



## REVISED PLAN FEBRUARY 2016

# CHURCHYARDS & CEMETERIES

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Churchyards, cemeteries, crematoria and 'green' burial sites are places where people are laid to rest and the living come to remember them. Churchyards can be very ancient and were often areas of old hay meadow likely never to have been ploughed, fertilised or sprayed. They are often the oldest enclosed piece of land in a parish, the establishment of boundaries preventing the grazing of animals from the 13<sup>th</sup> century.

Churchyards can therefore represent relics of former countryside with the meadow habitat never fertilised apart from their primary use as a place for burial. This 'unimproved' pasture may be the only such grassland in a parish, and may contain a variety of plants that are now rare in the surrounding countryside such as devil's-bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) and betony (*Stachys officinalis*). Churchyards can also be a habitat for butterflies, other insects, molluscs, amphibians, slow worms (*Anguis fragilis*) and bats. The church itself may be a roost for swifts (*Apus apus*) which can be problematic for repair and restoration.



Oldberrow © Jane O'Dell

Other habitats can include veteran trees especially yews (*Taxa baccata*), hedges, ponds, ditches, ivy-clad walls and unusual tree specimens; three quarters of Britain's ancient yews are found in churchyards (Cooper, 2014). The variety of stone used in boundary walls, gravestones and the church itself provides habitat for a range of mosses, ferns, and drought tolerant plants; 20 species that rely on church walls are now rare in the wild. Where ivy (*Hedera helix*) has completely smothered graves its presence can be problematic, causing them to subside or collapse; however, in some cases it is holding monuments together and removal must be selective (Cooper, 2014).

The variety of substrates and aspects in churchyards also encourages a rich diversity of lichen species which are particularly important in Warwickshire because of the rarity of stone outcrops elsewhere in the local landscape.

Some 'natural burial grounds' are created in old grassland with the meadow vegetation allowed to remain unchanged, or modified to create a nature reserve as at [Sun Rising](#) in the south east of the county on the edge of the Cotswold escarpment. City centre churchyards can often provide refuges for wildlife and bring solace into an otherwise busy, noisy environment. Any rough grassland would be valuable for barn owls (*Tyto alba*). The increasingly scarce spotted flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) can be encouraged by open fronted boxes high on walls to avoid predation from grey squirrels.

In this action plan the churchyard incorporates the church, other buildings, graves and walls as well as grass and trees. These habitats are the responsibility of the churchwardens with all management works to them requiring Diocesan permission. Churchyard management is normally carried out either by volunteers from the church congregation or by a gardener employed and paid for by the Parochial Church Council.

There are a number of [redundant churches and chapel sites](#) which are closed for regular worship and these also need management and could be of value for wildlife.

2.	OBJECTIVES	TARGETS
Associated Action Plans are: 'Lowland Grassland (all types)', 'Built Environment', 'Hedgehog', 'Bats', 'Barn Owl' and 'Song Thrush'		
<b>PLEASE CONSULT THE '<i>GENERIC HABITATS</i>' ACTION PLAN IN CONJUNCTION WITH THIS DOCUMENT FOR OBJECTIVES COMMON TO ALL HABITAT PLANS</b>		
A.	<b>To enhance the range of habitats within churchyards and cemeteries for wildlife and wild flowers</b>	<b>by 2020</b>
B.	<b>To use churchyards as a source of local provenance seed to restore local meadows.</b>	<b>ongoing</b>

### 3. NATIONAL BAP OBJECTIVES AND TARGETS

There are no national Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) objectives and targets for Churchyards and Cemeteries. However, the distinctive threats and management issues associated with this land use make it worthy of a separate action plan.

Although not a national BAP habitat, churchyards may well harbour national BAP species. The only recorded churchyard site of the rare lichen [Anaptychia ciliaris](#) in Warwickshire is at Weston-under-Weatherley, on only one headstone so the species is very vulnerable; this is possibly its only site in the county. The British Lichen Society are revisiting sites where it has been recorded in the past to reassess its present status (pers.comm. Ivan Pedley, 2014).

