Making Space For Nature

Climate change – A global problem

- Climate change is one of the most globally pressing issues, affecting environments, world economies and the health of every living thing on the planet.
- The impacts of climate change are now being felt in our everyday lives and in the places we live.
- Climate change is an evolving process. Many of its impacts are well known. Some less so. And some may not yet have become apparent. But it is safe to say that these impacts will be with us for decades, possibly even centuries.
- Incidents of extreme weather, flooding, illnesses relating to heat extremes, poor air quality etc. are now becoming more commonplace making climate change **a very personal experience**.

The Need for Change

- UK plants and trees will not be able to cope with future climate change without significant intervention and adaptation measures.
- The pace of climate change is much faster than the natural ability of many species to adapt, leading to widespread stress, decline, and potential ecosystem collapse.
- As native species are stressed, they are less able to compete with invasive non-native species that may be better adapted to the changing climate.
- Our greenspaces are under constant threats from other factors such as urbanisation, infrastructure development, agriculture, and other habitat destruction.
- There is a need to re-assess our current greenspace management and horticultural practices in light of the future impacts of climate change

The Impact on animals

- Climate change affects animals and plants by causing habitat loss, disrupting food and water supplies, and triggering extreme weather events like droughts and wildfires.
- Droughts can significantly lower the survival rates of young plants and animals.
- These changes force species to migrate, alter their life cycles, or face starvation, disease, and extinction.
- Oceans are particularly vulnerable, with rising temperatures and acidity leading to coral bleaching and stressing species with shells and skeletons
- The combination of these pressures increases the risk of extinction for many species, particularly those already vulnerable.
- The loss of species can destabilize entire ecosystems, leading to cascading effects throughout the food web leading to ecosystem collapse.

Legislation to protect and enhance wildlife

- The revised Environment Act (2024), amongst other targets aims to protect wildlife and ensure the state of the environment is improved using **biodiversity net gain** requirements relating to new developments and require local authorities to produce **Local Nature Recovery Strategies** which will create the framework for a national system of interconnected sites for nature.

- Local authorities in England have a **legal obligation** to conserve and enhance biodiversity, a duty significantly strengthened by the **Environment Act 2021**. This goes beyond merely protecting existing nature and requires proactive steps to improve i

- Local authorities are producing their own plans:
  - Climate Change
  - Ecological Emergency
  - Biodiversity
  - Pollinator
  - Wildflower
  - Grassland Management

Re-wilding

What is re-wilding?

'*The large-scale restoration of ecosystems to the point where nature is allowed to take care of itself.*'
Rewilding Britain

Rewilding is comprehensive, often large-scale, conservation effort focused on restoring sustainable biodiversity and ecosystem health by protecting:

