ST JOHN'S CHURCH
LOVE • GROW • SERVE

Churchyard Management Plan for St John the Evangelist Church Old Moulsham, Chelmsford



A ROCHA UK GOLD AWARD WINNER 2022 ECO CHURCH learn more

October 2026

Churchyard Management Plan

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1. The Church context and background

The parish church of St John the Evangelist has been prominent in Moulsham since the late 1830s when the population of Chelmsford effectively outgrew the parish church of St Mary's (now Chelmsford Cathedral). It is located on a busy thoroughfare which, when it crosses the inner ring road, becomes the City's High Street, and hundreds of people walk past the church daily.

The church is Grade II listed, and the churchyard is in the Chelmsford – Moulsham Street conservation area. The Moulsham War Memorial is situated in the front of the church building, also Grade II listed.

Having opened in 1837, the church burial ground filled quickly, and just 47 years later in 1884 it was closed to new burials. No comprehensive record remains of who and where people are buried, but it is believed that over 2,000 people have been laid to rest in St John's churchyard. As a closed churchyard, it is currently maintained by Chelmsford City Council. We are proud to be a gold awarded Eco Church and have a firm commitment to care for God's creation and to encourage our community to recognise and take action on climate change.

With 140 years having elapsed since the churchyard's closure, sadly it is rare to have family historians visit, and relatively few gravestones remain either erect or intact, although there are a few monuments, mostly around the front path. There is much broken stone around the periphery of the churchyard, which wild flowers have largely colonised.

We have worked closely with Chelmsford City Council which is responsible for the maintenance of the churchyard and they have been extremely supportive of the development of the churchyard. Since our 2022 plan, we have created an accessible pathway round the churchyard, involved over 600 school students in creating a mosaic in a new quiet, reflective area, created an activity space, installed 9 new benches made of recycled plastic (each with a plaque asking for prayers for a particular group of people eg people who are homeless, agricultural workers etc), put in 3 community vegetable beds, created a wildflower meadow and more animal-friendly habitats, installed a storytelling area, installed swift boxes, reduced the amount of mowing we do in a year and held wonderful community events in the churchyard.

2. Purpose

The churchyard is cared for as a place of remembrance, prayer, biodiversity, and community connection. St John's will honour its heritage as a (closed) burial ground while enhancing wildlife habitat and creating spaces for reflection, learning, and community engagement.

The churchyard is managed to:

- Respect the historic and sacred character of the site
- Encourage wildlife and biodiversity
- Provide safe and accessible pathways
- Create areas for quiet prayer and reflection
- Offer opportunities for community engagement, education, and wellbeing

3. Chelmsford City Council's Land Management Approach

The City Council's Director of Parks and Open Spaces, whose staff maintain many churchyards, aims to manage them for the encouragement and conservation of native wildlife and wild flowers. Their approach for churchyards is 'low intervention', as low as is safe, which for them means:

- Only mowing when necessary – "no mow summer" as far as possible
- Policy of no use of harmful chemicals, other than on paths when essential
- Annual topple testing of monument stones
- Routine annual inspection of trees, with only essential work undertaken
- Annual look at the boundaries for safety, ie fence and wall

Outcomes of the City Council's approach: Grass Cutting:

- A light touch mowing regime during the growing season encourages native wildlife
- The edges of the wild flower meadow and other wild areas are mown as a way of showing the wildness is intentional
- Grass cuttings are left allowing nature to reseed
- Unmown edges of the churchyard, where unsafe and broken stones have been laid by the walls, are home to a number of wild flowers (something that has increased significantly with the introduction of our wild flower meadow)
- Prunings, large and small, are left beside the church walls where they become home to wildlife.
- Timber from recently felled trees, cut down due to safety concerns, has also been left beside the churchyard walls
- During Messy Church Goes Wild, children have found that the churchyard supports ladybirds, honeybees, bumblebees, shield bugs, earwigs, garden spiders, money spiders, woodlice, cabbage white and peacock butterflies, earthworms, centipedes, millipedes, snails, ground beetles, ants and squirrels and other species
- The hedges are trimmed annually, but never during birds' nesting season, and provide thick cover for birds to nest.
- Ivy and elder have taken hold around some of the neglected graves. The City Council cuts the elder down as part of its annual tree work in the churchyard, and where it could damage structures, church volunteers cut the ivy.

