

St Peter's Churchyard Consultation

Information Session

Response – Analysis – Learning

Bredhurst Village Hall
Friday 4 February 2022

Embarking on the Consultation: The Timeline

2020

12 July PCC meeting agreed to conduct a consultation of all those with a genuine connection to St Peter's Churchyard.

2021

12 October Final approval received from Diocesan Registrar's office.

6 November Numbering, collating, enveloping of consultation documents.

7-9 November Envelopes hand-delivered, posted, and emailed to recipients.

14 December Cut-off for returns.

16 December First 'count'.

2022

5 - 6 January Tally of results and transcription of comments.

18 January Presentation of summary to the PCC.

4 February Public meeting and sharing of results.

How the Consultation was carried out: The Method

The consultation was quantitative, not qualitative.

The responses were not given a "value scale" (there was no sliding scale where one answer was "worth" more than another).

** For more detail about the formulas and the mechanics of tallying the Consultation results, please see the end of the results section of this hand-out on page 11.*

What was included

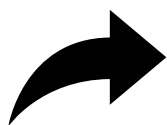
The Consultation contained 37 Questions, some of which were subdivided (*for example, lists of items people would like added*)

Throughout the document there were control questions, and repeated questions for the avoidance of doubt.

The final two questions, 36 & 37, were narrative, inviting open ended comments. These comments were all transcribed into a Word document and not edited. There was a mixture of positive and negative.



250 envelopes were posted



91 responses were received**



All responses received within the timeframe were included.

**One of those responses did not use a form, but sent a narrative reply by email – this has been included with the narrative responses. The total in each case is therefore calculated on the 90 completed form submissions and is expressed as a percentage of that total. The following is the compilation of those results, expressed as percentages of respondents.

What we learned: How people use the churchyard

Frequency of Visit

- 34% visit the churchyard weekly
- 24% visit at least monthly
- 22% visit several times a year for special anniversaries and dates

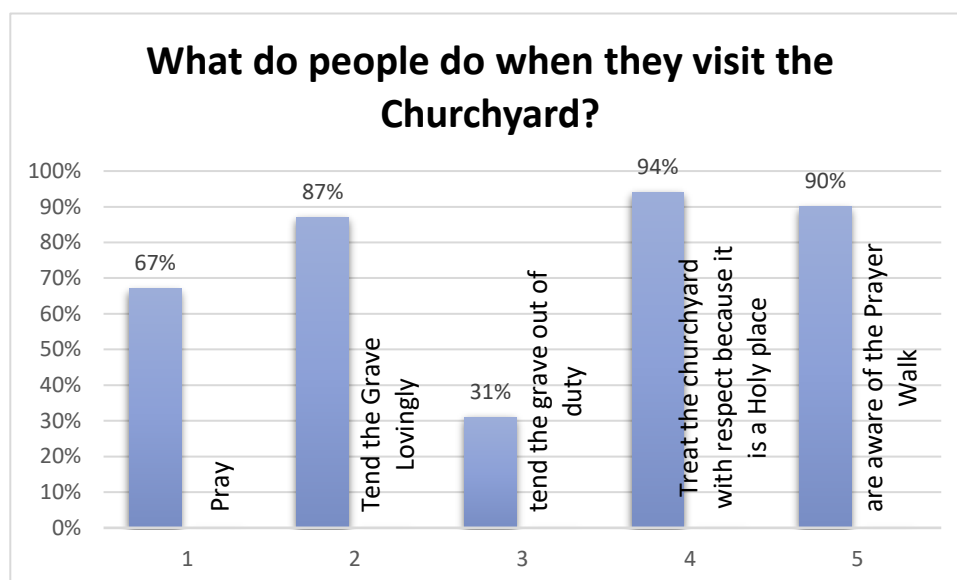
Of those unable to visit:

- 2% asked someone else to “grass over” the grave
- 2% grassed it over themselves
- 4% asked a friend or relative to care for the grave on their behalf.

Perception of the churchyard

- 79% are aware of the difference between a public cemetery and a Christian churchyard
- 92% are aware that it is consecrated (‘holy’) ground
- 86% had chosen St Peter’s because it is a Christian churchyard
- 80% have seen the volunteers at work
- 78% were aware that the work of the volunteers is in compliance with Churchyard Regulations
- 71% were aware of Health and Safety authorities’ involvement

What people do when they visit



(The Consultation did not ask if people used the Prayer Walk, only if they were aware it was there.)

