

## Much Wenlock Town Council

### The Old Cemetery

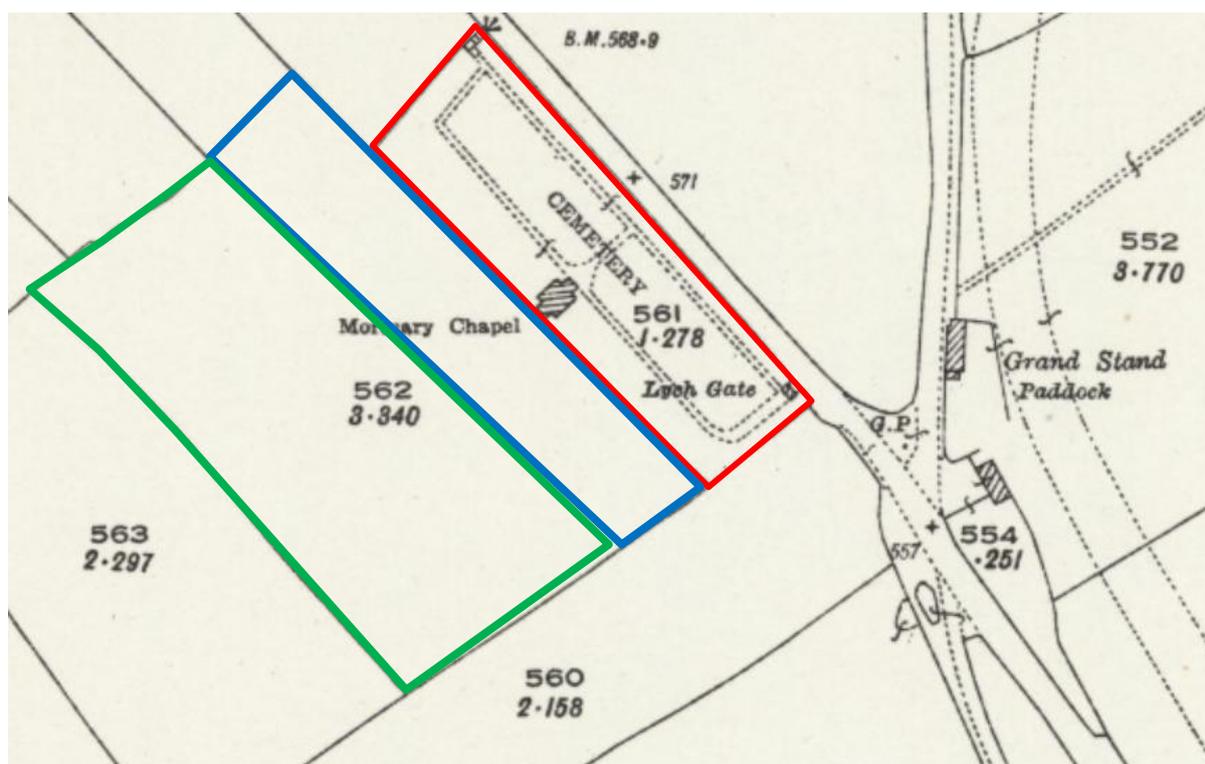


### Management Plan 2022-2027

## Introduction

In 1890, when the burial ground adjacent to the parish church in Much Wenlock town centre reached full capacity a new cemetery was established to the west of Bridgnorth road. The new site, which extended to 0.5ha (1.3 acres) was enclosed by a limestone wall and included a small mortuary chapel. This cemetery was used for burials for around 100 years but by 1980 this area had also reached capacity and an additional area of land to the west was acquired by the Much Wenlock Borough (now Town) Council as a cemetery extension. This is the current burial ground for the town. A plan of the old cemetery, photographs of all the graves and a spreadsheet of headstone information are held by both MWTC and Lesley Durbin.

This management plan covers the walled nineteenth century cemetery (outlined in red below), which is the responsibility of Much Wenlock Town Council with management work undertaken partly by contractors and partly by volunteers from the Friends of the Cemetery. The latter was established by the Council in 2012 and includes three Town Councillors and a number of community volunteers. In practice, with the exception of work parties, just 1-2 volunteers undertake the majority of tasks for this group. Support and advice on management of the cemetery has also been provided by the Caring for God's Acre organisation.



