

Ross-on-Wye Churchyard Management Plan

This is a draft document which will be updated as we experiment with changes to the way we manage the churchyard. It focusses on the “open” churchyard. The “closed” churchyard is mowed fortnightly during the growing season by contractors working for Ross Town Council.

Areas of the churchyard are treated differently based on:

- The density of recent graves that are visited or tended by the general public.
- The types of plants to be found in different areas.
- The availability of labour (volunteer and paid) and funding.

We’ve used management regimes as suggested in [Caring For God’s Acre – Managing Churchyards and Burial Grounds: 2 Caring for Grassland](#) This is an excellent document, some of which has been used here but is a good read alongside this policy.

There are a number of locations around the churchyard where scrubland has developed, with nettles, brambles and thistles and several Elder saplings. There is also a conifer at 45 degrees in area B4. We have applied to Balfour Beatty to eliminate these for us as a Community Service Project.

Areas with nettles may need to be strimmed more regularly for a few years to eradicate them.

We need to monitor plant growth over the next 12 months, particularly in the spring – more areas may need to be treated as SPRING MEADOW.

Available labour

Churchyard Angels – volunteers (up to 20 currently and more volunteers have been coming forward this year) – first Saturday of the month – 9.30 to Noon

Probation Service – have agreed to increase their input and will now look after the whole area south west of the main track running across the churchyard from the Crossfields gate. They will also use the winter months to carry out much needed work on clearing the bases of trees of growth, raising tree canopies particularly over paths etc. They continue to work with us on a monthly basis but with more teams.

EnviroAbility – are interested in helping, we’d need to find funding – a joint application? They could perhaps, look after C3, D3 which would relieve the burden on the Churchyard Angels.

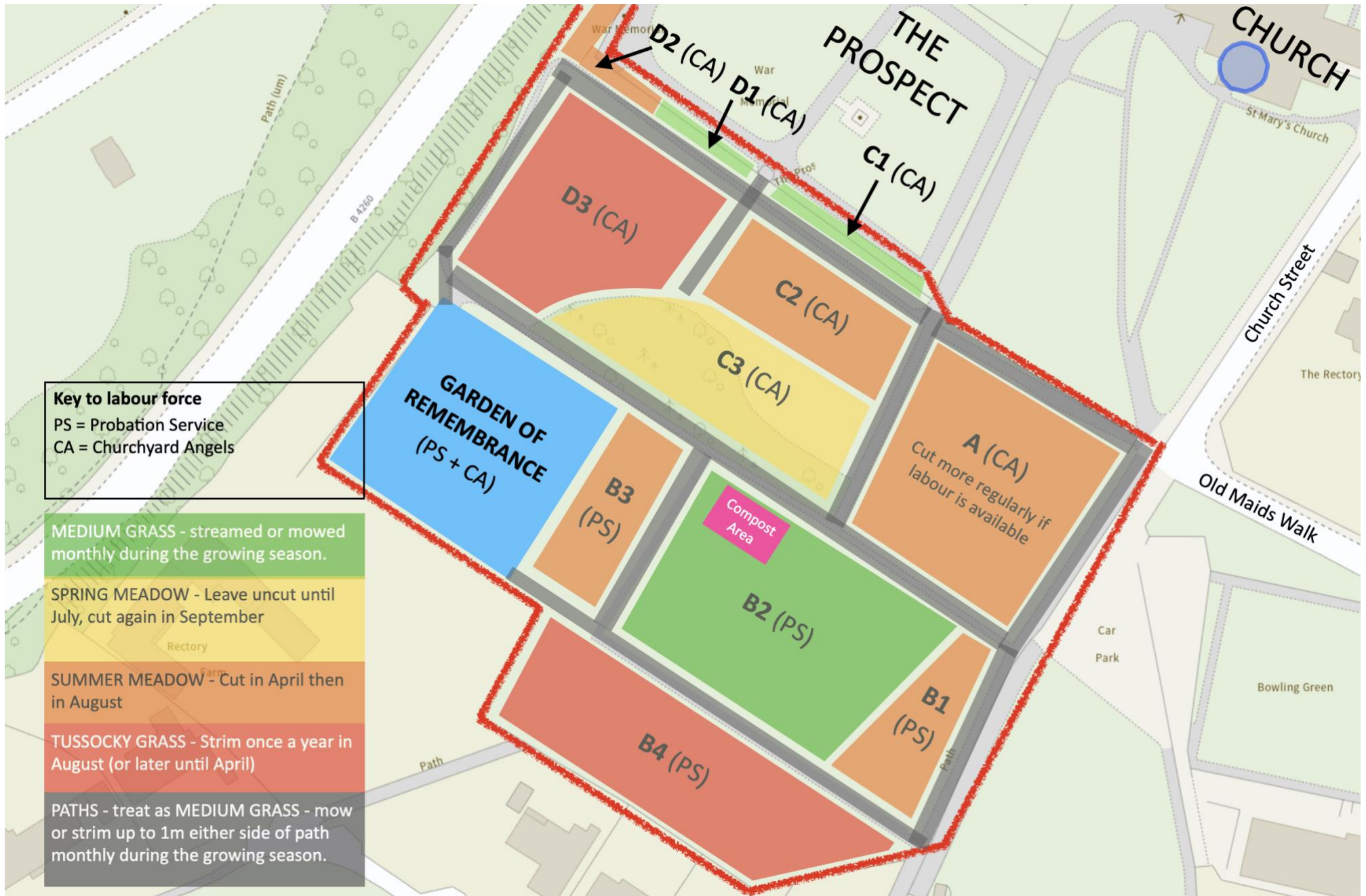
Monmouthshire Council – maintains the closed churchyard for Ross Town Council, fortnightly (though the contract is out for tender in Autumn 2023)