The churchyard and the Environment

- 82% support initiatives by the church to protect the environment
- 92% enjoy coming to St Peter’s as a place where nature is allowed to flourish
- 87% support initiatives to become an Eco Church

What we learned: The Churchyard Regulations

Awareness of the Churchyard Regulations:

- 83% have seen the Churchyard Regulations displayed in the churchyard
- 50% recall them from the time of arranging the funeral/memorial
- 10% do not recall ever seeing the Churchyard Regulations

Understanding of the Churchyard Regulations

- 80% know the Churchyard Regulations are a legally binding document
- 78% know it is unlawful not to uphold the Churchyard Regulations

Changing the Churchyard Regulations

A list of items and categories were offered that people might like to see added to the Regulations. The list is presented here, sorted from the highest to the lowest. The third entry on the list below was the final on the list presented to people in the consultation, hence “none of the above”.

- 81% Christmas Wreaths, Remembrance Poppies
- 46% Baskets & pots for living plants
- 44% None of the above - I prefer bulbs and plants in the ground and natural flowers in small authorised vases
- 43% Wider option of vases
- 40% Small bushes and perennial plants such as roses
- 32% Silk flowers
- 29% Other small personal items like photographs or small adornments
- 28% Small Christian statues and figurines
- 12% Plastic flowers
- 12% Fairies, elves, dwarfs and other fictional or non-religious figurines

How long should items be left on graves?

Please note: these numbers do not add up to 100% because of the freedom for people to select multiple options

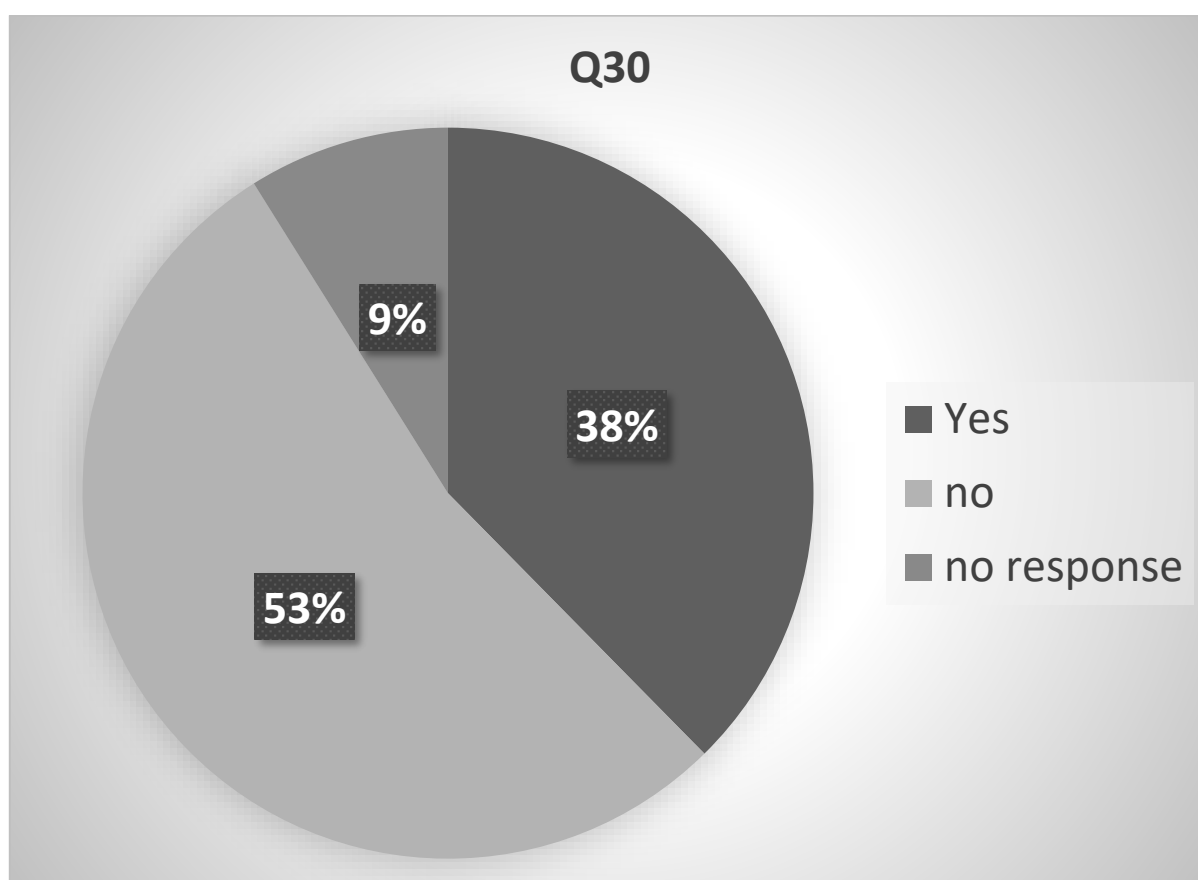
- 23% did not respond
- 23% would like items left on the grave for a week to ten days
- 22% a month
- 20% 6-8 weeks
- 16% none of the above

Questions 30 (control question), 34 and 35

These three questions – 30, 34 and 35 – gave people three separate and specific opportunities to state whether they wanted changes to the current Churchyard Regulations. This meant people had three separate opportunities to state their desire and avoid any possibility of “ticking the wrong box by mistake”.

Q30 (control question)

30. Would you like to see the Churchyard Regulations changed in respect of St Peter's, Bredhurst?



(Would you like to see the Regulations changed? 53% no; 38% yes; 9% no response)

Question 34 and 35

These two questions asked the same question, in two different wordings, to ensure that there was no misunderstanding of what was being asked

34. A group representing some Next of Kin publicised a desire for specific items to be allowed on graves, namely: “1 trinket on an adult grave, 2 trinkets on a child’s grave” and silk flowers.

The consultation offered three options to respond to, and people were not limited to just choosing one. These options were:

- a) to change the regulations to allow for limited changes as stated in the question;
- b) to change the Churchyard Regulations so that they would allow for much broader changes not limited to those listed, and
- c) to not change the regulations.

63% selected: c) I do not think the Churchyard Regulations need changing as they already allow for appropriate flexibility in a sacred place and the means for individuals to apply for special permissions via the Faculty

The remaining responses were split across “some change” and “complete” change, with 30% ticking *both* “some” and “complete”

Q35 asked the same as Q34 in slightly different words using the specific terms offered by the Registry Office (i.e. legal department) for this consultation

62% do not want the PCC to petition the Chancellor for any change to the existing Churchyard Regulations

The remainder was split between those who wanted the PCC to petition for “limited” changes and for “more than just a limited number” of changes, with 8% ticking both “limited” and unlimited

In Summary:

62% - 63% of the respondents did not want any changes introduced
as they agree the Churchyard Regulations already permit enough variation
through the process of individual faculties.

What we learned: Narrative responses – (Q36-37)

Responses in this section included both positive and constructive comments. We take your feedback and comments very seriously, and are grateful for them, as they help us understand your views and how we can improve your experience of the churchyard.

Here is a selection of some of your comments we received in these sections:

Question 36: What other changes would you like? (open question for comments)

- *"None. I believe the churchyard is managed extremely well and should be maintained as a place where nature is the only intrusive element."*
- *"Would like to see the removal of CCTV watching us whilst at our graves. Would like to stop being watched whilst at the cemetery by staff. And would like the removal of fresh flowers to be stopped immediately after being laid, have been seen in the newly built compost bins."*
- *"None. Currently peaceful and respectful and serene space. Does not need changing."*
- *"My only wish would be to allow a small toy to be allowed on a child's grave."*
- *"None. I am happy the way things are"*
- *"Consultation either verbal or written to inform family/relative of removal of item/items from grave. This will enable the family to remove! Particularly when the grave is less than one year old. Misunderstanding and conflict could be avoided in this way. Complete innocent a misunderstanding a point of initial burial is then avoided. Communication it's always best practice."*

Question 37: Any other comments you would like to make:

- *"My responses are on behalf of the entire NN family who would wish the graveyard to remain in its present pristine state."*
- *"I know Bredhurst is a private cemetery and personally I have not been affected by the regulations. It is lovely peaceful place to visit and would like to keep it that way. I do however feel that a small amount of flexibility could be introduced without spoiling the peace and sanctity of the graveyard."*
- *"I think St Peter's churchyard is a lovely natural peaceful place to sit and take in its natural environment and contemplate those who rest within its sanctuary. I don't like artificial adornments on graves at all. It is alien to the natural aspect surrounding the church. I have not seen another as pretty and peaceful as St Peter's and I would not like to see it change."*

- *"I believe allowances should be made for parents that have lost children and need momentos (sic) to help with their grieving process and especially for significant anniversaries."*
- *"I am very happy with how the churchyard is cared for and find it a peaceful and quiet place I can visit the grave of my wife where I can spend time in reflection and prayer. The prayer walk is especially present and quiet place to visit."*

Comments about the Garden of Remembrance

Some very helpful Responses and comments were received which made reference specifically to the Garden of Remembrance and we include some of them here:

- *"...small plaques similar to those found that crematoria could be incorporated into the garden."*
- *"To have a personalised plaque put down in the remembrance garden. More space available for memorial vases et cetera – limited placement in provided troughs."*
- *"I would like a small named plaque in the remembrance garden."*
- *"A proper pathway to the cremation part would be nice for us old people. Also plaque of remembrance for those cremated as this area is very small and filling up fast maybe a wall."*
- *"The memorial garden as at present very poorly presented."*
- *"...a small plaque when NN was interred... a small and varnished tile or stone over each place with a name, date of birth, death and all tiles/be oblong identical wouldn't be out of keeping otherwise we think it's a lovely peaceful and very well maintained churchyard."*

Notes about how we processed the responses:

The total number of responses for each answer was worked out as an *addition* of responses given.

In order to be able to compute results the following codes were used: “Yes/agree” = 1, “no/Disagree” = 0; unanswered questions were not given a code and remained as “blank”. These results were collated into an Excel spreadsheet. In order to avoid human error or bias, Formulas were used to calculate the totals. None were disregarded or ignored. All responses were counted.

Answers do not add up to 100% - some questions were not applicable to everyone (*for example burial/interment of ashes*), some questions invited multiple answers (*for example, items people would like to see added to the permitted list*), and some people chose to leave answers blank. No-one was compelled to answer all the questions. For all these reasons, results will not add up to 100%.



Going forward: what we will do

Firstly, thank you to everyone who responded and who has supported this process.

We **hear** what you have told us about how you **feel**, what **concerns** you, and some of your **questions**. Based on the consultation responses, we know that there are some things we need to do better.

Therefore, as the PCC of South Gillingham Parish **will do** our best to:

Communicate better

- Offer tips, best practise, advice, and seasonal reminders.
- Improve the visibility of the Churchyard Regulations (larger print, better location – *permissions needed*).
- Be clear on maintenance or grave clearance dates.

Work within the Regulations

- Make improvements to the Churchyard.
- Improve communication with people about grassing over graves, suitable plants and bulbs, memorial services and events, including invitations to participate in various worship, or cultural activities in and around the churchyard, as appropriate.

Here are some early responses and first steps we are taking towards improving St Peter's Churchyard for all visitors to enjoy, based on what we have heard:

We hear your request for Wreaths and Poppies to be allowed

Our action:

Wreaths - are allowed and they must be flat on ground (not propped up), made of natural materials in keeping with the rest of the churchyard.

Poppies - can be placed in the designated area, in the period of Remembrance only (1 November to Advent Sunday). We will improve communication on this and clearly mark the designated area for poppies around the Service of Remembrance.

Christmas Natural decorations other than wreaths (plants & flowers), provided they are natural, or made of natural materials, are allowed from 1 December to Candlemas – the family can remove before this date if they wish to keep them.

All remaining Christmas decorations will be removed by the maintenance volunteers from Candlemas (*inclement weather, or other circumstances may mean this is delayed but the volunteers will begin removing from Candlemas onwards*)

***Remember, if you would like to have any permanent decoration on the grave, currently not allowed, individual faculties can be applied for by family members or Next of Kin (NOK). To apply for a Faculty – an official permission - you must write to the Registrar for the Diocese (address at the end of this booklet)*

We hear your concerns about the unsightly condition of the Garden of Remembrance (ashes), and we are already working on solutions

Our action:

Flowers in the Garden of Remembrance (Ashes) - Fresh flowers can be left on the grass or in the designated containers on the periphery.