*1904 OS map (reproduced under Creative Commons Licence CC-BY-NC-SA ). The 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery covered by this plan is outlined in red; the area within the blue boundary is the current burial ground and the area outlined in green is currently used for allotments but is earmarked for a future extension of the burial ground. The map also shows the site of the grandstand of the Much Wenlock racecourse, where the current Primary school now stands.*

The 19<sup>th</sup> century cemetery contains just over 400 graves of which less than 10 are regularly tended by families. These include nine war graves and the burial sites of notable local people including the family grave of Alderman Davies who donated the Fair Field (on which Back Lane car park is now sited) to the town. The cemetery also contains a WW1 Remembrance Garden created by the Friends of the Cemetery in 2014. A short Remembrance service is held here for the Primary School every year, organised by Mary Hill.

Historically the main aim of the Town Council has been to keep the cemetery neat and tidy and provide a safe place for the residents of Much Wenlock and others with family connections to visit. However, in recent years the wildlife value of cemeteries has been better recognised and the old cemetery in Much Wenlock provides an ideal place for the Council to fulfil its obligations under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 to conserve biodiversity when exercising its functions. The proposals within the plan will also assist the Council in reducing its carbon footprint by introducing lower carbon management and improving soil carbon storage.



This management plan builds on the past management by the Council and Friends Group and incorporates a previous plan produced by the Caring for God's Acre group, to provide a suggested framework for enhancing biodiversity within the cemetery without impacting on its historical interest or compromising health and safety. The proposals require no additional funding from the Council for the day to day running of the cemetery and much of the additional work can be undertaken by volunteers. The majority of the proposed capital works could be funded through grants or local fundraising if required.

## 2. Interest Features of the Old Cemetery

### 2.1 Cultural Importance

The old cemetery is of great historical importance to the town and its inhabitants, with previous generations of many long-standing Wenlock families buried here. The cemetery, through its headstones, provides an insight into the former residents of the area, their roles in local society and their social connections. For individuals, the cemetery has an important value for genealogical research, as a place of spiritual connection with ancestors and as a place of remembrance for loved ones.

The cemetery is also of value as an area of secluded green space within the town which can be used for relaxation and quiet contemplation. This aspect is compromised somewhat by the proximity of the A458 which creates a visual and noise intrusion on an otherwise peaceful place.



*WW1 Remembrance stone*

### 2.2 Wildlife Importance

#### 2.2.1 Botanical Interest

The area of land which now forms the old cemetery was formerly agricultural land which was likely to have been managed as permanent pasture or on a pasture/arable rotation but long before the days when inorganic fertilisers or herbicides came into use. As such it retains many characteristics of unimproved species-rich limestone grassland which is now becoming increasingly rare and supports a number of limestone-loving plant species including cowslip, hoary plantain, viper's bugloss and lady's bedstraw. Flowering of many of the taller species is suppressed by the current mowing regime but since 2015 three areas of approx 5m x 5m have been left uncut until late summer, allowing species such as ox-eye daisy to bloom and set seed.



*Fox and Cubs, Hoary Plantain and Viper's Bugloss, species that benefit from the long-grass areas*

The botanical interest of the cemetery has also been enhanced by grave gardens, created by allowing both wild flowers and cultivated species to become established within grave kerbs and left uncut through the summer months.



*Two examples of “grave gardens”, enhancing biodiversity and reducing trip hazards*

The cemetery also includes mature trees and shrubs, particularly along the eastern perimeter adjacent to Bridgnorth road, with more recent planting focussing on nectar-rich and berry-bearing species to enhance the wildlife interest of the site.

### **2.2.2 Lower Plants**

Mosses, liverworts and particularly lichens are early colonisers of bare rock for which graveyards have become a really important habitat, replicating bare rock faces in the wider countryside. In Much Wenlock cemetery both the gravestones, with their different stone types and varying orientations and the limestone boundary wall provide a valuable habitat for these species and although no surveys have been undertaken it is likely that a good range of species are present with some of the lichens being of great antiquity as they can be very long-lived. Lichens cause no damage to the stone and indeed in many cases will help protect it from weathering.



Fungi have not been surveyed but typically long-established semi-natural grassland can be rich in waxcap species.

### 2.2.3 Slow-worms

One of the most notable wildlife features of the cemetery is the presence of slow-worms; reptiles which resemble a small snake but which are actually legless lizards. Slow-worms feed on insects and



other invertebrates in grassland areas and hibernate under tree roots and rocks/stones, so churchyards and cemeteries provide important habitat for this fast-declining species. Slow-worms are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and it is illegal to kill or injure them. Unfortunately, in Much Wenlock cemetery, slow-worms are regularly caught up in and killed by mowing operations and a change of mowing regime/operation is necessary to minimise effects on this important population.

### 2.2.4 Insects

The species-rich grassland provides important food plants and nectar sources for a variety of insect and insect biodiversity is likely to have been greatly enhanced by management initiatives in recent years to increase the numbers of native flowering plants and provide more structural diversity through the creation of areas of long grass. The latter has already encouraged colonisation by



Meadow Brown butterflies and Large and Small Skippers which also require long grass for their larval foodplant are likely to colonise in the future. Holly Blue butterflies, whose larvae feed on both holly and ivy have also been recorded in the cemetery and are likely to utilise the ivy growing on the boundary wall, the latter also providing a late nectar source for insects and hibernation sites for Brimstone butterflies. Two “bug hotels” was constructed in the NW and SW corners of the cemetery in 2017.

*Holly Blue butterfly*

### 2.2.5 Birds

The grassland areas, which have never been subject to applications of pesticides and which have avoided compaction issues created by heavy machinery, provide important feeding places for birds, including declining species such as the song thrush which is still present in small numbers in the Much Wenlock area. Recent planting of berry-bearing trees and shrubs will also benefit birds during the winter months and provide additional nesting sites in spring.

### 3. Management Aims

- To conserve the historical features and cultural importance of the old cemetery
- To provide safe public access for education, relaxation and quiet contemplation
- To enhance the wildlife interest of the old cemetery, where this is compatible with above aims

### 4. Management Actions

MWTC-Much Wenlock Town Council

VOL - Volunteers inc. Friends of Cemetery CON - Contractor

<b>4.1 Historical and Cultural Features</b>			
<b>Feature</b>	<b>Management</b>	<b>By Whom</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
4.1.1 Gravestones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited intervention. Any cleaning of headstones should be limited to removing lichens etc. only from lettering. Remedial work may be required on collapsing graves to prevent structures becoming unsafe.</li> </ul>	MWTC, Vol	2022-2027
4.1.2 Boundary wall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain stonework as necessary. Retain ivy, only trimming stems which are impacting on access to the cemetery.</li> </ul>	MWTC, CON	2022-2027
4.1.3 Chapel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be agreed by MWTC</li> </ul>		

<b>4.2 Public access for education, relaxation and quiet contemplation</b>			
<b>Feature</b>	<b>Management</b>	<b>By Whom</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
4.2.1 Paths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain current stone and mown grass paths to provide access to all parts of cemetery.</li> </ul>	MWTC, CON	2022-2027
4.2.2 Seating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain existing seats but also consider provision of additional seating in shade areas, which is currently lacking.</li> </ul>	MWTC, VOL	2022-2023
4.2.3 Roadside screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plant additional trees/shrubs along roadside boundary to provide a no maintenance screen between the cemetery and the road to reduce visual intrusion and road noise.</li> </ul>	MWTC/VOL	2023-2024
4.2.4 Shelter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce exposure of cemetery to northerly winds through additional tree planting along north wall.</li> </ul>	MWTC/VOL	2024
4.2.5 Interpretation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide interpretation boards at northern and southern entrances to cemetery, explaining the importance of the site, showing locations of paths and seating and making visitors aware of off-path trip hazards around</li> </ul>	MWTC/VOL	2024

