



East Suffolk Council's Environmental Policy for Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. East Suffolk Council is exploring ways of promoting and facilitating the provision of burial with due regard to environmental impact and encourage service options that eliminate or significantly reduce the risk of harm to our environment.

2. Objectives of the Policy

- 2.1. The Council is seeking to ensure it is adopting a clear, measurable and sympathetic approach to the management of its assets in open spaces, which will take account of the sometimes-contrasting needs of a variety of facility users.
- 2.2. The policy will establish responsibility for grounds maintenance within cemeteries and closed churchyards.
- 2.3. The Council through the policy will endeavour to always offer the highest standard of service in undertaking its management and regulatory responsibility.
- 2.4. It is the intention that the policy only covers broad common issues and is not meant to be exhaustive. The policy will be reviewed at least every three years.
- 2.5. This policy supersedes all previous arrangements, policies and agreements on this matter.
- 2.6. This policy will be made available to the public.

3. Grounds maintenance of closed churchyards and cemeteries managed by East Suffolk Council.

- 3.1. Cemeteries owned by East Suffolk Council and any closed churchyards whose upkeep responsibility falls to the Council will be maintained at this minimum standard, unless additional funding to cover any enhancements to this level of service is provided by the PCC, Parish Council or other body to cover the additional costs incurred.



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- 3.2. Newly closed churchyards which are to be transferred to the Council must be in good order and repair and have been maintained to the satisfaction of East Suffolk Council at the point of transfer.
- 3.3. Any deviation from the maintenance schedule below will be at the discretion of East Suffolk Council and their contractors.
- 3.4. Cemeteries and closed churchyards maintained by East Suffolk Council receive regular risk assessments and periodic inspections including those by qualified Tree Inspectors.

4. Graveyard biodiversity.

- 4.1. The biodiversity of a closed churchyard will actively be encouraged and is the default standard for the maintenance schedule. East Suffolk Council has a policy of no-spraying within closed churchyards and cemetery boundaries (unless as a final resort to remove invasive species such as Japanese Knot Weed).
- 4.2. Cemeteries which are in active use for burials are assessed on a location basis and certain areas are identified for biodiversity management.
- 4.3. ¹The grassland found in a closed churchyard is unlikely to have been fertilised or reseeded and is therefore often rich in wildflowers which are now so scarce elsewhere.
- 4.4. Careful management of all or part of the churchyard to favour these wildflowers, offers a unique opportunity to safeguard this valuable habitat in a place where it can be enjoyed by parishioners and visitors alike.
- 4.5. Leaving for nature does not mean leaving alone. If left to its own devices, wildflower areas will be overtaken by scrub and invasive plants such as nettle and hogweed. To maintain the floral diversity the grassland needs to be cut once a year.
- 4.6. The selection of areas to be managed for wildflowers will depend not only on where the most wildflowers are, but also on the layout and use of the churchyard or cemetery.
- 4.7. In order to maintain a 'cared for' appearance, it is important to keep grass short adjacent to the main paths and to allow access to regularly attended graves. Cutting

¹ Advice from the Suffolk Wildlife Trust website



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paths through the longer grass areas, and carefully defining their edges by regularly mown grass, shows that the 'wildlife areas' are part of a plan and allows visitors to appreciate them easily. If there is space, leaving some areas uncut throughout the year is beneficial. Seed heads are a food source for birds and many invertebrates overwinter in long grass.

- 4.8. With the policy of not using herbicides it should be noted that with the process of grass cutting, arisings can be distributed or be blown onto memorials. The Council will not remove such arisings. Whilst we endeavour to keep this to a minimum it is unfortunately an unavoidable consequence of this approach but one we feel is less intrusive than the alternative.

5. Standard Maintenance Schedule:

5.1. Grass Cutting:

- 5.1.1. No use of pesticides or spraying will be carried out (unless this is a final resort to remove invasive species such as Japanese Knot Weed).
- 5.1.2. For closed churchyards and identified biodiversity areas within cemeteries, grass cutting will be carried out on the basis of 1 cut per year in the autumn where areas are set aside for the growth of wildflowers to encourage biodiversity. Clippings will be left in situ. Another cut may be carried out in the spring depending on weather conditions and re-growth rates. Grass clippings will not cause any damage and visitors are welcome to wipe off their memorials if they wish to.
- 5.1.3. For active areas within cemeteries, grass cutting will be carried out a minimum of 4 cuts per annum
- 5.1.4. For formal paths and desire lines, a minimum of 4 cuts per annum will take place. This will cover a strip of 1 metre each side of a formal path.
- 5.1.5. All major pathways and entrances are kept clear of growth throughout the year.
- 5.1.6. In adopting this approach, ESC understands that some PCCs / parishes might wish to opt-out of creating a biodiversity area within the closed churchyard and can request 4



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cuttings a year throughout the site; which will be considered they can also enter into a separate contract for additional cutting to take place.

5.2. Hedgerows:

5.2.1. Hedgerows will be clipped annually unless there is a legitimate need to undertake further maintenance such as the intrusion of the hedgerow onto a footpath or highway which introduces an unacceptable risk on public safety.

5.2.2. Hedges vary in terms of individual purpose, species, height, width and layout and graveyards are assessed on an individual basis, according to this.

5.2.3. Major cutting does not take place between February and October due to nesting birds and observed in accordance with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. However, some trimming back may be required for access and visibility between these times.

5.3. Trees:

5.3.1. The Council's appointed tree officers will be responsible for the supervision of all work relating to trees.

5.3.2. Inspection of trees are carried out on a schedule of 1-5 years, according to risk.

5.3.3. Trees will be maintained to a minimum standard to prevent further decay through disease and/or personal injury to the general public.

5.3.4. Trees are checked for nesting birds before any remedial works are carried out.

5.3.5. If a protected tree in a conservation area or subject to a Tree protection order has to be felled because it is dangerous or dying, the parishes and ward members will be given the opportunity to discuss planting of a replacement tree.

5.3.6. Fallen trees will be cleared and removed.

5.3.7. The church authorities remain the legal landowners of the trees within closed churchyards and may choose to manage their trees in addition to, or in concert with any works carried out by the local authority.

5.4. Boundary maintenance:



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5.4.1. Boundary walls and fences will only undergo repair and maintenance where it is perceived by an appointed officer of the Council that failing to do so may cause a significant risk to public safety or failing to do so will result in a disproportionately higher cost being incurred at a later stage.

5.5. Pathways, roads and hardstandings:

5.5.1. Pathways and other hard standings will be maintained and repaired only where there is determined by the Council to be a risk to personal safety.

5.6. Buildings & other structures:

5.6.1. Buildings and other structures will not typically be transferred as part of the closure of a churchyard, however where such a transfer takes place, the Council will maintain the structure to a standard to ensure public safety is not placed at risk. The future use of the building will be at the sole discretion of the Council.

3.1.1. Buildings in Council owned cemeteries are subject to regular inspections and any repairs and maintenance will be carried out according to policy.

3.2. Headstones:

3.2.1. Where a headstone is covered in vegetation, this will not be automatically cleared by the grounds maintenance operator. If vegetation is present and considered to be causing a health and safety risk – as identified in the condition survey of a headstone, or the vegetation is preventing a risk assessment to take place, then the grounds operator will be notified to clear the headstone from vegetation. See East Suffolk Council's Health and Safety Policy for Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards for further details on the management of headstones.