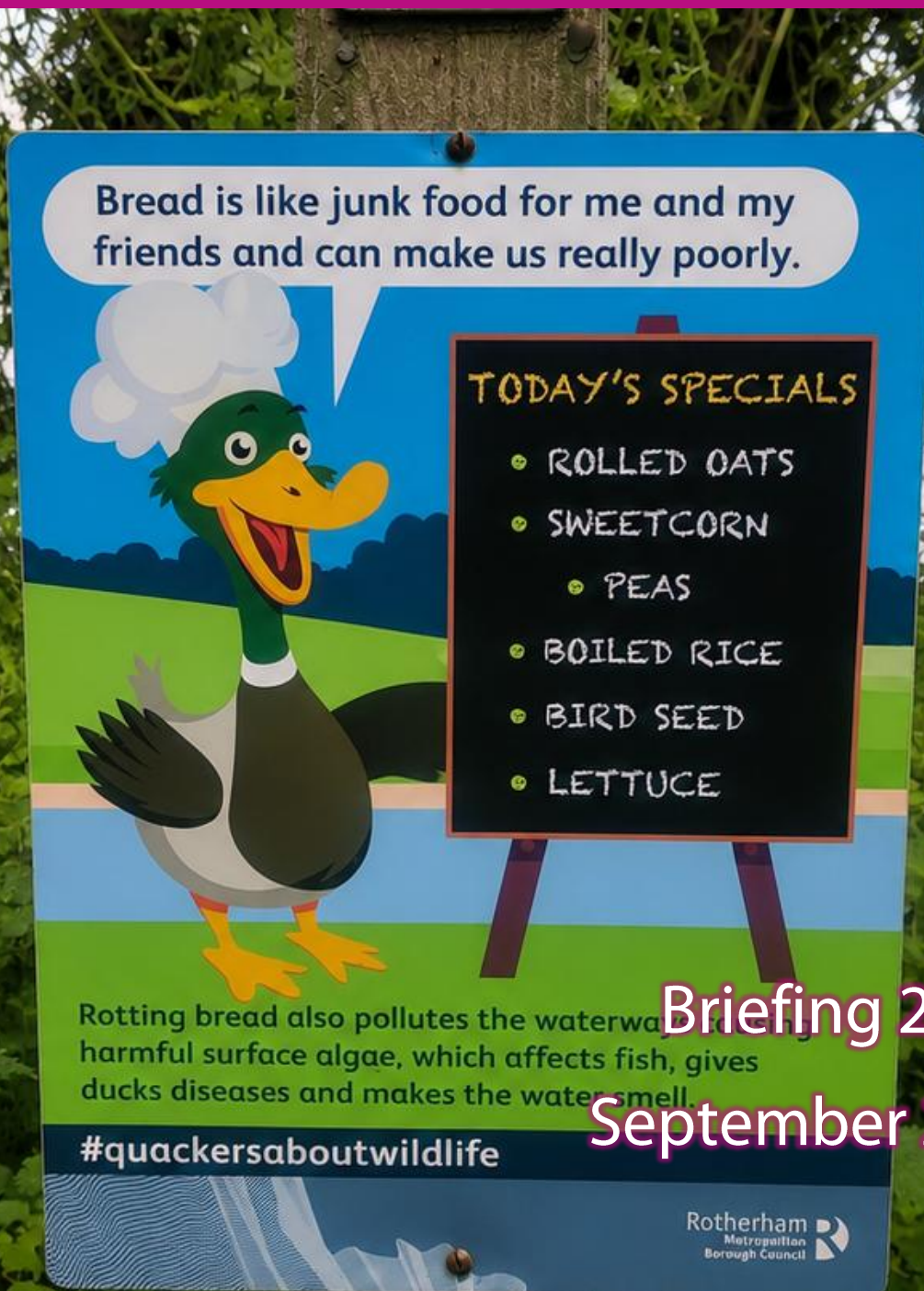


Fowl Language

Public signage for responsible duck and bird feeding



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Fowl Language: Public signage for responsible duck and bird feeding

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Background

Feeding ducks and other wild birds is a popular activity in parks, lakes and other public open spaces, providing many residents with an opportunity to connect with nature. However, inappropriate feeding practices can have [negative consequences](#) for bird health, water quality and the wider environment, creating challenges for councils responsible for managing these spaces.