Paid labour (Alan Sonn) –

Balfour Beatty – one off support may be available for free (see above)

Others to approach (possibly to strengthen Churchyard Angels)

U3A – gardening groups?



Key to labour force
 PS = Probation Service
 CA = Churchyard Angels

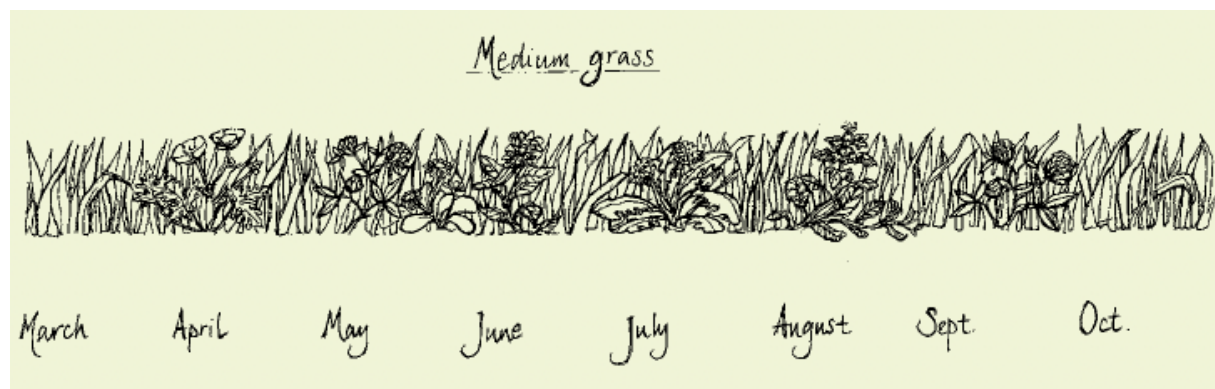
- MEDIUM GRASS - streamed or mowed monthly during the growing season.
- SPRING MEADOW - Leave uncut until July, cut again in September
- SUMMER MEADOW - Cut in April then in August
- TUSSOCKY GRASS - Strim once a year in August (or later until April)
- PATHS - treat as MEDIUM GRASS - mow or strim up to 1m either side of path monthly during the growing season.