### 4. CURRENT STATUS

In 1984 it was estimated that there were 759 'churches' in Warwickshire Vice County 38, of which 283 had enough churchyard to warrant a survey. A botanical survey of churchyards was therefore carried out during 1984/85 by the Women's Institutes (WIs) and the results are available in the Warwickshire Biological Record Centre in the [Warwickshire County Council](#).

#### 4.1 Legal and Policy Status

A wide range of species and habitats are protected under international and domestic laws, including the [Wild Birds Directive](#) (1979), the [Wildlife and Countryside Act](#) (1981), the [Conservation Regulations](#) (1994) and [EC Habitats Directive](#) (1992). Protection of sites is afforded nationally through [Sites of Special Scientific Interest](#) (SSSI), [Special Areas of Conservation](#) (SAC) and [Local Nature Reserve](#) (LNR) statutory status. Other sites are offered recognition of their value through Local Wildlife Site status (LWS), Local Character Areas and identified Landscape Scale Areas. The [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (2012) chapter/section 11 states conditions with regard to any development negatively

affecting biodiversity, including protected sites, ancient woodland and other irreplaceable habitats (paragraph 118). The Wildlife & Countryside Act and schedule 2 of the [Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010](#) make it an offence to intentionally kill, injure, take, possess, sell, buy or transport a range of species.

Nationally a few churchyards have been legally designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and some churchyards have become nature reserves. These usually have well-written management plans. It is more common for a churchyard to be designated a Local Wildlife Site (LWS) or equivalent; the designation of sites is ongoing, with 5 in 2015: Alderminster, Lillington, Oldberrow, Wishaw and Barston (the last two sites include meadows).

Churches and churchyards can also provide habitats for a number of statutorily protected species such as bats, badgers and reptiles. Relevant legislation includes various schedules of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 as well as the Habitats Directive; for example, bats are protected under schedule 5 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act and Schedule 2 of the [Conservation Regulations \(Natural Habitats\) 1994](#) (Regulation 38).

## 4.2 Current Factors Affecting the Habitat

- **Size** - most churchyards are relatively small which may affect population sizes of certain groups or species. Cemeteries tend to be larger.
- **Attitude** towards 'untidiness'. There can be ignorance of the value of tall herb and longer grass for a wide diversity of insect and bird life, with grass areas often being mowed too closely or subject to the use of chemical fertilisers. The main problems for butterfly conservation are too frequent mowing, over-tidiness and total neglect (pers.comm. Michael Slater, 2013)
- **Lack of resources / volunteers / equipment** to carry out the final cut and rake off grass. This can be a very labour intensive exercise but is important since leaving cuttings can lead to gradual nutrient enrichment of the soil. In the long-term it will favour the growth of more vigorous grasses rather than fine grasses and flowering herbs.
- **Gravestones** make cutting very time consuming and the grass can become tussocky in the immediate vicinity.
- **Introduction of inappropriate plants**, such as memorial trees that shade out valuable grassland or plants that compete or hybridise with native species (e.g. cultivated *Primulas*).
- **Insufficient management guidelines**. There is sometimes little control over the planting of inappropriate species, the use of pesticides (especially herbicides) and removal of rubbish from tended graves and headstones.
- **Cleaning lichens off gravestones**. Some gardening firms advertise this as a service.
- **Lack of awareness/education** of how the churchyard or cemetery can each serve its primary purpose and also be managed in a way that is sensitive to its inherent biodiversity value.

