

Churchyard Management Plan 2021

BACKGROUND

There has been a church on the site since 1120. Although much of its parish is in Bedfordshire, the churchyard is in Cambridgeshire and in the District Authority of Huntingdonshire. The National Grid reference is TL 17040 58869. St Mary's is also known as "The Church on the Green". It is adjacent to Eaton Socon Village Green and the village War Memorial.

The church is Grade II* listed and the churchyard is in the St Neots Conservation Area.

The churchyard was "closed" in the 1990's, which meant that no further burial of bodies was allowed, although interment of ashes still occurs. The responsibility for maintaining the churchyard is primarily that of St Neots Town Council, although the congregation is also involved.

In 2020 a small "Creation Care" Group (CCG) was formed under the aegis of St Mary's Parochial Church Council (PCC) to draft and implement environmental plans for the church and churchyard, among other activities, and is allocated a modest annual budget.

THE CHURCHYARD AND ITS FUNCTIONS

The churchyard serves several functions:

- An historical burial place
- A place for interment of ashes
- A place to remember those who died
- A place to sit on its many public benches
- Public walkway - it contains busy public footpaths
- A place for wildlife conservation
- The setting for the church buildings



PURPOSES OF THE CHURCHYARD MANAGEMENT PLAN

1. The main purpose of this plan is to bring together in one document the various strands of work that are being carried out both now and those that are planned for the coming months.
2. This vision can then be shared with stakeholders, who include – the church congregation and leadership; the Council; the local community; the local Wildlife Trust.
3. It serves as a basis for annual reviews of work completed and for planning the following year.

KEY MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

- All work should be done in a manner sensitive to the sacred nature of the area and to users of the space
- Whenever possible, new trees, shrubs and plants should be native species
- The “carbon footprint” of every activity should be minimised
- The use of chemicals should be avoided or minimised
- Clear signage should be used to explain to the public what we are trying to achieve
- Management principles should be sympathetic to wildlife whenever possible

GOVERNANCE

Once the churchyard was “closed”, responsibility for its maintenance was devolved to St Neots Town Council. The Council needs to apply for authorisation from St Albans Anglican Diocese via the church PCC to authorise any works in the churchyard such as installation of benches or planting of trees. The good relationship between the church and the Council is key to managing the churchyard. We believe that church and Council can continue to cooperate in a productive way in the future over the proposals in this plan.

The Creation Care Group (CCG) maintains this document under the authority of the PCC. The PCC approved the plan on 20th May 2021 and will review it in April/May 2022.

The church insurance policy covers the work of volunteers in the churchyard when on an authorised church activity.

SURVEYS

Other than some data in the National Biodiversity Network online Atlas, which lists wild plants from a survey in 1999, and mosses in 1991, we have little data on the current flora and fauna within our churchyard. The Bedford/Cambridgeshire/Northamptonshire Wildlife Trust (BCN) hopes to put us in touch with a botanist to survey wild flowers later in the year.

We participated in the RSPB Big Garden Bird Watch in January 2021 – see table.

We are registered with “Churches Count on Nature” 5th – 13th June 2021.

Species observed January 29th – 31st	
Black Cap	1
Chaffinch	2
Coal Tit	1
Collared dove	2
Carrion crow	2
Dunnock	1
Goldfinch	10
Great tit	2
House sparrow	2
Magpie	3
Robin	1
Wood pigeon	4
Species seen	12
Total birds seen	31

MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR EACH ELEMENT

Grassland

Most of the churchyard is covered in grass. For at least the last decade, all the grass has been mown frequently during the growing season with a mulching mower so that cuttings were left in the grass. Having taken advice, particularly from Diana Cook of BCN Wildlife Trust, the Council and the CCG have agreed to four mowing regimes in four areas of the churchyard to favour the growth of wild flowers – see Appendix 1. These are:

- **Wild Area** - this will be mown once every three years if at all. The area was covered with membrane followed by bark chippings about 5 years ago. Our plan is to remove most if not all the membrane and allow the area to re-wild
- **Cut area** - this will be regularly mown during the growing season and cuttings removed each time. In the longer-term the church leadership hopes to convert part of area "A" into a multi-purpose grass area for outdoor gatherings and events
- **Spring Meadow** - this will be mown (cuttings removed each time) at the end of May, (to allow seeds to drop), then several times until a final one in late Autumn
- **Summer Meadow** - this will be cut in March and in late Autumn (cuttings removed both times)



The result of this mowing regime, particularly the benefit to wild flowers, will be assessed during the year.

