

The Church of St Laurence, East Harptree

Churchyard Management and Maintenance Plan 2024 -2025



East Harptree Environment Group

Version 2 January 2024

(after completion of Project Newton building work.)

The Church of St Laurence, East Harptree

Churchyard Management and Maintenance Plan 2024 – 2025

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 proposed Chew Valley South Benefice, which incorporates 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 interment of ashes in an area marked by stones opposite the south porch. The site is within the village conservation area, The Mendip Hills Natural Landscape (previously Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) 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 and North- East Somerset, BANES) in 1989. The Cemeteries Department of BANES provide funds for a local contractor to cut the grass and hedge, arrange for major tree works after routine inspections, and for the repair of the walls as necessary. The contact is:

Liz Williams, Assistant Bereavement Manager, Cemeteries (Monday – Wednesday and Friday 8.00am – 4.00pm)

Bereavement Services

Neighbourhood Environmental Services

Bath and North- East Somerset Council

Haycombe Cemetery and Crematorium

Whiteway Road, Bath, BA2 2RQ

Telephone: 01225 396020 Facsimile: 01225 394362 Email: liz_williams@bathnes.gov.uk

www.bathnes.gov.uk

Liz reports to Vincent Young AICCM - Bereavement Manager

Email: vincent_young@bathnes.gov.uk

Phone: 01225 396021 Mobile: 07970 946521

Tree safety surveys are managed by Denise Hart BSc - Tree Manager

Parks and Greenspaces Team

Bath & North East Somerset Council

Telephone: 01225 3968698 Email: denise_hart@bathnes.gov.uk

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 chris.billingham@btinternet.com or 01761 221579.

Project Newton

Project Newton (PN) involved urgent repairs to the Grade 2* listed church, and at the same time improving inclusive access and creating a heritage exhibition area. It also included 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. 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. The main building works were completed in Spring 2023 and included the installation of swift boxes and bat housing within the church fabric, as well as certain aspects of the planned planting.

This version of the management plan describes the ongoing management of the churchyard following the completion of the main PN building works and now includes the footpath.

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 joint initiative, "Wilder Churches" between the Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Bath & Wells Diocese Eco Church South West group. [Wilder Churches | Somerset Wildlife Trust](#) Training courses for volunteers involved with churchyard management can be found on the Wilder Churches website.

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 and in 2022/3 an invertebrate survey was completed by J & J Boyd. 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. In the areas planted as a garden (coloured pink in the map on page 5) suitable garden plants that meet the criteria in 1.2 can be used.
 - 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 season”.
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 six 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 the 50 mark (on the available mower) for the Memorial Garden and all cuttings removed to the compost heap. Grass paths through the churchyard, and for the recreation area (compartment 6) are cut with the mower set at 60. These areas may contain plants that flower close to the ground such as self-heal and the short sward attracts ground-feeding birds.
2. **Grassland containing spring bulbs**, is cut with a strimmer and mower when all foliage has died back in summer. It may contain plants such as violets, primroses, daisies, selfheal, clover and bird’s foot trefoil as well as bulbs; a medium cut will allow these plants to flower and attract bees and other insects as well as small mammals and slow worms.
3. **Areas seeded with meadow mix in 2023** These are maintained according to the instruction on the Boston Seeds BS12M, 80/20 Low growing wildflower meadow maintenance instructions. This is a 10cm high cut in March and in September / October with a reciprocating bar mower. Autumn cuttings are left for a week, then tossed and turned to allow seeds to fall before the cuttings are removed to the compost heap.

4. **Summer meadow** areas are generally only cut in early autumn when most of the flowers have set seed. They are cut with a strimmer or reciprocating bar mower and the cuttings are left for a week, then tossed and turned and raked off and removed to the compost heap. This method 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 has been 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.
5. **Permanent long and tussocky grass** strips are maintained along the east and south boundary walls and along part of the retaining wall along the south path. They provide over-wintering habitat for many butterfly, moth, and other invertebrate species as well as shelter for many other animals that nest or hibernate in the tussocks. They are cut high in September, each section in rotation, every other year.
6. **Sparse grass / ivy / bare ground areas** under trees and round graves are cut as needed with the mower set high or a strimmer.

The plan showing the grass cutting regime for each area is shown below.



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 T1 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. A crab apple replaces the flowering cherry, T23, removed during building works. T18, a crab apple, regrew after felling and stump treatment and is now a multi-stemmed coppice.

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



BANES Cemeteries Department are responsible for arranging 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. **Note:** *At St Laurence the north hedge is cut by the local contractor employed by the churchwardens in late summer, as it is mainly evergreen species, avoiding cutting into old wood, avoiding removing flowering ivy and removing brambles before cutting. Minor maintenance to shrubs is also completed by the local contractor, and BANES staff agree not to complete any other maintenance without prior notice.*
- 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) **Note:** *At St Laurence BANES staff agree that the local contractor can remove minor dead, or overhanging branches with a hand saw, if necessary. The churchyard is in a conservation area so most tree work requires planning permission. The BANES Tree Officer is aware that the school use the grass area below the yew tree and take this into account in their inspection regime.*

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 tear-shaped stone planter bed next to the footpath steps, and the planted borders along the top of the retaining wall as far as the steps up to the grassland. Notices on Notice board.
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, the stone planter, and the retaining wall along the path to the south porch.
4. **The Memorial Garden** The trees and planting around the interment 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 interment area. This includes spring bulbs along the southern edge.
5. **West** The planted bulbs, 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. Its boundary to the east is the grass path reinforced with mesh.
7. **North** The area between compartments 6 and 1, including the footpath, the north hedge and hedge bank.

A plan of the compartments is shown on page 6.

Compartment 1 – Entrance

Description

The churchyard entrance has been remodelled, as part of PN, to make the path into the church more accessible. A stone planter (for herbaceous plants) and a seat has been built where the levels change. A planted herbaceous border has been created along the top of the reconstructed retaining wall on the south

side and extends as far as the 2 new steps. On the north side the compartment is the area around tree T1. The compartment includes notices about the churchyard in the noticeboard just outside the gate.

Management Objectives

To create an attractive and welcoming entrance to the churchyard, including seasonal information notices in the church notice board by the entrance.

Prescriptions

1. Plant and maintain drought resistant, minimum maintenance, flowering, and where possible scented, species in the stone planter.
2. Maintain the herbaceous border above the retaining wall by planting low growing herbaceous plants that meet the requirements of Principle 1. e.g. spring bulbs, primroses, violets, cyclamen etc.
3. Maintain the prostrate cotoneaster on the bank below the pear tree.
4. Update the churchyard information notices on the notice board each season. (appendix 2)

Compartment 2 – South

Description

This large area includes the area seeded with a Boston seed mix in 2023, and two oval summer meadow areas established in 2019 and 2020. The summer meadow area around trees T20 and T21 contains many snowdrops in the grass. The area along the east and south walls is planted with daffodils in the grass, especially along the east wall and round trees T 19 and T22. A crab apple tree *Malus* “Evereste” was planted to replace the flowering cherry T23 lost in the building work.

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 appropriate seed and plug plants of meadow flowers such as yellow rattle within it. To maintain the margins of the compartment as tussocky grass, and to encourage flowering ivy over tree stumps and walls.

Prescriptions

1. Cut the grass as shown in the grassland management section.
2. Enrich the biodiversity of the meadow areas by planting appropriate species using plug plants and seed, in spring and in the autumn after cutting the long grass areas.
3. Remove, as necessary suckers from the thorn trees T20 and T21 while they are dormant and suckers in the planted meadow and paths from the common dogwood T22.
4. Lightly trim branches that encroach on the path from the *Pyracantha* between May and July.
5. Cut back Red Valerian along the retaining wall once it has finished flowering and seeding.
6. Cut back brambles that encroach on the meadow areas.

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,

marjoram, greater periwinkle and creeping jenny in the retaining wall. It includes the small planter containing culinary herbs on the edge of the gravel area.

Management Objectives

To maintain the existing grass and plants along the retaining wall so that they provide maximum pollen and nectar for insects. To provide homes for wildlife in the stone retaining wall and the gravel areas. To maintain the scented Mediterranean herbs in the stone planter.

Prescriptions

1. Weed and trim the Mediterranean herbs in the stone planter as required.
2. *Build a free- standing home for solitary bees and site 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, and the plants in the gravel area in autumn.

Compartment 4 – Memorial Garden

Description

This is the area which is dedicated for the interment 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 prostrate rosemary, bulbs and other low growing herbaceous plants, along the top of the retaining wall. Much of the western end of this compartment is heavily shaded by the Indian Bean tree (*Catalpa*) 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. More snowdrops, bluebells and winter aconites were planted “in the green” in spring 2023 along the southern edge. 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. Two stone troughs have been built either side of the steps and contain flower vases to contain cut flower tributes. There is a bat box in the Catalpa.

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 interment area.

To maintain short grass which allows blackbirds and thrushes to feed on invertebrates in the grass.

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, noting the position of the spring bulbs.
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. *Develop the planting in the areas either side of the path leading to the seat with more bulbs and low growing, shade tolerant, scented shrubs. 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 primroses and violets to the grassland between the bulbs to create a woodland effect.
5. Maintain the narrow border along the front of the interment area, replanting as necessary.
6. Maintain the troughs for floral tributes.

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. A habitat pile of branches and twigs from the crab apple felled in 2020 has been created along the wall behind the 3 bay compost heaps. There is a shed in the south -west corner. Snowdrops and bluebells were planted “in the green” in spring 2023 in areas shown on the plan on page 5, under the canopy of trees T12 and T13. There is a stone pile for invertebrates and reptiles behind tree T6, and a log “wall” in front of the compost heaps. There are 2 bird boxes and 3 bat boxes in the trees in this compartment.

Management Objectives

To maintain 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 maintain the bird and bat boxes.

Prescriptions

1. Maintain and rotate the bays in the compost heap. 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. Clean bird boxes in the autumn. *Find someone with a bat licence to monitor bat boxes?*
3. Continue to add new brash and logs to the habitat pile and compost heap dead hedges as they rot down.
4. Add to the 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 steps from the footpath 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 4-6 on grassland and tree management.
2. Maintain the new yew and holly hedge from the north-west corner to the memorial cherry tree.
3. Maintain the dead hedge on the footpath side of 2.

Compartment 7 – North

Description

This is an area dominated by old gravestones in grassland. It includes the evergreen hedge, mainly yew, holly and ivy, and the footpath on the north side of this hedge. It has a population of moles. There are planted daffodils in the grass at the east end, and the hedge bank within the churchyard is being developed as a “primrose bank”. The strip along the path to the north church door was seeded with a Boston seed mix in 2023, following the PN building work.

Management Objectives

To maintain the hedge such that the plants, especially ivy, within it can flower, but without increasing its height too much or so that it blocks the footpath. To maintain the grassland as shown on pages 4 and 5. To develop the primrose bank with primroses and other spring flowers.

Prescriptions

1. Cut the grass as shown in the grassland management section.
2. To lightly trim the hedge on both sides every other year, starting in late summer 2024, but maintaining the flowering ivy.
3. To control bramble and nettle growth along both sides of the hedge.

Church Tower

As part of PN swift boxes have been installed in the tower, and an old flue has been converted to a possible roost site for bats.

Monitoring and Review

Members of the East Harptree Environment Group (EHEG) and other specialists complete 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 2023 and hope to repeat this on an annual basis.

Plant, Fungi, Invertebrate and Bird Recording

Records of these taxa are kept in a spreadsheet which is constantly updated and is available if required from EHEG. J & J Boyd completed a general invertebrate survey with 32 visits in autumn 2022/ spring and summer 2023.

Appendix 1 - Significant Changes from Version 1.

1. Removal of the requirement to plant shrubs in compartment 7 as there is no room, but creation of the primrose bank in their place.
2. Removal of Spirea from compartment 2.
3. Addition of hedge maintenance to the management plan, as approved by BANES staff.
4. Definition of the areas to be maintained as conventional garden.
5. Changes to grassland management based on the limitations of the available equipment, including mower height adjustments, and the need to plant the Boston seed mix where the builders had disturbed the ground.
6. Addition of tussocky grass areas to grassland management.
7. Planting of a large area of donated spring bulbs.
8. Completion of Project Newton objectives:
 - a. Installation of bat and bird boxes
 - b. Trough for floral tributes.
 - c. Planting crab apple tree
 - d. Addition of 2 stone planters.

Appendix 2 – Notice Board (see compartment 1)