## 4.3 10 point Action Plan for enhancing a churchyard or cemetery for wildlife.

<b>First, get together a group of like-minded people to spread the word about caring for parish wildlife and to forestall any concerns - also it shares out the work.</b>	
1.	<b>Map the site</b> , noting the different areas e.g. church buildings, gravestones, grassland, trees, and <b>keep a notebook</b> for people to record the plants and animals they see, e.g. meadow flowers, bats, hedgehogs. Write a <b>management plan</b> .
2.	<b>Create a summer meadow</b> , leaving some <b>grass areas long</b> from the end of May, but cutting in August/September or the grass will become tussocky. Manage by strimming or scything so that wild flowers can set seed. Consider grazing if sheep are available but care if you have yew trees. <b>Manage areas of spring flowers</b> by not mowing until June.
3.	<b>In regularly mown areas</b> , do not mow too often or too short to allow plants like self-heal, plantains and bird's foot trefoil to flower. <b>Aim to mow every 2-3 weeks</b> , always <b>removing cut material</b> to reduce nutrient levels and prevent shading of the plants. <b>In out-of-the-way spots let grass become tall and tussocky</b> , only strimming to 4-6in high - you may have slow worms which like a structured habitat.
4.	Create a <b>compost heap using grass cuttings and dead flowers</b> , ideally with three open sections for a 3-year rotation – offer compost free to members of the congregation. A good opportunity for volunteering and it may attract the harmless grass snake.
5.	Install a range of types of <b>bird boxes</b> , <b>insect 'hotels'</b> , <b>hedgehog homes</b> and <b>bat boxes</b> , away from artificial lighting to reduce disturbance.
6.	<b>Aim to cut only a third of hedgerow length each year</b> , allowing shrubs to flower and fruit to remain through the winter to feed birds. <b>Restore gappy hedgerows</b> by layering and planting up gaps with native species.
7.	<b>Avoid damaging bark</b> when mowing and strimming around all trees. <b>Retain mature and veteran trees</b> , and <b>plant new native species trees</b> to ensure replacement for the future. <b>Take care when removing ivy</b> as it may be holding stonework together; the best method of control is to weaken it by continuous cutting.
8.	<b>Retain dead wood</b> where possible, leaving fallen branches and <b>standing dead trees</b> which is 10 times as valuable for bats, birds and invertebrates – though care over danger to the public.
9.	<b>Keep pathways clear</b> and cut paths through grassy and wild flower areas so that people can see that churchyard is being looked after.
10.	<b>Care for your lichens</b> . They take many years to grow and may be the only example in the county so need to be conserved. <b>Only clean those parts of gravestones and memorials with inscriptions</b> , with water and a soft brush. Leave lichens on dry stone walls, church buildings, old gate posts and fences. If replacing woodwork, retain some old sections from which recolonisation to the new wood can occur.
<b>Tell people what you are doing by displaying the map of the churchyard and the management plan so that they can see and understand the importance of the work.</b>	

## 5. LOCAL ACTION

- In 1984 the [Warwickshire Federation of Women's Institutes](#) carried out a botanical survey of churchyards; many WIs took part in collecting this information and preserving the often beautifully illustrated results. In 2014, the WFWI is asking WIs to update their records or perhaps survey their churchyard for the first time.
- In 1994 the [Warwickshire Wildlife Trust](#) promoted the improvement of churchyards and burial grounds for wildlife with a leaflet of advice, highlighting sites already known to give wildlife 'Special Sanctuary'.
- A number of churchyards in the sub-region manage part or all of their grounds for wildlife, many working to existing management plans, developed with the support of Warwickshire Wildlife Trust or the 'Living Churchyard' Project. Examples include Offchurch, Oldberrow, Alderminster and Oxhill - see below, also Barston, Temple Balsall, Studley, Lea Marston and Wootton Wawen. Rowington and Dunchurch also have good meadows (pers.comm. Camille Newton 2013).
  - At Offchurch the churchyard has been divided so that conservation can take place in an old area and the grass is neatly mown where interments take place.
  - [Oldberrow churchyard](#) is a perfect example of old unimproved neutral grassland and is managed accordingly. Two requests for local provenance seed have recently been received and one of the projects is now in progress: hay from the churchyard has been spread on a paddock belonging to a local farm in an agri-environment scheme. An annual 'Wildflower Weekend' is held to inform visitors of the biodiversity of the churchyard; the churchyard hay cut is often a community event.
  - The [Oxhill Wildlife Society](#) has organised an unmown area in the churchyard for wildflowers and are seeing an increase in butterflies; it is planning to install swift boxes in the church roof.
  - At Alveston the [St James Churchyard Conservation Project](#) which began in 2013 with the erection of bird boxes has now built a new compost heap and habitat pile; it is now restoring a meadow in the old area of the churchyard (2014), transplanting wildflowers to 'more appropriate' places and marking out areas to be left unmown. Signs will be put up to tell people about the nettles left as caterpillar food.
  - At Rowington-with-Lowsenford a management plan is being written to conserve the grassland for the primroses and rare burnet saxifrage and dropwort with an appropriate mowing regime.
  - Alderminster has been in the [Living Churchyards Project](#) for several years. Close to the church are closely mown paths, and just outside these paths is meadow-type grassland. This is mown once or twice a year, usually in late summer (but mowing schemes vary). In the more remote parts of the churchyard, the grass is not mown, and these are allowed to grow wild. The area around these gravestones had been colonised by vipers bugloss.
  - At Gaydon there are 2 burial grounds managed as wildlife areas, with good butterfly populations: the church has common blue (*Polyommatus*

