

Whitecastle Community Council
Cyngor Cymuned Castellgwyn
Churchyard Management Plan
Churchyards of Llanvihangel-ystern-llewern (St Michael)
and Llangattock Vibon Avel Church (St Cadoc)

Aim

Whitecastle Community Council is responsible for the churchyards of Llanvihangel-ystern-llewern and Llangattock Vibon Avel. The churchyards are cared for in a way which makes them pleasant and attractive for visitors, a place in keeping with the function of burials, a fit and proper setting for the church and a haven for wildlife.

Objectives

This Management Plan sets out a programme of practical care consistent with the Church in Wales recommendations specified in Management of Churchyards: Policy and Guidance (Church in Wales, 2013), and with the principles and practices of the Council. The Management Plan intends to:

- create a clear and transparent procedure for reporting and remedying safety issues
- identify persons responsible for remedying issues
- set out a vision for the churchyard, its ecology and its gravestones
- ensure visitors are made welcome, and derive a safe and worthwhile experience from their visit

In order to ensure that this Management Plan continues to be relevant and up to date, it is intended that the Plan will be reviewed annually.

1. Management

The clerk to the council is the Churchyard Safety Officer. The Churchyard Safety Officer works with members of the council and members of the local church committees to ensure the effective management of the churchyards.

The ward member for Llanvihangel-ystern-llewern and the Churchyard Safety Officer are jointly responsible for Llanvihangel Ystern Llewern churchyard. The ward member for Llangattock Vibon Avel (currently vacant) and the Churchyard Safety Officer are jointly responsible for Llangattock Vibon Avel churchyard.

The Churchyard Safety Officer and local members report to the council on matters relating to the churchyards at each council meeting.

The Churchyard Safety Officer and local members are responsible for the implementation of the churchyard maintenance strategy and will provide input to the council's biodiversity policy.

Consultants: the principal consultants on biodiversity is One Voice Wales. Rachel Carter Local Places for Nature Officer rcarter@onevoicewales.wales

2. The Maintenance Strategy

Grass cutting schedule: The grass in Llanvihangel-ystern-llewern churchyard is cut four times a year in April, May, August and October. The closed part of Llangattock Vibon Avel churchyard is cut four times a year in April, May, June and September.

Maintenance of graves: Subject to accepting the potential risk of personal injury or accident in areas of the churchyard that may contain concealed hazards, relatives and friends are encouraged to maintain or tidy up a grave.

The council acknowledges that some graves may be neglected and will take appropriate action if necessary. Contractors will ensure that the grass around graves is trimmed as part of the normal mowing schedule.

Hedge trimming: Hedges and individual bushes will be kept in a tidy condition.

Boundary walls: Boundary walls should be kept free from invasive vegetation. Walls which are structural unsound should be identified and repaired by a competent builder.

Disposal of grass cuttings and grave tributes: Any grass cuttings which are collected will be deposited on a heap in a corner of the churchyard. Plastic tributes on gravestones are discouraged. These will be disposed of in the litter bin adjacent to the entrance to the church. Fresh flowers will be disposed of on the grass heap.

Litter collections: Llanvihangel-ystern-llewern - There is waste bin by the church gate which belongs to Monmouthshire County Council and is emptied every 2 weeks. Litter is not expected to be a problem in the churchyard and small amounts of litter can be collected as necessary by the team opening/closing the Church. Llangattock Vibon Avel – there is a litter bin at the entrance to the church which is managed by a local resident.

Paths: On occasions when there is snow and ice the churches are likely to be inaccessible. No-one is responsible for clearing paths and there is no container for grit or shovels. Paths should be inspected on an annual basis to assess their condition. Where necessary paths should be weeded by a contractor to ensure the long term stability of the paths.

Arrangements for inspection and survey A full safety inspection will be undertaken by the churchyard safety officer twice a year in March and October.

Maintenance procedures and risk assessments These will follow Management of Churchyards Policy and Guidance (Church in Wales, Cardiff 2013) covering guidance in safety procedures for volunteers etc. Risk assessments are attached to this Management Plan as appendices.

Trees The condition of the trees will be checked twice a year on a visual basis, and professionally as required. Any remedial action required will be undertaken by a qualified tree specialist. Trees which have suffered storm damage will be assessed and appropriate action taken. Trees and branches adjacent to power lines will be assessed and reported to National Grid if action needs to be taken. Trees will be marked on the churchyard plan. Llangattock Vibon Avel churchyard has a number of significant trees including Scots Pine and Yew.

Dogs: Both churchyards are designated as a 'Dogs on Lead Zone' under Monmouthshire County Council's Public Space Protection Order (Dog Fouling) 2024. Signs put in place March 2025.

Noticeboards and signs: Visitors to the churchyards are advised of churchyard regulations and personal safety information by posting notices on church and churchyard noticeboards. The wording of any notices is to be agreed by the council and local church committees.

3. Wildlife Conservation Policies

Parts of Llanvihangel-ystern-llewern churchyard will be managed for wildlife conservation, to encourage wildflowers, invertebrates and the birds and animals which feed on them. The closed part of Llangattock Vibon Avel churchyard will not be managed in this way. The open part (managed by St Maughans Church Committee) will follow its own Wildlife Conservation Policy.

Grass cutting will be timed to allow plants to flower and set seed. Llanvihangel-ystern-llewern churchyard has a population of glowworms and cutting in the June will be avoided.

