

Land Management Plan St Mary's Ringmer

Background Information and overall plans.

St Mary's has a closed churchyard known as the Old Church Yard of 1.4 acres surrounding the church and across the road with access from a small church car park adjacent to the road, is a path leading to the New Church yard of 0.8 acres, ie 2.2 in total, plus the car park verge and entrance garden to the left and recycling area to the right. Designated public footpaths cross the Old Church yard on brick paths to the road, across the road and through the New Churchyard to the fields beyond. Both churchyards are surrounded by mature trees. The New Churchyard borders the South Downs National Park. St Mary's began the project to embrace the Eco Church across all aspects of our Christian faith from January 2021 with a first focus being: **Our Wild Flowers in the Churchyards Project 2021**

Blue hearts with **Eco Church** written on them, were displayed in 12 key places in both the old and new churchyards as, bit by bit, we set in motion a church and community lead project, linked with Wildflower Ringmer. Our aim in this particular 'God's acre' at St Mary's, was, and continues to be, to start the restoration of as much as we can of nature's intended biodiversity, increasing the range of wild flowers to aid pollination by bees and insects. Young people, including the church's own Friday Club members, church and community volunteers, were all invited to take part in:

- planting of a special wild flower area,
- improving areas left to grow and seed,
- planting butterfly attracting shrubs and trees,
- gathering up mown grass to compost,
- building compost bins and recycling facility
- offering to help make or provide bird boxes
- donating time and/or funds to cover minimal costs
- responding to appeals for items



A major factor in encouraging wildflowers is to change and manage the mowing regime in both churchyards. The mowing contract in the Old Churchyard is the responsibility of the Parish Council, but in the New Churchyard falls to the PCC. This latter had been done by unpaid volunteers, but by 2021 the PCC was paying for a gardener responsible for the cutting and maintenance of the New Churchyard. **Until 2021 both churchyards had been close cut around all the graves for many generations.**

Summary of 2021 Plan

Immediately plans were made to improve the cutting regimes, with in 2021, except for neat paths alongside brick paths, access to graves in the Old Churchyard known to be still tended, and the front rose beds, all the rest were left through **No Mow May**, in order to establish and record what wild flowers we had already. **We already knew that in the front of the church there was a wonderful display of primroses, celandines and some violets each year (see above).** We linked extensively with Wildflower Ringmer and the SDNP ranger for the area to gain knowledge of how to count, recognise and record the flowers that emerged.

We established a monthly Church Gardening Group to keep monitoring the project (see page 4). The number of ox eye daisies that bloomed in May/June was amazing, and helped gain much approval from the community. Over 100 plant plugs were planted in our wildflower garden under a large elder tree by volunteers from the village and foxgloves behind the car park (A). A display area with posters was made in the Church Porch for the public, and up to date articles printed in the monthly Church and Village News.

These were the outcomes:

- **The Churchyards' new flowering regime was appreciated in Spring/early summer**
- **The dry and windy later summer left large areas looking 'untidy' by late summer and hard for the contractor to strim down to the ground.**
- **There was too much grass/dead flower stalks to rake up for our team and to dispose of.**

We could not easily compost and distribute these cutting ourselves, even though we had bins.

Plans from 2022 onwards:

- 1. The Eco Church Team will work directly with the Parish Council and their contractor grass cutter /churchyard management, to ensure their responsibilities for the old 'Closed' churchyard adopt this the Eco Churchyard regime.**
- 2. The gardener employed by the PCC to care for the new churchyard will be part of the Eco Church team, sharing the Eco Church priorities.**
- 3. The churchyards and associated verges/areas will focus on the T25 endangered environments and species: From 2022 this will focus on:**
- 4. T1:** Grasslands, churchyards and verges, (flora and fauna) **T6 :** Native wildflowers **T&:** Farmland and garden birds **T9:** Butterflies **T10:** Bees **T24:** Hedgehogs + continue consideration of swifts.
- 5. Improving the monitoring of the varieties and extent of the wildflowers, trees, birds, wildlife, butterflies by:**
 - Surveys involving church and community members
 - Installing a wildlife camera and noting activities across the seasons to assess effectiveness of our efforts.
 - Inviting the congregation and members of the community to exploring and engage in activities in the churchyards: eg Quizzes, providing needed plants and seeds, updating information board.
- 6. The management of the encouragement of wildflowers in the two churchyards and related areas will be responsive to the particular weather each year, with new areas added as opportunities arise.**