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*icarus*), small copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*) and brown argus (*Aricia artaxerxes*) butterflies and the grave ground also has marbled white (*Melannargia galathea*).

- In 2013 WWT obtained funding for a churchyard project, carried out by several parishes including Wellesbourne (pers.comm. Jennifer Wharton, 2014).
- Local authorities are responsible for the maintenance of many cemeteries, these are managed under contract. London Road Cemetery (Coventry) has an impressive selection of trees, good bird population and areas for wildlife. [Oakley Wood](#), managed by Warwick District Council, has an extensive area of open space and associated woodlands.
- The Coventry Diocesan Advisory Committee has appointed an ecologist, currently David Lowe, WCC's Principal Ecologist.
- The [Coventry Diocesan Environmental Group](#) (CDEG) has formed a 'Care of Creation Champion' role to help develop and assist the CDEG in inspiring and encouraging God's people to engage in caring for creation. A flyer sent out in 2014 invites interest in this national campaign so that a champion may be appointed in each church; the role is flexible, adaptable to each local situation, and a point of contact for the diocese. A conference 'Reconciling a Wounded Planet' is to be held at Coventry Cathedral in 2015, to respond to the challenge of reconciliation in a world where conflicting demands on the world's limited resources are leading to a developing crisis and to draw lessons from the past.
- In Solihull '[Ecocentres](#)', an initiative that builds on the Ecoschools concept, is being trialled in four churches (St Peter's Church, Balsall Common, St James' Church, Bentley Heath, St Philip's Church, Dorridge and Chelmsley Baptists Church, Chelmsley Wood). The scheme promotes activities that will count towards a church achieving Eco-centre status. Those undertaking a churchyard-based activity as part of their Eco-centre work will refer to the fact that it supports wider biodiversity objectives including the Churchyards & Cemeteries Biodiversity Action Plan. The contact is David Biss ([dbiss@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:dbiss@solihull.gov.uk)).
- In 2015 the HBA partnership will work with [Caring for God's Acre](#) (CFGa) to carry out a survey of Alderminster churchyard, using the [Burial Ground Botanical Companion](#) booklet.
- At Sun Rising Natural Burial Ground & Nature Reserve, 16 acre of set aside was bought in 2006 to turn improved grassland into a number of different habitats, funded by the burial ground business. Within the 4 acres currently used for burial, a half-acre wildflower meadow has been sown, and by 2017 another 1-2 acres will become more meadow. Native trees, seeds and bulbs have been planted on the graves by relatives, hedges been extended and a pond and long-term tussock habitat created, The remaining grassland, improved with minimal fertiliser and mown for hay and sometimes grazed by sheep, will be developed as a further patchwork of habitats. Open Days and Activity Days are held, including the annual wild flower meadow cut. Nature

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Watch days with nature walks, bulb planting and tree planting days; in 2015 there will be a moth night open to the public.

- The Warwickshire Flora Group has surveyed 13 churchyards in their tetrad survey programme for 2015: these are Church End, London Rd Coventry, Newton Regis, Mancetter, Barston, Warwick Cemetery, Clifton, Dunchurch, St James Old Milverton, St James Long Lawford, Middleton and Churchover.

