

Churchyard Management Plan St John the Baptist, Shedfield

1. Summary

The plan can be summarised as follows:

Front section – the attractive flower beds will continue to be maintained. Grass will be kept short, but disturbance of special wild flowers such as orchids and violets will be avoided.

Middle section – this will be sensitively managed to support spring bulbs/ primroses, as well as to encourage germination and regeneration of grasses and other wild flowers which enhance its biodiversity.

Rear section – this will be less intensively managed, with some ranker, wildlife-friendly growth, as well as log pile and compost heap. There is an opportunity to set aside areas for recreation – e.g. children’s activities.

The Remembrance garden will continue to be mown, and some pathways will be strimmed to improve access.

Advice on management is sought from wildlife groups, and occasional surveys will be carried out.

2. Background

The area covered by the churchyard is quite considerable and measures around 2 acres – see appendix A). There are a number of distinct areas within this, each consisting of their own micro environments with their particular type of flora, including a good variety of grasses. The churchyard hosts a large number of spring bulbs and flowers, and as well rhododendrons, some very elegant and tall pine trees.

Churchyards such as ours at St John’s tend to have been cut infrequently, have rarely been fertilised, dug over, drained or reseeded – for detailed account, see appendix B. Consequently, they represent an insight of what our ancient meadows were like, full of a balance of grass species and wild flowers that are no longer commonly seen, even in rural locations.

Since the early 1990s, at the initiation of the late Eve Evans, St John’s churchyard was allowed to regenerate for the benefit of wildlife, and at the same time the tower of the original church has been renovated. This low intensity management was considered by some to have left the churchyard looking “scruffy”.

As part of the parish’s ecocongregation initiative, this management plan is intended to protect and enhance the churchyard’s biodiversity, as well as to provide parishioners with a place for relaxation and contemplation.

It is intended that this plan should be flexible and reviewed/ modified on an annual basis.

3. Objectives

Primary objective – to develop and implement a plan to improve management of our churchyard for the benefit of parishioners and the environment.

- i) to form a worthy setting for the listed church building and old tower, situated within the Shedfield Conservation Area
- ii) to get advice from conservation bodies, including periodic surveys of plant species
- iii) to document a plan for management of each area of the churchyard
- iv) to maintain easy access for parishioners
- v) to consider whether areas of the churchyard should be set aside for specific activities – e.g. worship, children
- vi) to make parishioners aware of the plan and provide them with opportunities to help and share their views

4. Conservation Advice

Advice has been obtained from the Hampshire Wildlife Trust, and their comments should be sought on an occasional basis.

Surveys of plants have been carried out in the past by the HBIC (Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre)/DEFRA, and should be repeated every 5 years. Previous surveys are on file (see appendix C), and results of the 2010 survey are attached.

The detailed management routine outlined below should be reviewed on an annual basis.

5. Management plan (see diagram Appendix A)

- i) Front section** – strim or mow regularly and remove all grass cuttings, maintain flower beds. Consider planting small, indigenous trees along front boundary. Keep an eye open for orchids, violets and other wild flowers of interest, to prevent their disturbance
- ii) Middle section – Study Centre to rhododendrons.** This is the richest section for plants. Experiment by strimming (with raking/removal of strimmings) in sections to encourage wild flowers to germinate: -
west section – cut twice – in mid summer and autumn

east section – cut after bulbs have died back and repeat in mid summer and autumn

Encourage/introduce shade-loving wild flowers to rear of this section.

Expose some of the gravestones (but leave turf over the graves).

Remove coarse weeds (brambles) and saplings

iii) Rear section – cut back and rake in the late summer/autumn. Keep area around Remembrance Garden and seat mown and tidy. Allow ranker, wildlife friendly growth (nettles, brambles, etc.) along rear border, and w. edge of laurels in NE corner. Expose gravestones. Build log piles, compost heaps, burn coarser brushwood, etc. Identify possible areas for future development for children's activities, recreation, etc.

iv) General

Avoid cutting back spring flowering bulbs, primroses, etc.

Avoid early strimming of other flowering plants (violets, ox-eye daisies, etc.)

Maintain mown pathways, and areas around seats.

Remove brambles and saplings where possible.

Maintain hedges, but be mindful of needs of church flower team!

Build log pile and maintain compost heaps, possibly bagging and selling compost

Burn or remove to municipal tip branches and clippings not suitable for composting or log pile

Remove oasis, dead wreaths, redundant flower containers, etc. to refuse bins

Ensure parishioners and work parties are aware of guidelines for composting, rubbish disposal, etc.

v) Short term work party tasks

Bramble and sapling removal in middle section.

Clearance of area under rhododendrons for shade-loving flowering plants

Clearance around gravestones

Compost heaps and wood piles

Consider suitable plantings: -

 shade loving indigenous plants

 indigenous trees, maybe at front

Consider removing rubbish from SE corner