Herbicides and fertilisers:

- are only used on the paths from the pavement into the church, and applied as per the manufacturer's instructions
- Fertilisers are not used in the churchyard
- The community garden raised beds will benefit from home-grown compost

Bird boxes:

- There are a number of bird boxes on the established trees in the churchyard
- The Great British Garden Birdwatch, running annually at St John's since 2021, revealed that the churchyard is home to robins, blackbirds, blue tits, great tits, collared doves, wood pigeons, starlings and house sparrows

Wild life structures:

- The churchyard hosts a large bug hotel (made during Wild Worship), a hedgehog box and bird feeders.
- The edge of the churchyard which houses felled trees of broken branches and stones from old gravestones provides additional habitats for wildlife to flourish

It is worthy of note that the maintenance is undertaken by Council staff who view the task of churchyard work through a long-term lens, and the way that they have pruned trees, and maintain the shape of the relatively new Millennium Yews along the north side evidences that.

4. Objectives

Heritage

- Protect historic gravestones and monuments
- Interpret local history through the heritage trail
- Encourage respectful visitor engagement

Wildlife & Biodiversity

- Manage in a sustainable way, reducing unnecessary waste to preserve natural resources
- Protect and increase habitat diversity
- Support pollinators and birds
- Manage grassland to encourage wildflowers
- Keep clear records of Target 25 species

Community

- Provide attractive spaces for reflection, prayer, and wellbeing, allowing people to connect with the natural environment
- Encourage community gardening and volunteering
- Support outdoor learning for children and other community groups
- Engage the community in local events held in the churchyard eg Green Fair

Accessibility

- Maintain clear accessible paths
- Provide seating throughout the site
- Ensure inclusive use of the churchyard

5. Zoning of the Churchyard



5.1 Wildflower Meadow Area

Purpose
To increase biodiversity and provide habitat for pollinators.

Management
- Cut once or twice annually (late summer and autumn) with mown path at edge to emphasise rewilded area
- Remove cuttings to reduce soil fertility
- Avoid mowing during peak flowering
- Signposted to explain

Benefits
- Supports bees, butterflies, and insects
- Enhances visual beauty of the churchyard
- Reduces mowing frequency



5.2 Prayer Walk

Purpose
A quiet spiritual pathway encouraging reflection and prayer.

Features
- Signposted prayer stations
- Audio version available
- Benches placed at intervals, each asking for prayer for specific groups

Management
- Maintain pathways clear and accessible
- Seasonal planting to support atmosphere of reflection
- Regular inspection for safety

5.3 Heritage Trail

Purpose
To celebrate the history of the churchyard and local community.

Features
- Marked route linking significant features
- Interpretation board
- QR codes and audio guides linking to further information with versions for children and adults to read and to listen

Management
- Regular monitoring of gravestone stability (carried out by City Council)
- Vegetation control around historic monuments
- Collaboration with local history groups

5.4 Children's Storytelling Area

Purpose
A welcoming outdoor learning space for children and families.

Features
- Natural seating logs
- Small storytelling circle

Management
- Maintain bark surfaces
- Ensure visibility and safety

- Seasonal storytelling or educational events
- Regular use by schools

5.5 Community Vegetable Beds

Purpose
To encourage community participation and sustainable food growing.

Management
- Managed by church and community volunteers
- Organic gardening encouraged
- Composting of green waste

Benefits
- Strengthens community relationships
- Provides educational opportunities
- Promotes environmental stewardship
- Provides food



Volunteers planting the new community veg bed

5.6 Quiet Reflective Area

Purpose
A peaceful space for contemplation, prayer, and remembrance.

Features
- Community designed mosaic as focal point
- Planting designed for calm and reflection
- Recycled plastic benches – each saving 31,000 plastic bags from landfill
- Minimal disturbance zone
- Guided reflections for people of all faiths and none



Management
- Limited maintenance to preserve tranquillity
- Sensitive planting and pruning

6. Nature Surveys and Monitoring

6.1 In addition to carrying out the annual RSPB Great British Bird Watch (January), Count on Nature (June) and the Big Butterfly Count (July/August), we also keep track of flora and fauna in the churchyard by recording our findings on iNaturalist and iRecord.

6.2 It is great to record that when the local community is informed of our various surveys, many have now started joining us as volunteers.

7. Target 25 action

7.1 Target 25 is an ARocha UK conservation project to protect 25 declining species, taxonomic groups and threatened habitats across the UK affected by climate change, habitat loss and pollution.

7.2 In terms of species we are going to be monitoring our local swift population (T22), having installed 12 swift boxes in the church tower in 2026.

7.3 On taxonomic groups we will continue to monitor butterflies (T9) during the Big Butterfly Count, as well as birds (T7) in the RSPB Great British Bird Watch.

