

# HOLY TRINITY, PRESTWOOD AND ST. MARY MAGDALENE, GREAT HAMPDEN

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Approved by PCC June 2018

## **Holy Trinity Prestwood churchyard, environmental management principles and scheme**

### **Historical context**

Before the enclosures of the 1860s heath and acid grassland covered much of the clay-capped area of the parish; where there was heavy grazing or over-cutting of the heather acid grassland occurred. Following enclosure and cultivation this area diminished but was still extensive before the house-building programme in the village in the 60s and 70s.

Today few areas remain. The large open areas of Prestwood and Kingshill Commons are managed for sports pitches and there are few significant plants or animals there except that the mowing regime is favourable to fungi. Also there are relicts of heathland inside Lodge Wood and acid grassland on Widmere field and beside Peterley Wood.

The largest area in the parish that remains with the characteristics of acid grassland and a diverse ecology is the one hectare of HTP churchyard.<sup>[1]</sup> In general regardless of the specific soil type, churchyards are havens for wildlife being largely free from intense management – cultivation, fertilisation and ‘weed’ killing – commonplace in gardens, parks and much farmland, thus allowing biodiversity.

### **Development of the Management Plan**

In 2003 Prestwood Nature (PN) recognised the need and, indeed, the practicality, of maintaining and improving the ecology and biodiversity in the Parish and produced an action plan ‘Towards a Local Biodiversity Action Plan for the Parish of Prestwood’ that has been followed in the succeeding fourteen years by its group of volunteers.

Also in 2003, under the aegis of Max Watters, HTP worked with the Berks, Bucks and Oxon. Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) to derive a management plan for the churchyard and this forms the basis of the plan adopted by PN and followed, with updates, to the present.

As a result of the work undertaken by volunteers from HTP and PN managing what was in effect scrubland surrounding the lawns immediately around the church, the biodiversity has improved and this has been recognised in 2016 by the churchyard becoming a Wax-cap Site of International Significance and in 2017 by its selection as a Local Wildlife Site<sup>1</sup> by Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Local Sites Survey

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Note in grant letter from B&MK LSSP:

*‘A Local Wildlife Site (LWS) does not confer any legal or statutory obligations upon the landowner and does not create any new rights of access. LWSs are recognised in local planning documents, hence restricting development that would significantly harm the site.<sup>[1]</sup> The long-term survival of wildlife sites depends upon the interest and goodwill of their land managers and owners. Habitat management*

## Project (B&MK LSSP.)

The present management plan is thus a compendium of the original work with BBOWT, PN's biodiversity plan and the recommendations of B&MK together with input from Holy Trinity's Parochial Church Council which, along with the Rector, have the ultimate responsibility for the maintenance of the churchyard.

LSSP. Iterations of the Plan take into account new species found and work undertaken to recover scrubland. The Plan will, of course, be subject to regular review by all stakeholders. Its essence is to manage the churchyard primarily to reflect the needs of the Church while maximising the advantages to flora and fauna wherever and whenever possible.

The Plan has been discussed both informally by a small group (David Page, Estate Manager, David Wickham, HTP Buildings Manager, Peter Baker, HTP PCC Secretary and the Rector, the Reverend Deiniol Heywood) on 27 March 2018) and also at a full meeting of HTP's Parochial Church Council (8th May 2018).

HTP's PCC is aware of the need to maintain and, wherever possible, enhance the environment (in its widest sense) of our beautiful churchyard which we regard as a treasure. However, we also have to be mindful that our volunteers are often not in the first flush of youth and modern lifestyles make the recruiting of new and younger volunteers difficult. The costs of contracted labour are very high and although we are looking at ways of gaining some further contributions towards the upkeep of the churchyard, it is absolutely essential that we take steps to reduce the labour required to maintain the churchyard through simplification in a number of areas.

The PCC is very grateful to David Page, our Estate Manger and his team of volunteers for everything they do for the churchyard, and also to Prestwood Nature who have collaborated in the production of the initial drafts of this plan. HTP looks forward to working closely with Prestwood Nature to implement the plan and thus preserve the churchyard and its environment for generations to come.