As a result, many local authorities have introduced signage and educational materials to encourage responsible feeding behaviours. These messages often explain what birds should and should not be fed, while highlighting the animal welfare and environmental reasons behind the advice.

This report builds on themes explored in APSE's earlier publication, [Grassroots Messaging: Visual Communication for Biodiversity Areas](#), which examined how councils use signage to communicate environmental management practices and encourage public understanding of biodiversity initiatives. While that report focused on grassland management and biodiversity areas, *Fowl Language* considers how visual communication is being used to influence behaviour around the feeding of ducks and birds. These include illustrated interpretation panels, educational artwork, child-friendly messaging as well as feeding stations.

Drawing on the responses to an [APSE Network Query](#), this report showcases examples of signage, artwork and public messaging submitted by local authorities across the UK. By sharing these examples, it aims to support councils in developing effective communications that promote responsible feeding practices, improve animal welfare and protect local habitats.

Pet Safety Note:

While some councils include grapes (cut in half) as a suitable food for ducks, it is important to note that grapes can be toxic to dogs. Where grapes are recommended, councils may wish to include a warning advising visitors to keep them away from pets and to supervise dogs when feeding wildlife.



Greenspace challenges taking root? APSE can help!

APSE regularly receives queries on parks and grounds maintenance from our member councils. We source responses to these queries by circulating them to our extensive UK-wide network of parks professionals.

If you belong to an APSE member council and have wildfowl management queries – or any queries relating to your local government service – the APSE network may have the answers. Connect with the APSE network and get involved with our Network Queries service [here](#).

Signage

Leicester City Council



Leicester's signage uses bright, eye-catching graphics to encourage visitors to think about what they are feeding ducks and other waterfowl. The visual approach makes the message easy to understand at a glance and helps engage both adults and children. By focussing on suitable foods and the reasons behind the advice, the signs encourage responsible feeding habits while supporting bird welfare

Feed The Ducks!



We have introduced a Duck Feeder at Abbey Park so you can take your family to feed your local Swans and Ducks with healthy feed that is good for their diet.



If you want to feed them with your own feed that's okay too! Just remember to Not Feed Them Bread.



The Feeder is located not far from here by
by the lake.

PLEASE DO NOT FEED BREAD TO THE BIRDS



Bread makes the birds ill as it does not contain the correct nutrients.

Throwing bread in the water causes it to rot, which pollutes the water, causing it to smell and surface algae to build up, killing the fish and spreading diseases.

Better food to feed the birds:

Birdseed

Peas

Corn

Oats

Chopped lettuce



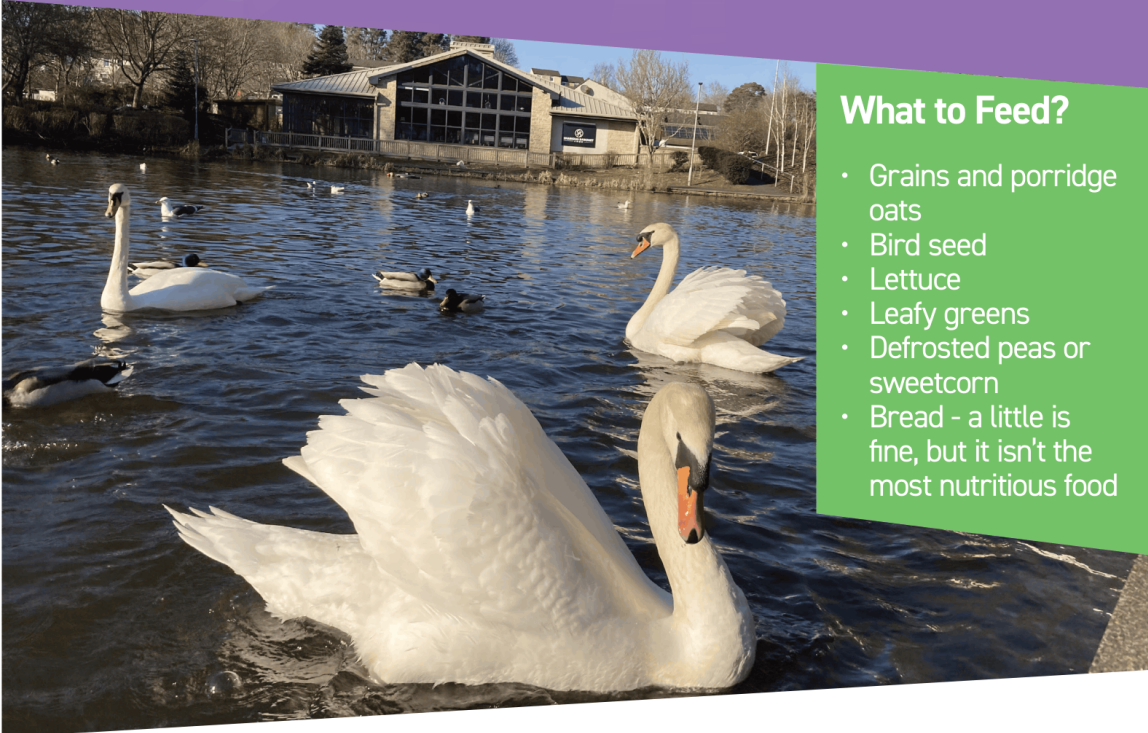
Nottingham
City Council

Nottingham's signage takes a very direct approach. The message is clear, concise and difficult to miss, making it particularly effective in a busy public setting. Rather than relying on lengthy explanations, the sign focuses on delivering key information quickly, helping visitors understand what responsible feeding looks like and why it matters.



Rotherham's signage shows how humour can be a powerful communication tool. Featuring a duck wearing a chef's hat alongside a menu-style design, the sign presents feeding advice in a fun and memorable way. This creative approach helps capture visitors' attention and encourages them to engage with the message while learning more about appropriate foods for ducks and other waterfowl.

Image courtesy of Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council (Megan Valentine)

A photograph of a loch with several white swans and some ducks. In the background, there is a large building with a glass facade, likely a visitor center or cafe. The water is calm, and the sky is clear.

 #yourpart

FEEDING THE DUCKS AND SWANS AT GUNKNOWE LOCH

There is plenty of food naturally occurring in the loch for the swans and ducks, but we know how much fun it can be to feed the birds, so here are some tips...

What to Feed?

- Grains and porridge
oats
- Bird seed
- Lettuce
- Leafy greens
- Defrosted peas or
sweetcorn
- Bread - a little is
fine, but it isn't the
most nutritious food

Safety Tips:

- Feed directly into the loch to avoid the birds leaving slippery droppings on the path.
- Feed small amounts at a time to ensure it is all being eaten, otherwise it can pollute the water.
- Keep Your Distance! Enjoy watching the swans from afar as getting too close can stress them.
- During nesting season be extra cautious in spring and summer when swans are on their nests or with cygnets (baby swans). They can be protective and may become aggressive.

Thank you for helping us keep our swans and loch safe and healthy.



The Scottish Borders example shows how signage can be used to blend education with enjoyment of nature. Visitors are encouraged to consider the needs of local wildlife while continuing to engage with the natural environment. The result is a gentle but effective form of behaviour change communication.

Image courtesy of Scottish Borders Council



Southampton's signage uses clear visuals and simple messaging to show visitors what they should and should not feed ducks and other waterfowl. Its straightforward design makes the guidance easy to understand and encourages responsible feeding habits.

Image courtesy of Southampton City Council



One of the most distinctive features of St Albans' signage is its use of artwork created by a young child. This gives the sign a personal and engaging feel, helping the message connect with families and younger visitors. It also demonstrates how councils can involve local communities in environmental campaigns, creating a greater sense of ownership and awareness around responsible feeding practices.

