

The Church of St Laurence, East Harptree

Churchyard Management and Maintenance Plan 2021 -2025



East Harptree Environment Group

May 2021

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Site Details

Location

The churchyard is an area of approximately 240 square metres, within which the church is situated, at Church Lane, East Harptree, Bristol BS40 6BD. Grid Ref ST565559

Status

St Laurence Church is within the Diocese of Bath & Wells, and the United Parish of East Harptree with West Harptree and Hinton Blewett. The trustees are the Parochial Church Council. The churchyard has been closed for burials since 1883, except for the internment of ashes in an area marked by stones opposite the south porch. The site is within the village conservation area, The Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and the buffer zone around the North Somerset and Mendip Bats Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Management

The maintenance responsibilities were passed, as is permitted in law, to the local authority (now Bath & North East Somerset, BANES) in 1989. The Parks Department of BANES carry out major tree works after routine inspections and provide funds for a local contractor to cut the grass. Garry Bowles at Haycombe Cemetery is the overriding manager for all cemetery sites; the team within the parks department carries out routine maintenance in the outer cemeteries. The contact there is:

Domonic Leach

Senior Tree and Landscape Supervisor

[Contact details removed]

Repair of the walls is the responsibility of the Property Services team at B&NES.

BANES recognise that a team of volunteers drawn from the church membership and the East Harptree Environment Group (EHEG) are involved in the management and maintenance of the churchyard and BANES wish to work with this team to implement this management plan.

This plan has been prepared by EHEG in close consultation with, and the approval of, the churchwardens, Guy Stobart and Mary Cookson, and a group of church members. The EHEG contact is Chris Billingham
[Contact details removed]

Project

Newton

Project Newton (PN) involves urgent repairs to the Grade 2* listed church, and at the same time improving inclusive access and creating a heritage exhibition area. It also includes work to improve and enhance the churchyard as a natural habitat for wildlife, a beautiful place for people to enjoy and the creation of a teaching area for use by the local Primary School. Part of the funding was granted by the Heritage Lottery Fund in September 2021, with the remainder from other sources. The works will include the installation of swift boxes and bat housing within the church fabric, as well as certain aspects of the planned planting. The work that is dependent on the completion of the PN building works is identified in this management plan. Planning permission was granted for certain aspects of this management plan in April 2020, the necessary Diocesan consents were obtained in October 2020 and the detailed planning conditions were satisfied in February 2021

Caring for God's Acre and Wilder Churches

The guidance in the Action Pack, (<https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/action-pack/>) published by the "Caring for God's Acre" organisation, has been used to inform the management outlined in this document, as has information from the 2021 joint initiative, "Wilder Churches" between the Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Bath & Wells Diocese Eco Church South West group. [Wilder Churches | Somerset Wildlife Trust](#) Volunteers involved with churchyard management will participate in the training courses run as part of this initiative during 2021.

Wildlife Surveys

Baseline surveys of the wildlife in the churchyard were completed prior to the preparation of this management plan and include trees (Alltree Services) bats (Country Contracts) wild and garden plants and moths. (EHEG members). In addition, records have been kept by EHEG members and neighbours of other mammal, bird, insect, and fungi sightings. These data have been entered on the spreadsheet (which is available only as an electronic copy as it is constantly updated) and have been used to inform the aims, principles, and prescription of this management plan.

Aims

1. To create a new role for the churchyard:
 - 1.1. A wildlife haven and a peaceful outdoor space where both villagers & visitors, especially walkers passing through, will want to linger & enjoy the sights, scents & sounds of the flora & fauna living there.
 - 1.2. An outdoor classroom for children at the primary school, and others, to learn about, and come to appreciate, the wonderful wildlife in East Harptree
2. To achieve this in a sustainable manner, minimising ongoing maintenance requirements, while ensuring the churchyard looks cared-for and well-tended.
3. To review the success of each element of the plan before moving to the next.

