

Burial Committee – Wednesday 28th July

Report – Agenda Item 6: To receive an update on initial Environmental & Conservation activity and to consider preliminary proposals

1. Situation

1.1 The Burial Committee have previously agreed to work on assessing opportunities to enhance environmental and conservation activity at the Tetbury Hill Cemetery and has allocated £750 to facilitate initial activity.

1.2 Original plans to engage a professional advisor were derailed by COVID 19. A small group of local volunteers has now formed which includes the participation of a professional botanist and land management expert.

1.3 A meeting with this group, and the groundstaff, the Mayor, the Chair of Burial Committee, the Acting Town Clerk has resulted in a preliminary report and proposals that will move forward our environmental and conservation management practices at the Cemetery. This report and proposals are attached in this report. The identified plant list is attached as a separate document. The volunteer group would be pleased to stay involved to help support the implementation of the proposals and future activity.

1.4 The report is clear that the current management regime practised by our groundstaff offers a good base on which to base the proposals in the preliminary report.

2. Proposals

- a) To thank the volunteer group for their report and proposals and to accept their offer to support the implementation of the proposals and future activity.
- b) To allocate up to £400 to be spent implementing the planting proposals in 1 and 3 (except trees and conifer hedge). Spend to be managed by the ATC.
- c) To agree to implement the recommendation for a slight increase in the time between strimming activity around individual graves, subject to review based on outcomes.
- d) To ask for a tree planting plan based on the proposals for consideration at our next meeting.
- e) To ask for proposals on further encouraging wildlife diversity, for example by construction of bird boxes, hedgehog covers and insect 'hotels', with a view to encouraging school and youth organisations in implementing these proposals.
- f) To agree to make information available to local schools and youth organisations on the opportunity to be involved in implementing and monitoring the effect of the proposals and to those interested in the Cemetery as a nature and history.
- g) To agree to include plant, wildlife, general history and appropriate family history information about the Cemetery within Explore Malmesbury, with complementary printed leaflets (at a volume that can be printed using in house resources).
- h) To share this report and proposals to P&R, including results achieved, for incorporation into the developing plans for park maintenance and development, as appropriate.
- i) If these proposals are passed that they may be reported on the MTC website etc.

3. Financial Implications of this report

The proposed spend of up to £400 will be from the previously agreed project expenditure. The proposed reduction in time on strimming will enable the groundstaff related activities in the proposal to be implemented and will be of overall benefit to our grounds maintenance activity.

Preliminary Report and Proposals on conservation and environmental management and enhancement at Tetbury Hill Cemetery are as follows:

- The cemetery was probably created on an area of ancient meadow grassland, which is why it is rich in plant species. It also supports important numbers of hedgehogs (a rapidly declining species nationally) and species such as slow worms (actually a legless lizard) and grass snakes (which are totally harmless). The hedges support nesting birds (though the conifer hedges are less good for wildlife, being very dense and not producing any flowers and/or fruit) and act as corridors for wildlife
- The current management (regular cutting of grass in blocks every 2-3 weeks in summer with no use of fertilisers, herbicides or pesticides) is maintaining the botanical diversity of the grassland. Ideally, as a long term aim, the cut grass should be gathered somehow, though I appreciate this would be labour intensive and reliant on volunteer effort
- Shaun and Graham do a great job keeping the grassland mown so that it both looks good/cared for and supports pollinating insects. This is achieved by mowing the grassland in blocks on rotation, so not all the area is cut in any one week. This means there is always at least one area which has plenty of flowers such as bird's foot trefoil, self-heal and clovers. If the strimming around individual graves was reduced slightly, to say once every 3-4 weeks, the wildflower displays would be even more special
- The perimeter hedges are cut once a year, and cuttings disposed of at the far end of the site

The cemetery could be further enhanced for nature, in line with the Living Churchyard ethos, and improved for people (who will find solace in nature) by a few simple steps. None of this need be costly, and there are various grants that can be applied for, to fund capital items.

1. Some supplementary planting of wildflowers such as knapweed, moon daisy, scabious, yellow rattle, primrose and cowslip would further diversify the sward and could be a great project-based way of involving the local primary school (many children walk through the area on their way to and from school on a daily basis)
2. Informative signs and leaflets could be produced, and a couple of seating areas could be created
3. In the extension, plug plants could be introduced and would greatly enhance the grassland, which is a basic grass-dominated amenity mix (and is cut very regularly by a different contractor). A few planted trees would greatly enhance the aesthetic value of this area..... I would recommend a small grove of 3-5 silver birch trees in the grassland (they are relatively quick growing but not too tall or long lived). If space allows, small ornamental trees such as crab apple would provide much needed shade and flowers/fruit for wildlife and could be removed when the space is needed
4. The removal of the low conifer hedge in the middle of the extension area would reduce maintenance need and free up land for planting a few low growing trees/shrubs
5. The area of trees, shrubs, tall herbs and bramble at the far end of the site (near the tennis courts) is of great importance for nesting birds, hibernating animals and hedgehogs. Any future infilling (because the land level is low and the water table high, rendering it unsuitable for use as a graveyard) and development of this area should be left for as long as possible.
6. There is great potential for involving the local community in researching (eg the social history and previous land use), using, enhancing and recording the wildlife that uses the site

I hope this is helpful at this juncture
Kind regards, Ann Skinner