

ENCOURAGING USE OF THE CHURCH LAND



LAND

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AN A ROCHA UK PROJECT



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Use of the church land

WHY?

Our outdoor spaces can say as much about our view of God and our worship of him as our Sunday services do. Those spaces are often used during the week by people, who may or may not come to church on a Sunday and since the start of the pandemic they have become extra important as places for relaxation, contemplation, prayer, or to connect with friends.

Our churches are all different, for example some in the middle of a town, will be used by passers-by for lunch whilst some in rural areas are primarily visited by those coming to graves. Some are modern buildings with little space around them whilst others again will have space to give priority both to cultivated flowers which look attractive, and also to wildlife.

Whatever the context of our building, with a little creativity we can use these spaces to point people to Christ.

HOW?

Probably the best way to encourage the use of your church land is to first think about the needs of the local community and church members:

- Do people need space away from the busyness of daily life, or perhaps an area to connect with one another, or maybe somewhere for children to run around?
- Do you have space for a nature trail or a guided walk to draw people into God's presence?
- Could you draw the community together through growing fruit and vegetables?



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We profile some churches in very different situations, to show why and what they have done:

A RESTFUL SPACE FOR PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.' Mark 6:31

Following Jesus' practice of withdrawing to quiet places, the 'Quiet Garden Movement' nurtures access to outdoor space for prayer and reflection: <https://quietgarden.org/> Perhaps your church might host such a space?

Holy Trinity, Margate wanted to create just such a Christ-centred, restful space to offset the impact of two new housing estates in their parish, mitigating the impact on both people and wildlife. They started the project on their land, just before the 2020 Covid lockdown. It has proven a great place for people to rest and enjoy nature, boosting their physical and mental well-being. Their hope is that through this project Christ is glorified, and that God's presence is tangible to all who spend time in the grounds of the church. See the separate case study paper.

HELPING KEEP THE TOWN CENTRE ALIVE

Sitting in the middle of Rugby, the grounds around St Andrew's Church are some of the few green spaces in the town centre. Whilst owned by the church, the Borough Council are responsible for their upkeep. Having attractive green spaces are important to encourage people to keep visiting the town for shopping and leisure. Working with the council, St Andrew's Church is rejuvenating much of the space, installing practical and attractive features such as a water refill fountain, a solar powered charging bench, a memorial garden and a public art piece: <https://www.standrewrugby.org.uk/garden-project>

A WALK AROUND THE GROUNDS

St Mary's Mildenhall were frustrated about having to keep the church closed due to vandalism, so created two outdoor trails to encourage people to use the grounds instead. One focuses on the church building and one on the wildlife to be found.



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A WALK AROUND THE COMMUNITY

All Hallows in Leeds has direct access to community land around the churchyard and has created a walk which highlights the plants and wildlife likely to be encountered en route: <https://www.bardseyekparish.com/the-glade>

welcome to ALL HALLOWS Glade

This area next to the historic church of All Hallows, is being cared for by volunteers to provide a relaxing green space for local people and wildlife. We have developed a lovely wildlife walk which takes you through the wooded area and to the banks of the Gill Beck (glade take care next to the water). Or you may just choose to take a seat and enjoy the peace and tranquillity.

This board shows some of the wildlife you might see in the glade.

Holly
Mature holly trees can grow up to 15m and live for 300 years. Younger plants have spiky leaves, but the leaves of older trees are much more likely to be smooth.

Comma butterfly

Peacock butterfly

Red campion
The vibrant pink flowers of the red campion brighten up our meadow throughout the spring and summer.

Guelder rose
The flat-topped flowers of this shrub appear in May so late. Each lacecap-like cluster of flowers is encircled by a ring of larger flowers.

Kingfisher
Gill Beck provides a wonderful watery habitat for a whole range of wildlife. Please take care near the water's edge.

Ranunculus
Ranunculus or Wild garlic has a wonderful pungent smell in spring and summer.

Wood anemone
One of the first flowers of spring, wood anemones bloom like a galaxy of stars across the woodland floor.

Wild strawberry
This striking looking plant is also known by various other names, including Lovers and Ladies and Jack in the pulpit.

Bullfinch
This woodland bird has distinctive colour differences between the male and female. The flesh of the rump is light and piping whistled call are usually the first signs of bullfinches being present.

Black kite
Following an increase in the 1990s, numbers of this large bird of prey are now increasing. They can be regularly seen over the glade.

Goldfinch on fence
This outgoing little bird can often be seen on the fence which grows in the wild area.

Long tailed tit
This tiny little bird is longer than in body. They are often seen in small exclusive groups and are master nest builders, building elastic nests which grow with the size of the chicks.

Jawny Owl
This kind of owl is usually nocturnal, it mainly hunts rodents, usually by dropping from a perch to seize its prey, which it swallows whole.

Great spotted woodpecker
Mature, broadleaved trees such as in the glade, provide the perfect habitat for this striking bird. It is often heard before it is seen, drumming on dead wood.

Jay
This noisy, colourful member of the crow family is actually very shy, often travelling far from its native woodland.

THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND
Diocese of Leeds

Funding for the development of ALL Hallows Glade was provided by: Regency Bank, Halifax, Malvern.



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THERAPEUTIC AND TRAINING GARDENS

Two churches have turned their grounds into more formal ministries of the church:

St Mary's Church in Lewisham sits next door to 'The Ladywell' – a mental health unit. Seeing the needs of the patients, the church asked the Ladywell team how they could help. The response was "Gardening". The church designed a garden to help patients feel safe, to encourage their recovery and to provide space for regular therapy sessions. The website includes a clip from 'Gardeners' World' when St Mary's Therapeutic Garden was profiled: <https://www.lewishamparish.com/garden>

St. Peter's Community Garden and Hall (Gardd a Neuadd Cymunedol Pedr Sant), in Cardiff decided to turn a large area of wasteland behind the church hall into a community garden. Clearing took much longer than expected, with much of the space resembling a landfill! Over the course of five years, a fabulous space has been created including raised beds, an orchard, a pond and a wildflower meadow. The area now hosts a gardening club to teach skills and support vulnerable adults, helping them to build confidence and self-esteem: <https://www.stpeterscommunitygarden.org.uk/>

LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

Gardens and land can be used to inspire and challenge as shown by these two works from the RHS Flower Shows in 2021:

- The Bible Society commissioned Sarah Eberle to design a garden based on Psalm 23 for the Chelsea Flower Show. You can find out more about the garden, including useful tips of how to design your own community space here: <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/psalm-23/>
- 'Extinction' is a more dramatic garden, confronting people with the possibility of a 6th mass extinction from our continual exploitation of the planet: <https://www.felicityorourkegardendesign.com/rhs-global-impact-garden-extinction>



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STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Taking action on this topic will contribute to these UN Strategic Development Goals:

