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# Church of St Aeddan's

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## Burial Ground Management Plan

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**Autumn 2022**



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## Introduction

The Church of St Aeddan’s burial ground is a refuge for people and nature. Nestled within a much-modified landscape, it is home to three ancient or veteran yew trees, one of which pre-dates the church; various meadow areas which are already quite species-rich in flora, fauna and fungi and are thought to be of some age; and ‘woodland edge’ Spring meadows which support native Spring bulbs and other flora. It is likely that numerous lichen species are present on stone fascias but these have not yet been assessed.

These natural and semi-natural features are indicative of a long continuity of land use and management. The trees and meadows have not been damaged by ploughing, herbicide or pesticide use or by cropping or forestry and are therefore exceptional and of principal importance to nature conservation. In the context of the climate crisis, trees and ancient grasslands are important carbon stores that are able to sequester and store more carbon over time if managed appropriately and aid climate regulation and cooling.

With a more nuanced approach to managing the burial ground, it could be of even more biodiverse and beautiful, while still serving the needs of parishioners and visitors.

## Community Involvement and Specialist Advice

In June 2022, St Aeddan’s received a £500 grant from WWF’s Climate Action Project Fund to spend on running a community consultation event in July. The event was hosted by the vicar and the Leader of the Raglan Ministry, the Reverend Kevin Hasler, and was well attended.

Attendees joined a walk and talk by ecologist Phoebe Miles to learn about the current and potential biodiversity value of the burial ground and to ask questions and make suggestions about its future management. It was agreed at the event that a new biodiversity management plan would be drafted and instituted with help from the ecologist and with the aim of enhancing the site’s biodiversity while maintaining its aesthetic beauty and functionality as a burial ground. In particular, the site’s potential to host orchids, present nearby, and a greater range of butterfly and pollinator species, was discussed. The desire for the site to be clearly managed, and not simply ‘wild’ was also agreed.

The management plan, laid out below, is based on several seasonal assessments of the churchyard in 2022 by the ecologist, as well as suggestions and requests from the local community and known best practice. Such best practice is widely advocated by conservation organisations such as the Wildlife Trusts, RSPB, Plantlife, Buglife and others. In short, best practice states that maintaining the burial ground as a semi-natural ‘patchwork’ containing a variety of structural features and habitats – grassy areas of various lengths, hedgerows, trees, dead wood and stone fascias in the case of St Aeddán’s – will provide for a diversity of species throughout the year.

In this document there are several links to further guidance produced by Caring for God’s Acre, a national charity which specialises in “promoting the conservation of burial sites and supporting the volunteers who look after and maintain them”. Their website hosts a wealth of relevant information: <https://www.caringforgodsacre.org.uk/>

The biodiversity management plan will be delivered by the community primarily, with contractors brought in for some tasks. Various members of the community have kindly volunteered their time and skills and will undertake tasks such as mowing or strimming and raking meadow areas; boundary management; and keeping ivy in check on walls every few years.

## How to use this plan

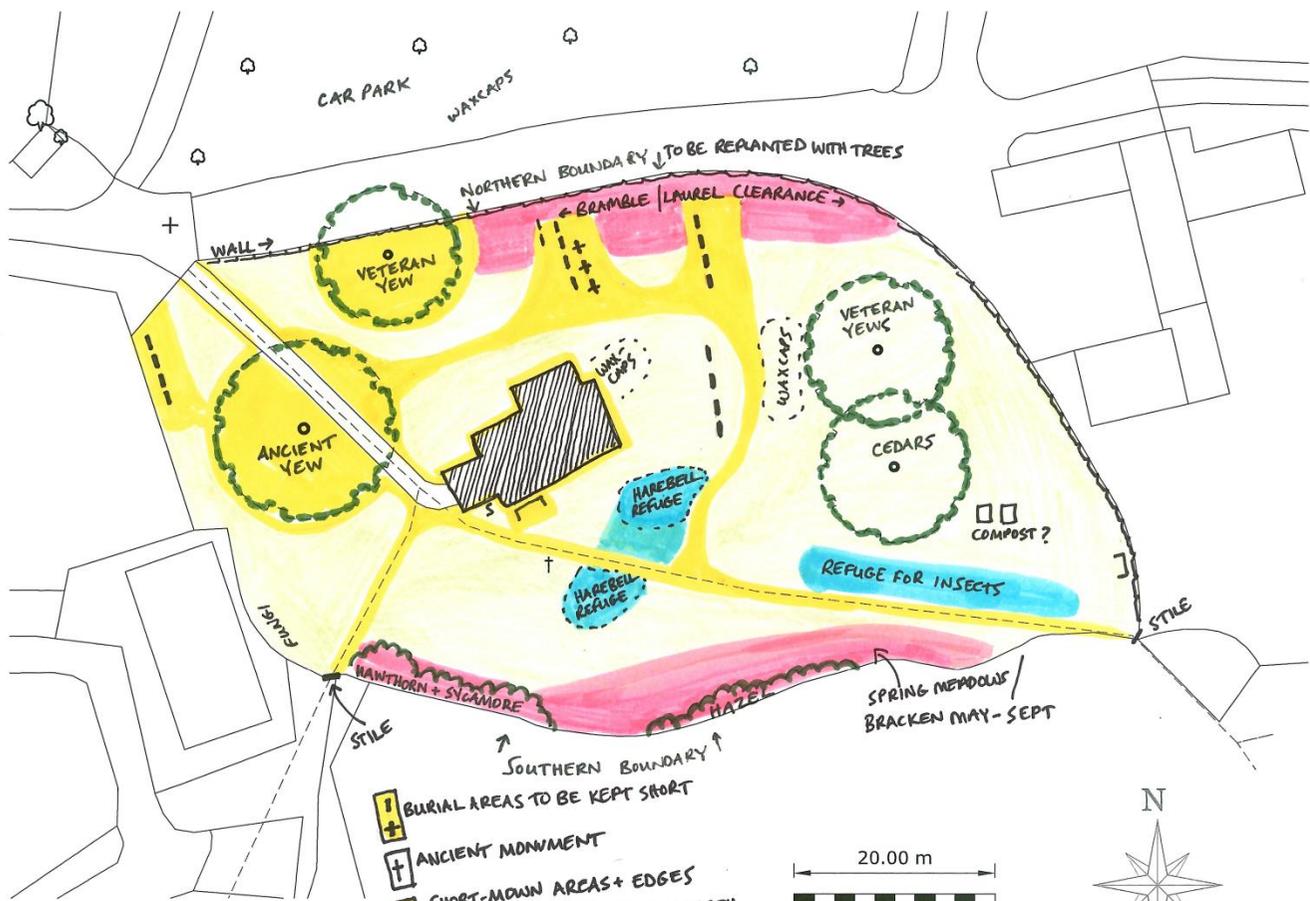
**The sketch** below shows the locations of the features to be managed.

**The management notes** give information on each of the features and guidance on how to manage them.

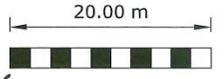
**The ‘gantt’ chart Annual work plan’ ‘in section 4(c)** shows, at a glance, when annually recurring tasks should be carried out throughout the year. Seasonal variations and resource availability may mean that these timings vary a bit year to year or month to month. This is normal and deemed good practice.

**The ‘gantt’ chart in section 4(d) ‘Three year work plan’** shows tasks done less regularly and as required. The phasing of these tasks over the three years is suggestive and will, in reality, depend on funding and resource availability.

The plan will be reviewed every three years or as deemed necessary.



-  BURIAL AREAS TO BE KEPT SHORT
  -  ANCIENT MONUMENT
  -  SHORT-MOWN AREAS + EDGES
  -  SPRING MEADOWS / MEDIUM LENGTH
  -  SUMMER MEADOWS / LONG FOR 12 WEEKS
  -  REFUGES - LONG + CUT ONLY ONCE A YEAR
  -  SEDGE CLEARANCE
- WAXCAPS: DON'T MOW SEP - DEC / JAN



1:500



## Management Notes

### Ancient and veteran trees

**The ancient yew:** Clear the under-storey of elder and bramble from around the base to ensure the tree's ability to take up water, nutrients and to photosynthesise is not inhibited. The ivy is not yet smothering the tree but it should be kept in check. Do this between October and February (out of bird nesting season). Proceed cautiously with hand tools so as not to damage the tree, and use a tree contractor if climbing is involved. No evidence of roosting bats has been detected in this tree but if any evidence comes to light, engage a qualified ecologist to advise before removing any ivy.

