

## Churchyard Policies: Some Guidance

Churchyards are an important location for the mission and ministry of the church. They can be a source of great blessing to church and community. They are often much loved places and the focus of people's deepest feelings with respect to the departed. There is often tension between what individuals wish to do with graves (with or without permission) and the nature of the churchyard as a shared and public space for which the church has a responsibility on behalf of all.

Considerable distress can occur as a result of misunderstandings between individuals, families and the church. Churchyard policies are one means of clear communication and can help reduce misunderstandings and provide the basis for resolution should that be required.

The context for all churchyard policies is the Chancellor's [Churchyard Regulations](#).<sup>1</sup> This includes clear instructions regarding memorials, areas for the burial of cremated remains, reservation of grave-space, artificial flowers and items left in the churchyard. Guidance at the end of that document indicates how to seek the Chancellor's approval for local modifications. Such modifications can deal with variants regarding headstones or the style of a new area for the burial of cremated remains.

The PCC itself can decide upon certain matters including whether it will allow reservation of grave spaces and whether the right to be buried in the churchyard should be extended to former residents who have moved out of the parish to go into care.

Memorials are owned by the family who are responsible for their maintenance. It is important to check with the registry before the PCC undertakes any direct intervention with memorials or other grave markers (kerbs etc).

If the PCC charges for copies of churchyard plans or information regarding the location of a specific grave, this is better agreed in advance.

When drawing up a graveyard policy the PCC should seek the advice of the relevant archdeacon if they wish to change what has been done in the past or if they are unsure as to how to proceed with any matter.

[Caring for God's Acre](#) provide a wealth of advice on caring for churchyards. This can be the basis for an agreed churchyard maintenance plan, which may include information about when grass is cut and the regular clearance of time expired or unwanted items.

Having agreed a churchyard policy, and sought the Chancellor's approval where required, PCCs may wish to display prominently a summary policy statement that includes some of the following items:

- Welcome
- Opening statement on how the churchyard is important
- Invitation to enjoy natural features
- Any points of particular historical interest
- Guidance regarding care of graves, including water, waste-disposal (compostable/bins) and restrictions on artificial flowers and other items
- Advice to dog-owners
- Summary of any churchyard maintenance plan
- Whom to contact for matters such as access to the church building, location of graves, funeral arrangements, and for a full copy of the Parish's Churchyard Policy and the Chancellor's Churchyard Regulations.

David Primrose, August 2017

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<sup>1</sup> See diocesan website for latest version