

Knighton Churchyard Wildlife Area

It's Your Neighbourhood Assessment August 2017

Introduction and background

The churchyard at St Mary Magdalen was declared closed for further burials in 2016, and Leicester City Council (LCC) took over the management of the churchyard from the Parochial Church Council (PCC). Around that time the gardener employed by the PCC retired from his role managing the churchyard. This gardener had, with the agreement of the PCC, used a range of approaches to different areas of the churchyard. The areas where the graves were older were managed to encourage wildlife through, for example, less frequent mowing. The gardener had also maintained over time a list of the plant and animal species he had noted in the churchyard.

Knighton Wild (KW) was approached to assist in the management of those parts of the churchyard that had been managed to encourage wildlife. Knighton Wild has been working with the churchwarden and staff at LCC to develop an agreed approach to the management of the areas identified.

Knighton Wild is a local group established two years ago to promote interest in and support for wildlife in the Knighton ward. The group organises a series of events and activities in the ward throughout the year. Over the course of the year Knighton Wild organises a series of visits to local green spaces to record the wildlife present – these are recorded on NatureSpot. During the winter months there is a programme of talks, usually held in the Parish Rooms on a variety of wildlife topics.

Activity over the past year

2016-2017 has been the first full year that Knighton Wild has been involved in the management of the wildlife areas of the churchyard. A meeting has been held with members of the PCC (led by a churchwarden) and members of Knighton Wild to discuss what could be achieved with the wildlife areas.

We have met with representatives of the City Council and a church warden to agree on the broad approach to managing the areas and signed an annual agreement. The principal agreement is to continue with the reduced mowing and strimming of the wildlife areas to enable native flowers to seed and remain established.

The wildlife areas are now clearly signed so that people interested in wildlife can explore these areas. The signs also act to reassure visitors who may think that the longer grass and more relaxed management approach is a sign of neglect.

Knighton Wild successfully applied to the ward for funding to support its activities. This bid included funds to buy a small collection of equipment for surveying and collecting as well as purchase third

party insurance from the RHS to ensure Knighton Wild activities were covered. This funding has been of direct benefit to the work in the churchyard.

A risk assessment has been produced so that any work in the churchyard is safe – a copy is attached for information.

The principal activity this year has been to ensure the meadow area where the older graves are located is managed in line with the agreement with the PCC and the City Council Parks Department. This area is now strimmed once in late summer and the arisings removed by the group to encourage the wildflower population in the area. The late strim this year will take place in September.

The PCC made a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund this year for repairs to the steeple. In this bid they had to demonstrate community involvement. Knighton Wild was happy to provide support to this bid both in words and in the organisation of an afternoon of guided tours of the churchyard in June. The tours attracted about 30 visitors on two guided tours to look in particular at the flora of the meadow area. The church was open for the afternoon and tea and biscuits provided for the visitors.

A management plan is being prepared for agreement with the PCC and City Council, which will provide a framework for Knighton Wild's work in the churchyard over the coming year. A draft of the plan is attached.

Future plans

- The gardener who used to manage the churchyard maintained a list of species he had recorded over the years. This list is due for review, so over the coming year Knighton Wild will organise a series of survey activities to update the list and upload the records to NatureSpot.
- The meadow area will continue to be maintained with a late strim and clearance.
- Subject to PCC agreement, the native species hedge along Brinsmead Rd will be layered to improve the screening and habitat for nesting birds and insects. This hedge laying will be carried out using traditional tools and methods and will be an opportunity for a demonstration workshop.
- The bird boxes that were put up 25 years ago will be located wherever possible and replaced. Other suitable sites will be identified and bird boxes installed.
- Knighton Wild's autumn programme includes a talk about pollinators and the Urban Buzz project. Subject to agreement of the management plan we propose to construct and install in discrete locations, habitats such as "bee hotels" that will encourage pollinators in the churchyard and surrounding gardens.

IYN assessment criteria

The churchyard partnership meets the assessment criteria in the following ways:

Community participation

- Inclusiveness and representativeness – Knighton Wild is a membership organisation that is open to anyone who supports the aims of the group and lives locally. We organise events with particular opportunities for family learning. We aim to improve our representativeness in relation to ethnic origin over the coming year.

- Partnership working – Knighton Wild is pleased with the developing partnership with the PCC and the city council and grateful for their support. We look forward to working more closely with Parks to ensure effective management of the wildlife areas in the coming year. Our plans also include a potential partnership with Urban Buzz to promote pollinators.
- Making a difference to local people. The churchyard is a valued area locally and many people walk through and enjoy its peace and solitude. We hope that with the improved signage, visitors' appreciation of the area will increase further.
- Planning for the future – the management plan, when agreed, will provide a framework for future activity by Knighton Wild and partners to further improve the wildlife habitats in the churchyard.

Environmental responsibility

- Development of green spaces – the churchyard is an important local green space and provides a series of opportunities for members and friends of Knighton Wild to increase their knowledge, skills and understanding of managing green spaces for wildlife.
- Conservation activities – at the heart of the work in the churchyard is the improvement of the habitats to support a wider range of wildlife.
- Encourage a sense of local heritage – the churchyard is likely to be a relict of ancient meadow, and the explanatory signs and renovated information board are used to educate and inform visitors to the churchyard about one aspect of its value and history.

Gardening achievement

Although there is no active gardening in the wildlife area, Knighton Wild aims, by its management to show how gardens can be managed to encourage wildlife.

John Crookes for Knighton Wild, August 2017