Some shaded areas have been overtaken by ivy. This provides shelter and food for wildlife, and need not be discouraged unless it is causing damage, or distress to the owners of affected graves.

Paths

There are two tarmac surfaced public paths within the churchyard, both of which can be quite busy with pedestrians and cyclists. An adjoining strip (about 0.5m) of grass will be regularly mowed to keep the paths tidier.

In addition there are several paths across the meadows, which will be cut regularly (cuttings removed), to a width of about 1m – see Appendix 1. If necessary, further paths may be mown, for example to access tended graves.



Trees

The churchyard is within a conservation area, so permission must be obtained from the Council for work on any tree whose trunk is more than 75mm diameter at 1.5m from the ground. The Council is responsible for a quinquennial inspection, remedial action and

replanting as and when required. Whenever possible native species are used for new planting – see Appendix 2.

A dead tree near to the proposed Quiet Area will be removed soon. This will be replaced by an ornamental cherry tree (possibly to be used by the church as a “prayer tree”), although repositioned about 3 m. closer to the boundary.

In the medium term, the Council are planning works on the large horse chestnut trees along the boundary with School Lane. An application (20/02581/TRCA) has been made for major reductions of two of these trees.

Hedges

There are laurel and beech hedges belonging to neighbours along part of the northern boundary of the churchyard. There is also a mixed hedge, largely covered in ivy, along part of the eastern boundary, separating it from the adjacent road. The Council are responsible for trimming all these hedges on the churchyard side.



In 2020 the CCG suggested a new hedge in front of the bare brick wall, which is part of the northern boundary. In February 2021 the Town Council planted “whips” of various native species including hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel and field maple. As it matures this hedge may be ‘layered’ to improve ground-level cover for wildlife, and will be kept to a readily maintainable height around 1.6m.

Also in February 2021, the Town Council planted a crescent-shaped yew hedge in preparation for the planned “Quiet Area” – see below under “seating”.

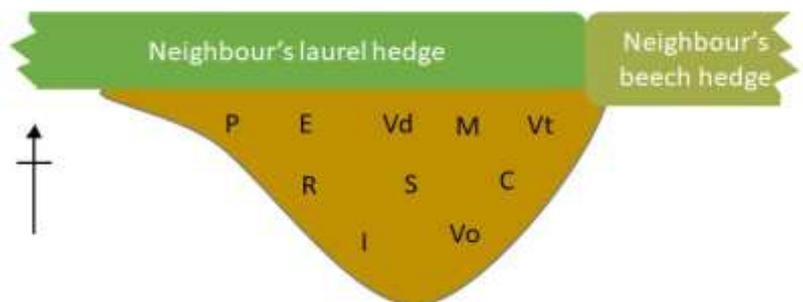


Both of the hedges within the churchyard will be trimmed when necessary to maintain a ‘natural’ rather than artificially-shaped appearance.

Flower Beds

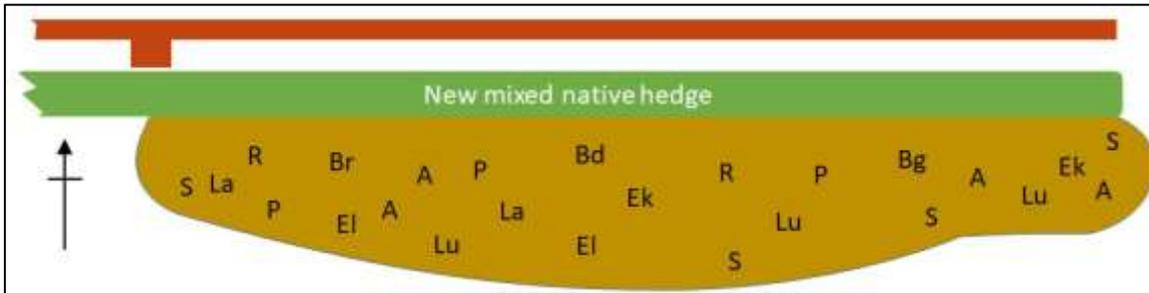
There are already several beds with various species, including Lavender, Rosemary, Sage and Thyme. During 2021 they have been numbered and many of the plants identified; the list is available at www.eatonsocon.org/churchyard. People are being recruited to help keep them tidy.