core wild/wilderness areas,

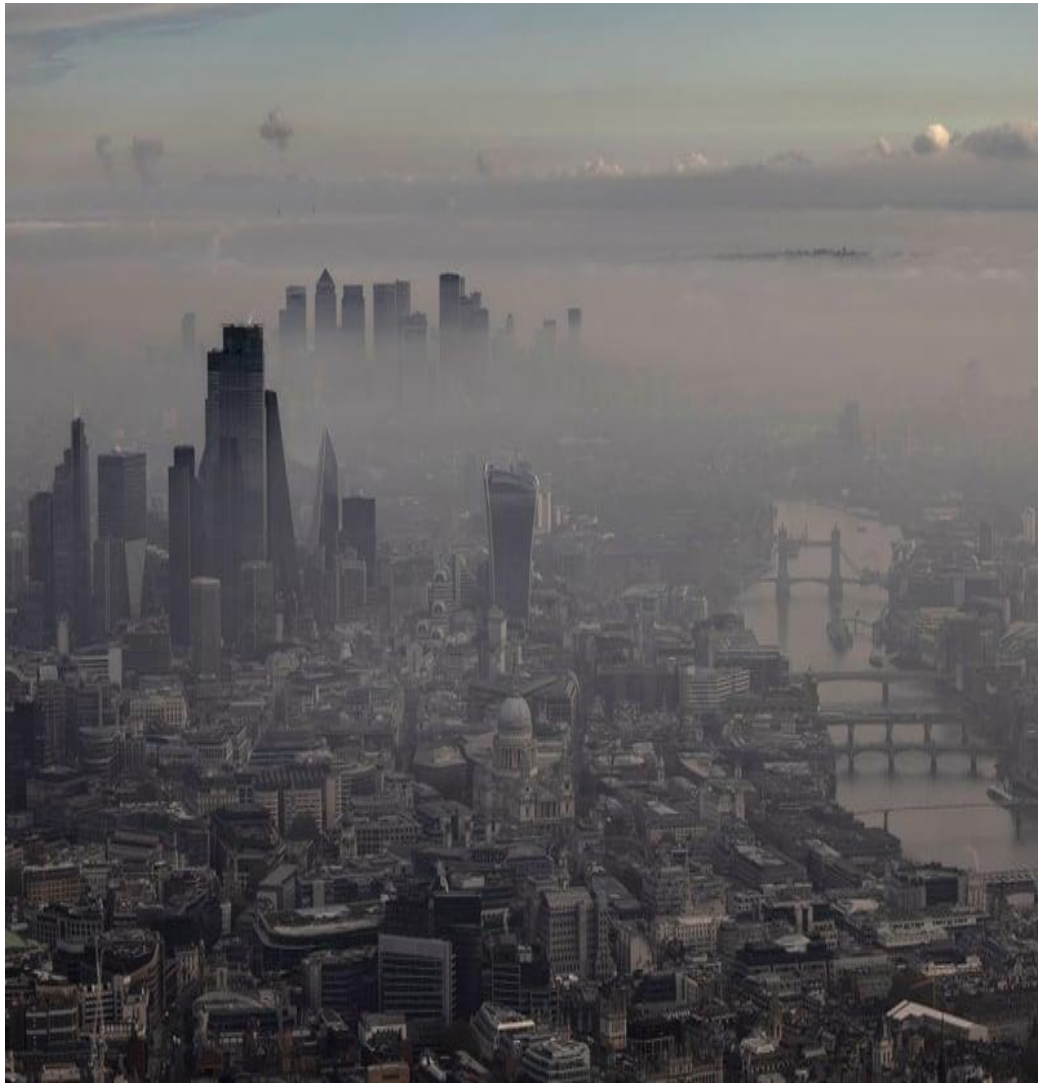
connectivity between such areas,

protecting or reintroducing **apex predators** and highly interactive species (keystone species).

The vision is of dynamic but stable self-regulating and self-sustaining ecosystems with near pre-human levels of species diversity that require little or no human intervention or management

Why re-wild?

- By 2050 over two-thirds of the global population will live in urban areas which will need to be resilient to the impacts of climate change, embracing the natural world will be one way to achieve this.
- The UK has lost large areas of natural spaces and with it has seen a large decline in biodiversity levels.
- Over two-thirds of the UK is now used for agriculture and 8% is built on
- Between 1970 and 2013, 56% of species in the UK declined.
- Helps ameliorate impacts of climate change.

