

# **Enhancing wildlife in St Mary's Churchyard: A draft proposal**

## **Introduction**

Wild About Wivenhoe is a loose collective of local people with an interest in enhancing wildlife in Wivenhoe. As part of our work, we have been working with Wivenhoe Town Council to look at areas across the town that might benefit from a more conscious approach to wildlife.

Wivenhoe Town Council has agreed a Wildlife Charter with ten principles (see attached) and Dr Chris Gibson has put forward a series of suggestions on behalf of Wild About Wivenhoe to fulfil the Charter. So far, Wivenhoe Town Council has agreed to additional hedges and revival of wild grass areas in the new cemetery and the establishment of 2 hay meadows in King George fields.

Wild About Wivenhoe suggested last year that St Mary's Churchyard was an area where wildlife could be enhanced. Wivenhoe Town Council took the view at the time that this should not be a priority, as any changes would involve agreement with Church authorities, which would take some time.

Volunteers from Wild About Wivenhoe have therefore spent time pulling together proposals, involving discussions with Erwin Lammens and church wardens.

From our discussions so far, the strong view that has emerged is that a clear, up to date management plan for the Churchyard is now overdue. Clarity and reassurance is needed for churchgoers, Wivenhoe Town Council staff and wildlife enthusiasts that all uses of, and aspirations for, the Churchyard are being addressed.

We also note the current St Mary's Appeal. A visibly enhanced green space is obviously very much in step with this level of ambition and will increase support for the Appeal, both through increased visitors to the Churchyard and because it will be an early visible sign of positive change.

## **Key features**

Wild About Wivenhoe is conscious that the churchyard is not a nature reserve and that the main uses of the area need to be respected. This includes the need to gather before and after services, take photographs at weddings and host key events in the Wivenhoe community calendar, such as Art on the Railings. Our focus is therefore at the margins, looking at simple, cheap ways that could enhance wildlife and the shared experience of this space for the local community. A draft Management Plan is attached to this paper, with the main points being:

1. No use of herbicides - already in place in line with Wildlife Charter, so reaffirmed in the plan
2. Creation of wildlife areas at margins
3. Maintenance of key areas for Church use - gathering before and after services, taking photographs at weddings and hosting key events in the Wivenhoe community calendar, such as Art on the Railings
4. A sign to explain how the Churchyard is being managed and why.

## Risks

We have reviewed the proposals and identified the following risks:

1. **Confusion about management of the Churchyard** - the lack of a structure for St Mary's and Wivenhoe Town Council staff to work to together is creating a high potential for confusion and for adverse impact on key uses of the Churchyard. **Mitigation: WTC agree and implement the attached management plan.**
2. **Wildlife plans not aligning with Church activity throughout the year** - St Mary's is a key hub of Wivenhoe community life with a busy schedule that utilises the Churchyard in different ways throughout the year. **Mitigation: St Mary's has outlined a detailed calendar and identified the implications for Wildlife initiatives, so that requirements are clear, and this is included in the draft Management Plan.**
3. **Churchgoers and residents not clear about rationale for changes** - this is a familiar space for many with the need to be sensitive to areas of remembrance. Changes of approach can be disconcerting or unwelcome. **Mitigation: co-production of the proposals via discussion at the Parish Church Council, clear communication with churchgoers and residents before and during implementation by St Mary's, Wild About Wivenhoe and Wivenhoe Town Council.**

## Implementation and next steps

Subject to St Mary's being content with the attached ideas, the next step will be to present the draft management plan at Wivenhoe Town Council for agreement and implementation.

Implementation will involve clear signage and communication to Wivenhoe residents, so that everyone knows what is happening and why.

Any day-to-day issues with implementation would be raised through established channels eg via the Town Clerk to staff, and escalation to Estates Open Spaces if needed.

As key stakeholders, St Mary's and Wild About Wivenhoe will monitor the plan through their regular meetings and ongoing observation.

Joint site inspection could be arranged for St Mary's , Wild About Wivenhoe and Wivenhoe Town Council ground staff, perhaps quarterly. These checkpoints can pick up any further suggestions for amending or adding to the plans as wild areas mature and develop throughout the year.

Updates on progress will be given at Estates Open Spaces, also on a quarterly basis. Audit would be through the annual report on the Wildlife Charter at the Wivenhoe Town Council AGM.

## Recommendation

Wild About Wivenhoe asks that St Mary's considers the attached proposals as a basis for managing the Churchyard area.