**Two veteran yews:** Clear the under-storey of elder, bramble and most of the ivy from around the bases, as above. Remove any compost piles from underneath and relocate.

For more information on yew tree care see [Caring for God's Acre Action Pack A5 Yews and other Veteran Trees](#)

**Western Red Cedars:** This pair of trees are notable by virtue of their massive size and value to sheltering birds. They should continue to prosper with little intervention but consider moving the compost from underneath it. While it is unlikely to cause the tree problems, Western Cedars can be vulnerable to honey fungus which can be spread via compost.

For more information see [Caring for God's Acre Action Pack A5 Yews and other Veteran Trees](#)

### Northern and Southern Boundaries

**Northern Boundary tree re-planting:** This boundary has been lined by trees for at least 175 years. It has developed a "woodland edge" ecology that should be conserved by re-planting native trees to replace the sycamore felled in early 2022. Sycamore or Beech sourced locally will do well here. Autumn planting may be best given the dryness of recent Springs. Retain the any remaining felled sycamore deadwood in-situ.

**North & Eastern bramble and laurel clearance:** Cut back some of the brambles as required to make space for burials, although for wildlife a little bramble allowed to remain will be beneficial. Clear the laurel: dig up and/ or treat stumps between October and February. Chip and remove laurel wood and stumps to halt re-growth. In time, the adjacent Spring meadow should extend into this area and it can then be managed in the same way as the Spring meadows.

**North-East Boundary wall:** Keep ivy in check every two or three years by cutting it back (not removing it altogether) in two stages, firstly in May and then in November. May might seem like an odd time of year to cut ivy back and indeed it is during bird nesting season, when ivy may be used by nesting wrens. It is recommended that ivy is reduced in extent but not removed by cutting it back in

two stages in order to always have some ivy available to wildlife. Ivy is valuable during the Autumn and Winter months as shelter and as a source of late season nectar to butterflies and bees (including *Colletes* species of Ivy bee which depend on local sources of ivy). It is also used as a larval food plant by Holly blue butterflies which lay their eggs on the base of ivy flowers in the summer. Proceed cautiously with hand tools and resist the urge to pull rooted ivy out of the wall unless you are prepared to mend the wall if it falls – ivy can degrade walls but also help to hold them together! The aim is to cut it back to reduce its extent and weight.

For more information see [Caring for God's Acre , caring for Stone Walls](#)

**Southern Boundary:** The southern boundary contains remnants of wall, what look like sycamore pollards, and Hawthorn and hazel trees. Conserve sycamore, hawthorn and hazel trees by letting them be; and only cut back from the churchyard side every few years if absolutely necessary. At the South-western corner by the stile, treatment is underway for Japanese knotweed. Continue with the Japanese knotweed treatment plan.

### Spring Meadows

**Northern Spring meadow/ medium-length grassland:** Snowdrops, English bluebells, Violets and Wood anemone grow adjacent to the Northern boundary. Leave the area to bloom from February onwards then cut in early June. Cut again when all the other meadow areas are cut in late Summer. Always rake off and remove the clippings.

**Southern Spring meadow/ medium-length grassland:** Adjacent to the Southern boundary, Spring meadows comprised of native Bluebells, Stitchwort and Violets flower in the Spring. Leave the Spring meadow to bloom, cutting it in early June and then again at the end of the Summer/ early Autumn when the rest of the Summer meadows are also cut.

**Bracken along Southern Boundary:** From May onwards, bracken extends several metres from the Southern boundary into the churchyard. Knock back the bracken to reduce its extent and spread and to stop it from smothering the spring flowers. This is best done by bashing or bruising the emerging fronds in May and June with a spade or simply by stamping. The fronds will be partially crushed which will reduce the vigour of the bracken overtime. Strimming can also help but it's best to then clear away cuttings. Prioritise the fronds growing furthest into the churchyard. The aim is not to remove the bracken altogether – it has some value nature to as part of the 'patchwork' - but to limit its spread into the churchyard.