Principles

1. To introduce, manage and encourage shrubby and herbaceous plants that are, as far as possible:
 - 1.1. UK natives or naturalised.
 - 1.2. Good for pollinating insects and where possible are food plants for butterflies, moths, and other insects. This includes a mixture of native grasses managed by different mowing regimes, and plants that flower throughout the year, from snowdrops in the early spring to ivy in autumn.
 - 1.3. Seed, nut or berry producing to provide food for mammals, birds and insects.
 - 1.4. Suitable for the aspect, for example woodland plants under deciduous trees, grey-leaved herbs in hot, sunny corners.
 - 1.5. Sympathetic to the use of each area of the churchyard.
2. To provide nesting and roosting boxes and habitats for bats and other mammals (such as hedgehogs), birds (including swift boxes in the tower) and invertebrates (long grass, "bug" hotels, dead hedges and managed compost heaps)
3. To provide interpretation material, such as "what to see in the churchyard this month".
4. To devise a low- cost maintenance schedule appropriate for the new landscape treatments.

5. To involve members of EHEG, church members and other volunteers from the village in growing, planting, and maintaining different areas.

Grassland Management

The BANES advice on grassland management on cemeteries is that the grass should be mown fortnightly during the growing season. They encourage maintenance plans which foster biodiversity, which may mean leaving some areas to grow naturally. At a minimum, they advise that mowing should maintain grass paths through the burial ground, so that it is suitable for visiting. (BANES website February 2021)

Different areas of grassland in the St Laurence churchyard are managed by one of three different ways. These are:

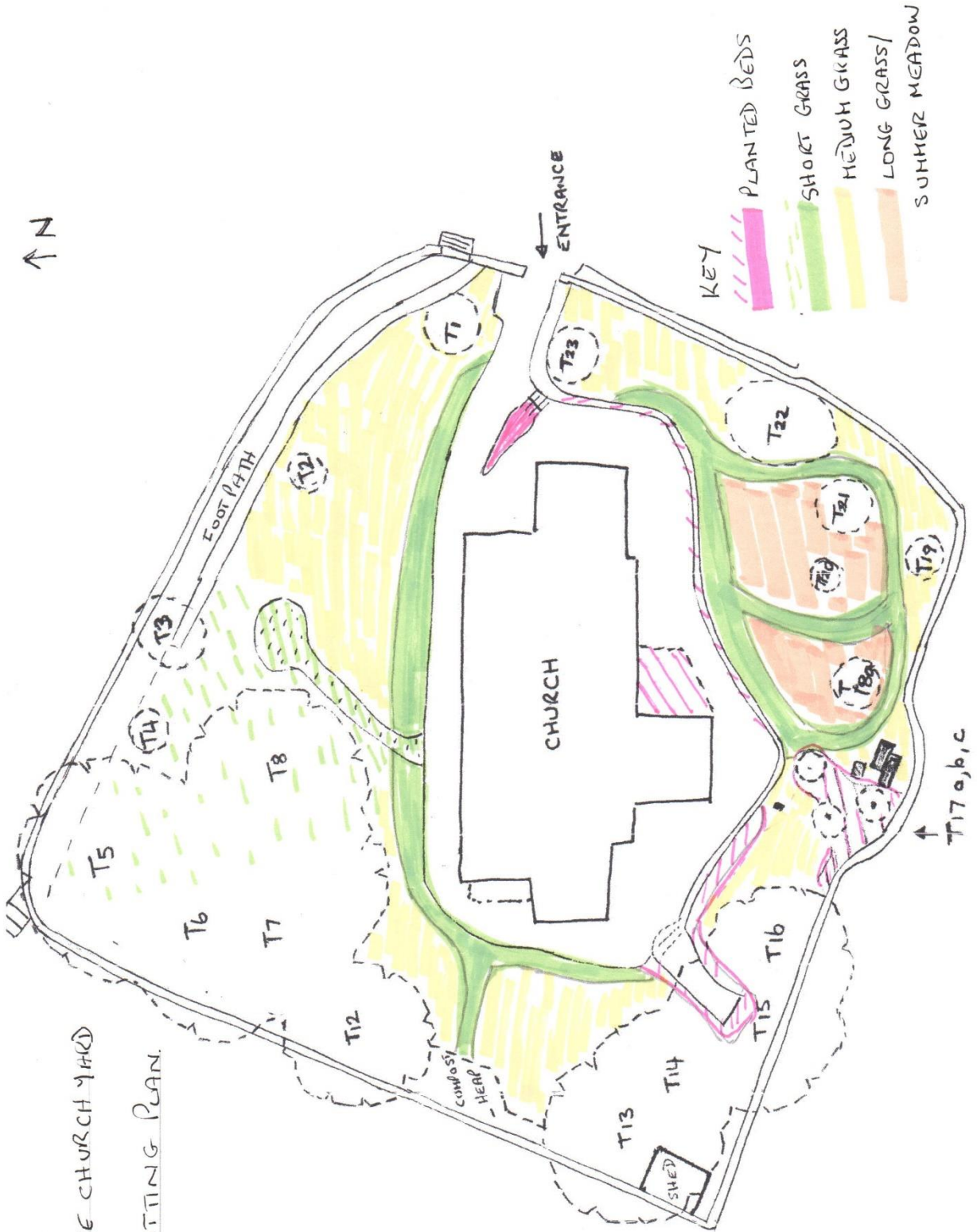
1. **Short grassland** is cut like a lawn on a regular basis, no more frequently than fortnightly, with the mower cutter height set at around 30mm and all cuttings removed to the compost heap. It is used for grass paths through the churchyard and for the recreation area (compartment 6). It may contain plants that flower close to the ground such as self-heal and the short sward attracts ground feeding birds.
2. **Medium grassland** is cut no more frequently than monthly, unless the growing conditions are exceptionally fast, with the mower cutter height set on high at 75-100 mm and all cuttings removed to the compost heap. It is used for areas where people do not walk on the grass, such as the Memorial Garden, between shrubs and where there are spring bulbs, in which case the first cut is not until all foliage has died back in mid-June. It may contain plants such as violets, primroses, daisies, self- heal, clover and bird's foot trefoil; a medium cut will allow these plants to flower and attract bees and other insects as well as small mammals and slow worms.
3. **Long grass and summer meadow** areas are cut only once each year during August when most of the flowers have set seed. It is cut with a strimmer or reciprocating bar mower and the cuttings are raked off and removed immediately to the compost heap. It is used in sunny areas where flowers in the grass such as rough hawkbit, various buttercups, yarrow, bush vetch, common sorrel, rib-wort plantain can flower during the summer, as in a meadow. The biodiversity of these areas may be improved by plug planting with suitable meadow species and seeding with yellow rattle. The long grass areas may attract many insect species including beetles and grasshoppers as well as small mammals.