## **St Mary's Churchyard Management Plan, June 2018 DRAFT**

### **Purpose**

This document sets out the agreed approach to managing St Mary's Churchyard for the benefit of churchgoers, residents, visitors and wildlife. It has been co-produced with St Mary's and Wild About Wivenhoe.

St Mary's is a key focal point and shared space in the Wivenhoe community. This plan recognises that the Churchyard is in use throughout the year for a range of key events in the Wivenhoe calendar, as well as for worship, and personal and family remembrance.

This plan represents the fulfilment of the Wildlife Charter agreed by Wivenhoe Town Council.

### **Key features**

#### ***1 Non-use of herbicides***

Wivenhoe Town Council staff have already applied this principle from the Wildlife Charter. We reaffirm this approach for the Churchyard going forward.

#### ***2. North Area at Front of the Church***

The grass will be cut and borders maintained for this area, which is in regular use of weddings, funerals and Wivenhoe events, such as the June market.

#### ***3 North East Corner***



This corner contains several mature trees and numerous old gravestones and monuments. A strip around 2m wide, north and east of the path, will be mown regularly, from the Sainty gravestone on the northern wall and across to behind the tombs on the eastern wall. This will support social uses, such as the placing of Gazebos for the June market. The corner behind the strip will remain unmown in summer to allow the native flora to flower and seed. It will be planted with locally-native grassland plants (such as those found in Lower Lodge), including Red Clover, Bird's Foot Trefoil, Field Scabious, Yarrow etc.

At the end of summer (October), this grassland (apart from the strip along the northern boundary itself – see picture), will be mown or strimmed, the mowings raked up and removed.

In a strip along the northern boundary (including adjacent to the ivy hedge), the natural vegetation will be allowed to grow up, and remain unmown, for two years, to encourage valuable plants such as Cow Parsley to bloom, and form a more structured gradation into the hedge itself. It will be cut (and removed) on a two-year rotation, half each year. **There will be a review of what grows here, in order to recommend further ideas for planting.**

In this area of the Churchyard only, Ivy will be managed to ensure that it does not grow over the wall into adjacent properties, including those in Alma Street. If necessary, this may include removal of Ivy to the roots, subject to maintaining structural integrity of the walls. Removal of ivy will be suspended if any breeding bird nests being found, as these are protected by law. Removal in these circumstances will proceed after the breeding season.

#### **4 Western Boundary**



This area comprises a line of five small trees and is used for Art on the Railings, so will continue to be mown for this event. There is a ground flora dominated by Lesser Celandine along the boundary wall here, and this will be enhanced during Spring as a woodland border. The area between the tree trunks and the wall will remain uncut in spring, allowing the celandines to flower, and a range of locally-native woodland plants will be planted or sown in to complete the patchwork. These will include for the spring display:

- bluebell (NOT Spanish or hybrid bluebell)
- wild-type (ie yellow) primrose
- wood anemone
- wild arum
- yellow archangel (the native, non-variegated form)
- In addition, red campion and foxglove to extend the attractive flowering season into the summer.

After flowering has finished, the vegetation will be strimmed back, although not close to the ground (above 10cm), so as to provide refuge for invertebrates.

### **5 Rear of the Church**



The grass areas behind the Church will be kept mown and tidy throughout the year. These areas are used for events and access to the boiler room door alongside the South wall of the Church is required throughout the year.

There is no right of access beyond the end of the footpath and through the gates at the Southern boundary of the Churchyard. The area at the Southern exit near the chipshop is known as the Carolin garden. St Mary's aim to transform it in an area of greenery where people can relax and enjoy the sunshine, and is raising money to achieve this. St Mary's is also proposing an extension here as part of the St Mary's Appeal, which will unfortunately involve removing the 25 year-old tree which has grown here, which would otherwise block the entrance to the extension. Wivenhoe Town Council has no role in this area.

### **6 East Window Area**

This area has very special significance for many Wivenhoe residents. Ashes are interred here and local families come to remember, contemplate and reflect. This area will be kept presentable and well maintained throughout the year, including regular mowing. There is the potential in future for planting, to complement, respectfully, the tributes placed in this area by families.

## **7 Southwest Corner**

This area is between the Carolin garden and the storage shed, and another corner that will be managed as a wildlife area, supplemented by planting as above.