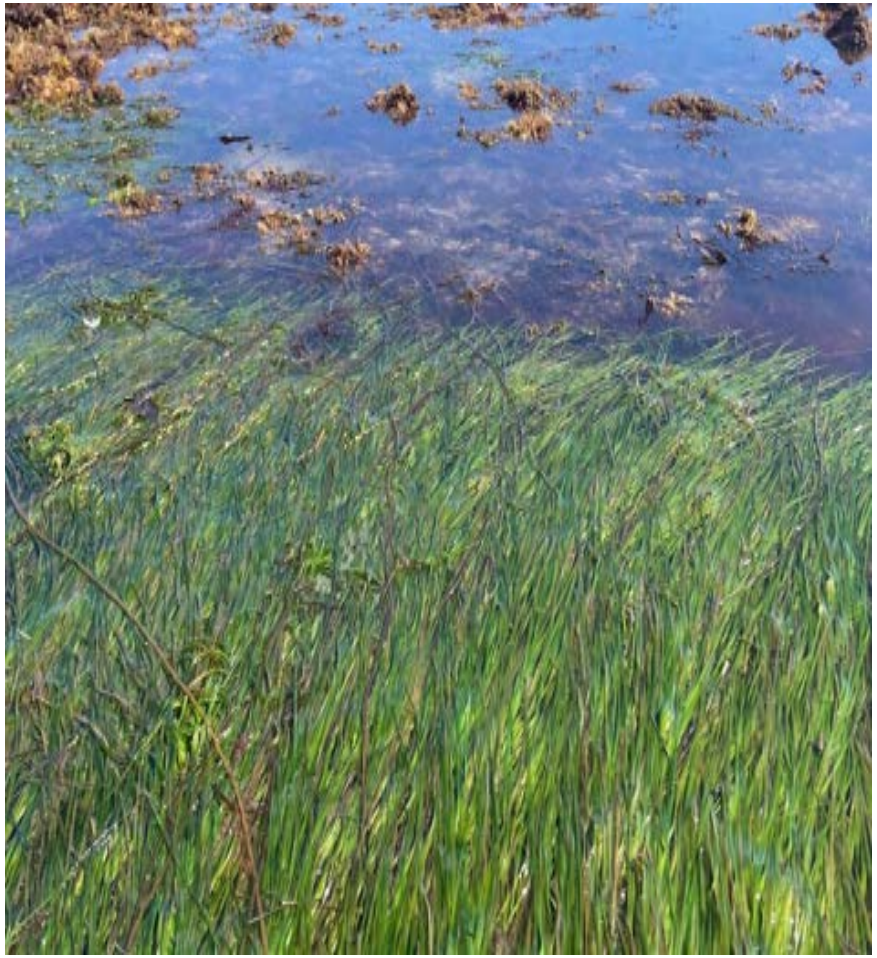


The Growing problem of ‘Nature deficiency’

- Nature-deficit disorder (NDD) describes the human costs of spending less time in nature, resulting in negative effects on mental and physical health, (reduced attention spans, higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses, and diminished use of the senses).
- Worry that plummeting biodiversity levels and worldwide threats to greenspace environments there is a danger that we are facing an ‘**extinction of experience’.**
- Potential for public indifference to the decline in nature makes it harder to address wider environmental issues such as climate change.
- The American ecologist and author Robert Pyle wrote***, ’What is the extinction of the condor to a child who’s never known a wren***
- We need to look at how we can play a part in the idea of re-establishing the natural ecosystems which our ‘civilised’ lifestyles have damaged or destroyed.
- No matter how small our contribution is, there is no reason not to try to redress the imbalance.

Large Scale Partnership rewilding

- Peat bog restoration in Northumbria, Cumbria, Lancashire, Yorkshire and Greater Manchester – carbon sequestration, purify and store water, alleviate flooding risk and provide unique wildlife habitats.
- Returning Swindale Beck in Cumbria to its original course has led to the return of salmon and trout as well as increasing the quality of aquatic habitats in the river and reducing the potential for flooding downstream.
- Creating Highly Protected Marine Areas by banning fishing and any activities which may damage the seabed. **South Tyneside Stronger Shores Project.** focusing on nature-based solutions for coastal resilience and habitat restoration like kelp beds, oyster reefs and seagrass.



If not re-wilding, then what?

Until now rewilding, which is by its very nature tends to be a large-scale effort, has been concentrated in the countryside and rural areas.

More recently, however, there have been a number of projects and local movements pushing for more urban rewilding and at a smaller scale.

By creating urban '***micro-rewilding'*** projects there will be an ability to connect such spaces and create nature corridors throughout the landscape.

Micro-rewilding can offer many benefits such as reducing flood risk, improving air quality, and countering the urban heat island effect.

Perhaps most importantly it can be seen as **achievable**

So where do local authorities stand in relation to re-wilding?

Recent study stated that 21% of councils in the UK said they were ‘re-wilding’ or had plans to do so in the future.

Not every council has the potential or resources to undertake large scale landscape re-wilding. and often councils do not have the same understanding or definition of what re-wilding is nor how they can apply it.

Scale and public acceptance are often the biggest concern.

Large Scale rewilding, urban rewilding and micro rewilding – what’s in a name?

Local Authorities and rewilding – APSE Survey findings (2024)

