

WIVENHOE TOWN COUNCIL

Management Plan for The Old Cemetery

October 2007



1 Background

The Old Cemetery on Belle Vue Road is owned by the Town Council and management responsibility rests with the Council's General Amenities Working Party (GAWP). The site is approximately rectangular in shape. There are numerous trees and open areas of grass. There is a figure-of-eight path formerly surfaced, but now with encroaching grass.

Work on this management plan began following a site visit on 26th June 2007 involving Cllrs Richards, Sinclair, Lodge, Fox, and Richard Moulson from Contract Services. Revisions were made on the basis of information obtained from the Chelmsford Diocesan Advisory Committee, Jason Pettitt and others. Further amendments were made after discussions at meetings of GAWP on 6th August 2007 & 3rd September 2007. The plan was drafted by Cllr Fox with additional input from Cllr Hill.

2 Objectives

The objective of this plan is to manage the Old Cemetery in a way that makes it an attractive place to visit, and which enhances its wildlife value, using conservation practices that can be supported by community involvement.

3 Paths

The surfaced path is being encroached by grass. Preventing this encroachment and renewing the path would be costly and of little conservation value or general amenity. In general, the encroachment should be permitted to continue, with the grass being maintained as permanent short grass, or close mown grass (terrain permitting), cut at least monthly during the growing season, with 0.5m borders to prevent fallen long grass obstructing the path. Overhanging and overgrowing plants are to be cut back were they obstruct the path or present a hazard. Potholes and other trip hazards should be repaired in a way that is sympathetic to the state of the path at that point.

In the event that paths are renewed, consideration should be given to the use of construction methods, materials and maintenance methods (such as gravel with regular topping up) that aid nature conservation and that do not require chemical weed control.

4 Grass

With the exception of the path and firebreak, the grass should be maintained as permanent long grass, brush-cut and raked annually on a two-year rotation. The long grass provides a safe refuge for small animals, and a source of food for a range of birds, animals and insects. The periodic cutting helps to manage invasive plants, such as brambles. This helps to slow the natural succession to woodland, and maintains a more diverse range of habitats.

The path provides a convenient way of defining the areas to be cut by reference to the two "islands" it creates and the wall side areas adjacent to each of these islands. It is proposed that the two regions to be cut in rotation each consist of one island together with the area bounding the *other* island. Cutting the areas in this pattern will have a better visual impact than some alternative regimes.

Brush-cutting is to take place around September to minimise fire risk from dried cuttings. The cuttings are to be managed on site (see Waste). String-trimming or hand-cutting should be used were brush cutting or mowing is likely to damage masonry or ironwork. Attention should be paid to ensure that cutting does not have an adverse impact on small animals such as frogs and hedgehogs.

5 Trees

The trees are to be lifted to around head-height to improve views across the site, and allow better light penetration. This will help improve both the wildlife value of the site, and help address safety issues. Some trees may be allowed to obscure views of composting sites. Any tree-mounted nesting boxes can be inspected at this time.

Pruning of trees should take place in the Autumn after leaf-fall during the dormant season (e.g. November onwards) to minimise the volume of cuttings. Cuttings are to be managed on site (see Waste).

6 Brambles and nettles

Any brambles and nettles are normally to be cut back as part of the brush cut rotation. Brambles provide a valuable source of food for wildlife. To this end, one area of brambles may be allowed to remain uncut, for example at the northern end of the boundary with Belle Vue Road. Any encroachment from this patch can be managed during the brush cut rotation or firebreak maintenance. Plots that are regularly overgrown by nettles or brambles may have additional maintenance, as described below, in the section “Plots”.

7 Chemicals and Weed Control

The use of chemicals such as fertilisers, pesticides, herbicides and defoliants is to be avoided, following the recommendation of the Diocesan Advisory Committee and the Essex Churchyards Conservation Group. In the event of a particular control issue, such as maintenance of surfaced areas or preventing regrowth from sycamore stumps, use of appropriate chemical control methods may be considered. Such methods should only be used after consultation with appropriate experts and after obtaining specific approval from the Council (e.g. via GAWP).

In the event that the site becomes colonised by aggressive non-native species, or subject to a statutory control order (e.g. under the Weeds Act (1959) or the Ragwort Control Act (2003)), then expert advice will be sought on correct identification and appropriate control measures. Non-chemical methods of control are to be preferred.

8 Waste

Prunings and cuttings are to be left on site as far as possible in a manner that is beneficial to wildlife.

Normally grass cuttings are to be placed on larger pieces of wood at pre-determined locations to form hibernaria for small animals. The rotting wood will also provide a habitat for beetle lava.

If necessary, the height of lifting for trees adjacent to these locations might be adjusted to help obscure them. The locations should not be too close to trees to avoid bark damage.

Once regular maintenance has been established, the volume of waste should be reviewed. Chipping or burning on an ad hoc basis may have to be considered if waste volumes become excessive, but any such changes to the waste management plan should not be implemented without consultation.

9 Nesting boxes

The Council has maintained a number of nesting boxes for birds and bats on the site. Boxes should be inspected and repaired where necessary, taking care not to disturb boxes that are in use. Additional boxes may be provided for birds, bats and other animals, where thought desirable.

10 Firebreak

The existing 3m firebreak along the Belle Vue Road boundary will be maintained as at present. Ideally any mowing of the firebreak should maintain the area as permanent short-grass of circa 10cm rather than close-mown grass, as the former has more conservation value.

11 Plots

Ivy and, where feasible, woody plants should be removed from monumental masonry. Small plants and lichens may be left in place.