In early 2021 the CCG created, with assistance from the Council and community volunteers, two new beds. The “fruit” bed, which was previously an untidy copse of heavily-cut-back trees, aims to provide birds with berries and fruit, (see Appendix 3).



St Mary's Church, Eaton Socon

The second larger new "wildlife" bed was planted in late March 2021 directly in front of the new native hedge. This will provide pollen for insects and be attractive for people to enjoy when seated in the circle of remembrance (see Appendix 3).



Gardens of Remembrance

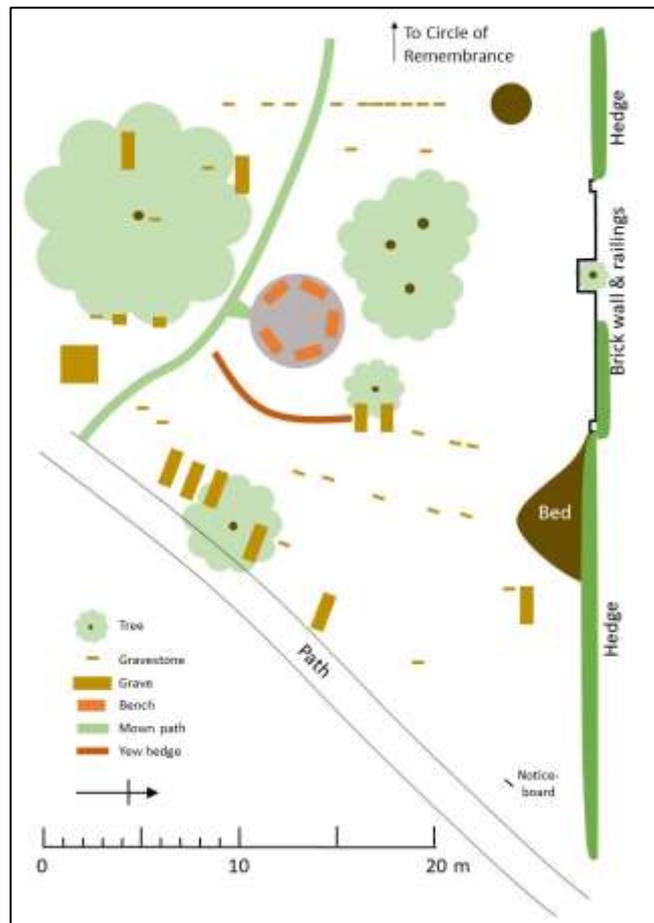
The churchyard, although "closed", still has interment of ashes. Currently there are two areas - a rectangular section adjoining the east side of the church building, which is now "full". This is gravelled between plots. The larger Circle of Remembrance is a grassed area, regularly mown, with five concrete plinths for benches around one aspect, which have benches in memoriam. The public are encouraged to leave fresh flowers in vases on their loved one's plot. It is estimated that the circle will become "full" within three years. A new area within the churchyard is currently being explored.

Seating

There are nine park benches for public use within the churchyard:

- 5, at the circle of remembrance
- 2 along the public paths and 2 close to the church building

The PCC has agreed a CCG proposal for a new "Quiet Area", comprising a 5m diameter circular paved area on which 5 benches will be placed in a circle, thus creating an outdoor seating area for individuals and groups from the community and the church. The Council will provide and maintain a litterbin in the vicinity. The recently planted yew hedge will be kept at about 1.2-1.5m in height so as to provide some visual separation, but not total privacy, from the public path. It is hoped this project will begin later in 2021.



Water

Currently there is an external tap near the circle of remembrance plus three watering cans for public use. A water butt fed by rainwater from a church hall roof down-pipe close to the circle of remembrance to the right of the hall double exit doors was installed in late March 2021. Alongside is now a robust box to store the metal vases used in the circle.

One or more shallow water containers will be added to the current single one at suitable positions in the churchyard for the use of mammals and birds.

Tombstones

A full list of these is available from the vicar. The Council is responsible for checking them from a safety point of view and taking any remedial action as needed - see 4.