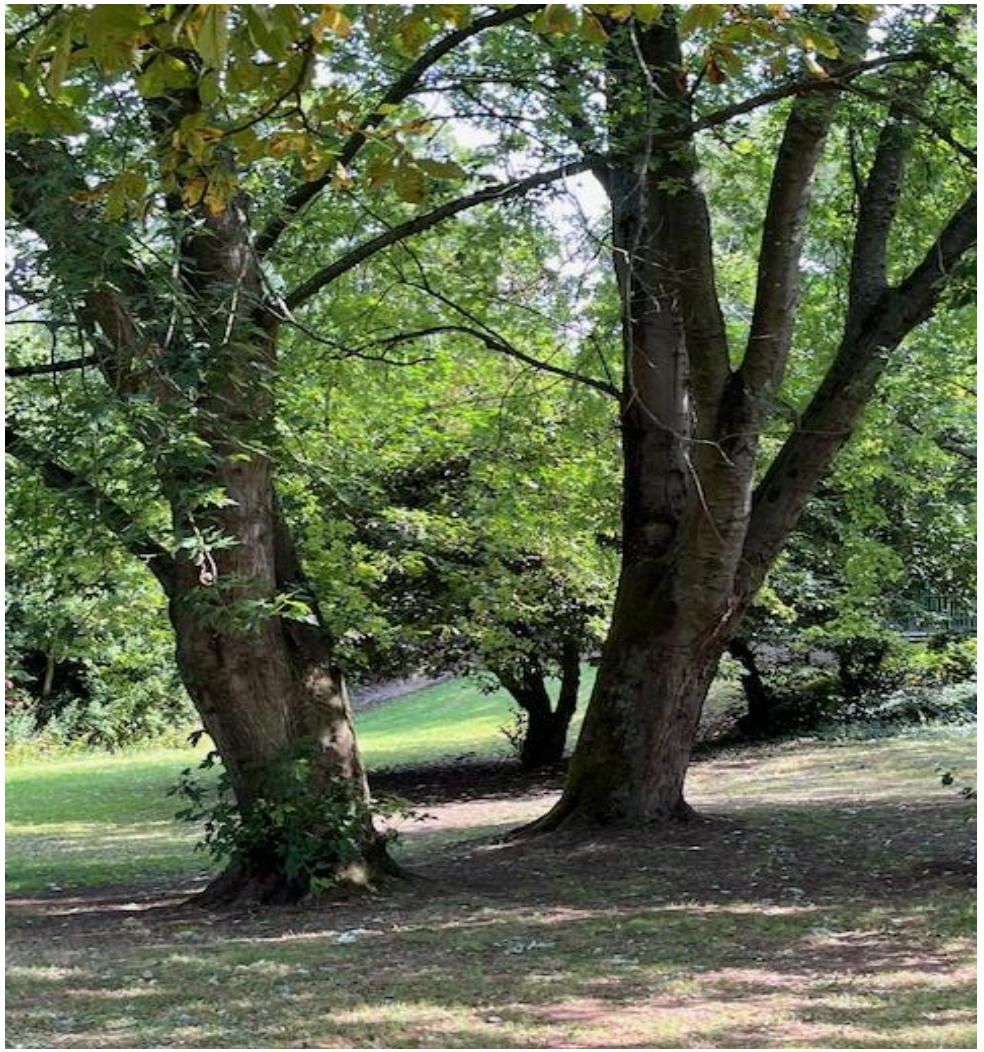
- Redesigning grassland management operations to create species rich grasslands and associated wildflower areas.
- Hedgerow planting and protection of tree copses and planting of native tree species
- Restoration and enhancement of existing woodlands.
- Creation of pollinator gardens to act as green infrastructure links to other greenspace areas.
- Reviewing parks and greenspace areas to promote opportunities for greater biodiversity levels.
- Creating scrapes in wet areas to improve opportunities for invertebrates, frogs and other amphibians.
- Beaver and willow tit/warbler reintroduction.
- Peatland and wetland restoration.
- Building natural flood management defence systems.
- Dune restoration.

Local Authority Actions

Considering biodiversity in our tree planting schemes

Trees have multiple environmental, economic and social benefits. benefits including::

- Clean the air by filtering pollutants and releasing oxygen.
- Combat climate change through carbon sequestration, managing intense rainfall and providing cooling effect through shade particularly in urban areas.
- **Trees provide essential habitats for flora and fauna**.
- Woodlands will need to be designed specifically for improving biodiversity levels, commercial tree plantations, scrub and trees outside of woods and on our city streets, even agroforestry schemes on farmland.
- **Natural reforestation** needs to be encouraged alongside new planting .



