

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS



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| Agenda Item: | Closed Churchyard update |
| Meeting Date: | 17 th of March 2025 |
| Contact Officer: | Operations Manager – Angus Whitburn |

Background

Under the closed churchyard act the council manages the churchyards of Holy Trinity and St Marys churches. In July 2021 the council approved the rewilding of the churchyards for both Holy Trinity and ST'Marys.

Current Situation

Holy Trinity

The rewilding of Holy Trinity Church Yard has been a massive success. Just threw the basic process of cutting and collecting the grass in early autumn and late spring the churchyard has flourished. This has been massively attributed to the ground upon which Holy Trinity is situated, which is highly likely to be ancient woodland.

St Marys

In comparison St Mary's has struggled, the ground again is the massive contributing factor and St Mary's likely sits on made-up ground which is supported by recent historical information. This means to achieve a true rewilding of the churchyard an engineered approach would have to be attempted. This would involve stripping the turf layer or killing off the grass and then seeding with wildflower mixes. The Church are keen to just leave the ground to grow which will leave long unkempt grass.

Impact Assessments

The Town Council has a duty to consider the effects of its decisions, functions and activities on equality, biodiversity, and crime & disorder. Consideration should also be given to effects on the environment, given the Council's Climate Emergency declaration in 2019.

- a) Biodiversity – The rewilding of the church yards will increase biodiversity
- b) Environment & Climate Emergency – The church's goals of achieving eco church credentials are linked to the rewilding programmes

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

St Mary's Churchyard is a central point in Witney and on the main walking route from the town centre to the Leys recreation ground. The rewilding over the past years has looked unsightly and caused complaints for the council to handle. The church has tried to placate this with signage but the appearance of the churchyard can't be overlooked.

St Mary's church is keen to continue with the rewilding programme despite the bad appearance. If the council were to cancel the programme at St Mary's this may damage the relationship with the church.

Financial implications

- To rewilding of St Mary's churchyard there would be a substantial financial and also labour cost to the council.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and

1. Decide if to continue with the rewilding of St Mary's Church yard.