A total of five are identified as Commonwealth War Graves. These have additional modern plaques. A map attached to the metal railings near the car park shows their positions. Particular attention will be paid to their upkeep and access.

Many tombstones provide a good habitat for lichens, but these have not been catalogued.

Walls and fences

Most of the south and west boundaries are defined by a low brick and stone wall covered in ivy. Some of the ivy has been trimmed back from time to time, but this can be left to provide food and shelter for birds and mammals so long as it is not damaging the wall.

There is wooden fencing along parts of the northern and eastern boundaries. Ivy is climbing some of the northern boundary fencing, but must be controlled before it damages the fence.

Birds

Many common species are to be seen and heard in the churchyard, no doubt attracted by the large number of mature trees. There is a bird feeder near the church porch. At the end of 2020, the CCG installed five nesting boxes – for robin, sparrow, blue tit, great tit and owl. These will be monitored during the spring and summer and cleaned in the autumn. Members of the church took part in the RSPB “Big Garden Bird Watch” in the churchyard in January 2021 – see above. This will be an annual event in the churchyard. We are interested in the possibility of installing swift boxes in the church tower – this has been done successfully in St Mary's Church St Neots. However, there are significant works planned on the external fabric of the tower in the next year or two, so swift boxes will be considered after these have been carried out.



Mammals

Little is known about mammals in the churchyard. We plan to use a "trail cam" to survey them. In the autumn of 2021 the CCG is planning to site a hedgehog house in a suitable quiet place in the wild area.

Compost Heap, Log Piles, Bug Hotel

The CCG plans to construct a compost heap frame out of old wooden pallets, in a secluded part of the wild area. Adjacent to this will be log piles, which will serve as refuges for small mammals etc. There will also be a "bug hotel" in the area made partly from old pallets and dead wood from trees.



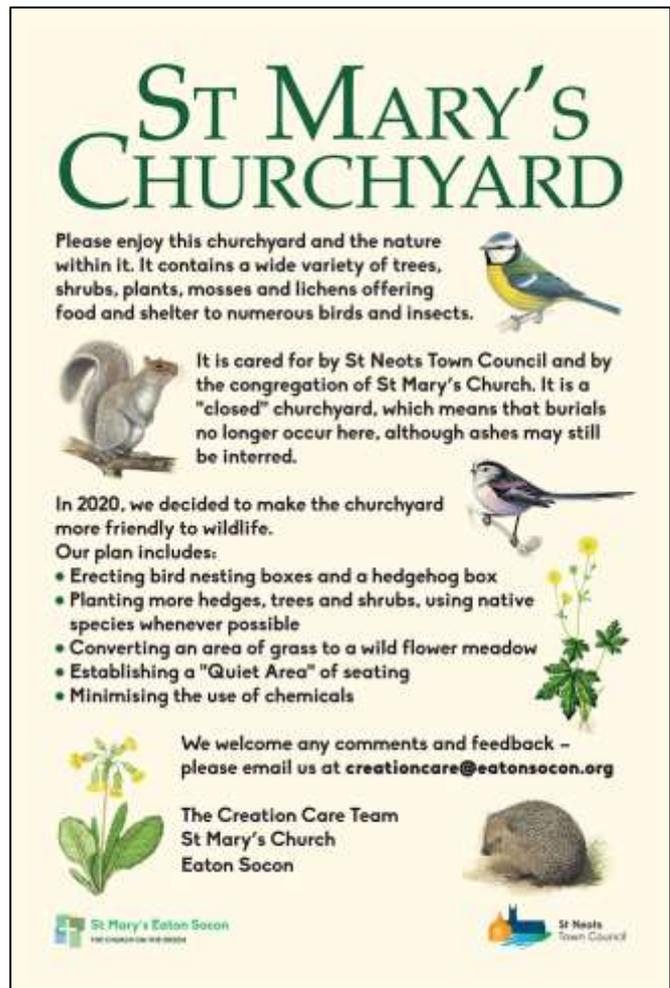
COMMUNICATION

With the public

It is vital to explain to passing people what is happening to the churchyard and the underlying reasons for changes. This hopefully may interest and inform, as well as reduce misunderstanding, particularly if people see long grass and conclude wrongly that the churchyard is being neglected. The CCG has already changed the sign in the large notice board near the path at the north end of the churchyard, to reflect our current plans (the previous sign was about 20 years old). Comments are welcomed via the CCG's email address, which is displayed. Several smaller signs were installed in May 2021 to interpret the management of various aspects of the churchyard, including the different meadows. We may post articles about the churchyard in the local village magazine, ESCAN.

