



Spion Kop Cemetery, Hartlepool

Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership



Churchyards and cemeteries

Habitat Action Plan

2009-2013

Plan Lead Organisation	Middlesbrough Borough Council
Plan Coordinator	Anne Gladwin
Action Group	Urban
Associated Plans	Lowland meadows
Latest version	Draft 23 April 2009

Description

Many churchyards were originally grasslands enclosed either when the church was built or as a later extension. They range from manicured lawns and tended flower beds to neglected wildernesses. Cemeteries can also support an important range of wildlife and, in some cases, act as valuable refuges for rare and uncommon species.

Churchyards are often refuges for meadow and woodland plants such as cowslips (*Primula veris*), lady's smock (*Cardamine pratensis*) and lesser celandine (*Ranunculus ficaria*). Over 100 species of plant may occur in an average sized churchyard. Typically, older churchyards have more native species, with mature yew (*Taxus baccata*) and beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) dominating, mixed with lime (*Tilia platyphyllos*) and exotic conifers which were often planted in Victorian times. Shrubs including holly (*Ilex aquifolium*) and climbers like ivy (*Hedera helix*) are also typical. Churchyards and cemeteries are often similar in terms of wildlife and both may attract wildlife because of their lower disturbance and greater habitat diversity compared to surrounding areas. The gravestones themselves can support a huge variety of lichens.

Many churchyards and cemeteries, especially larger sites in urban areas need to be considered as multifunctional green spaces as they can make a significant contribution to the provision of urban green space, providing a sanctuary for wildlife and people in the urban settlements. However often they are subject to intensive management regimes aimed at producing a tidy and cared for appearance. Intensive management can reduce the value of such sites for wildlife. In recent years there has been increasing recognition of the wildlife value of this habitat and a move to manage these areas to enhance their wildlife value and aesthetic appearance.

Current factors causing loss and decline

- ◆ A general lack of awareness and understanding of the biodiversity value of churchyards and cemeteries.
- ◆ A lack of understanding of what constitutes suitable wildlife conservation churchyard management.
- ◆ A shortage of resources to manage churchyards .

- ◆ Health and safety issues leading to loss of habitat, e.g. repositioning of gravestones (which can cause damage to lichens) and felling of veteran trees which are considered 'dangerous'.
- ◆ Potential/perceived conflict within local communities between the desire for a manicured site and more informal wildlife habitats.
- ◆ Vandalism and antisocial behaviour, especially in urban cemeteries.

Conservation Status

No general nature conservation status unless individual site is designated (e.g. SSSI, LNR, Local Wildlife Site).

The Habitat in the Tees Valley

In the Tees Valley there are some examples of cemeteries and churchyards that provide a significant wildlife habitat. Spion Kop in Hartlepool is an outstanding example. The Cemetery's cliff top, coastal location on sandy nutrient poor alkaline soil has developed a rich dune grassland that is unique on Teesside. This locally rare, 'coastal grassland' type of habitat which has a diverse flora and supports many animals, in particular moss snails, grasshoppers, common blue butterflies and skylarks

Linthorpe Cemetery provides 21 ha of open space in urban Middlesbrough. The older parts of the cemetery are Victorian and have a canopy of mature trees. The cemetery is rich in bird life, both resident and seasonal visitors. Regular songbirds include nuthatch, greenfinch, dunnock and siskin. Greater spotted woodpecker successfully breed there and occasionally tawny owls. In 2008 16 species of butterfly were recorded including the common blue and speckled wood.

Thornaby Cemetery in Stockton contains tiny relics of salt marsh habitat from the River Tees. Oxbridge Cemetery and Durham Road, also in Stockton borough have examples of species rich grassland. Redcar and Cleveland borough has many closed churchyards with old specimens of trees and woodland plant communities. The nature conservation of many sites in the Tees Valley, whilst not containing rare habitats or species, provide havens for more common wildlife. In many cases their potential has not been evaluated.

Current Activity in the Tees Valley

During the past five years there has been a marked increase in understanding and appreciation of the wildlife resource of cemeteries and churchyards in the Tees Valley by local authorities, church managers and community groups. The Tees Valley is one of the few Local Biodiversity Plans to have a specific Habitat Action Plan for churchyards and cemeteries. There are currently at least six active friends groups who are actively involved in improving local cemeteries and churchyards.

Spion Kop and Linthorpe Cemetery have been designated as Local Nature Reserves through English Nature's Wildspace grant scheme. Linthorpe Cemetery and Thornaby Cemetery obtained Green Flag Award in 2008. The Green Flag Award is the national standard for parks and green spaces in England and Wales. The award scheme began in 1996 as a means of recognising and rewarding the best green spaces in the country. One of the judging criteria is management for biodiversity. Spion Kop and parts of Thornaby Cemetery are awaiting designation as Local Wildlife Sites through their Local Development Frameworks.

In Hartlepool at Spion Kop, meadow management has been introduced to enhance and maintain the natural flora. North Cemetery, also in Hartlepool, has undergone a number of biodiversity enhancements including the planting of native trees, allowing long grass areas to develop and the planting of wildflowers and spring bulbs. In Redcar and Cleveland borough, St Nicolas Church, Guisborough and North Cemetery in Redcar both have friends groups that are carrying out projects to increase their wildlife value. In Middlesbrough, Linthorpe Cemetery has completed five years of a Nature Conservation Plan and undergone a substantial programme of improvements through a Heritage Lottery grant scheme. This has included woodland management and woodland meadow enhancements. An extensive programme of structural improvements and education programme has resulted in a marked decline in vandalism and antisocial behaviour. Stockton Council's bereavement services are currently developing a Friends of Stockton cemeteries group as a consultative group.