7.4 On habitats, we are monitoring grassland, hedges and trees (T1/2).

8. Plan of work / maintenance

8.1 In addition to the planned, seasonal work carried out by Chelmsford City Council, our regular maintenance is helped by a group of church and community volunteers who regularly litter pick in the churchyard, keep the pathways clear of weeds, fill bird feeders, plant where needed, help in planting and harvesting the community veg beds, ensure good signposting shows people why we don't mow the wildflower area and why we leave a lot of land in an "untidy" state quite deliberately (our favourite sign is "Pardon the Weeds – we're feeding the bees").

9. Engagement and celebration

9.1 As a gold awarded Eco Church, we aim to hold services in the churchyard throughout the year, particularly in Creationtide when we really enjoy celebrating God's creation outdoors and enticing our neighbours to join us! Messy Wild Church is popular with families with young children and we run these jointly with our friends from the local URC church.

9.2 We hold regular events in the churchyard (and beyond) such as a Green Fair, autumn fair, events for All Hallows Eve etc, and we also encourage people to come and simply spend time in the churchyard. Our new (recycled plastic) benches are frequently filled with local families, workers and others enjoying their time in Creation.

9.3 We also created a heritage trail round the churchyard to enable the local community to learn about the church history, and we also created a prayer walk.



Our most recent Green Fair held in the churchyard with some of the 850 people who attended

10 Date for review

10.1 Our Land Management Plan is reviewed every 3 to 5 years, with changes made during that period as determined by our churchyard team and volunteers. Our last plan was made in 2022, but this plan reflects the significant changes that have occurred in our churchyard.

10.2 To review again in October 2030.

October 2026

Appendix A: Monitoring the wildlife and plants

To give a flavour of the way in which our churchyard is home to many species, this table is taken from our 2025 audit (and recorded on citizen science apps). Our 2026 Count on Nature is also recorded.

July 2025 flora audit

1 Autumn Hawkbit	36 Crested dogtail grass	71 Oxeye daisy
2 Big leaf Linden	37 Cut leaf blackberry	72 Pendulous sedge
3 Black bindweed	38 Daisy	73 Perennial rye grass
4 Black Horehound	39 Elder	74 Persian walnut
5 Black Knapweed	40 English Yew	75 Piloted-leaved blackberry
6 Black nightshade	41 European black elderberry	76 Pineapple weed
7 Bladder campion	42 European holly	77 Quack grass
8 Borage	43 European hornbeam	78 Ragged robin
9 Bristly Oxtongue	44 Fat-hen	79 Red campion
10 Broad-leaved dock	45 Fig leaved goosefoot	80 Redshank
11 Bull thistle	46 Garden privet	81 Ribwort Plantain

12 Butterfly bush	47 Garlic mustard	82 Shepherd's purse
13 Charlock	48 Goutweed	83 Small flowered crane's bill
14 Colonial Bent	49 Great stinging nettle	84 Smooth sow thistle
15 Common bird's foot trefoil	50 Greater plantain	85 Speedwell
16 Common cat's ear	51 Green alkanet	86 Spear thistle
17 Common dogwood	52 Hanging sedge	87 Spotted lady's thumb
18 Common crouch	53 Heart's tongue fern	88 Sycamore
19 Common groundsel	54 Hazel	89 Sycamore maple
20 Common hawthorn	55 Hedge bed straw	90 Tall fescue
21 Common hops	56 Herb Robert	91 Wall barley
22 Common ivy	57 Hoary plantain	92 White bedstraw
23 Common Knapweed	58 Hoary willowherb	93 White campion
24 Common lamb's quarter	59 Hogweed	94 White dead nettle
25 Common milkthistle	60 Japanese acuba	95 White carrot
26 Common poppy	61 Japanese spindle tree	96 Wild oat
27 Common selfheal	62 Lacy Phacella	97 Wood avons
28 Common sorrel	63 Laurel	98 Wood dock
29 Common sowthistle	64 Large-leaved lime	99 Yorkshire fig
30 Common yarrow	65 Long-headed poppy	
31 Common marigold	66 Maize	
32 Cornflower	67 Meadow crane's bill	
33 Creeping buttercup	68 Nipplewort	
34 Creeping cinquefoil	69 Opium poppy	
35 Creeping thistle	70 Orchard grass	