Whenever possible, cut grass will be raked and removed to reduce soil fertility for the benefit of less competitive plants; the raking will also help establishment of seeds.

Control of brambles, nettles, etc. will be performed as required by cutting down and digging up plants.

Cleaning of gravestones will be done in a way which will preserve the lichen flora; if any gravestones or stones on the walls need to be repositioned, conservation of the lichen will be taken into account.

4. Monuments And Tributes

The Regulations for churchyards of the Church in Wales will be adopted by the council and displayed. Notices will request existing plot holders to abide by the Regulations.

New plot holders will be given a copy of the appropriate sections of the Regulations and asked to abide by them.

Surveys of graves will be performed regularly; any unsafe graves will be marked with warning tape and reported to the council for decisions on further action.

5. Arrangements for Inspection and Survey

Safety inspections A safety inspection will be undertaken by the churchyard safety officer annually. Risks will be assessed and documented and preventative actions listed.

Potential safety issues Potential safety issues will be reported to the council when identified.

Survey A full survey of the churchyard, to include gravestones, tree safety, the paths, access, boundary walls, will be undertaken annually. Issues arising will be reported to the council.

Warning Signs Appropriate signs will be placed in the churchyards, and notices displayed on the church noticeboards. The signs will warn visitors of potential hazards, especially the uneven ground around the graves in areas where the grass has been left to grow. The signs will be bilingual (English & Welsh) and will include appropriate warning symbols.

Churchyard Plan A plan of the Churchyard will be displayed in the porch, identifying paths, trees, areas considered to be unsafe for visitors, notable graves, grass areas to be left uncut. The plan of the churchyard will also fulfil the role of a visitors' guide to features in the churchyard.

6. Key Contacts

Community Council

Cllr. Debbie Astrill-Parsons (debastill@hotmail.com) and the Clerk to the Council, Les Taylor (whitecastlecommunitycouncil@gmail.com), are responsible for the management of the closed section of Llangattock Vibon Avel Churchyard, as well as the entire Llanvihangel-Ystern-Llewern Churchyard.

The Community Council employs professional gardeners to maintain the churchyards.

Llanvihangel-Ystern-Llewern Churchyard is maintained by Nettles to Petals Gardening Services, while Llangattock Vibon Avel Churchyard is cared for by Matthew Baker Gardening Services.

Llanvihangel-ystern-llewern Church

The church committee is responsible for the upkeep of the church building.

Karen Stafford-Smith Email: kstaffordsmith@gmail.com

Llangattock Vibon Avel Churchyard (open part)

The church committee of **St Maughans Church** is responsible for the open part of the churchyard.

Richard Harbottle Chair

richardh.grip@googlemail.com

Alan Bennett Secretary

bennett933@btinternet.com

Glyn Rees Treasurer

glynrees@gmail.com

The Friends of Friendless Churches

Zachariah Young

office@fofc.org.uk

St Cadoc's Community is responsible for managing the use of the church.

Anthony Vines

anthonyvines@yahoo.co.uk

Kate de Ste Croix Stewart

secretary.scc.lva@gmail.com

7. Reporting Of Faults

Members of the Church and visitors are encouraged to report any safety issues to the council. Issues reported will be discussed at council meetings.

8. Review and Signatures

The Management Plan will be reviewed annually by the council at its annual general meeting and signed by the Chair and Churchyard Safety Officer

Appendix 1

Whitecastle Community Council Risk Assessment Llanvihangel-ystern-Illewern Churchyard

General Information Risk assessment completed in March 2025, L Taylor

Uneven ground/pathways

Who might be harmed?	Visitors, maintenance staff
How could they be harmed?	Trips, falls
Likelihood of harm occurring	Medium
Severity of potential harm	Medium
Overall risk level	Medium

Damaged or leaning headstones

Who might be harmed?	Visitors, maintenance staff
How could they be harmed?	injuries from falling objects
Likelihood of harm occurring	Low
Severity of potential harm	Low
Overall risk level	Low

Walls and edges

Who might be harmed?	Visitors, maintenance staff
How could they be harmed?	injuries caused by falling over edges and by collapsing walls.
Likelihood of harm occurring	Low
Severity of potential harm	High
Overall risk level	Medium

Wildlife

Who might be harmed?	Visitors, maintenance staff
How could they be harmed?	Bites from insects
Likelihood of harm occurring	Low
Severity of potential harm	Low
Overall risk level	Low

Maintenance activities

Who might be harmed?	Visitors, maintenance staff
How could they be harmed?	Use of power tools, lifting heavy objects, chemical usage
Likelihood of harm occurring	Low
Severity of potential harm	Medium
Overall risk level	Low

Preventative actions

- Regular inspections and maintenance of pathways and headstones.
- Signage warning of hazards
- Pruning overgrown vegetation to reduce hidden trip hazards.
- Appropriate safety equipment for maintenance tasks
- Clear instructions for visitors regarding respectful behavior
- Emergency procedures
- Contact details for emergency services

Review and Monitoring

Date for next review	March 2026
Person responsible for review	L Taylor

Accessibility needs

Assess potential risks for people with mobility impairments.

Community involvement

Consult with local residents and church users to gather feedback on potential hazards.

Remember to document all findings clearly and update the risk assessment regularly as conditions change or new hazards are identified.