Further Information

Greenoak, F. (1993). *Wildlife in the Churchyard, the Plants and Animals of God's Acre*. Little Brown Books.
Cocke, T. (2001). *The Churchyards Handbook*. Church House Publishing.
Cooper, N. (2001). *Wildlife in Church and Churchyard*. Church House Publishing.
White, J. & Hodsdon, J. (2007). *Paradise Preserved-an introduction to the assessment, evaluation, conservation and management of historic cemeteries*. English Heritage.

Websites

Eco Congregation

www.ecocongregation.org

National Federation of Cemetery Friends

www.cemeteryfriends.org.uk

Institute of cemetery and Crematorium Management

www.iccm-uk.com

Vision Statement

To develop the protection, management and enhancement of the nature conservation value of cemeteries and churchyards whilst respecting the primary purpose of cemeteries and churchyards.

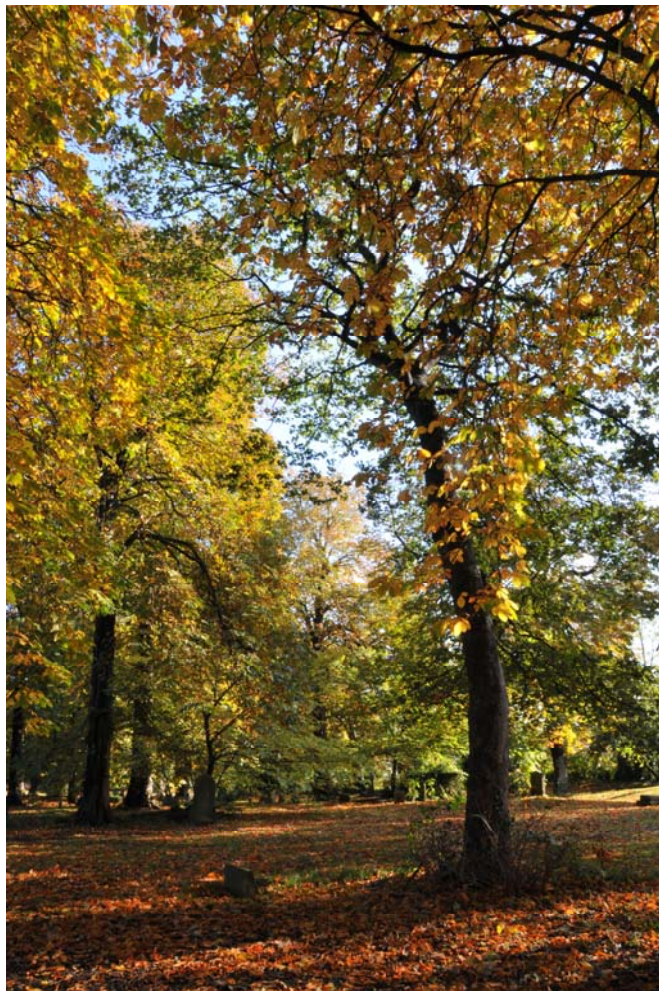
Targets

CC.T1 To maintain the biodiversity value of sites which have habitats of significant nature conservation interest.

Goal: To retain the key habitats at Spion Kop, Thornaby Cemetery and Linthorpe Cemetery.

CC.T2 To enhance the potential for biodiversity of churchyards and cemeteries through practical projects and changes in maintenance regimes.

Goal Sustainable biodiversity enhancements carried out at 12 sites by 2013.



Linthorpe Cemetery
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Actions

Code	Action	Organisational lead	Action contact	Partners	End date
CC. A1	Retain Green Flag Status at Linthorpe Cemetery and Thornaby Cemetery. Progress green flag status for two other cemeteries in the Tees Valley.	Middlesbrough Borough Council	Anne Gladwin	Hartlepool Borough Council, Stockton Borough Council, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council	Ongoing
CC.A2	Establish a forum in the Tees for the management of churchyards and cemeteries for site managers and volunteers to share best practice, skills, experience and inspire action.	Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership	Sue Antrobus	Hartlepool Borough Council, Stockton Borough Council, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council	2009
CC.A3	Support the continued development and role played by "Friends of " groups.	Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership	Sue Antrobus	Hartlepool Borough Council, Stockton Borough Council, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council	Ongoing
CC.A4	Carry out an evaluation of the biodiversity management of closed churchyards and cemeteries in Redcar and Cleveland.	Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council	David Spenser	Tees Valley Wildlife Trust	2009
CC.A5	Maintain database of churchyards and cemeteries nature conservation interest, contact details and practical conservation activities.	Tees Valley Biodiversity Partnership	Sue Antrobus		Ongoing
CC.A6	Linthorpe Cemetery-carry out programme of work as described in site nature conservation plan (2009-13).	Middlesbrough Borough Council	Carole Davis	Friends of Linthorpe Cemetery	Ongoing
CC.A7	Spion Kop – produce a nature conservation management plan and carry out annual programme of nature conservation activities.	Hartlepool Borough Council	Helen Beaman	Friends of Spion Kop	Ongoing
CC.A8	Thornaby Cemetery - carry out nature conservation actions outlines in general site management plan.	Stockton Borough Council	Barry Hunter		Ongoing
CC.A9	Carry out practical conservation projects to improve wildlife habitats on at least 12 churchyards and cemeteries.	Middlesbrough Borough Council	Anne Gladwin	Hartlepool Borough Council, Stockton Borough Council, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council	Ongoing