Smaller changes being made by local authorities to make space for nature

Amenity Grasslands

- Up to a third of the area of a town or city may be grassland. Of this, about two-thirds is closely mown amenity grassland used primarily for recreation.
- Amenity grasslands are mainly open grassy areas, such as parks, playing fields and informal green spaces used by the public.
- Such amenity grasslands generally consist of few species, compounded by quality fertile or fertilised soil and management regimes that can discourages either structural or species diversity.
- The maintenance costs of maintaining such spaces can be extremely costly and heavily reliant on fertilisers and herbicides.
- However, amenity grasslands can offer a very versatile and practical means of expanding the social and economic benefits offered by greenspace.(recreation, leisure, sports, events, community gatherings, informal play spaces etc.).

A change in management styles

- More recently amenity grasslands are beginning to be managed to increase biodiversity levels through more relaxed management regimes and wildflower planting.
- By changing the traditional management of such grassland areas in urban settings, through the provision of native or naturalised grasses and flowering plants, this is helping attract insects (including butterflies and bees), arthropods (from spiders to millipedes), birds and mammals
- The reduced-intensity management needed for rough grasslands and urban commons also makes them a cost-effective alternative to closely mown amenity grassland.

Making the change

- Complete change to standard grounds maintenance practices.
- Explain why the changes are occurring.
- Identifying where changes can be made and importantly, will be supported,
- Explain Climate change and biodiversity and other environmental benefits.
- Understanding the importance of letting people know.

Less obvious spaces for nature

Changing the way we see cemeteries

- Cemeteries now seen as more than places to bury and remember the deceased.
- Increasingly being seen as spaces which provide multiple benefits for recreation and nature conservation.
- They also importantly contribute to an area's ecosystem services, by:

➢ improving health and wellbeing,
➢ contributing to flood risk management,
➢ improving soil, water and air quality,
➢ offering pollination opportunities
➢ Providing habitats for flora and fauna
➢ helping climate adaptation.

Why are cemeteries attractive to wildlife?

- Burial grounds can be rich in biodiversity, supporting many different species of fauna and flora.
- Whilst some plants and animals may move into a well-managed burial ground it is more likely that most have been there for a long time.
- Intensification in farming practices and urban sprawl have reduced wildlife habitats, cemeteries are providing refuges in these places.
- Stonework, grasslands, food sources and tree cover provide growing, feeding, nesting, roosting and hibernating places for all sorts of plants and animals.
- It is a combination of the features of burial grounds so attractive to nature.

Is the desire to increase biodiversity really an option when considering the wishes of the bereaved?

- Consider the area to be included – age of graves , number of visitors.
- Natural burial grounds – woodlands and meadows.
- Involve any community / Friends Groups associated with cemetery.
- Undertake public opinion surveys and communications campaigns.
- Allow minimal grounds maintenance and no chemical treatments and provide limited public access.
- **Publicise plants and species which appear**.
- In more visited areas consider other 'rewilding options' – bird tables, bird/bat boxes, log piles, wildflower areas etc
- Look to gain local member and senior officer support.

Middlesbrough Council

- Managed by Friends Groups the historical cemetery is a green space in the middle of a large urban area.
- Packed with history, the cemetery is an important heritage site.
- Council and volunteers working together to ensure the dignity of the deceased is preserved whilst recognising the importance of the biodiversity value of the site.
- Largest area of mature woodland in the area and wildlife rich.
- Public consultation and communication has been a major part of the success.
- Areas where burial rights had expired for more than 20 years chosen for 'rewilding'.
- Designated local nature reserve.
- Wildflowers, tree planting, log piles, woodland burial area, habitat boxes for birds, hedgehogs and bats, hedgerows planted - most of these activities have a link to memorial events.
- Success has created a blueprint to allow other cemeteries to be included in the works.

Other considerations

Urban Greening and Biophilic design

- Fewer than 1 in 10 children now play in wild spaces around their homes, because it is estimated that these spaces have shrunk by 90% since the 1970's.

- Some councils are struggling to provide such spaces due to increasing demands for housing, economic development and shrinking greenspace budgets.

- The way we design our cities and greenspaces is beginning to include designs which connects people to nature by incorporating direct and indirect elements of the natural world into buildings and communities

- Natural light, air, plants, natural materials, and patterns that mimic nature are all being used to help re-establish the connection with nature. – 'biophilic design'.

