



Fact Sheet • June 2023

Closed churchyards

Churchyards are important places for people, but they can also be important areas for wildlife too. These habitats remain largely undisturbed, and plants and animals have space to thrive. So, what is often a peaceful place for contemplation can also become a haven for wildlife.

What is a closed churchyard?

A closed churchyard is one which has been closed for burials by order of the Privy Council under the provisions of the Burials Act. They continue to form part of the church site and may be used for church purposes.

Maintenance responsibilities

The Diocese owns the land, but if formally requested by the Diocese, the local authority is required to take on site maintenance. The transfer of maintenance responsibilities is compulsory. It does not depend on the condition of the churchyard or the local authority's ability to fund the costs.

Cornwall Council is responsible for features such as boundary walls, memorials, fences and footpaths, grass cutting, tree works and site safety. Any buildings (including ruins) remain the responsibility of the church.

Cormac, on behalf of Cornwall Council maintains 50 cemeteries and closed churchyards across the county.

Encouraging wildlife

We aim to strike the right balance in encouraging wildlife – wildflowers, birds, butterflies, and animals in these localities and at the same time tend to areas that are used for activities such as weddings and other events staged locally.

We will work with local church wardens, friend's groups, and volunteers to ensure that churchyards are maintained to meet local aspirations and Cornwall Council service requirements. Working with local people to make space for nature, creating havens for wildlife that bring joy to visitors and our community.

Maintenance schedules

We manage the grounds in a more sympathetic way to balance access while improving biodiversity.

On average, we cut the grass in closed churchyards three times per year. While ensuring that all main footpaths and entrances are kept clear throughout the year with a more regular cut.

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We regularly visit to cut and maintain entrances; strips adjoining footpaths and provide routes for families to visit and tend graves.

We maintain hedgerows in closed churchyards on a cyclical basis. Unless we need to carry out priority work in the interests of public safety. We are also responsible for identifying, programming, and supervising all tree works.

Cutting a path to a headstone

If you would like us to cut a pathway to enable safe access to tend a grave, please contact your local church warden or email us. Please let us know the grave details, such as name, section, and grave number, or an alternative to help our teams to identify the location of the headstone or monument that you would like to access.

Where there are very old headstones amongst established habitat wherever possible we will do our best to assist.

Grass cutting before a wedding or event

We will always do our best to work with the church to accommodate changes to our cutting schedules. However, any additional grass cutting will need to be paid for. Please discuss your requirements directly with the church at least six weeks in advance of your event. That way our maintenance teams can programme the work.

Cleaning after each grass cut

We do not collect the grass clippings, these are left on-site, evenly distributed to break down naturally and disperse back into the soil.

We use a combination of rotary mowers and trimmers to cut around memorials, borders, and kerb edge sections. We will sweep or blow off headstones following each cut. Unfortunately, we are not able to clean individual memorials by hand, with over 60,000 to maintain.

Some grass clippings will inevitably settle on headstones. This is weather dependent, though commemorative objects placed on or around monuments will also make it harder to cut around. Grass clippings will not cause any damage and visitors are welcome to wipe off their memorials if they wish to.

Volunteering

If you would like to get involved with the management of closed churchyards or some environmental or outdoors volunteering, please get in touch.

We are always happy to enlist volunteers to get involved in local community projects. There are many opportunities available, and you get to work in some of the most beautiful places in the country. New and occasional volunteers are always welcome, and no previous experience is needed.

More information

You can find out more about how we maintain these areas on Cornwall Council's Website <http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/parks-and-open-spaces/closed-churchyards/>

Please note where closed churchyards are maintained by a town or parish council, the standards of maintenance are set locally and the grass cutting regimes may vary.

To find out when we will be in your local area to cut the grass or carry out other maintenance activities in our parks and open spaces, please visit <https://www.cormacltd.co.uk/>

Our schedules are published through the cutting season on a weekly basis by Community Network Areas. If your area is not listed, this means that we do not have works planned in your area for that working-week. Please remember to check the pages regularly for up-to-date information.

You can get in touch by emailing us at: environment@cormacltd.co.uk

If there is an issue which is a threat to public safety, please telephone 0300 1234 222 (24-hour service) giving details of the location.