With the Congregation

The CCG has permission to display an overall plan and interpretation on a noticeboard inside the church entrance hall. When the church is open, members of the public will also be able to access these. The congregation has the CCG's email. From time-to-time during Sunday services and in the vicar's regular communications, the congregation will be informed about work in the churchyard. This management plan will be published on the CCG part of the church website, as well as occasional articles of specific interest.



RESOURCES

The church is indebted to the Council for the essential work they perform during the year and for their cooperation on maintenance and development of the churchyard. The church organises a number of "Ground Force" working parties during the year, usually on a Saturday morning. A few members of the local community also join in. Activities include weeding, clearing up, planting etc. A small number of local people also spend some of their own time tending to the flower beds, which is much appreciated. The PCC funds some development work in the churchyard via the CCG budget, and manages donations by families of people buried in the churchyard to enable memorial benches to be provided.

AWARD SCHEMES

EcoChurch - this scheme for churches in England and Wales is run by the Christian environmental charity A Rocha UK (part of the A Rocha International organisation). We are currently working towards the bronze level award. The system uses an online tool in five sections, one of which is, "Management of Church Land".

Cambridgeshire Churchyard Conservation Award Scheme - this also has bronze, silver and gold awards. It is hoped to engage with this scheme at the bronze level during 2021. The BCN Wildlife Trust run the scheme.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The CCG is grateful to:

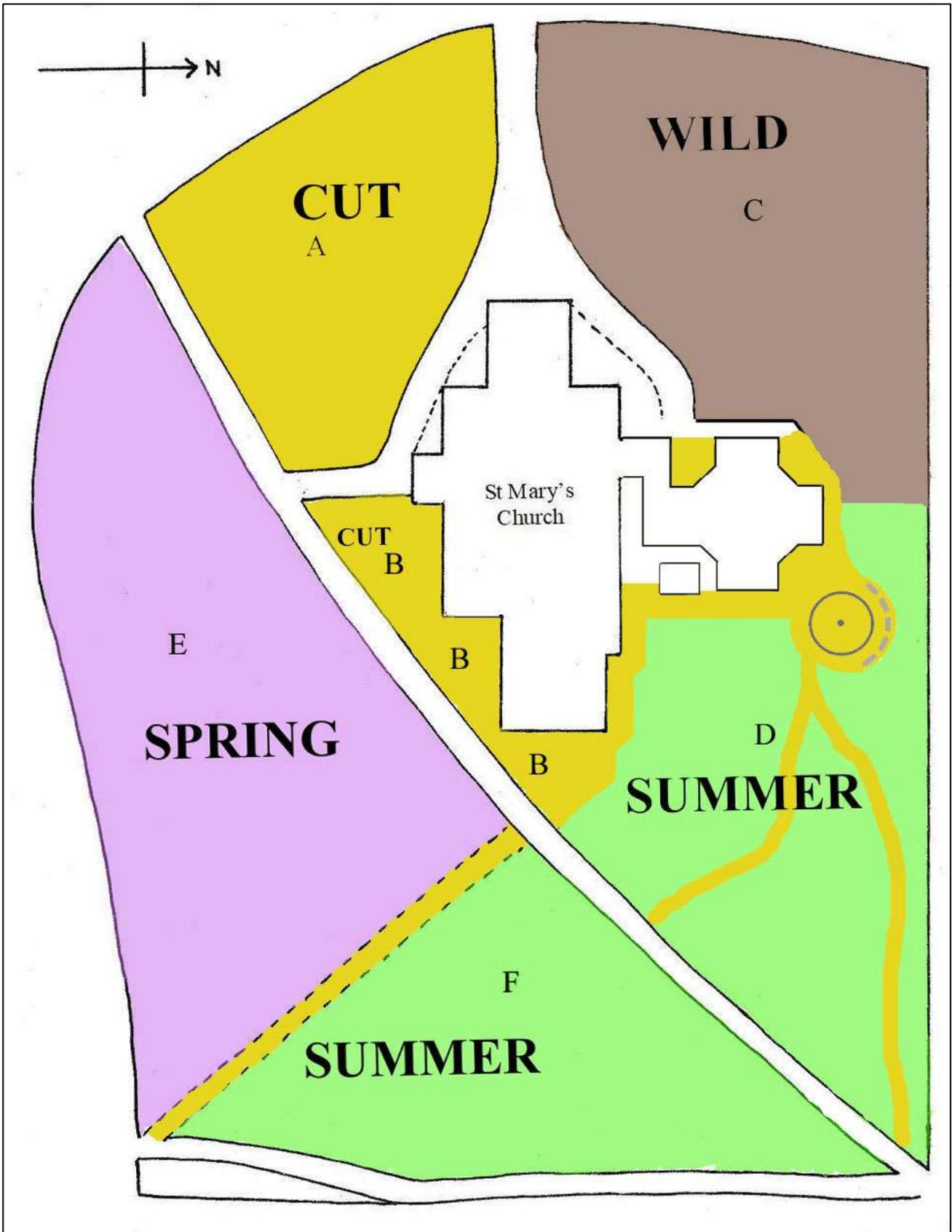
- The Vicar, the PCC and the congregation for support and willingness to embrace changes to the churchyard
- The Council for its hard work during the year in caring for the churchyard and also for willingness to change their ways of working and cooperating in a very positive manner
- The local community which volunteers to help and generally treats the churchyard with respect
- BCN Wildlife Trust for its helpful website, and especially Diana Cook for her advice and encouragement
- Caring For God's Acre – for the excellent information on its website
- Google Earth for the satellite photo of the churchyard