Month	Activity	Areas	Priority for PS	Priority for CA
April	Strim all MEDIUM GRASS , remove cuttings if possible. Cut grass either side of paths up to 1m. Strim SUMMER MEADOW , remove cuttings if possible.	B2, C1, D1 All Paths A, B1, B3, C2, D2	B1, B3, GoR, B2, Paths	C2, D2, C1, D1, A
May	Strim all MEDIUM GRASS remove cuttings if possible. Cut grass either side of paths up to 1m.	B2, C1, D1, (A) All Paths	GoR, B2, Paths	A, C1, D1
June	Strim all MEDIUM GRASS remove cuttings if possible. Cut grass either side of paths up to 1m.	B2, C1, D1, (A) All Paths	GoR, Paths, B2	C1, D1, A
July	Strim all MEDIUM GRASS remove cuttings if possible. Cut grass either side of paths up to 1m. Strim SPRING MEADOW where necessary (mainly under trees, probably not necessary)	B2, C1, D1, (A) All Paths C3	GoR, B2, Paths	C3, C1, D1, A
August	Strim all MEDIUM GRASS remove cuttings if possible. Cut grass either side of paths up to 1m. Strim SUMMER MEADOW , remove cuttings if possible. Strim TUSSOCKY GRASS and remove cuttings (or any month after before Spring)	B2, C1, D1 All Paths A, B1, B3, C2, D2	B1, B3, GoR, B2, Paths	A, C2, D2, D3, C1, D1,
Sept	Strim all MEDIUM GRASS remove cuttings if possible. Cut grass either side of paths up to 1m. Strim SPRING MEADOW where necessary.	B2, C1, D1 (A) All Paths C3 B4, D3	GoR, B4, Paths, B2	D3 (if not done in Aug), C1, D1, A
October	Strim all MEDIUM GRASS remove cuttings if possible. Cut grass either side of paths up to 1m.	B2, C1, D1 (A) All Paths B4, D3	GoR, B4 (if not done in Sep), Paths, B2	A, C1, D1
Nov - Mar	Tree and path maintenance (clear basal growth from trees, raise canopies over paths, tackle difficult areas of growth) as labour is available.	All areas	As possible	-

MEDIUM GRASS (Areas A, B2, C1, D1 and up to 1m either side of paths)

This is the most thorough approach to management in the open churchyard.

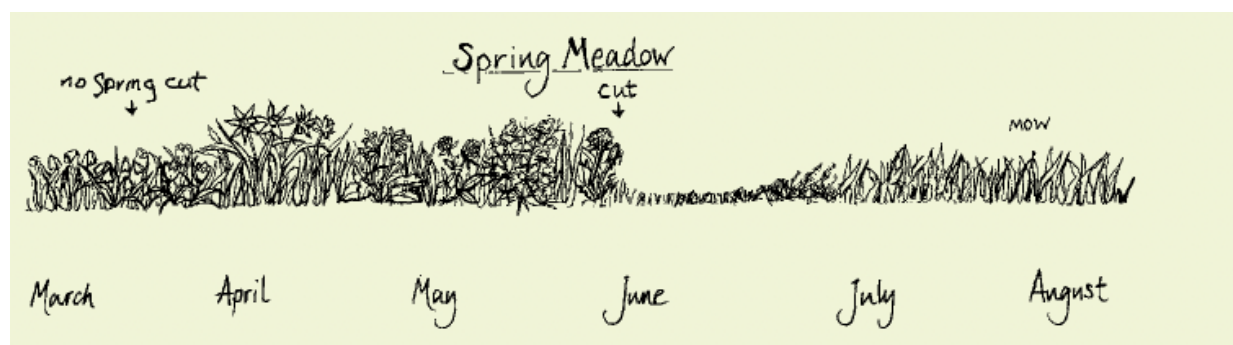
- Mow occasionally and always remove cuttings.
- Strimmers are the most useful tools in our churchyard though medium grass can be cut with a mower with the blade set at about 4 inches (10cm) and this approach is best either side of paths.
- It requires less frequent mowing (probably on a monthly basis during the growing season).



LONG GRASS: SPRING MEADOW (C3)

The majority of area C3 is under trees and as such requires little maintenance. The area extends beyond the tree canopy and this grass needs management. It is dominated by snowdrops, celandines, bluebells in the spring.

- Leave uncut until about mid-June and then cut again in August or September.