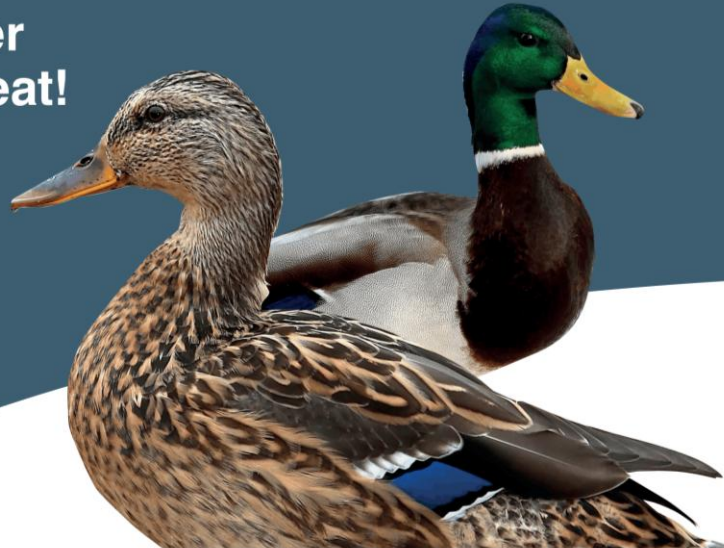
Thank you for not feeding us bread

Bread leaves ducks, geese and swans feeling full but it doesn't give them the nutrients, vitamins and minerals they need to stay healthy.

But there's lots of other food that they love to eat!

**Bird Seed | Grapes
Peas | Corn | Lettuce
Oats | Rice**

You can chop the lettuce up and cut the grapes in half to make them easier to eat.



Stafford's signage provides practical advice on healthier alternatives to bread, including lettuce leaves and grapes. By recommending that larger foods are cut into smaller pieces before feeding, the sign helps visitors provide food that is easier for birds to eat while promoting responsible feeding practices.

Image courtesy of Stafford Borough Council



Torfaen's signage demonstrates the value of bilingual communication in public spaces, with messages provided in both Welsh and English. Alongside making the information accessible to a wider audience, the signage uses engaging visuals and clear guidance to encourage responsible feeding and greater awareness of wildlife welfare issues.

Bwydo'r Hwyaidd Duck Feeding



Nodyn Ymgynghorol:

Mae bara'n brifo'n boliau ac yn ein gwneud yn dost.

Dyna bara ddim yn cynnwys y maeth gwyth na'r caloriau sydd angen amom ni i fyw.

Mae'n gwneud i ni teimlo'n llawn ac yn atarw ac yn dydyn ni ddim yn bwyta'r bwyd sydd angen amom ni.

Mae bara hefyd yn llygru'r dŵr ac yn achosi algâu ar wyneb y dŵr, sy'n lladd bwyd dŵr, yn rhoi afiechydon i ni.

Rydym yn aros yn iach trwy fwyta bwydydd naturiol fel:

- Ceirch, hadau i adar neu rawfwydydd eraill
- Pys
- Grawmwin wedi eu haneru heb hadau
- Rets wedi'i goginio
- Letys wedi ei dorri

Advisory Note:

Bread makes our tummies hurt and makes us ill.

Bread does not contain the right nutrition or calories that we need to survive.

It makes us think we are full and then we don't eat the food we need.

It also pollutes our water and causes surface algae, which kills our fish friends and gives us diseases.

We stay healthy by eating natural foods like:

- Oats, birdseed or other grain
- Peas
- Halved seedless grapes
- Cooked rice
- Chopped lettuce

Gorchymyn Gwarchod Mannau Cyhoeddus

Llyn Cychod Cwmbra a dan Orchymyn Gwarchod Mannau Cyhoeddus sy'n mynnu bod cŵn yn cael eu cadw ar dennyn ar bob adeg. Gallwch gael hysbysiad o gosb benodedig neu ddirwy o hyd at £1000 yn dilyn eugalfarn os byddwch yn torri gorchymyn y gorchym hwn. Os hoffech dâweud am achosion o dorri'r gorchymyn hwn cysylltwch os gwelwch chi ar 01495 762200.