The Barbican Centre, London – biophilic design in practice

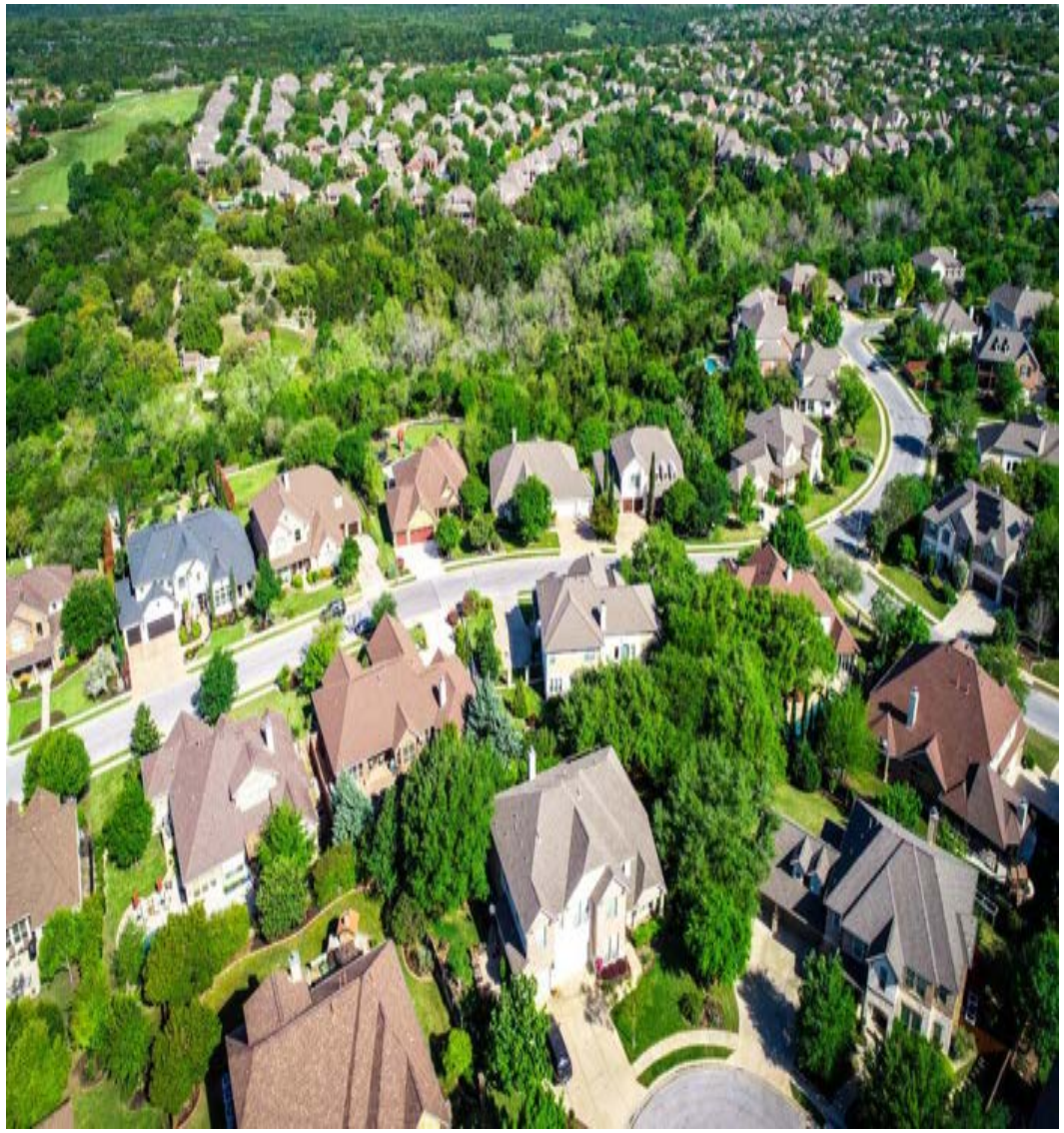
Rewilding our residents.

Gardens cover about a quarter of many cities, and rows of gardens can form a habitat corridor, potentially linking up wider green spaces like parks, as well as allotments, school playing fields, cemeteries, and other places that can be of value to wildlife.

In urban environments, largely due to a lack of access, and opportunities for contact, many people have forgotten how to co-exist with wildlife.

Through smaller and more local micro-rewilding efforts, these relationship can be restored.

Many local authorities and wildlife charities are now providing help and advise on how to rewild gardens.



