



**Bedfordshire  
Cambridgeshire  
Northamptonshire**

## **Fenland District Council Cemetery Sites**

# **Management Statement 2019 to 2029 (for review after 5 years in 2026)**

## **Wisbech General Cemetery, Wisbech**

**Report prepared for Fenland District Council  
by the Wildlife Trust**

**December 2019**

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## 1 Introduction

Fenland District Council (FDC) approached the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire (the Wildlife Trust) to write maintenance plans for two cemetery sites under their management to support the Friends of Groups and to assist with improving the biodiversity value of the two sites:

- 1) Station Road Cemetery, March
- 2) Wisbech General Cemetery, also known as Leverington Road Cemetery, Wisbech

Both cemeteries are on FDC's grounds maintenance contracts, and volunteers carry out additional work on each site.

A Management Plan for Wisbech General Cemetery exists, but is in need of updating (Tim Bennett, Wayside and Wildlife, December 2000). There is also a Wisbech General Cemetery Conservation Plan (Friends of Wisbech General Cemetery 2017). See appendix.

Station Road Cemetery has no management plan, but has a maintenance schedule as part of FDC's grounds maintenance programme.

There is an active Friends of Group for Wisbech General Cemetery, and three active volunteers for Station Road Cemetery, March. There is potential to engage more volunteers for each of the sites, and possibly to set up a more formal Friends of Group for Station Road, March.

The first step in the process is the surveying and writing of management statements for the two sites. Second visits are planned for late spring / summer 2019 to gather more ecological data, and to meet with volunteers.

## 2 Methodology

- 1) A desk search was carried out for Wisbech General Cemetery including:
  - Fenland District Council site files
  - Wildlife Trust site files
  - CPERC records
  - Maps produced using MapInfo showing site boundaries
- 2) A site visit and meeting was carried out on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2019 by the Wildlife Trust's Community Wildlife Officer and the Cambridgeshire Conservation Manager, meeting with Rebecca Robinett, Street Pride Coordinator for Fenland District Council, and Kevin Wilkins, Horticultural Officer for FDC.

During the visits the following information was gathered:

- FDC's current maintenance regimes
- Priorities for the site; both ecological and for the local community
- Current volunteer activity, along with potential activities
- A description of the main physical features of the site and surrounding areas, together with notes on the current condition and management
- A list of plants found along with other incidental records of mammals (signs) and birds (calls).

## References:

Wisbech General Cemetery Conservation Plan – Friends of Wisbech General Cemetery 2017

The General Cemetery, Leverington Road, Wisbech – Wayside and Wildlife for FDC December 2000

Phase 1 habitat survey for Cambridgeshire – 1997 (The Wildlife Trust BCN)

### 3 Site description

Wisbech General Cemetery, otherwise known as Leverington Road General Cemetery, in Wisbech is a relatively large Victorian town cemetery, dating back to 1836. There is also a chapel at the eastern end of the site, which has recently been restored by the Wisbech Society, Fenland District Council and the Friends of Wisbech General Cemetery. The external structure has been restored to its former glory, with improved access, and the inside to a heritage centre and meeting place. The cemetery closed in 1972, and remains closed as a burial ground.

The site, which is also designated Pocket Park, is open access. Leverington Road lies to the east from which the main, formal access route into the cemetery leads, between houses and light industry, along a short path with flower beds either side, into the main site. The site is otherwise bounded by residential housing to the north, the National Trust bequeathed Harecroft Road playing fields to the west, and industrial estate to the south. A circular path leads around the site, with an offshoot to the west, leading to the 1855 cemetery extension and on into Harecroft Road playing fields. This appears to encourage visitors through the site. A number of benches, installed in 2001, around the circular path appear to be popular places for local people, including lunching workers, to stop and relax.

There is a recently created stumpery in the north-east corner of the site, and log piles and compost heaps in the south-east corner. Some specimen trees, including field maple, guelder rose and rowan have been planted, along with a selection of plug plants including geranium, red campion, wild daffodils, primulas and winter aconites.

The site contains a number of old trees, mature scrub, some recently opened glades, and a newly sown wildflower area to on the western fringe. The site has a feeling of woodland to the north-east; an uncommon and valued habitat in the town. There are areas of dense scrub to the north, but very little vegetation exists now along the southern boundary, in particular to the eastern end, exposing the site to the adjacent car park serving the large supermarket. *Pyracantha* was planted along this boundary but some, in this area, was compromised when the adjacent supermarket renewed the boundary fence. The more southern central area of the site has been opened up to more light. This could benefit from more coppicing of additional trees, and management of scrub to prevent its return.

The site benefits from a highly active and very dedicated Friends Of Wisbech General Cemetery Group, who have achieved a great deal since their establishment in 1992.

There is some anti-social behaviour. Rough sleepers are often found in the mature scrub to the top north-west corner, and there is sporadic fly tipping.