### **General Management Principles**

1. All grass cuttings to be taken away and composted.
2. No fertilisers to be used, the exception being the use of manure/compost on the rose beds to the south of the church, in the quiet garden and on the flower/shrub beds outside the lych gate and the cottage.
3. No insecticides (chemical or biological) to be used.
4. No herbicides to be used, the exceptions being in the overflow car park (to manage weed growth on the shingle) and on the tarmac paths.
5. Ivy on walls and memorials not to be pulled off but to be cut away at the base and then allowed to fall off.
6. Plants, mosses and lichens on walls not to be removed without consulting the Estate Manager.
7. Shrubbery to be shredded/chipped<sup>2</sup> and composted with useful wood saved for

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*recommendations are highlighted in the survey report and it is hoped that these management prescriptions will be considered and adopted where possible.*

For the extent of the Local Wildlife Site see the churchyard plan

<sup>2</sup> The acquisition of a shredder/chipper is planned, this to be a transportable unit that can be shared with Prestwood Nature

use as fuel by parishioners (wherever possible).

8. A 1m wide rough edge to be left around the outer edges of the graveyard as fauna cover<sup>3</sup>.
9. Yew bushes (the 'twelve apostles') for the time being to be managed professionally under the direction of the Estate Manager.
10. Compost heaps not to be disturbed between November and June<sup>4</sup>

## **1. Grass-cutting:**

### **a) Principles**

In addition to the stricture to remove all grass cuttings to compost there are four types of cut that are applied to the HT Estate:

1. Fine Lawn or 'suburban garden': cut length 25-30mm (one stop below half-height on the Hayter and Honda mowers)
2. Rough Lawn: cut length 30-50mm (about half-height on the Hayter and Honda mowers)
3. Meadow: cut length not less than 50mm
4. Fallow: applied to certain areas of the estate in May June and early July to allow spring flowers and grasses to flourish and seed and to provide nectar for bees and butterflies. This may require a strim/brush-cut to cut down long grasses and plants before mowing can be resumed.

It is important not to cut too short to avoid scalping and weed growth<sup>5</sup>.

### **b) Regime**

Mow weekly or more frequently, depending on the weather, at the start of the growing season (March/April) but keep the cut higher than the cut level specified for the conservation compartment.

As the season progresses, reduce the height of the cut to that specified for the compartment and reduced the frequency of cut to, say, every 2-3 weeks.

In very dry weather set the mower blades to their highest and mow only if there is growth and to keep the grass at an even height.

Stop mowing as soon as fungi start to appear – usually around the end of September – for around six weeks.

Winter mowing: provided the grass is dry enough and there are no hard frosts likely for a few days, winter mowing is acceptable; set the mower blades at their highest.

If orchids are seen (common spotted orchids appear in some years), mark them with a peg and mow around them.

If pig-nuts grow, cease mowing until growth is complete (likely only in compartments C and D.)

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<sup>3</sup> This rough strip can be managed, but should be significantly longer than any of the mown areas within it. Originally we had started with refuges but found that they were continually disturbed or removed completely. The long-term aim is to construct 'bug hotels'.

<sup>4</sup> Reptiles are known to hibernate in our compost heaps and in spring will emerge to bask beneath the covers on the heaps.

<sup>5</sup> much of the estate does not have a level surface that would be conducive to close mowing and has rough grasses that do not respond well to close-mowing. In addition the sward contains flat-growing plants that spread and exclude grasses if mown too short.

### **c) Management of individual compartments (see churchyard plan)**

#### **COMPARTMENT A:**

Cut as rough lawn. Mow at a lower height one cut-width along the path to keep the path edges neat.

#### **COMPARTMENT B:**

This area contains dwarf heather (rare), heath grass and harebells. Cut as rough lawn except that patches of heather should not be mown more frequently than monthly and then with the mower blades set at their highest. The margin towards the south hedge to be progressively managed until it is 1m wide. Mow at a lower height one cut width along the path to keep the path edges neat.

The margins of the rose beds on the south side of the church which are maintained by John and Mary Wiles to be cut short (fine lawn) to a maximum of one metre width. These rose beds are a feature leading to the entrance to the church and are maintained to a high standard.

#### **COMPARTMENT C:**

Cut as rough lawn. Mow at a lower height one cut-width along the path to keep the path edges neat.

#### **COMPARTMENT D**

Cut as rough lawn. The 1m margin around the compartment should be left to re-grow. Mow at a lower height one cut-width along the path to keep the path edges neat.

#### **COMPARTMENT E:**

This area contains a variety of spring grasses and flowers including ladies' smock, star of Bethlehem, hairy sedge and cuckoo flowers.

Mow as rough lawn early season then cease mowing during May and June. Start to mow again in July (the compartment may need to be strimmed before it can be mown again.) Streaming should be carried out carefully so as not to damage the graves.