A Few words of warning

Biosecurity

- Climate change is changing the geographical distribution of pests , plant diseases and non-native invasive species.
- Warmer temperatures are enabling some insect pests to have more generations each year.
- This increased reproductive cycle extends the period over which insects are active as well as extending their range.
- Increasing stresses on trees, such as from drought or waterlogging, are making them more susceptible to pests and pathogen attack.
- Higher temperatures are likely to result in faster development rates and therefore rapid increases in the populations of insect vectors that disseminate pathogens, allowing them to extend to a wider range of plants and trees.

- Plant diseases and pests are being introduced to countries across the world.
- Factors such as climate change, the world-wide transportation of plants for food, horticulture, industry etc. are causing the spread of such pests, diseases, and non-native species to increase more rapidly.
- We therefore need to adapt and adopt new and co-ordinated approaches to detecting such occurrences before they become a problem and once detected have management and eradication plans in place.
- Plant diseases and pests threaten not only food security but also already fragile levels of biodiversity and the many inter-linked ecosystems we all rely on.
- Therefore, collectively we need to develop a greater awareness and understanding of what we need to do to manage and prevent future outbreaks through the:
- creation of national strategies,
- help of national support agencies
- development of a wide network of information sharing.

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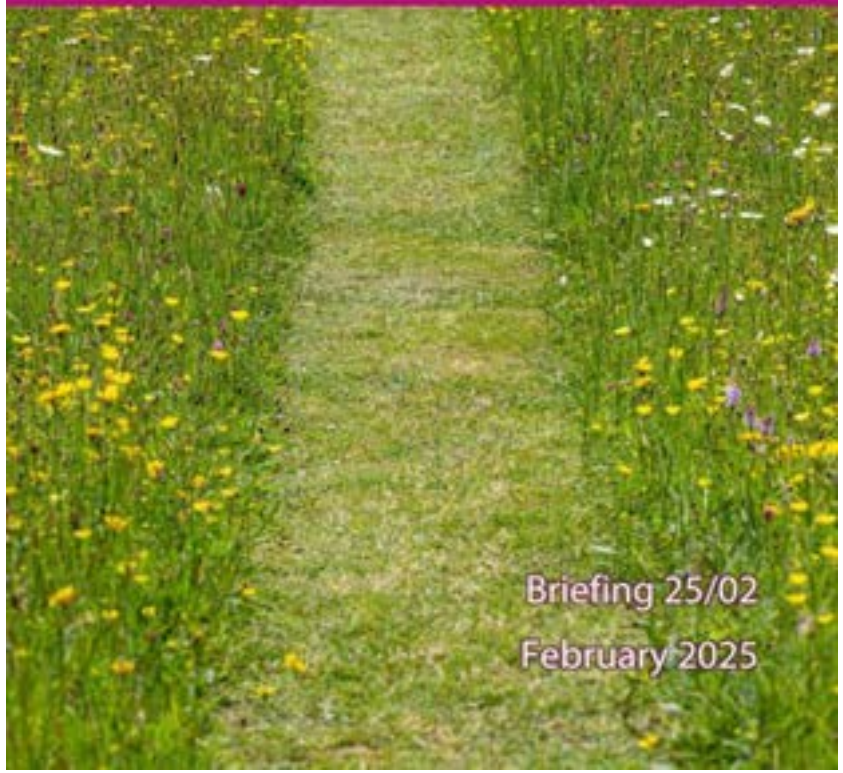
Making space for nature in our burial grounds

apse association for public service excellence

Grassland management

A guide for local councils



Briefing 25/02

February 2025

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Plant Biosecurity

Delivering a healthier future for the UK's plants and trees

apse association for public service excellence

Rewilding for the future

Insights and best practice from local councils

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Tree planting schemes

Progress, challenges and opportunities for local councils

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Adapting Parks

Climate change and local authority greenspace

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UPCOMING COURSES

Ensure the future security and sustainability of UK greenspaces with
Plant Biosecurity for Local Authorities
Wednesday 21 January 2026, 10:00 – 16:00

Learn more about the swift biodiversity benefits of grassland management with **Wildflower Meadows and Grasslands Management**
Tuesday 24 February 2026, 10:00 – 16:00

Maximise the use of all greenspaces with
Making Space for Nature in our Burial Grounds and Churchyards
Tuesday 03 February 2026, 09:00 – 16:00

Scan the QR code or click here to learn more about all our courses or book your spot today!

A Final thought

“We moved from being a part of nature to being apart from nature".

Sir David Attenborough