The plan showing the grass cutting regime for each area is on page 5.

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ST LAURENCE CHURCH YARD

GRASS CUTTING PLAN.



Tree and Shrub Management

All the trees in the churchyard are listed in the tree and shrub sheet in the accompanying species spreadsheet. They are numbered from T 1 to T23 as on the Tree Survey by Jim Walker of Alltree Services Ltd in June 2019. Trees numbered T17 and T18 were noted as dead or dying in this survey and were removed and replaced by 3 Amelanchier “Robin Hill” (now T17 a, b, c) and a walnut (now T18a) in November 2020. This was part of the agreed mitigation required in the Project Newton planning permission for the removal of the 3 Irish Yews, T9-T11, during the remodelling of the north entrance.

The position of each tree, together with the spread of its branches, is shown on the plan below.



BANES Parks Department are responsible for tree, shrub and hedge inspection and maintenance. Their website states that their responsibilities include the following, as listed at:

<https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/churchyard-cemetery-and-memorial-maintenance>

- Maintaining fences or hedges which surround the burial ground and cutting back larger plants and shrubs during the winter season
- Inspecting any trees on site (Our tree officers will carry out any necessary work to trees, or subcontract this to approved experts. We will ensure there is no work done to trees during bird nesting season)

Management Compartments - Churchyard

The churchyard has been divided into seven compartments for the purpose of describing the management. These are, starting at the entrance, and working clockwise:

1. **Entrance** The area either side of the entrance path from the gate, including the stone planter bed in the Project Newton (PN) Plans.
2. **South** The grassland, planting, trees, and boundary wall as far as the Memorial Garden.
3. **Gravel area and retaining wall along path.** The small area in the angle of the south porch and the south wall, and the retaining wall along the path to the south porch.
4. **The Memorial Garden** The trees and planting around the internment area for ashes and to either side of the steps & path to the seat and memorial stone under the *Catalpa*. The planting along the retaining wall opposite the south porch and the grassland over the internment area.
5. **West** The grassland and trees on the west side of the church, including the compost heaps and shed.
6. **Recreation Area** The area in the north west corner, designed for school and recreational use in the PN plans. Its boundary to the east is the grass path reinforced with mesh
7. **North** The area between compartments 6 and 1, including the north hedge and shrubs to be planted as part of PN.

