

St Mark's Land Management Plan First Draft September 2022

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1. What we do now

Grass. Mown as required to keep it short during the growing season. Grass is used by various children's & young people's groups during the year, summer fun, as well as occasional church picnics and other activities.

The following plants were identified in the grass in June 2022: green alkanet, red & white clover, hawkbit, lesser trefoil, bird's foot trefoil, large grabgrass, daisy, buttercup, ribwort plantain, ragwort, dandelion, purslane, nipplewort, stinging nettle, goosegrass, cock's foot grass, annual meadow grass false oat grass, Yorkshire fog grass.





A 1-2 m wide strip along the east end of the garden is left unmown from spring until autumn, and then cut as needed.



Bluebell project. Area of trees and shrubs at the east end; work in progress of being managed to be wildlife friendly, with some native species planted (including bluebells). Plants include holly (non prickly, variegated), ivy, oak, yew, lime, beech, dogwood, rosemary, Franchets Cotton Easter, Buddliea atternifolia, Redclaws Escalonia, Eleagnus, brambles and stinging nettles.

There are some log piles to provide shelter for wildlife, and bird boxes are planned.



Car park borders. A mixture of planted and wild shrubs/ perennials. Managed to keep it tidy.

South wall of church. Shrubs managed for tidiness, pruned in autumn.

Rainbows Garden a peaceful spot with benches. The most 'managed' part of the grounds. Plants include hanging baskets,

Also a bug hotel.



Borders along the path to the church hall. Shrubs and perennials. Managed for tidiness and keeping the lights visible. Most work done in spring and autumn with wild flowers (weeds!) allowed to grow over the summer months.



Area behind the hall.

Mostly grass, all of which is mown regularly.

Border with an emerging blackthorn hedge.

Log pile house.



One raised bed belonging to the Beaver group, used for vegetables and potentially wild flowers.

Weed killer used occasionally on the paths and against the walls of the east end of the church building.

2. What a plan could look like

1. It's helpful to research heritage and environmental information that is already available about the site. (Parish profile?)

Consecrated in 1879, church hall added 1985, Grade 2* listed and in a conservation area. Garden no burial ground.

2. A map with fixed points such as buildings, paths, large memorials and trees marked on it is the best starting point. The current status can also be noted for example 'area of short grass', hedge, 'blue tits seen nesting here', bulbs, compost heaps, shrubs. At this point it's very helpful to do a wildlife survey, and consider letting the grass grow for longer periods (if it has been kept short) to find out which grass and wildflower species emerge.

3. Create a plan of how to care for the space, taking into account those three aspects of people, heritage and natural environment. Mark up a blank copy of the map with how you plan to use each area such as a spring meadow, seating area or access path. A list of annual tasks and a three to five year plan for larger projects will help keep everyone aware and united in purpose. A local conservation group or Wildlife Trust can help with the environmental aspects of this - or ask the A Rocha UK Volunteers Advisory Network: <https://arocha.org.uk/our-activities/advisornetwork/>

4. Inform and engage people by keeping notice boards up-to-date and attractive, using social media, speaking at local events or holding open days. Making contact with people in these ways may also help you to find interested volunteers, garner support from locals and become a source of funding for larger projects. Good communication will lead to opportunities to raise the profile of environmental issues and the significance of this particular patch of land. The National Biodiversity Network are keen to build up a long-term picture of species prevalence, so you can help them by adding what you discover to their atlas: <https://burialgrounds.nbnatlas.org/> Finally, celebrate what is achieved, and review with the team regularly.

3. Background info and links

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/action-pack/section-a-managing-churchyards-burial-grounds/>

Land management/ Grass cutting (From the Caring for God's acre resources)

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/A3-Cutting-Long-Grass-and-Dealing-with-Grass-Cuttings-v2.pdf>

Golden Rule: Remove all grass cuttings; compost them, make hay or take them off site. Removal improves the sward for conservation and also gradually reduces the nutrients in the soil, leading to slower grass growth and more flowers.

COMPOSTING ON SITE

Choose an area for your compost heap which is:

- In a sunny or lightly shaded place.
- Not directly under a tree – this is damaging to the trunk and the roots and can shorten the tree's life

A compost heap in a burial ground is there to get rid of unwanted waste and to provide a haven for wildlife. Do not worry if there is not the 'correct' mix of materials or if it isn't turned. You will get compost in the end! The ideal months to empty compost bins are October and April when there should be neither nesting animals, such as grass snakes, or hibernating ones, such as hedgehogs or newts. The timing of hibernation is affected by temperature and so may start later than October and finish earlier than April depending on local conditions. If you need to empty a compost bin in the winter, take care not to injure hibernating animals. Stop if you find one, cover it back up and leave the task until spring.

Caring for Grassland

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/A2-Caring-for-Grassland-v2.pdf>

The variety of grass heights to consider are: • short like a lawn. • medium and cut regularly but to about 10cms each time. • long and flowery and cut a few times a year. • long and tussocky and cut once a year or every other year.

The key guidelines for managing long grass are:

Follow the golden rule and remove all cuttings or leave to make hay.

Allow most of the plants to grow, flower and set seed but do not delay the cut too long. Cut the grass while it is still growing, before all the strength of the plant has gone down into the roots. In practical terms this means:

Plan for 12 to 16 weeks without cutting in the spring and summer (any time between mid-March and mid-August).

Cut areas of long grass before the end of July and definitely before the end of August (late flowers may not have set seed but this can't be helped). Cutting after the end of August leads to the strength of the grasses being stored in the roots. Over time the sward will become rank, tussocky and lose wild flowers. Cutting later occasionally won't matter too much, however.

Ideally cut a couple more times over the late summer, early autumn or spring. Collect the cuttings.

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/A8-Creating-a-Wildflower-Meadow-and-Helping-Wildlife-v2.pdf>

<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/A1-Five-Steps-to-Churchyard-and-Burial-Ground-Care-v2.pdf>

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<https://ecochurch.arocha.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Land13-Management-plan.pdf>