## 6. PROPOSED LOCAL ACTIONS

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By
<b>PLEASE CONSULT THE '<i>GENERIC HABITATS</i>' ACTION PLAN IN CONJUNCTION WITH THIS DOCUMENT FOR ACTIONS COMMON TO ALL HABITAT PLANS</b>			
<b>Policy &amp; Legislation</b>			
<b>PL1.</b> Continue to select all qualifying churchyards and cemeteries as LWSs, using appropriate LWS criteria for ' <i>Grassland</i> ' or ' <i>Parkland</i> ' depending on the dominant habitat, and enter onto database.	LWSP	WWT WCC NE LAs	ongoing
<b>PL2.</b> Birmingham and Coventry dioceses to draw up a Biodiversity Statement, recommending a strategic approach to the management of churchyards as wildlife stepping stones across the landscape.	CDEG	NE DACs WWT PCCs	Done
<b>PL3.</b> Birmingham and Coventry dioceses to circulate this Statement to their parishes in a phased approach of minimum 10 per year from 2016.	CDEG	NE DACs WWT PCCs	2016 - 2020
<b>Site / Species Safeguard &amp; Management</b>			
<b>SM1.</b> Ensure all LWS sites receive management guidance and that all LWS churchyards/ cemeteries have a full management plan.	LWSP	NE WWT LAs	ongoing
<b>SM2.</b> Maintain and enhance existing quality habitats within churchyards and cemeteries, e.g. grassland, walls, stonework, veteran trees, hedgerows and specific roosts e.g. bats, swifts, through liaison with PCCs.	CSG	PCCs BTO EH SRNBG BCT LWSP SJCA	ongoing
<b>SM3.</b> Work with <b>10</b> churchyards per year, with reference to the Biodiversity Statement ( <b>see PL.2</b> ) and the <b>10 point plan</b> ( <b>see section 4.3</b> ), to enhance conditions for wildlife and wild flowers by adding biodiversity features and changing	CDEG	WCC WWT PCCs LWSP WBRC LBAP	2016 - 2020

ACTION	Lead	Partners	By
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grassland and hedgerow management.			
<b>Advisory</b>			
<b>A1.</b> Promote good practice guidelines (see <b>section 4.3</b> ) to enhance biodiversity.	CDEG	LAs DACs	ongoing
<b>Research &amp; Monitoring</b>			
<b>RM1.</b> Continue the survey to Phase 1 (usually grassland category) methodology and digitise information of churchyards, cemeteries and crematoria habitat, including veteran trees.	HBA	WBRC PCCs SRNBG	ongoing
<b>RM2.</b> Carry out a detailed survey of the flora (including lichens) of a minimum of 10 churchyards annually as identified by HBA, to inform habitat enhancement plans and linked to the LWS designation process.	WFG	PCCs WBRC BLS HBA LWSP	2020
<b>RM3.</b> Repeat the 1984 botanical survey of churchyards by the Women's Institutes to determine the extent of losses and gains in wildlife value and extend to include butterflies using Butterfly Conservation's <a href="#">'Churchyard Butterfly Monitoring' form</a> .	CSG	WWT DACs BC WBRC WFWI	2014 - 16
<b>RM4.</b> Trial the use of local provenance seed /green hay at 5 sites which are species poor, found by survey work, particularly in urban areas.	CSG	Unis SRNBG LWSP PCCs LOs LAs	2018
<b>Communication, Education &amp; Publicity</b>			
<b>CP1.</b> Establish an annual "Wildlife in Churchyards Day" with a programme of events as good examples of well managed churchyards, in spring / early summer to demonstrate the value of churchyard conservation to local communities, schools etc.	CDEG	DACs WWT LAs SRNBG	ongoing
<b>CP2.</b> Involve volunteers in management by turning the final grassland cut of the year into a community event, e.g. as at Oldberrow churchyard.	SRNBG	PCCs DACs CWs	ongoing