A plan of the compartments is shown on page 6.

Compartment 1 – Entrance

Description

The churchyard entrance is being remodelled, as part of PN, to make the path into the churchyard more accessible. A stone planter and seat will be built where the levels change, and the wall adjacent to tree T23 will be rebuilt. The areas on both sides of the entrance contain many spring bulbs and other plants such as primroses and cyclamen.

Management Objectives

To create an attractive and welcoming entrance to the churchyard, including a new notice and interpretation board adjacent to the entrance.

To protect the existing nest sites of house martins on the north wall.

Prescriptions

1. Remove the flowering cherry T23, when the wall is rebuilt for PN, and replace with suitable crab apple trees.
2. Plant drought resistant, minimum maintenance, flowering, and where possible scented, species in the planter once it is built for PN. Possible species are prostrate rosemary, variegated sages, thyme, rock rose etc.
3. Manage the grassland as a spring meadow, with a medium cut not before mid- June each year.

Compartment 2 – South

Description

This area contains many daffodils and snowdrops in the grass, especially along the east wall and round trees T 20 and T21. An oval area around these 2 trees was managed as a summer meadow in 2019 and 2020.

Management Objectives

To extend the long grass summer meadow area over a large part of the compartment, with grass paths through it as shown in the plan on page 4, and to increase the biodiversity of the meadow by planting seed and plug plants of meadow flowers such as yellow rattle, knapweed, ox-eye daisy, betony, and scabious within it.

To maintain the outer edges as a spring meadow, with native shrub planting added as part of PN.

Prescriptions

1. Cut the grass as shown in the grassland management section.
2. Plant meadow species plug plants and seed, in groups, in the autumn after cutting the long grass areas.
3. Remove suckers from the trees T20 and T21 while they are dormant, as necessary.

Compartment 3 – Gravel Area and Retaining Wall

Description

This is the gravel area in the SE angle of the south porch, and the retaining wall along the path leading to the south porch. Red valerian and ladies mantle dominate both areas, with hardy geraniums, columbines, greater periwinkle and creeping jenny in the retaining wall.

Management Objectives

To reduce the dominance of the valerian and ladies' mantle in the gravel area and to plant, either direct into the gravel, or into a stone planter, scented Mediterranean herbs such as rosemary, lavender, thyme, and sage.

To maintain the existing planting along the retaining wall.

Prescriptions

1. Once the PN building allows, to create either a suitable planting bed in the gravel area or install a stone trough on the gravel. Plant with Mediterranean herbs.
2. Build a free- standing home for solitary bees and place close to the south wall of the church but away from the proposed seat.
3. Cut back the dead flower heads and stems from the plants in the wall in late winter / early spring.

Compartment 4 – Memorial Garden

Description

This is the area which is dedicated for the internment of ashes, the planting surrounding it, and the steps leading up to the seat and memorial stone. It includes the narrow flower bed, which contains memorial rose bushes and other plants, along the top of the retaining wall. Much of the western end of this compartment is heavily shaded by the Indian Bean tree and other trees during the summer. Spring bulbs including English bluebells, *Anemone blanda*, *Crocus tommasinianus*, daffodils and scilla were planted either side of the steps and seat in autumn 2019, together with some primroses and cowslips. An informal woodland garden was created in winter 2020/ 21 around 3 newly planted Amelanchier “Robin Hill” along the eastern edge. This contains daffodils (previously hidden under bramble) snowdrops, grape hyacinths, foxgloves, violets and other suitable, donated woodland type plants.

Management Objectives

To develop the informal woodland planting around three sides of this compartment to delineate it from the rest of the churchyard and to deter unnecessary access to the internment area.

To change the grass cutting regime to “medium” to allow the plants described in 2) on page 3 to flower. To create a memorial flower border along the edge of the retaining wall, considering the wishes of those people whose loved ones’ ashes are interred in this area.

Prescriptions

1. Cut the grass as shown in the grassland management section.
2. Continue to add suitable plants to the woodland garden. Weed out brambles, nettles, and docks as they appear. Allow the new planting to merge with the surrounding grassland at the edges.
3. Plant shade tolerant and low maintenance small shrubs amongst the bulbs either side of the path leading to the seat. Include suitable, if possible scented, slow growing varieties such as *Sarcococca*, *Skimmia*, *Mahonia*, *Vinca*, *Hebe*, *Daphne laureola*. Mulch well after planting to prevent ingress of grass.
4. Add low-growing plants such as bird’s-foot trefoil, primroses and violets to the grassland.
5. Once the churchyard re-opens after PN building is complete develop the narrow border along the front of the interment area by planting drought tolerant, low growing shrubs such as lavender between the roses.