Mow at a lower height one cut-width along the path to keep the path edges neat.

#### **COMPARTMENT F:**

Cut as fine lawn

Cut through the red bistort (*Persicaria amplexcaulis*) to control it so that it protrudes no more than 0.5m from the NW buttress.

#### **COMPARTMENT G:**

Cut as fine lawn.

#### **COMPARTMENT H:**

Cut as fine lawn.

#### **COMPARTMENTS I, J, K and L:**

The pathway from the memorial garden between the compartments down the slope to the lowest part of the churchyard to be cut 1.2m wide as fine lawn.

The remaining parts to be cut as rough lawn with each year one compartment in turn to be left fallow in May June and July, then strimmed and mowing restarted.

Streaming to be carried out with care so as not to damage the graves.

#### **COMPARTMENT M:**

Cut as fine lawn.

#### **COMPARTMENT N:**

Cut as rough lawn but in May and June leave the part by the footpath fallow except to mow one cut-width alongside the footpath and to cut a vision splay at the car-park

entrance.

#### COMPARTMENT O:

Currently unmanaged, see future work. A Pocket Park and a Forest School has been discussed for this area but is currently on the back-burner.

## 2. Back car-park

The gravel area should be treated as needed with glyphosphate (Roundup or similar) weedkiller to control the growth of weeds and grass following the instructions for use with care (particularly in relation to spray drift). Overhanging hedges and bushes to be cut back to the limits of the parking area and the lights to be kept clear.

## 3. Tarmac paths

Any weeds that grow through the paths may be treated with spot application of a glyphosphate weedkiller. No SPRAY application to avoid the risk of overspray.

## 4 Gardens

Manage the gardens

- a) in front of the lychgate
- b) on the approaches to the main entrance of the church (alongside compartments B and F – essentially the rose gardens)
- c) in the quiet garden
- d) around the cottage as your garden at home.

## 5. Walls, hedges and trees

**a) Laurel hedges** around the perimeter of the old churchyard, around the quiet and memorial gardens to be clipped annually or as necessary to maintain the existing height, preferably in early spring (the height of the hedge on the East side of the church bordering the main car park).<sup>[17]</sup><sup>[SEP]</sup>In the east perimeter hedge (compartment B) there are several young trees and bushes, currently an English oak, a spurge laurel and a copper beech; take care not to damage them. In this same compartment the drive-side of the hedge must be clipped back to the line of the driveway setts.

See future work for additional management of the north-side hedge (compartments D and E)

**b) The Ivy covered flint walls** by compartments G,J,L and M are owned by the Hoskins Family : however much of the ivy is growing from HTP's side of these walls. It is proposed to cut the ivy at the base and allow it to die back naturally. It will not be physically removed from the walls. Any activity of this nature will take place after the nesting season (September 2018).

**c) West boundary** (compartment M) no management of the trees is needed. Laurel hedge can be clipped as needed, preferably in early spring.

**d) North boundary** (compartments I,K and M). No current management, see future work.

**e) Yew Trees in churchyard.** The 'twelve apostles' are currently being managed professionally with no current HT input, this will revert to HT by 2020. The large English yew in compartment C to be judiciously hand-clipped to lift the crown sufficient to allow ready access to the memorial tablets at its base.

**f) Dog-rose hedge – front of the car park** (compartment N).

Cut back each year to the height of the fence and grub-out any suckers.

A full professional survey of the trees on the church estate has been carried out and two trees, considered unsafe or likely to become unsafe in the short term, have been removed. Further work may be necessary in future but this is entirely in the hands of professionals both for advice and remediation.

## **6. Future work**

### **a) Laurel hedge bordering compartments D and E**

This hedge was cut back and reduced in height in 2017 and will be maintained at this height by regular cutting. Over the years the hedge has grown towards the sun (towards the South - in the direction of the church) and intrudes a significant distance into the graveyard. The issues with overgrown laurel hedges of this nature are threefold:

- a) the hedge is very thick and leggy (drawn towards the light)
- b) even trimming the hedge in its current state generates a considerable amount of waste which is not easily compostable
- c) this waste is hard to collect if the ground upon which it falls is unmanaged.

The hedge will be cut back hard on the south side in order to reveal the graves currently overgrown. The north side of this hedge will be trimmed and allowed to thicken. Although this may leave the south side looking a little thin for a year or two, such a procedure may well encourage the north side to grow better. The grass on the south side adjoining the hedge will be cut short (one metre width) to facilitate the collection of the trimmings (which might then be done by volunteers). Small patches of grass will be left untrimmed as corridors for wildlife. The expectation is that the heavy duty cutting of hedges etc here and elsewhere in the churchyard will be contracted out and the cuttings removed off site.