Species found in the churchyard with Essex Wildlife Trust 23/7/25 9am – 12noon

Animal	**Common name**	**Number**
Bats	Common pipistrelle	4+
	Soprano pipistrelle	2+
Birds	Swift	20+
	Feral pigeon	2
Moths	Mother of Pearl	5
	Jersey Tiger	21+
	Marbled Beauty	2
	Tree Lichen Beauty	1
	Cloaked Minor	2
	Furness Dowd	1
	Light Brown Apple Moth	1
	Gipsy Moth	1
	Common Wainscott	1
	Ringed China Mark	2
	Double striped pug	1
	Broad bordered yellow	1
	Water veneer	1
	Common grass moth	3
	Garden grass veneer	1
	Garden straw	1

	Tawny-fronted straw	1
	Common masoner	1
Other insects	Crucifer shieldbug	1
	Green shieldbug	3
	Hairy shieldbug	1
	Garden spider	2
	7 spot ladybird	1
	14 spot ladybird	1
	22 spot ladybird	1
	Long hoverfly	1
	Southern oak bush cricket	1

Count on Nature June 2026

Flora	Scientific name	Common name
1	Poa annua	Annual Meadow-grass
2	Hedera hibernica	Atlantic Ivy
3	Cota austriaca	Austrian Chamomile
4	Scorzoneroides autumnalis	Autumn Hawkbit
5	Bromus sterilis	Barren Brome
6	Tilia platyphyllos	Bigleaf Linden
7	Lotus corniculatus	Bird's-foot trefoil
8	Ballota nigra	Black horehound
9	Centaurea nigra	Black knapweed
10	Silene vulgaris	Bladder campion
11	Calliphora vicina	Blue Blowfly
12	Acer negundo	Box elder
13	Rubus	Brambles
14	Triticum aestivum	Bread Wheat
15	Helminthotheca echioides	Bristly oxtongue
16	Rumex obtusifolius	Broad-leaved dock
17	Bromus	Bromes
18	Cirsium vulgare	Bull Thistle
19	Ranunculus	Buttercups
20	Buddleja davidii	Butterfly bush
21	Daucus	Carrots
22	Galium aparine	Catchweed bedstraw
23	Hypochaeris	Cat's-Ears
24	Prunus cerasifera	Cherry-plum
25	Allium schoenoprasum	Chives
26	Dactylis	cocks-foot and orchard grasses
27	Hypochaeris radicata	Common Cat's-ear
28	Taraxacum officinale	common dandelion
29	Cornus sanguinea	common dogwood
30	Sphaerophoria scripta	Common Globetail
31	Crataegus monogyna	common hawthorn
32	Corylus avellana	common hazel
33	Humulus lupulus	common hops
34	Hedera helix	common ivy
35	Chenopodium album	Common Lambsquarters
36	Malva sylvestris	Common Mallow
37	Allium cepa	Common Onion
38	Papaver rhoeas	common poppy
39	Rumex acetosa	Common Sorrel
40	Sonchus oleraceus	Common Sow-thistle

41	Vicia sativa	Common Vetch
42	Achillea millefolium	common yarrow
43	Pinales	conifers
44	Centaurea cyanus	Cornflower
45	Anthriscus sylvestris	Cow Parsley
46	Potentilla reptans	Creeping cinquefoil
47	Cirsium arvense	creeping thistle
48	Oxalis corniculata	Creeping Woodsorrel
49	Rumex crispus	curled dock
50	Rubus laciniatus	Cutleaf Blackberry
51	Geranium dissectum	Cut-leaved crane's-bill
52	Magnoliopsida	Dicots
53	Rumex	docks and sorrels
54	Geranium molle	Dove's-foot crane's-bill
55	Quercus robur	English oak
56	Sambucus nigra	European black elderberry
57	Ilex aquifolium	European holly
58	Carpinus betulus	European Hornbeam
59	Cetonia aurata	European Rose Chafer
60	Hypnales	Feather Mosses
61	Convolvulus arvensis	field bindweed
62	Pyracantha	firethorns
63	Ligustrum ovalifolium	garden privet
64	Allium sativum	Garlic
65	Alliaria petiolata	garlic mustard
66	Veronica chamaedrys	Germander Speedwell
67	Aegopodium podagraria	Goutweed
68	Poaceae	Grasses
69	Urtica dioica	great stinging nettle
70	Epilobium hirsutum	Great Willowherb
71	Arctium lappa	greater burdock
72	Plantago major	greater plantain
73	Pentaglottis sempervirens	Green Alkanet
74	Grimmia pulvinata	Grey-cushioned Grimmia
75	Glechoma hederacea	ground-ivy
76	Vicia hirsuta	Hairy tare
77	Anthophora plumipes	Hairy-footed Flower Bee
78	Sisymbrium officinale	Hedge mustard
79	Geranium robertianum	Herb Robert
80	Leycesteria formosa	Himalayan honeysuckle
81	Heracleum sphondylium	hogweed
82	Alcea rosea	Hollyhock
83	Quercus ilex	Holm oak
84	Achillea pannonica	Hungarian yarrow
85	Ilex	Ilex sect. Ilex

