservation (ARC):
<http://www.arcworld.org/projects.asp?projectID=76>

The Church of England Council for the Care of Churches (CCC):
<http://www.churchcare.co.uk/cc/>

The Churches Conservation Trust: <http://www.visitchurches.org.uk/>

The Eco-congregations Project: <http://www.encams.org/ecocongregation/>

The Historic Chapels Trust: <http://www.hct.org.uk/chapels.html>.

The Islamic Foundation for Ecology & Environmental Sciences (IFEES)
<http://www.ifees.org/>

The National Federation of Cemetery Friends:
<http://www.cemeteryfriends.fsnet.co.uk/>

The Re-directory of Faith Communities:
<http://www.theredirectory.org.uk/orgs/index4.html>

Yorkshire Living Churchyard Project: <http://www.yorkshire-wildlife-trust.org.uk/ylc.htm>

Books

"*Wildlife in the Churchyard - The plants and animals of God's Acre*" (1993), Francesca Greenoak, Clare Roberts, ISBN 0-316-90499-6 (out of print)

"*Wildlife in Church and Churchyard: plants, animals and their management*" (1995), Nigel Cooper, ISBN 0-7151-7574-2. Available from SPCK or Church House Publishing, Church House, Great Smith Street, London, SW1P 3NZ.

Responsible Care for Churchyards, Church House Publishing, London, ISBN 0-7151-7564-5

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Leaflets

Bats in churches (1994), The Bat Conservation Trust

Discovering butterflies in churchyards (1994), Butterfly Conservation

Geology in churchyards (1994), The Geologists' Association

Churchyard lichens (1994), The British Lichen Society

Date (30th June 2004)

Draft No. (3)

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