Ardal cŵn ar dennyn

Mae copiau o'r Gorchymyn Gwarchod Mannau Cyhoeddus a'r mapiau sy'n dangos y mannau sy'n cael eu heffeithio i'w gweld ar: www.torfaen.gov.uk

Mae Swyddogion Gorfodi ar batrôl yn yr ardal hon. Gallech gael dirwy os nad ydych chi'n cadw eich ci ar dennyn neu'n cael baw eich ci.

Public Spaces Protection Order

Cwmbra Boating Lake and Park is subject to a Public Spaces Protection Order which requires dogs to be kept on a lead at all times. You can be subject to a fixed penalty notice or a fine of up to £1000 convention if you breach the requirements of this order. To report fixed penalty concerns about this order please contact 01495 762200.



Dogs on lead area

Copies of this Public Spaces Protection Order and the maps of the affected areas can be viewed at www.torfaen.gov.uk

Gweithredir cosbau sefydlog ar gyfer y gorchymyn hwn. Am fwy o wybodaeth, ewch i www.torfaen.gov.uk



PLEASE DO NOT FEED THE BIRDS BREAD

Feeding bread to birds can cause a serious condition called “angel wing”.

It also causes blue/green algae which is very dangerous to dogs and humans.

If you want to feed the birds please give them one of the following.

- Chopped lettuce
- Defrosted peas or corn
- Grapes cut in half
- Oats
- Cooked rice
- Bird seed

Help us to help the wildlife in our park.

Thank you

wakefieldcouncil
working for you

Wakefield's signage takes a fairly stark and direct approach to communication. The bold design and clear messaging leave little room for ambiguity, ensuring visitors can quickly understand the guidance being provided. By promoting suitable alternatives to bread, the sign seeks to encourage more responsible feeding habits and support bird welfare. As with similar guidance elsewhere, councils may also wish to note that while grapes can be suitable for ducks, they can be harmful to dogs if eaten, highlighting the need to consider the welfare of both wildlife and pets when feeding birds.

Image courtesy of Wakefield Council



Watford's signage takes a different approach to many of the examples featured in this report. Rather than focusing on what visitors should feed birds, the sign explains that the site already provides a plentiful natural food supply and therefore asks people not to feed the birds at all. By setting out the reasons for this approach, the council seeks to protect both wildlife and the surrounding environment while encouraging visitors to appreciate the birds in their natural habitat.

This also helps demonstrate that councils are not all communicating the same message. While many authorities encourage visitors to switch from bread to healthier alternatives, Watford's sign shows that in some locations the preferred approach is to discourage feeding altogether.

Image courtesy of Watford Borough Council

Bird feeders and The Feed Ducks Initiative

Alongside traditional signage, a growing number of councils are introducing dedicated bird and duck feeding stations to encourage healthier feeding practices while maintaining a popular public activity. These feeders provide nutritionally appropriate food for waterfowl and help reduce the environmental problems associated with feeding bread, including water pollution, vermin and poor bird health.

One organisation supporting this approach is [The Feed Ducks Initiative](#), which works with councils to install solar-powered, contactless duck feed dispensers. The feeders provide nutritionally appropriate food, help reduce bread feeding and its environmental impacts, and are manufactured from recycled materials. The initiative also reinvests a proportion of proceeds into local environmental and community projects.

Ards and North Down Council

One example is at Kiltonga Nature Reserve in [Ards and North Down](#), where a solar-powered duck feeder was installed through the Feed the Ducks Initiative. Within weeks of installation the feeder had been used more than 500 times, demonstrating strong public interest in responsible wildlife feeding. Food is dispensed via contactless payment, with a proportion of proceeds supporting local environmental projects.

Bolton Council

In [Bolton](#), automatic birdseed dispensers have been installed in Queens Park, Doffcocker Lodge and Moses Gate Country Park. The initiative was introduced to address the well-documented problems caused by bread feeding, while allowing visitors to continue enjoying the tradition of feeding ducks, swans and geese in a way that supports their health. The dispensers are operated and stocked at no cost to the council and, like other examples, use solar power and recycled materials.