## **8 Signposting**

To explain to visitors about these management changes, a simple information board will be created and displayed in the North East corner immediately in front of the main area of wild growth in the churchyard. The wording will read:

***St Mary's Church is working with Wild About Wivenhoe and Wivenhoe Town Council to enhance the Churchyard as a shared space that supports wildlife.***

*Nurturing the wild corners of the Churchyard will provide a welcoming environment for wild plants and insects, making an important contribution to the green spaces we all enjoy in Wivenhoe.*

*These wild corners will supplement the main social spaces that are used throughout the year for Church services and key events in the Wivenhoe calendar.*

*The initial wild areas will be in this North East Corner, the South West corner at the rear of the Church and the strip along the Western boundary under the row of trees. The latter will be mown in preparation for summer social events.*

*We hope you enjoy this next stage in the activity of the Church, which continues our work to nurture the people and environment in Wivenhoe.*

***If you have any questions or need to contact us about the management of the area please call or email Wivenhoe Town Council Tel:01206 822864 Email: [wivenhoe\\_connect@btconnect.com](mailto:wivenhoe_connect@btconnect.com).***

The design will match that used for the hay meadows in the KGV, seen here:

**This area is intentionally being left unmown for the summer months.**

**We hope the emerging flowers will provide a feast for butterflies and bumblebees, and a sight that we can all enjoy.**

**Please don't feel you have to keep off the grass!**

Wivenhoe Watching Wildlife botanical experts have examined the grassland in KGV, and realised that in large parts it is very rich in species, full of wild flowers, an unsprayed relict of our former countryside.

However, repeated mowing during the summer months prevents the flowers from growing and achieving their full glory.

Leaving areas to grow through the summer will release the flowering, we hope abundantly, and so provide a food resource for butterflies, bumblebees and other declining insects.

As the end of the summer, the long grass will be mown down to prevent the special plants from being squeezed out.

This is an experiment: nobody knows how successful it will be and over what timescale. Monitoring of the results will therefore be crucial.

As the success or otherwise becomes clearer, the 'experiment' could be made permanent, or the experimental areas extended or changed.

This is a joint initiative of Wivenhoe Town Council, Wivenhoe Watching Wildlife and Wild About Wivenhoe, for and on behalf of the people and wildlife of Wivenhoe.



Illustration: Richard Allen



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## **Key dates at St Mary's**

The Church calendar is at its busiest from mid-May until the end of June: The season when wild flowers will be encouraged to grow is from July through to mid May the following year. Wild areas will be kept under close control from mid-May until the end of June when the Church calendar is at its busiest:

- Open Gardens - usually the weekend after 15 May
- June Market - the first Saturday in June
- Shakespeare Open Air - third week of June, but not every year in the Churchyard as venues alternate
- Weddings - throughout the year

Wild areas will be kept under close control during this busy period. The season when wild flowers will be encouraged to grow is from July through to mid May the following year.

## **Calendar 2018**

The consolidated list of dates is given here, as the initial basis for Wivenhoe Town Council staff to plan:

2 June: June Market and Art on the Railings

18-23 June: Shakespeare Open Air Theatre

30 June: The Mayor's Charity event WivFunHoe

28 July: Wedding at 12.30pm

2 August: Wedding at 2.00pm

15 September: Wivenhoe History Day High Street, Church and Churchyard

22 September: Wedding at 1.00pm



## Wivenhoe Wildlife Charter

Wivenhoe Town Council will work with local wildlife experts and volunteers to protect, enhance and promote wildlife and wild spaces in Wivenhoe.

We will:

1. Draw on the advice of local experts and volunteers on any Council activity that impacts on local wildlife.
2. Identify, agree and implement best practice for all wildlife sensitive areas, including the Wildlife Garden, Jubilee Garden and the Cemeteries.
3. Encourage wildlife, native species and natural spaces in Wivenhoe.
4. Encourage appropriate public access to wild spaces.
5. Avoid using pesticides, herbicides and artificial fertilisers wherever possible and where we think we may have to, treat this as the exception and seek expert advice first before acting.
6. Work with volunteers and the local community to sustain, manage and improve the local environment wherever an opportunity arises.
7. In accordance with being an open, transparent council, share and publish these principles and the names of local experts, volunteers and organisations we are working with.
8. Aim to be a green beacon for other local authorities, publishing an Annual Environmental Audit for the Wivenhoe Town Council AGM, including an independent expert view on progress made.
9. Draw on wider expert advice where needed.
10. Be mindful in the above of the impact on parish financial resources.

16 January 2017

Wivenhoe Town Council