### 4 Key features

The key features of Leverington Road Cemetery are:

- Stands of mature trees
- Lichen-covered old limestone gravestones
- Areas of semi-improved grassland
- Areas of bramble thicket and mature scrub for breeding birds
- Possible bat roots – surveys should be carried out

- A well-known and important historical burial site, including WW1 and WW2 graves, and magnificently restored chapel
- Good, easy access from nearby housing, and a major greenspace for the residents of this part of Wisbech
- Good access around the site, with provision of benches
- A long-standing, highly active and dedicated Friends Of Group who have, and continue to, dedicate a great deal of time to organising practical work, family events, and restoration projects

## **5 Management Objectives & Rationale**

### **Objective 1: To co-ordinate the efforts of FDC and local volunteers**

FDC carries out grounds maintenance on site, which includes:

- Grassland mowing
- Tree surveys, including annual health checks
- Gravestone clearance
- In addition, the Street Pride volunteers carry out regular litter picks
- The site has been entered into the In Bloom competitions for the area, and has been awarded gold in the past

The Friends Of Group volunteers carry out a number of activities that include:

- School citizen projects
- Two family walks per year; one in spring, and one on Remembrance Day in November
- Fundraising activities for specialist repairs to the gravestones
- Assisting in the application for large grants – including that to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the restoration of the chapel
- Removal of smaller seedling trees
- Coppicing of smaller trees
- Some scrub management
- The preparation of land and seeding of a wildflower meadow area to the west
- Employing the services of the Probation Service to carry out some practical work, as above

### **Objective 2: To assess the existing wildlife interest of the site including the old trees, grassland and lichen-covered stones**

A survey to establish the presence of deadwood, rot holes and other features, and the presence and location of bats should be carried out. Additional information on the presence of other plants, lichens, fungi, birds, small mammals and invertebrates could also be recorded.

The Cambridgeshire Bat Group should be engaged to check for and monitor any bat roosts, and there is scope to recruit and train local volunteers to help with species surveys for bats, lichens, flora and other wildlife.

A survey to establish the best areas of grassland should be carried out in spring / summer, to determine the optimum mowing regime for inclusion in the maintenance plans.

A survey to identify the lichen interest of the site could be carried out by an amateur local lichenologist. The existing scrub and thicket, to the darker northern half, should be mapped for breeding bird habitat.

**Objective 3: To maintain a mosaic of old trees, other trees, scrub and hedgerow, thicket, remnant grassland and lichen habitat within the site to provide breeding, sheltering and foraging habitats for a range of birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians, and invertebrates**

The aim should be to maintain a balance of habitats around the site including old and other trees, scrub and hedgerows, grassland and lichen-covered stones. This can be achieved through maintaining the existing trees and removing any seedlings encroaching on the open grassland areas.

Some of the older trees are one of the key areas of interest on site and should be maintained to extend their healthy life span for as long as possible. Regular health-checks will ensure any remedial works can be carried out in a timely fashion to prevent more rapid deterioration.

The existing areas of scrub should be maintained by occasional cutting back (every 5-10 years) to provide breeding, sheltering and foraging sites for a wide range of garden birds, reptiles and amphibians, small mammals and invertebrates. New areas of scrub should be removed, either by mowing, or by cutting by hand, to maintain the existing areas of open grassland. The areas recently cleared of snowberry should be cut to maintain open glades and encourage regeneration of grassland areas, or alternatively to encourage regeneration of native scrub and thicket. There is scope to do some selective coppicing of additional trees to further open up the canopy to the south of the site.

The sown meadow area to the western end of the site should be managed as meadow, with a late summer cut and arisings removed.

Due to a prolonged period with little to no management between 1972 and 1992, a proportion of the sub-canopy and scrub has been thinned on much of the site. This has opened up parts of the site to increased light levels. Some of these areas have become dominated by snowberry and cow parsley. Recent clearance of the snowberry again by volunteers has further opened up part of the site. Regular mowing or brushcutting could help to keep this in check, and ensure the maintenance of glades for basking invertebrates and reptiles, and for a lighter, more open feel for the site. There is scope in the southern half of the site to coppice additional smaller trees to reduce the canopy level and encourage the ground flora.

**Objective 4: To promote public access to the site for quiet enjoyment of the landscape and wildlife and to encourage an increased team of locally based volunteers to support Fenland District Council's management and monitoring programme**

Leverington Road General Cemetery is owned and managed by Fenland District Council. It is maintained as open access for local people to visit graves and to enjoy local history, quiet green space and wildlife. It is essential that good access and interpretation is maintained on site. The paths and the (currently clear) gravestones should be kept clear, and the buildings, entrances, benches, gates and interpretation boards maintained in a clean and undamaged condition.

An open day / volunteer day event, and / or a community consultation in the local area could assess how well known the site is within the local community, and how people feel about it. Such activities could be used to further raise awareness of the importance of the site, and to recruit additional volunteer members of the Friends Of Group to help with management.

There is a long-running, highly dedicated, active Friends Of Group currently carrying out practical work and running annual events, whose contribution is highly valued by FDC. There is scope to build up the number of volunteers, as well as to strengthen partnerships between FDC and all interested parties. FDC has the resources to supply training and tools for volunteers, and the Wildlife Trust can assist with risk assessments for all activities likely to be carried out.

Cambridgeshire Bat Group should be engaged to carry out a survey of potential roost sites, and a local lichenologist to carry out a lichen survey. There is scope to recruit local volunteers to assist with bat surveys as well as invertebrate, botanical and other wildlife surveys.

**Objective 5: To maintain site structures including paths, benches, buildings and entrance structures to meet all legal and health and safety obligations associated with the site.**

The entrances, buildings, benches and paths are in a good state of repair. The interpretation boards may be replaced at some point. It is essential to maintain the site infrastructure in a good state of repair with a range of weekly, monthly or annual checks as appropriate. Fenland District Council will arrange such checks in accordance with their policies and procedures. Likewise site risk assessments and other safety procedures will be followed.

Site signage related to health and safety needs to be regularly inspected and maintained.

Safety checks should be carried out on the older trees, buildings and gravestones, and recommended work undertaken in accordance with FDC policies and procedures. Grass paths should be mown throughout the growing season, the frequency depending on the speed and amount of vegetation growth. Likewise any overhanging bramble or other woody vegetation needs to be cut back from paths as required.

Litter picking must be undertaken regularly.