Creation Care Group
St Mary's Church Eaton Socon

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May 2021

APPENDIX 1: MOWING REGIME



APPENDIX 2: MAP SHOWING TREES IN THE CHURCHYARD

(Awaited)

APPENDIX 3: NEW FLOWER BED INVENTORIES

Fruit Bed

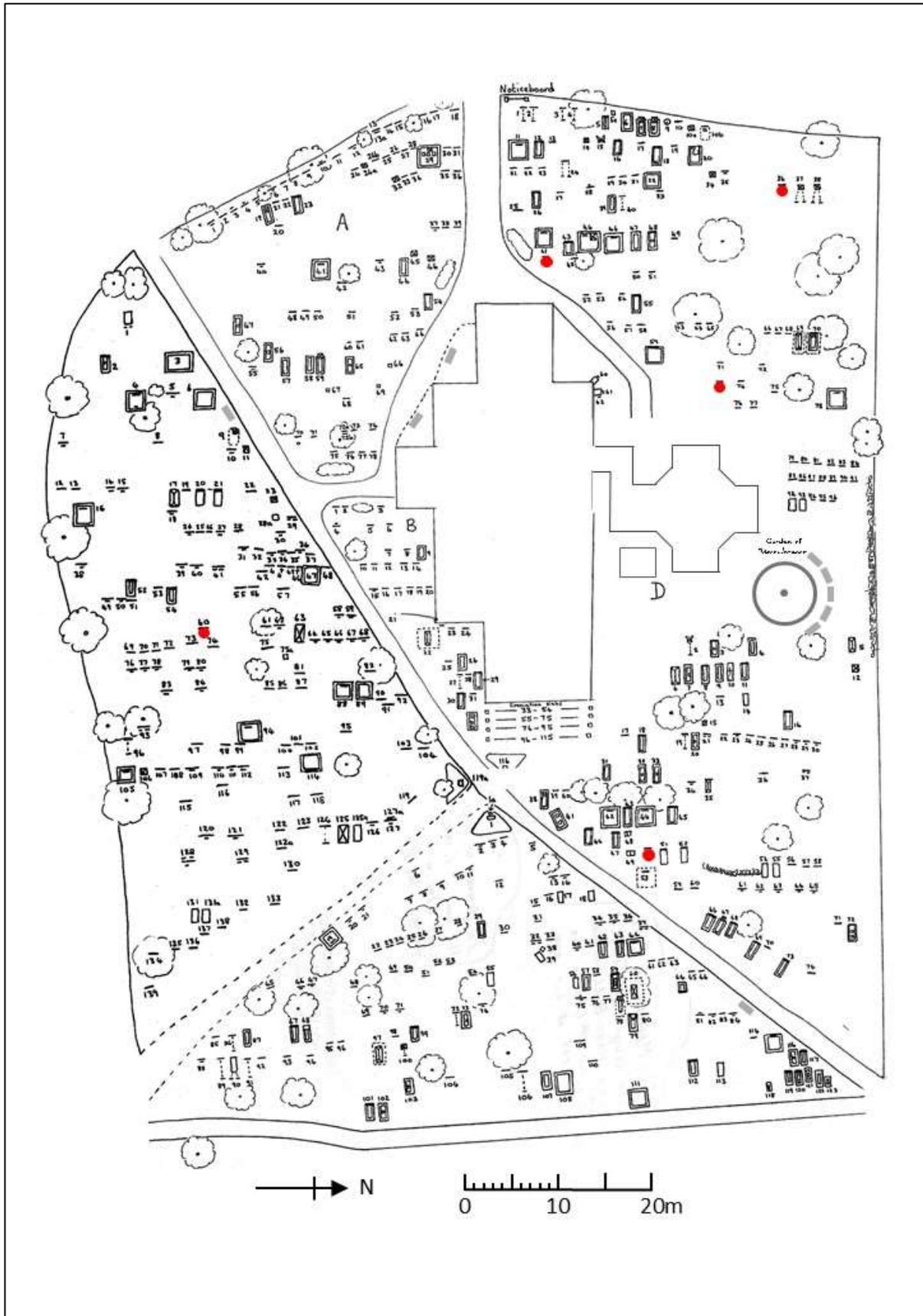
C	Cornus Alba Elegantissima (Dogwood)
E	Escallonia Apple Blossom
I	Ilex Ripley Gold (Holly)
M	Mahonia Sinensis
P	Pyracantha Saphyr Cadrou Red (Firethorn)
R	Ribes Rubrum (Whitecurrant)
S	Sambucus Serenade (Elderberry)
Vd	Viburnum Davidii ??
Vo	Viburnum Opulus Roseum (Red guelder rose, Snowball)
Vt	Viburnum Tinus Eve Price ??(Laurustinus)