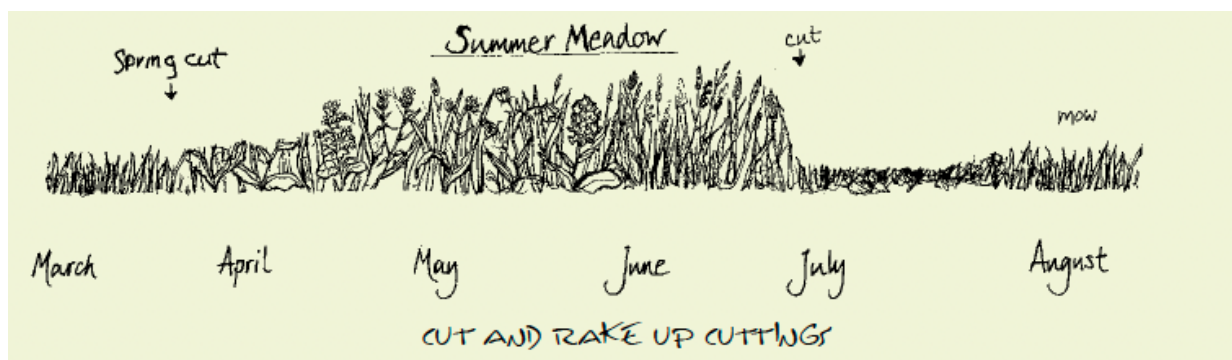
LONG GRASS: SUMMER MEADOW (B1, B3, C2)

Some of these areas have small areas of graves that are regularly visited. Many of these, and routes to them, seem to be cleared by those visitors but we need to be sensitive to access here and assist where possible.

Some areas (especially B3) have areas of scrub in them (thistles, nettles, sapling elder trees ...) which we will seek help (from Balfour Beatty initially) to clear so that regular maintenance will then be possible.

Summer meadows have lots of flowers in May, June and July – plants such as ox-eye daisy, bird’s foot trefoil, knapweed, hawkweeds, and buttercup.

- Strim in April (or earlier – February onwards),
- then leave uncut until mid-July or August (12 to 16 weeks cutting gap).



TUSSOCKY GRASS (B4, D3)

These areas are on the extreme edges of the churchyard and contain mainly old graves that are not visited. There are a small number of exceptions, however, but the people tending these seem to be self-sufficient in keeping them and the access clear.

Cut areas of tussocky grass once a year or once every other year. This will probably need strimming, scything or cutting with shears and the cuttings raked up and removed. Cutting less often can allow tree seedlings to establish and become a problem.

Tussocky grass should not be cut when species may be nesting or over-wintering.

In practice, cutting in late summer or early autumn works well (from about mid-August to mid-October). This gives time for re-growth before the winter and, if cutting is on a 2 year rotation, cut half one year and half the next.

- Strim in September and remove cuttings



PATHS

Where possible we’d like to widen paths by up to 1m on each side. This isn’t possible everywhere but where it is it will help to give a better feeling of purpose to the areas left to grow long grass as well as improved access of course on narrow paths). Mowing or strimming monthly (as for medium grass

above) should do the job. Many of these will be possible (once cleared by strimmers) with a mower.

The Probation Service, who already come with mowers, have agreed to take this on.

Tools

All organisations working in the churchyard bring their own tools. This works well, apart from the Churchyard Angels who often have insufficient strimmers. We don't have the facilities to store a stock of our own in a safe location (petrol). An approach has been made to Bradfords asking them to consider loaning us a few once a month. This approach could be widened if unsuccessful.

Compost Area

This is in a poor state. We are looking to replace it with a more solid structure this year. Simon Cutter is currently emptying it so that Alan Sonn can work on its replacement in the autumn.

Social Media and Website

Better communication to the general public of how we manage the churchyard and who does what is planned. See <https://rossparishes.uk/churchyard>

Information boards

For increased public participation and understanding of what goes on – phase 2. Also a possible trail based on Heather Hurley's "Tales from the Tombs" sessions – focussing on graves of notable Rossians – with background to where they lived, what they did etc. (also very much phase 2)

Closing the Churchyard

The Open churchyard is actually full, and now needs to be closed to further burials. We are looking into this possibility, after which it (like the already closed churchyard) can then become the responsibility of a local authority.