Plots that are known to be visited on a regular basis should normally be subject to additional maintenance in the form of regular string-trimming or hand-cutting of a circa 0.5m-1m area around the plot (obstructions permitting) and mowing or brush cutting of a 1m wide path to the plot. This can take place during at the same time that the main path is mowed, or during annual brush cutting.

Individuals with an interest in a plot should be able to discuss its maintenance with the Council, for example to request additional grass cutting as described above. Information on how to contact the Council to discuss plots and their maintenance should be displayed at the site.

In all cases, string-trimming or hand-cutting should be used when cutting grass in the vicinity of plots if brush-cutting or mowing is likely to damage masonry or ironwork. Attention should be paid to ensure that cutting does not have an adverse impact on small animals such as frogs and hedgehogs.

12 Boundary Wall

Ivy and woody plants should be removed to prevent damage to the cemetery wall. Small plants and lichens may be left in place.

Removal of extensive vegetation from the boundary walls should take place at times that avoid disruption to nesting birds. Consideration should be given to the provision of alternative habitats.

In the event that the Belle Vue Road boundary wall requires extensive repair, consideration should be given to rebuilding it at a lower level, to match the wall on the other side of the road and to improve views of the site from the road. Such a plan should only be implemented following consultation with interested parties, and clarification of any relevant conservation policies and regulations.

13 Benches

Seating will be provided for the benefit of visitors in at least two locations.

14 Notice Boards

A notice board should continue to be maintained near the entrance, providing, for example, a summary of the management plan together with information about who to contact concerning requests for additional maintenance of plots, reports of vandalism, and offers of help in maintaining the site.

Subject to available funding and the agreement of Council, interpretation panels or similar may be erected that provides information concerning the history of the site and species of interest etc.

15 Inspection and Review

There should be a minimum of two scheduled inspection of the site each year (e.g. by GAWP and appropriate conservation experts) to identify specific problems that need to be addressed and to review the implementation of the management plan. Any potential improvements that could be made to the management plan should be noted. Appropriate times for the inspections would be in Spring (e.g. May), and during brush-cutting and tree lifting. This will ensure that the site is visited at regular intervals throughout the year.

In the interests of preserving and enhancing biodiversity, it would be appropriate to seek an environmental audit of the site with a view to identifying any species of particular interest or conservation value that may require special measures or changes to the management plan. It would also be appropriate to consult with relevant experts at the time of site inspections, and prior to major revisions to the management plan, in order to review the impact of the plan on the wildlife. Appropriate organisations to consult include the Colchester Natural History Society and Essex Wildlife Trust.

APPENDIX: Activity Schedule

Proposed list of activities and decisions (*and times*) for 2007–2008.

A. Decisions Required

1. **Hibernaria.** The locations of hibernaria to be determined by GAWP. The locations to be obscured from the path by trees, but not too close to risk spread of disease. (There are perhaps five potential locations for stacking wood and grass cuttings, two on the north-east wall, towards the centre of the wall, and three on the south-west wall, one in the southern corner and two towards the middle of the wall. These locations are some distance from the path.) (*Time of decision: prior to first brush cutting of the year, e.g. during Autumn site visit for 2007.*)
2. **Bramble patch** A small patch of permanent brambles may be allowed to remain. The location is to be determined by GAWP. (*Time of decision: prior to first brush cutting of the year, e.g. during Autumn site visit for 2007.*)

B. Regular Activities

1. Mowing, brush cutting etc.

- (a) **Path and firebreak.** The figure of eight path with 0.5m border, and 3m firebreak adjacent to the Belle Vue Road wall to be kept mown. Cuttings to be placed on the hibernaria. (*Time: at least monthly during growing season, and as needed at other times.*)
- (b) **Other areas.** Vegetation away from the firebreak and path to be brush cut and/or string trimmed, and raked, on a two year rotation, using the map supplied by GAWP. Rakings to be placed on hibernaria. (*Time: September.*)
- (c) **Burial Plots.** Plots that are clearly being visited, or which have significant overgrowth of nettles, brambles, etc., or which have otherwise been identified by GAWP, to be kept string trimmed. Rakings to be placed on hibernaria. (*Time: at least during annual brush-cutting in September, and also during regular mowing whenever possible.*)

In all cases, care is to be taken to avoid cutting near frogs and hedgehogs etc. and avoiding damage to masonry and ironwork.

2. Paths maintenance.

- (a) Potholes and trip hazards to be repaired in a way that is sympathetic to the state of the path at that point. (*Time: whenever identified.*)
 - (b) Tarmac within the firebreak and near the gate: to be kept clear of the grass if possible. (*Approval to be sought from GAWP prior to use of any weedkiller for this purpose.*)
3. **Trees.** Trees to be lifted to head height. Cuttings to be placed on hibernaria. (*Time: November/December, following leaf-fall.*)
 4. **Walls and masonry.** Ivy and woody plants to be removed, taking care not to disturb nesting or hibernating animals, and placed on hibernaria. (*Time: once during the year.*)
 5. **Inspection.** GAWP (with others if appropriate) is to inspect the site twice a year. (*Time: to be scheduled where possible to coincide with the allotment inspections.*)

C. One-off Activities for the first year

1. **Nesting boxes.** The location and state of nesting boxes to be determined, and notified to GAWP, with renewal and replacement subject to consultation with GAWP. (*Time: winter, following leaf fall.*)
2. **Notice board.** Existing notice board to be repaired or replaced and perhaps re-sited. Information on the management of the site and details of how to contact the Council concerning plots etc to be displayed. (*Time: winter, following consultation with GAWP.*)