

CREATING A MANAGEMENT PLAN

LAND

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AN A ROCHA UK PROJECT



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WHY?

Churchyards and other open spaces have a unique place in society, as they are often focal points in our communities. Many people feel at home in church grounds even if they are not congregation members. People come for a variety of reasons, whether to celebrate weddings, eat their lunch, remember loved ones, tend graves or simply enjoy some peace and quiet.

As noted in our native wildflower and grassland management papers, churchyards are often valuable habitats with a wide range of grasses, wildflowers and a variety of wildlife living. As Christians, we have both the opportunity and the responsibility to care for the benefit of heritage, wildlife and people. To balance the needs of these three, a management plan helps give a framework to communicate the reasons for what is happening in the church grounds.

HOW?

Caring for God's Acre produces an excellent range of resources to help you produce a management plan ensuring support from congregation and community: <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/resources/action-pack/section-a-managing-churchyards-burial-grounds/>

This is a much-distilled version of the process they suggest:

Firstly, gather information. It's helpful to research heritage and environmental information that is already available about the site.

HERITAGE

- You may be able to get advice from your local authority, for example about conservation areas.
- To discover if you have scheduled monuments or other listed built heritage go to the relevant database for your country:
<https://historicengland.org.uk/>



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<https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/>

<https://cadw.gov.wales/advice-support/historic-assets>

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/historic-buildings-and-monuments>

- If your church is a Church of England you will almost certainly have some information available already, whether in a previous faculty application, a terrier or a church 'history book'. So track down the person who knows! You can also view the Church Heritage Record: <https://facultyonline.churchofengland.org/churches>

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

Different bodies have collected information over the decades where you may be able to find information. The National Biodiversity Network (NBN) is a collaborative partnership created to exchange biodiversity information. The NBN atlas helps you find out about wildlife which has already been seen in your area: <https://nbnatlas.org/>

Caring for God's Acre encourages churches to contribute to a subsection of the atlas particularly focused on burial grounds: <https://burialgrounds.nbnatlas.org/>

If your churchyard is a particularly valuable habitat, it may have been given a special designation. It might be an SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest), or a 'Local Wildlife Site'. Many local Wildlife Trust groups have a focus on churchyards and will be able to help you find out if any designations apply to you: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/local-wildlife-sites>

LOCAL PEOPLE

Often people in the local community or congregation will already be familiar with the space and will be able to tell you about plants or wildlife known to frequent the churchyard. They will be great people to enlist on a team working out a management plan. It's also worth assessing how people currently use the churchyard, so that they can be kept involved and informed about any changes.



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Secondly, 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.

Thirdly, 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/advisor-network/>

Fourthly, 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.



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LONGER READS & OTHER RESOURCES

The National Biodiversity Network also suggest other tools and resources:

<https://nbn.org.uk/tools-and-resources/useful-websites/>

In June 2021, A Rocha UK, Caring for God's Acre and the Church of England worked in partnership to hold a week called 'Churches Count on Nature'. Below are links to three webinars relevant to management plants which are applicable to all denominations:

- 5 steps to good management of your churchyard (skip to 6.40min):
https://youtu.be/r3_Uxyrjgy8
- Biological recording and the Beautiful Burial Ground Project:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HqjWqdBAXGY>
- Blooming and Beautiful – Flower rich grasslands:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U2UJNtIjHxo>

The full list of recordings is here:

<https://www.churchofengland.org/about/environment-and-climate-change/recordings-webinars-land-and-nature-churches-count-nature>

BOOKS

The Churchyards Handbook, Church House Publishing, 2012: <https://www.chpublishing.co.uk/books/9780715143018/the-churchyards-handbook>

The Nature of God's Acre, by Miles King and Mark Beston, 2014, explores the relationship between the spiritual and natural value of churchyards: <https://www.nhbs.com/the-nature-of-gods-acre-book>



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CASE STUDIES

The Diocese of St Albans is one of many dioceses which actively encourages their churches to participate in Eco Church. Here they profile two of the management plans created:

<https://www.stalbans.anglican.org/faith/living-churchyards/>

Eaton Socon in Cambridgeshire, have a dedicated churchyard page on their website including the churchyard management plan, map and plant inventory:

<https://www.eatonsocon.org/churchyard/>