	gravestones		

<b>4.3 Enhancement of Wildlife Interest</b>			
<b>Feature</b>	<b>Management</b>	<b>By Whom</b>	<b>Timescale</b>
4.3.1 Botanical interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refine mowing regime to cut to minimum sward height of 5cm, every 3 weeks through the growing season to allow low-growing species including bird's foot trefoil and bugle to flower and provide a nectar source for insects.</li> </ul>	MWTC, CON	2022-2027
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider modest increase in areas of long grass, to be cut once annually in late summer. Explain importance of long grass areas on interpretation panels.</li> </ul>	MWTC, CON	2022-2027
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Mow above in late summer</li> </ul>	CON/VOL	2022-2027
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increase number of grave gardens in untended graves to enhance botanical interest, increase pollen and nectar sources and reduce trip hazard around graves.</li> </ul>	MWTC, VOL	2023
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Persevere with the introduction of yellow rattle (which is partially parasitic on grasses) to reduce vigour of grasses and benefit the wild flowers.</li> </ul>	VOL	2022-2025
4.3.2 Lower plants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The lower plant communities (mosses, liverworts and lichens) require no management other than retention of grave headstones and the boundary wall. Cleaning of headstones (if required) should be limited to removal of lichens only from headstone lettering. New planting along the roadside will help reduce air pollution levels within the cemetery which should benefit lichen populations.</li> </ul>	MWTC, CON	2022-2027
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A survey of headstone lichens is desirable.</li> </ul>	VOL	2024
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Undertake fungi survey in late summer/autumn</li> </ul>	VOL	2023
4.3.3 Slow-worms	The cemetery, with its variety grassland habitats coupled with abundant nooks and crannies amongst gravestones and the boundary wall provides excellent feeding and hibernation areas for the slow-worm population. However, the regular mowing regime, in place to keep the cemetery neat and tidy, results in several slow-worms being inadvertently killed every	MWTC, CON	2022-2027

	<p>year. To minimise this risk the following regime should be implemented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summer mowing to take place at 3 weekly intervals (as at present)</li> <li>• Raise cutting height of mower to leave a minimum sward height of 50mm (2 inches) apart from along central path.</li> <li>• Whenever possible, mow cemetery on warm days when the cold-blooded slow-worms will be more readily be able to escape the mowing operation</li> <li>• Whenever possible, undertake mowing as last operation of day, i.e. at warmest time of the day, for reasons described above</li> <li>• Increase number of grave gardens on untended graves which are only mown once annually.</li> <li>• Consider modest increase in areas of long grass which are left unmown until late summer.</li> <li>• Monitor slow-worm population by recording numbers of individual found under corrugated sheets</li> </ul>	VOL	2022-2027
4.3.4 Insect populations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain structural diversity of vegetation through actions described above.</li> <li>• Continue to increase species diversity through supplementary sowing of appropriate wild flower seed (e.g. yellow rattle) and creation of wild flowerbeds.</li> <li>• Increase availability of nectar sources through implementation of mowing regime described in 4.3.3.</li> <li>• Retain ivy on boundary wall as an important foodplant, late nectar source and hibernation area.</li> <li>• Maintain bug hotels</li> </ul>	MWTC, CON VOL	2022-2027  2022-2027
		ALL	2022-2027
		MWTC	2022-2027
		VOL	2022-2027
4.3.5 Birds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain low input management regime to maintain soil health and soil invertebrate populations to benefit feeding birds.</li> <li>• Continue with policy of using wildlife friendly species in future tree/shrub planting to maximise feeding and nesting potential.</li> <li>• Retain ivy on boundary wall as winter berry source for birds</li> <li>• Maintain existing nestboxes on trees and</li> </ul>	ALL	2022-2027

	consider installation of house martin boxes on chapel if acceptable from an historical interest perspective.	VOL	2022-2027
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### Authorship

**Main author:** Tim Coleshaw (freelance ecologist, former National Nature Reserves Co-ordinator for Natural England and author of *NNR Management Plans: a guide* [English Nature, 2005]).

**Contributors:** Lesley Durbin (history and management)

Jo Jukes (management)

Mary Hill (history)

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