South Kesteven District Council

In March 2025, [South Kesteven District Council](#) partnered with the Feed Ducks Initiative to install a solar-powered duck feed dispenser at Wyndham Park in Grantham. The contactless feeder provides nutritionally appropriate food for wildfowl while helping to reduce litter, water pollution and the environmental impacts associated with feeding bread. The council highlighted that the scheme allows residents to continue enjoying the tradition of feeding ducks while supporting bird welfare and protecting local waterways. A proportion of the proceeds from feed sales is also reinvested into the park through local volunteers, demonstrating how feeding stations can support both environmental and community objectives.



Image courtesy of South Kesteven District Council

Torbay Council

[Torbay Council and SWISCO](#) have introduced a duck feeder at King's Gardens, Paignton, giving visitors access to nutritionally appropriate food for ducks and other waterfowl. The initiative encourages responsible feeding practices and helps reduce reliance on bread, while allowing residents and visitors to continue enjoying a popular park activity. The scheme has been well received by users, demonstrating strong public support for healthier wildlife feeding options.

Wychavon District Council

Similarly, [Wychavon District Council](#) approved the installation of a duck vending machine at Vines Park in Droitwich Spa. The feeder provides a healthy alternative to bread, is powered by solar energy and manufactured using recycled plastic. The Council promoted the scheme as a way of helping residents engage with nature while supporting bird welfare and environmental sustainability.

These examples demonstrate how councils are increasingly combining behavioural messaging with practical infrastructure to support wildlife-friendly feeding habits. By providing convenient access to suitable feed, authorities can positively influence public behaviour while protecting birds and local habitats.

Conclusion

Effective communication plays a key role in promoting responsible wildlife feeding within parks, lakes and public open spaces. The examples gathered through the APSE Network Query demonstrate the variety of approaches being used by local authorities, from educational signage and behavioural messaging to dedicated feeding stations and automated feeders.

While there is no single solution suitable for every location, the shared examples highlight a strong commitment across the sector to improving public understanding and protecting both wildlife and habitats. By providing clear, accessible and engaging information, councils can encourage positive public behaviour and support healthier environments for waterways and local communities. Ultimately, successful wildlife management relies on partnership between local authorities and the people who use these spaces.

How can APSE help?

All APSE members can sign up to APSE's Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Network, which is an online network providing at least four learning events across the year, with expert speakers from across local government and the wider parks and greenspace sector. You can sign up to the network using [this link](#).

APSE regularly receives queries from our member councils. We source responses to these queries by circulating them to our extensive UK-wide network of greenspace professionals. If you are an APSE member council and have wildfowl management queries – or any queries relating to grounds maintenance – the APSE network may have the answers. Connect with the APSE network and get involved with our Network Queries service [here](#).

Training

APSE Training has also designed a special interactive online course for those looking to develop their knowledge and understanding of parks management.

- **Introduction to Parks Management** - This course provides a practical introduction to the key aspects of managing parks and green spaces within a local authority setting. Covering topics including service planning, maintenance, community engagement and environmental management, it is ideal for those new to the sector or seeking a broader understanding of parks services. Book your place on the course [here](#).

Benchmarking for your parks service

APSE Performance Networks is the largest voluntary public sector benchmarking organisation in the UK. With over 200 authorities in membership, Performance Networks assists local councils by:

- Demonstrating progression on carbon reduction/ecological actions
- Helping to set a clear baseline on which competitiveness, efficiency and value for money can be measured in a systematic manner.
- Identifying the impact of service changes and interventions for your own local authorities and for others.
- Assessing the quality, cost and competitiveness of the services that councils provide on a regular basis.
- Helping to report data in meaningful ways to both elected members and the public.
- Identifying direction of travel and pace of change with regard to service delivery.
- Identifying inefficiencies such as poor productivity and high cost.
- Supporting service improvement through process benchmarking.

For more information about how your greenspace service can benefit from Performance Networks membership, click [here](#).

Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular network meetings, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Networks are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE. If you do not currently receive details about APSE Network meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

Our national networks include:-

- FM and Building Cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Veterans and Military Champions Network
- Local Government Reorganisation Network
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing

Visit www.apse.org.uk for more details.



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