### **b) Compartment B**

Following felling of the beech trees in the south hedge a thicket of self-set trees has appeared. Over the next year this thicket will be removed with any useful saplings being replanted elsewhere, their being offered to parishioners and voluntary organisations in need of trees (many have already been reserved.) Two beech saplings will be planted in the south boundary as replacements.

Following clearance the area will be remediated by steady cutting back over five years to 1m from the hedge line.

The expectation is that this work will be done by HT/Prestwood Nature volunteers

### **c) Compartment C**

Pollard the remaining trees - mostly holly - in the south and south-west boundaries. Over the next three years clear the undergrowth to reveal any graves and manage the secondary hedges in front of the boundary fence. Set additional bushes to complete the secondary hedge line.

Coppice the hazel in front of the garage (to be done every three years)<sup>[SEP]</sup>The expectation is that this work will be done by HTP/Prestwood Nature volunteers.

### **d)(i) Compartment H - the Ashes Garden.**

This area is one of the most special places in the HTP estate - not only beautiful but quiet and somewhat private. There is now only limited space for future interments of

ashes as currently practised (small caskets and memorial stones laid in the turf). A proposal to build a memorial wall on the north side of the garden where the names of loved ones can be inscribed and ashes strewn nearby: this has been discussed within HTP's PCC and a faculty for the building will be sought. This will require careful planning, not only for the wall itself which will be designed professionally but also for its design and the relationship between the wall and the garden. beyond emphasising that the character of the Ashes Garden will be maintained, plans are at present unformed.

#### **d)(ii) Compartment H - The composting area**

Given the amount of green and woody waste (particularly laurel and holly) that an area the size of the churchyard generates, HTP has agreed a budget for the Estate manager which will allow the purchase of powerful chipper/shredder to deal with matters into the future. However, in view of the amount of waste already in the composting area much of what is currently present will have to be removed under commercial contract. The importance of any wildlife living in the heaps over the summer is well recognised and thus clearance will only take place in September/October 2018.

HTP has a use for only a limited amount of compost, so the aim is to produce compost of good quality over the medium term. If the compost bins are managed in this way, then HTP volunteers may well be able to cope with turning the compost as required: if this is not possible, that work will also be contracted out.

#### **e) North-side boundary – compartments I, K and M**

Tree and bush management will take place over the next two to three years to recover the original boundary of the graveyard. A large holly tree is worth retaining and the English lime to the east (close to the most recent burials) needs to be crown lifted.

The expectation is that some work can be done by HT/Prestwood Nature volunteers but other work is both heavy and will require tree climbing and is best contracted out to professionals.