**Abbreviations:** BLS – British Lichen Society, CDEG – Coventry Diocesan Environmental Group, CSG – LBAP Core Steering Group, CWs – Church Wardens, DACs - Diocesan Advisory Committees, EH – English Heritage, NE – Natural England, HBA – Habitat Biodiversity Audit partnership, LAs – Local Authorities, LBAP – Local Biodiversity Action Plan Partnership, LOs – Landowners, LWSP – Local Wildlife Sites Project, PCCs – Parochial Church Councils, SJCA – St James Church, Alveston, SRNBG – Sun Rising Natural Bural Ground, Unis – Universities, WBRC – Warwickshire Biological Record Centre, WCC – Warwickshire County Council, WFG –

Warwickshire Flora Group, **WFWI** – Warwickshire Federation of Women’s Institutes, **WIs** – Women’s Institutes, **WWT** – Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

## 7. PROGRESS WITH ACTIONS

From 2015–2020 there will be a rolling programme of reporting on progress, of 10 action plans per year with an annual summary of results. Results will be entered onto the national Biodiversity Action Reporting System [BARS](#). Progress with this plan up to 2008 can be seen at [www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/LBAP](http://www.warwickshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/LBAP).

## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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[Butterfly Conservation](#) (1994). Discovering Butterflies in Churchyards.

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Dobson, F. S. (2003). A Field Guide to common Churchyard Lichens. Field Studies Council Occasional, publication 88.

Falk, S.J. (2009) [Warwickshire’s Wildflowers](#) - provides habitat-specific species and explanations of habitats from a botanical viewpoint.

Lawton, J.H. (2010) [Making Space for Nature](#): a review of England’s wildlife sites and ecological network. Report to Defra, advocating a landscape-scale approach guided by four key principles, summarised as ‘*more, bigger, better and joined*’.

DEFRA (2011) [Biodiversity 2020](#): A strategy for England’s wildlife and ecosystem services.

RSPB (2013) State of Nature – a stocktake of all our native wildlife by 25 wildlife organisations.

HBA (2013) The State of the Habitats of Warwickshire, Coventry and Solihull.

Cooper, S. (2014) Caring for God’s Acre. British Wildlife vol.26, no.2, pp.106-114.

## 9. FURTHER INFORMATION

Habitat Biodiversity Audit (HBA) for Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull – mapping data set and associated information. Phase 1 ([JNCC](#)) 1996-2002 and Phase 2 (Local Wildlife Sites) ongoing

[Bat Conservation Trust](#) (1988). Bats in Churchyards (leaflet). [Bat roost visiting](#) is carried out by volunteer workers who will provide advice on the protection of bats in churches and the impact of work on roosts.

[Action for Swifts](#) - provides advice for churches with nesting swifts.

Caring for God's Acre (11 Drovers House, The Auction Yard, Craven Arms, SY7 9BZ. Tel. 01588 673041) champions the conservation of churchyards and burial sites across the British Isles, through the [Living Churchyard Project](#) and '[Cherishing Churchyards Week](#)' to celebrate churchyards and burial grounds and to raise awareness of the treasures they contain. It provides information on management through [Managing Churchyards and Burial Grounds](#) and the [Churchyard & Burial Ground](#) action packs.

[Plantlife](#) - a charity which carries out plant species and habitat conservation, owns and manages nature reserves, campaigns, and raises awareness through education. Churchyard Lecanactis: old walls can harbour secrets (lichens). Leaflet available from 14 Rolleston St., Salisbury, Wilts. SP1 1DX, Send A5 SAE.

[Buglife](#) - the Invertebrate Conservation Trust (2004)- provides information on the habitat-management requirements of key invertebrates(CD-Rom available).

Norfolk Wildlife Trust Churchyard Scheme. Grassland in Churchyards. Available online or contact Andrina Walmsly: Tel. 01603 625540.

[Flora Locale](#) – promotes the restoration of wild plants and habitats for the benefit of biodiversity, landscapes and people in town and countryside.

British Lichen Society - [Lowland Churchyard project](#)

[Ancient Yew Group](#) - has a great list of veteran and ancient yews in the UK and provides management advice.

English Heritage has developed a framework for the protection of the historic environment, the [National Heritage Action Plan](#).

Field Studies Council (2015) Fold-out Chart: [Guide to Wildlife of Burial Grounds](#)

## 10. CONTACT

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