### Summer Meadows

**Summer meadows/ long-length grassland:** Summer meadows should be left to grow long, bloom and set seed for 12-16 weeks in the Summer. They are otherwise kept short (10cm or under is best), with the clippings always raked up and removed to minimise nutrient enrichment. Meadow plants thrive in low nutrient soils. Leave uncut between end of March and late Summer or early Autumn, cutting once most plants have flowered and set seed and just as the grasses start to turn brown. Collect the clippings and compost, or offer hay to local pet shops/ equine businesses.

### **Areas left long for much of the year**

**Refuges (only cut once a year):** While Summer meadows are cut at the end of the Summer or in early Autumn, leaving some areas long throughout the Winter months will provide much-needed refuges for over-wintering insects and small mammals and seed heads for overwintering birds and seed-eating insects. It is still recommended that these areas are cut once a year with the clippings raked up and removed to rejuvenate the sward. It may make most sense to do this when the Spring meadows are cut in early June.

**Harebell patches/ refuges:** These areas should be left to grow long throughout the summer and autumn to November to allow late-flowering Harebells to bloom and set seed, and to provide a refuge for insects, reptiles and mammals. It makes most sense to manage these areas in the same way as the refuges above, cutting only once a year in early June.

### **Short-mown areas**

**Short-mown grass:** As shown in yellow on the sketch above, short mown areas include paths, areas around tended graves, areas underneath the ancient and veteran yews on the West side, and the edge around the church. Mow or strim regularly to maintain c 10cm or less length; collect clippings and compost. Curved edges tend to give the best aesthetic value and are also preferred by wildlife.

**Waxcap patches (Grassland fungi):** Waxcap fungi are great indicator of old grassland as their underground networks of mycelium threads take years to form. These fungi are beneficial to other plants as they facilitate the exchange of nutrients and even aid communication between species, to, for example, warn against the spread of pathogens in the soil. Treat waxcap areas in the same way as the Summer meadows but do not cut in the Autumn or Winter to allow Waxcaps, Pinkgills and other grassland fungi to grow their fruiting bodies and thereby reproduce.

### **Other areas**

**Clear any Pendulous Sedge from the southern side of the porch:** The options are to spot spray the leaves with RoundUp, taking care to minimise chemical use and spread; dig up the sedge clumps; or strim it to ground level, then cover with a piece of old carpet or black plastic for several months over winter.

**Compost bins:** Consider erecting bins rather than having open pile and moving these to the area along the Eastern boundary, behind the Yew and Cedars.

**Ancient Monument:** Crevice growing plants such as Maidenhair fern and flowering perennials and biennials such as foxglove should be left to grow here. Ivy can be periodically cut back. Optional strimming around the base regularly could give the monument a tended, cared-for look. It would be worth having this and other ancient stone fascias surveyed for lichen in the coming years.

## Annual Work Plan for recurring tasks

What	Action	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Refuges (long areas only cut once a year)	Cut & rake clippings just once a year in early June												
Bracken adjacent to Southern boundary	Bash/ bruise emerging fronds in May and June with a spade or by stamping												
Spring meadows/ medium-length grass	Cut late early June & again at end of Summer; remove clippings												
Summer meadows/ long-length grass	Leave from March. Cut in Aug/ Sep & remove clippings. <b>*Keep short rest of yr mowing &amp; raking as required</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*			*	*	*
Grassland Fungi patches	Cut in Aug remove clippings. <b>Leave for autumn/ winter but keep short rest of yr mowing &amp; raking as required</b>	*	*	*	*	*	*	*					
Short-mown grass (inc paths, edges)	Keep < 10cm all year mowing <b>*as required</b> ; compost clippings.	*		*		*		*		*		*	
Harebell patch	Leave long between March – Nov. If easier cut just once in May												

## Three Year Work Plan

Activity	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
Yew trees – under-storey clearance (Oct – Feb)	Autumn/ Winter		
Northern boundary tree re-planting (Autumn planting recommended)		Autumn	
Northern boundary Laurel & bramble clearance areas (Oct - Feb)		Autumn	
Pendulous sedge clearance by Southern side of porch		Autumn/ Winter	
New compost bins installed?	Anytime		
Northern wall – cut ivy back			May and Nov