

Holy Trinity, Weston

Churchyard Management Plan

Weston churchyard is an 'open' churchyard i.e. burials still occur here. It is managed by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) in a manner appropriate to a country churchyard and the ethos of the Living Churchyard Scheme.

This scheme promotes the management of churchyards in a wildlife-friendly way while being sensitive to the needs of all the users, and in particular to its primary function as a resting place for the dead and a contemplative place for their friends and relatives.

The churchyard is designated as a County Wildlife Site due to the presence of bats. It supports neutral grassland rich in flora including a county rarity.

A plan of the churchyard showing the different areas accompanies this management plan.

Management

Note: The church is frequently let out for recording music. No machinery or other noise is permitted in the churchyard at these times. Anyone intending to use machinery must check with the vergers beforehand or check for notices in the porch.

Grass cutting

Frequency of cuttings is dependant on the weather and the following is a guide only.

- ◇ *Areas around modern graves and at the edge of paths*
 - These areas are mown regularly, approximately every fortnight, to keep the grass short.
- ◇ *Areas around old graves* – to the north and north-west of the church there are areas of old or unmarked graves. Some areas contain a number of primroses.
 - Those areas with primroses are not mown until the primroses have finished flowering, they are then mown about once a month. If the grass is growing quickly in the spring areas between the primroses are cut.

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- The areas without primroses are mown monthly.
- ◇ *Conservation area* – an area to the south west of the church is designated as a conservation area and is marked out with small notices
 - Monthly cutting of this area continues until the end of May, after this time the plants are allowed to flower and set seed for about 8-10 weeks. The area is then cut and the cuttings removed to the compost heap. Monthly cutting then resumes.
- ◇ *Under the trees* – an area in the south east corner of the churchyard is shaded by trees and has sparse growth which includes goldilocks buttercups (*Ranunculus auricomus*)
 - The area is cut once the buttercups have flowered and cutting continues as necessary during the summer.

Removing cuttings

- ◇ Grass cuttings should be raked up and removed to the compost heap whenever possible. This is essential in areas that have not been cut for a while, notably the conservation area. By removing the cuttings it will prevent the vegetation underneath from being smothered and killed and also prevent the build up of soil nutrients which would encourage the spread of weeds (e.g. nettles, docks and thistles) and coarse grasses at the expense of the fine grasses and wildflowers.

Trees

- ◇ The parish will undertake the routine maintenance of trees such as pruning but this is kept to a minimum as too much pruning can permanently damage trees. Any major work such as pollarding, coppicing or felling is carried out by trained arborists and a faculty obtained.
- ◇ A trained arborist is engaged to conduct a Health and Safety check of all the churchyard trees every 3 years.

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- ◇ The churchyard supports bats; bats and their roosts are protected by law. Before any major works occur to trees our local Natural England office is consulted as the work could result in the disturbance of bats or their roosts.
- ◇ *Dead wood* - valuable to a large number of invertebrates. Minor fallen branches and prunings are deposited next to the compost heap.
- ◇ *Planting new trees* - This is not always environmentally friendly. Planting new trees on grassland will shade out and eliminate many of the important plants that live in churchyards. Planting should only be considered when old trees are felled or they are approaching the end of their life and new ones are required to replace them. Trees will often propagate themselves naturally by seedlings or suckers which will produce healthier saplings however they should be removed quickly from areas where they are not wanted (i.e. from grassland, monuments and around mature trees).

Hedges

- ◇ Hedges are not cut during the bird-nesting season. They are cut during the months of October to February inclusive.
- ◇ The best shape for a hedge is an A shape i.e. thicker at the base.
- ◇ Berries provide a valuable food source for birds and are left where possible.

Gravestones and walls

- ◇ Gravestones and walls are important sites for lichens and mosses. A number of species are protected by law.
- ◇ Damage to stonework by lichens is minimal and they are not removed. They grow very slowly and many are long-lived. Bramble and ivy are removed if they overshadow gravestones with lichen as they will cause the lichens to wither and die through lack of light.

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Ivy

- ◇ Ivy broomrape (*Orobanch hederæ*) is a county rarity which is parasitic on the roots of ivy. It is found at the base of the large sycamore on the right-hand side of the path up to the church and round some ivy-covered graves in the vicinity. It is important that the ivy is not destroyed in this area, although it can be trimmed back.
- ◇ Ivy growing up trees can become a hazard to the tree due to its weight and the creation of a sail effect or by smothering the leaves preventing sunlight reaching them. In these cases the stem of the ivy will be cut through at a suitable point and the plant left to die *in situ*.
- ◇ Ivy provides a valuable source of nectar late in the season as well as berries and nest sites. It will be left to grow where it is not damaging structures.

Herbicides and fertilisers

- ◇ Herbicides are only used on the gravel path and French Drain round the church. They are applied as per manufacturer's instructions.
- ◇ Fertilisers are not used in the churchyard.

Bonfires

- ◇ Bonfires damage grassland and the ash causes an increase in fertility which leads to the growth of thistles, nettles and dock. There have not been any bonfires for a number of years and they are discouraged.
- ◇ Should a bonfire ever be necessary it should be in the north or north-west area of the churchyard.

Bird boxes

- ◇ There are 2 barn owl boxes attached to trees. The approach is kept clear of branches and ivy. They are not cleaned out.

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- ◇ There is one nest box for tits attached to a tree in the south east corner of the churchyard. It was erected in memory of a parishioner and his family clean it out annually.