#### **f) Compartment O**

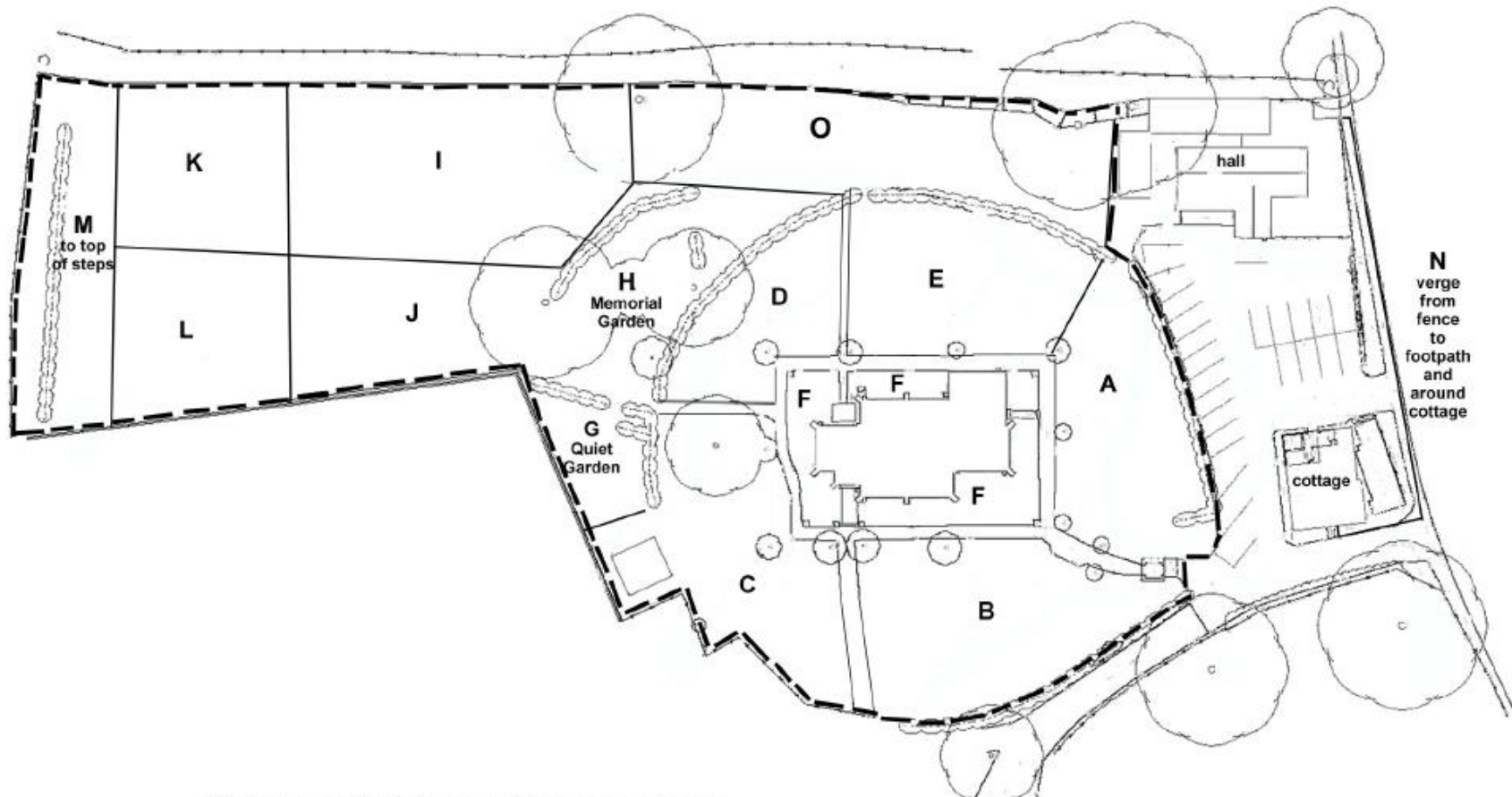
This is currently unmanaged. An urgent task is to cut away ivy from the trunks of the still-standing trees as these are becoming top-heavy. This work has already started and can be done by HT volunteers.

The compartment has a deep litter, a valuable environment for fauna but has become a dump for rubbish over the years. The rubbish needs to be removed and then the trees properly managed to promote good growth – many are straggly and need a good pruning while others are leaning onto other trees with risk to their stability. Much of this work can be done by HT/Prestwood Nature volunteers.

The large spruce trees to the south of this compartment and around the memorial garden need to be assessed professionally for stability. At least one of these is of a height that, if it were to fall in the wrong direction, would hit and damage the church.

#### **g) The Quiet Garden - Compartment G**

In addition to cutting the grass to fine lawn, the ivy on the flint walls (see above) requires to be cut back at the base and the fence at the back (concealing the old garage) requires attention. This is under consideration by the PCC. The PCC consider it important to maintain the character of this quiet place and maybe make greater use of it as part of the church's worship.

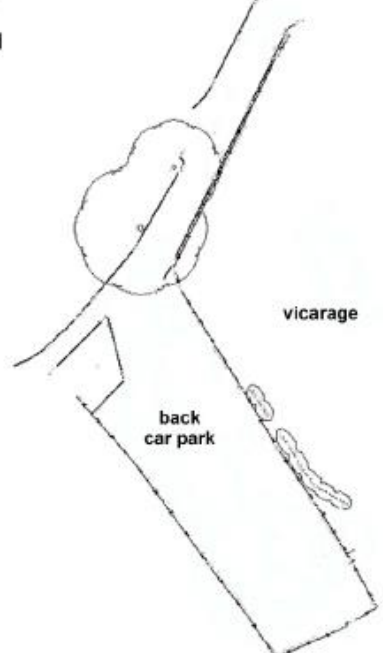


M  
to top  
of steps

N  
verge from  
fence to  
footpath  
and  
around  
cottage

**HOLY TRINITY CHURCH PRESTWOOD**  
**CHURCHYARD ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT PLAN**  
**MANAGEMENT COMPARTMENTS**

--- = BOUNDARY OF LOCAL WILDLIFE SITE



vicarage

back  
car park