

Vegetation Management Plan for the Churchyard of St Ida's Church, Ide

Purpose of the Management Plan

The main purpose of this management plan is to balance the need for a tidy and 'cared-for' appearance with the aim of improving the vegetation and wildlife value of the churchyard.

Present situation

The churchyard covers an area of approximately 0.3 hectares / 0.75 acres (measured using Google Earth), of which 315m² (0.3ha) is taken up by the church itself.

Grassland interspersed with gravestones and tombs covers much of the site. Based on a short walkover survey in May 2020 and subsequent visits, the grassland is considered to be relatively species poor and dominated by grasses and plants (e.g. dandelion, dock, meadow-buttercup, hawkweeds, plantain, cow parsley, burdock) typical of semi-improved and fertile grass swards. The grassland at the western end of the churchyard supports a good number of common primrose in the spring months. There are a number of mature trees, mainly to the east and south of the church, including three yews, an oak, two hollies and two large evergreen firs. There is no or very limited ground vegetation beneath the canopies of these trees. The eastern end of the churchyard is bounded by a stone wall, largely covered by bramble with some elder. There is an area of scrub in the south-eastern corner, along with a large holly and Liquidambar tree. The remainder of the southern boundary is marked by the walls and back terraces of 1-4 Cobbe House. The western boundary is formed by a banked hedge with sycamore trees, holly, hazel and bramble. The northern boundary is defined by the northern façade of the church, an area of scrub (bramble and sycamore) at its western end and holly bushes and sparse ground flora under the canopy of a yew at its eastern end. A public footpath runs along the entirety of the northern boundary with a narrow strip (<1m) of grass between it and the northern façade of the church. This strip of grassland supports a few fox and cubs plants.

Management of the churchyard is presently undertaken by contractors working on behalf of Teignbridge District Council who cut the grass and hedges / scrub vegetation. The frequency of cutting is not known, but it is carried out at least several times during the summer and autumn months. Based on visual survey, the grass cuttings from all parts of the site are left in situ and not removed from the site. Other than this regular cutting regime, there does not appear to be any selective management for specific parts of the churchyard.

Management Actions

In order to improve the flora and wildlife value of the churchyard, there are a number of actions that can be carried out.

1. Survey

To inform the grass cutting regime (see 3 below) and monitor the grassland vegetation, walkover surveys (one in April/May for spring flowers and one prior to the first proposed grass cut in summer) would be undertaken. This would confirm the botanical interest of the existing habitat and further identify any specific management requirements.

2. Removal of cut grass

This is perhaps the single most important action that could be undertaken in order to improve conditions for a greater diversity of wildflowers. Leaving the grass cuttings in place leads to an increase in nutrient release as the piles of grass rot down. This encourages the growth of tough grass species and weed species (e.g. dock, nettles) that thrive on the increased nutrients. The thick mats of rotting grass also prevent the germination of any wildflower seeds that may be present in the soil. All grass cuttings should be raked up (or collected when mowing) and removed either off-site or to a compost heap within the churchyard.

3. Alter the cutting regime

Relatively frequent grass cutting, particularly during the late spring and summer months does not encourage the establishment of wild flower species, as it prevents growth and seed-setting at the expense of grass growth. Undertaking cutting across the entire churchyard to the same prescription also decreases the potential for diversity and the establishment of areas with differing vegetation characters. Altering the timing and frequency of grass cutting along with mowing / strimming the grass to different sward heights would improve the potential for wildflowers to establish. The following grass cutting management could be implemented in the areas shown on the Churchyard Plan.

Short Grassland

Mowing should be undertaken along the edges (0.5-1m in width) of pathways through the churchyard and in areas where graves are tended. This would provide permanent short grass (5-10cm) and maintain a well-tended appearance. Close mowing may also be needed to provide paths through any meadow area that is created (see below). Mowing to obtain and maintain this sward height would need to be undertaken every 2-3 weeks during spring-late autumn. If, following the introduction of this regime, interesting low growing species show themselves to be present or become established, consideration should be given to adjusting the

cutting interval (e.g. cutting up until April and then not until after August) to ensure that important species are able to flower and set seed.

Spring flowering grassland

The area of grassland supporting primroses should be cut in July and the cuttings allowed to lie on the ground for a few days so that seeds can fall out. Cuttings should be removed. Thereafter, the area should be mown once a month until late autumn, with the removal of cuttings, and then leave unmown until the following July.

Permanent long grass

Small areas of long grass should be allowed to establish adjacent to areas of scrub vegetation, where this would not impede access to tended graves. Potential areas include the margin of the scrub at the eastern end of the boundary with Cobbe House and the north-western corner. These areas would provide shelter, food and overwintering sites for invertebrates and other small animals. e.g. frogs, lizards, field voles etc. To maintain and prevent scrub invasion these areas should be cut in the autumn with a different area cut on rotation every 2-3 years. Cuttings should be removed.

Areas of proposed wildflower meadow

Two areas of grassland within the churchyard are identified (see the Plan) where management should be geared towards increasing wildflower diversity. The cutting regime in these areas would comprise two cuts, one between mid-July and late September and another before Christmas. If feasible, the first cut should be undertaken as late as possible as it allows more species to shed their seed. These areas would then remain uncut until the following late summer. Any cuttings would need to be removed to reduce soil fertility and grass growth.

4. Undertake additional planting and seed sowing

The areas of the churchyard where the cutting regime is altered to develop meadow vegetation should be monitored in the first 1-2 years to determine whether the change is benefiting the existing vegetation and leading to an increase in wildflower diversity. If, it is apparent, that the grass sward is still very dominant, then these areas could be selectively scarified (to open up some areas of bare ground) and a specific meadow seed mix sown in early autumn. This seed mix could include yellow rattle, a species of wild flower that is semi-parasitic on a number of grass species and which assists in reducing grass vigour enabling wildflower species to establish and compete. Alternatively (or in addition) plug plants grown from locally collected seed of wildflower species such as ox-eye daisy, knapweed, and crane's-bill could be planted out in the

meadow areas. There is the potential to involve the school and/or Ide Growers in growing the flowers to be planted out.

5. Provide an information board

Erect a simple information board / display at the entrances to the churchyard to explain the management measures that are being undertaken, inform people about the aims of the work and the flora / wildlife benefits.

Summary and annual plan of activities

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Survey			Spring			Summer						
Path mowing			At least once a month to maintain short grass sward									
Spring flowers							First cut in July and then approx. once a month afterwards					
Wildflower meadow							One cut during this period				Late cut	
Long grassland									Areas cut on rotation every 2-3 years			

St Ida's Church - Plan of proposed Vegetation Management



- Y = Yew**
- H = Holly**
- Hz = Hazel**
- F = Fir**
- B = Beech**
- E = Elder**
- O = Oak**

Mow edges to path to maintain shorter grass sward

Maintain bramble / scrub along boundary wall

Maintain scrub and trees

Area of Spring Flowers

Summer Wildflower Meadow Area

Summer Wildflower Meadow

Mow path edges