86	Hedera	ivies
87	Aucuba japonica	Japanese aucuba
88	Euonymus japonicus	Japanese spindle tree
89	Centaurea	knapweeds
90	Pieris brassicae	Large White
91	Cotoneaster coriaceus	Late cotoneaster
92	Bellis perennis	Lawn daisy
93	Cichorieae	Lettuce, Chicory, Dandelion and Salsify Tribe
94	Geranium purpureum	Little-Robin
95	Malvales	Mallows, Rock Roses, and Allies
96	Ranunculus acris	meadow buttercup
97	Lapsana communis	nipplewort
98	Papaver somniferum	opium poppy
99	Papaver somniferum	opium poppy
100	Dactylis glomerata	orchard grass
101	Leucanthemum vulgare	oxeye daisy
102	Hypochaeridinae	Oxtongues, Hawkbits and Allies
103	Lolium perenne	Perennial Ryegrass
104	Juglans regia	Persian walnut
105	Euphorbia peplus	Petty Spurge
106	Rubus fruticosus	pilated-leaved blackberry
107	Conium maculatum	poison hemlock
108	Solanum tuberosum	potato
109	Sonchus asper	prickly sowthistle
110	Jacobaea vulgaris	ragwort
111	Silene dioica	red campion
112	Trifolium pratense	Red Clover
113	Bombus lapidarius	Red-tailed Bumble Bee
114	Plantago lanceolata	ribwort plantain
115	Lolium	Ryegrasses
116	Pezizomycotina	Sac Fungi and Lichens
117	Sanguisorba minor	Salad Burnet
118	Coccinella septempunctata	Seven-spotted Lady Beetle
119	Rumex acetosella	Sheep's sorrel
120	Sonchus	sow thistles
121	Veronica	speedwells
122	Acer pseudoplatanus	sycamore maple
123	Erigeron floribundus	Tall Fleabane
124	Arrhenatherum elatius	tall oat grass
125	Amblyteles armatorius	Toothed Tiger Ichneumon
126	Campanula poscharskyana	Trailing bellflower
127	Erigeron sumatrensis	tropical horseweed

128	Carex	true sedges
129	Vicia cracca	tufted vetch
130	Hippodamia variegata	Variegated Lady Beetle
131	Hordeum murinum	wall barley
132	Reseda luteola	Weld
133	Galium album	white bedstraw
134	Silene latifolia	white campion
135	Trifolium repens	white clover
136	Lamium album	White deadnettle
137	Daucus carota	wild carrot
138	Dipsacus fullonum	wild teasel
139	Epilobium	willowherbs
140	Pterygota	Winged and Once-winged Insects
141	Geum urbanum	Wood Avens
142	Geum urbanum	Wood Avens
143	Rumex sanguineus	Wood Dock
144	Pseudo-fumaria lutea	Yellow Corydalis
145	Taxus	yews
146	Holcus lanatus	Yorkshire fog
147	Origanum	
148	Cepaea	
149	Chrysolina lucida	
150	Pipizella	
151	Hedera crebrescens	
152	Hesperomyces harmoniae	
153	Sambucus nigra	
154	Brassicoideae	
155	Cepaea	

Fauna	**Scientific name**	**Common name**
1	Eupeodes	Aphideaters
2	Arthropoda	Arthropods
3	Harmonia axyridis	Asian Lady Beetle
4	Arion ater	Black Slug
5	Coccinellini	Black-spotted Lady Beetles
6	Cepaea nemoralis	Brown-lipped Snail
7	Bombus terrestris	Buff-tailed Bumble Bee
8	Lepidoptera	Butterflies and Moths
9	Calyptratae	Calyptrate Flies
10	Brassicogethes aeneus	Common Pollen Beetle
11	Columba palumbus	Common Wood-Pigeon
12	Cucujiformia	Cucujiform Beetles
13	Scarabaeinae	Dung Beetles
14	Troglodytes troglodytes	Eurasian Wren

15	Cornu aspersum	Garden Snail
16	Deroceras reticulatum	Milky Slug
17	Bombus hypnorum	Tree Bumble Bee
18	Coccinella nugatoria	Trivial Lady Beetle
19	Bombus vestalis	Vestal Cuckoo Bumble bee
20	Hordeum murinum	wall barley
21	Cepaea hortensis	White-lipped Snail