Compartment 5 – West

Description

This is the area at the west end of the churchyard, which is dominated by the canopy of mature beech, yew, oak and horse chestnut trees. Waste vegetation has been piled up along part of the west wall for many years and has rotted into compost in which nettles grow. A habitat pile of branches and twigs from the crab apple felled in 2020 has been created along the wall. There is a shed in the south west corner.

Management Objectives

To create a well-managed compost heap of several compartments which will be attractive to wildlife and which will produce good compost to improve the churchyard soil as required.

To maintain the habitat pile with new brash as necessary.

To encourage birds and bats by installing nesting and roosting boxes in both the trees and on the shed.

Prescriptions

1. Use the brash and timber from the Irish yews, felled as part of PN, to construct a compost heap in several compartments. Care must be taken not to disturb or injure hibernating wildlife such as slow-worms or hedgehogs. Take steps to prevent non-biodegradable material from being added.
2. Purchase and install, as described in PN, suitable bird and bat boxes. These can be made to the designs published by the British Trust for Ornithology and the Bat Conservation Trust, or purchased, in which case the boxes made from Woodstone or Woodcrete e.g., those made by Schwegler, are preferred.
3. Continue to add to the habitat pile with new brash and logs as it rots down.
4. Create a stone pile against the wall to form a shelter for reptiles.
5. Cut the grass as shown in the grassland management section.

Compartment 6 – Recreation Area

Description

This is the area under the trees in the north-west corner of the churchyard that is used by the primary school children for recreation and outdoor learning. PN plans include a seat in the corner next to the footpath, overlooking the field towards Harptree Combe, and a reinforced grass path and turning circle to allow wheelchair access to this area.

Management Objectives

To maintain this area as open short grass for recreation and as a resting place for passing walkers.

Prescriptions

1. See sections on pages 2 & 3 on grassland and tree management.

Compartment 7 – North

Description

This is an area dominated by old gravestones in grassland. It is bordered by a hedge, separating it from the footpath, on the north side, and will have a new, easy access path to the north entrance of the church as part of PN. It has a healthy population of moles

Management Objectives

To plant native shrubs that are good for wildlife amongst the graves. These shrubs should be known food plants for butterflies and other insects and provide food in the form of berries, nuts etc for birds and small mammals.

To maintain the hedge such that the shrubs within it can flower, but without increasing its height too much or so that it blocks the footpath.

Prescriptions

1. Once the PN building work allows plant 12 shrubs selected from the following species: spindle, dogwood, wayfaring tree, willow, guelder rose, hazel, honeysuckle and buckthorn. The positions of the shrubs are shown on the PN drawing

2. After 3 years start to coppice the shrubs on a rotation which ensures they are no higher than the adjacent hedge.
3. Cut the grass as shown in the grassland management section.

Church Tower

PN includes a plan to install swift boxes in the tower, and to convert an old flue for bats.

Monitoring and Review

Members of the East Harptree Environment Group (EHEG) intend to start regular survey and monitoring of the different plant and animal groups and these data will be reviewed to measure whether the management objectives to improve the biodiversity of the churchyard have been successful.

The results of the surveys are held electronically in a spreadsheet and can be requested from EHEG if required.

Bat Survey

Bat surveys of the churchyard by EHEG members are scheduled for May, July and September each year, starting in 2021. As well as being recorded on EHEG's local wildlife map, the survey will feed into the national Bat Conservation Trusts Sunset Survey programme. Using their methods and recording system will help to get a better understanding of all wildlife at dusk as in addition to bats; sightings of other creatures such as foxes, badgers, hedgehogs, owls and even Stag beetles will be recorded as well.

Swift Survey

EHEG members record the locations of swift nests in the village every summer and these records are reported to a national scheme, run by the RSPB and dedicated swift organisations.

Moth Survey

EHEG members completed a moth survey in the churchyard in 2020 and hope to repeat this on an annual basis.

Plant, Fungi, Insect and Bird Recording

Records of these taxa are kept in a spreadsheet which is constantly updated and is available if required from EHEG.