

Leaffield Churchyard - Ecology Summary

To Anne Ogilvie <clerk@leaffieldparishcouncil.org>

Dear Anne,

I recall you mentioned there would be a council meeting today. Apologies I haven't managed to get the report turned around in time for this, however I thought I would at least summarise some of the findings / likely recommendations in advance of the full report, if helpful.

The grassland was variable in nature throughout the site, with some areas frequently cut in keeping with their setting within the burial areas. However there were occasional patches which had been left to grow to a taller sward, which had a relatively higher diversity of species (at least 11 on average per metre squared in places, e.g. violets, cut-leaved cranesbill, speedwells). The new burial area to the rear also had a generally variable sward height and relatively diverse mix of species including frequent herbs (e.g. ragged robin in the southern section). Recommendations will likely include maintaining and enhancing the diversity of the long sward areas such as through rotational late-season cuts, potential plug planting, and extending them where practicable.

The trees and hedgerows at the site boundary / periphery were of generally good ecological value, including native fruit bearing species which provide an excellent resource for birds and invertebrates. Similarly the small woodland areas are of elevated value, with discrete nettle and bramble patches providing a resource / foodplant for wildlife such as butterflies. Recommendations here will likely include maintaining a proportion of such vegetation, plus some sucker growth from blackthorn to benefit rare hairstreak butterflies, whilst maintaining the transitional taller areas of vegetation between the wooded areas and more regularly managed grassland.

Other general recommendations will likely include retaining deadwood where safe to do so, the provision of 'mini' wildlife ponds, and other faunal enhancements such as bat / bird boxes, hedgehog shelters and reptile refugia / insect hotels.

A few incidental species sightings were noted, including the red-list birds swift and greenfinch, plus stock dove, coal tit, goldcrest and buff-tailed bumblebee.

In summary, many of the habitats present are already of elevated ecological value especially in the local context, so recommendations will aim to build on this and increase the value where possible.

I hope that's of some interest for the time being, the bat survey season is drawing to a close by September end, and I'll have more office time for catching up with reporting.

Kind regards,

Adam

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