Wildlife Bed

A	Allium hollandicum – Purple Sensation
Bd	Buddleja davidii
Bg	Buddleja globosa – Orange-ball-tree
Br	Buddleja davidii – Royal Red
Ek	Erigeron karvinskianus (Mexican Fleabane)
El	Erigeron karvinskianus – Lavender Lady (Mexican Fleabane)
La	Lavandula stoechas – Regal Splendour (French Lavender)
Lu	Lupinus – Gallery Red (Lupin)
P	Papaver orientale – Brilliant (Oriental Poppy)
R	Salvia rosmarinus (Rosemary)
S	Sedum (Stonecrop)

APPENDIX 4; POSITION OF BUILDINGS, TOMBSTONES AND TREES ETC

War graves marked by red dots.



APPENDIX 5: ACTION PLAN FOR 2021

When	Item	By Whom
March - October	Mowing of meadows according to new regime	Council
March - October	Mowing of grass alongside tarmac paths	Council
March - October	Mowing of grass paths - see Appendix 1	Council
March/April	Removal of dead tree and replacement by a cherry tree	Council
March/April	Provide one or more shallow water containers for wildlife	CCG
March/April	Shred large pile of branches etc	Council
May/June	Removal of most/all of the membrane in the wild area	CCG/Ground Force sessions
April/May	Construct Compost Heap, Log piles, bug hotel	CCG/volunteers /Ground Force
April/May/June	Produce and install signage for the public	CCG/volunteers
May	Produce churchyard map and interpretation to be displayed in the church entrance hall	CCG (RP)
5-13 th June	Churches Count on Nature Survey	CCG (RP)
September	Inspect and clean nesting boxes	CCG
Later in 2021	Quiet Area – lay foundations and paving, and later – install benches	PCC to organise
Later in 2021	Quiet Area – install litter bin	Council
?	Use trail cam to survey wildlife	CCG (JF)
?	Maintenance work on trees	Council
?	Explore the possibility of a new glazed notice board fixed to the external wall of the church hall near the new water butt, in which could be displayed a map of the churchyard and associated interpretation.	CCG/PCC