Small **plants** can be left in the troughs around the periphery, but not on the grass.

We hear your request for plaques, or a central place to leave memorials in the Garden of Remembrance (ashes).

Our action:

The Faculty the Parish was issued with to have a reserved space within the Churchyard for a Garden of Remembrance specifically did not allow for plaques or a central place for memorials.

However, we will work with the appropriate authorities, using the strong evidence of this consultation's feedback, to find out what is possible and we will keep you updated as and when we have more information.

Currently no plaques or permanent markers are allowed in the Garden of Remembrance. Please do not commission nor purchase one as we will have to remove it.

Remember, an entry is made in the Memorial Book, free of charge for every burial or interment of ashes. You can arrange to see this Memorial Book on a specific date, and it is also available whenever there is a service in the church.

We hear your request for greater variety of vases and pots.

Our action:

Under the current regulations, smaller pots and vases must be sunk into the ground to be level with the soil.

Larger pots, unless granted by individual Faculty, are not allowed. Unless an individual Faculty has been applied for, the PCC & volunteers will work with those families and individuals to assist them in complying with the regulations.

We will communicate directly with the families who have significantly larger than permitted vases and pots, and assist them where possible.

*****Remember, if you would like to have any item, including specific vases and pots currently not allowed, individual faculties can be applied for by family members or Next of Kin. To apply for a Faculty, you must write to the Registrar for the Diocese (address at the end of this booklet).***

We hear a few people's concern about CCTV and we offer these first responses for your peace of mind:

- The CCTV is installed for protection of the private property (the Churchyard and the Church)
- As it is private property the ICO regulates it differently than CCTV on public property.
- The CCTV is installed to protect property against crime and vandalism, and not to monitor visits or visitors.
- The CCTV is not monitored – it can only be viewed if a crime is committed or suspected of being committed. The crime must be reported to the police.
- The CCTV over-writes every 30 days, so if you suspect a crime, please report it as soon as possible. Only the police and authorised people can view the footage. The CCTV can only be viewed on the premises. There is no remote access and the images cannot be downloaded except under police instruction and to their device.
- To request that CCTV is viewed, individuals must complete the SAR (Subject Access Request) available from the Parish Office, presenting photographic ID and paying the £10 processing fee (ICO guidance). Photographic ID is a requirement by the ICO to ensure that no other 3rd party is visible in the period of time requesting to be viewed.
- There are no hidden cameras on the property.

We will continue communicating with you on progress and working with you to make St Peter's Churchyard a churchyard that all can visit to find peace and a space to reflect on life and their loved ones living and departed.

Additional Information – Clarifying some matters

Reading the responses, it became clear that there are some matters and services relating to the care of graves that people were either unclear about or unaware of. So here are some helpful reminders:

“Grassing over” graves

If you can no longer visit regularly, you can “grass over a grave”.

You can do it yourself, ask the volunteers to do so on your behalf, or write to the Parish Office if you are not mobile or aren’t able to visit. When writing to the Parish Office you will need to provide your contact details as we may need to follow up for further details to ensure the correct grave is grassed over. *The PCC can grass over any grave that is no longer looked after.*

When grassing it over, *why not plant some naturalising bulbs under the grass for Spring colour?*

Rosebushes, larger shrubs and gravemarkers on graves

These are currently not allowed within the Churchyard Regulations, but you will find that within the churchyard there are designated areas for roses and shrubs.

We will work with the families concerned over the next few months to find better situations for these roses and shrubs.

As part of their regular responsibilities, the maintenance volunteers will remove any dead shrubs and plants, whether in the landscape or on graves; if you approach them, they can also assist families in relocating larger specimens.

Redundant gravemarkers (*i.e., once the headstone or memorial has been installed*) should be removed. Nothing should be placed at the foot of a grave, unless an individual Faculty has been granted.

Become a Volunteer?

If you have a few hours to spare each week, or even once a month, why not help keep the churchyard as a beautiful place for you and others to enjoy?

You can speak with any of the volunteers from the maintenance group who can tell you a little more of what is involved. The volunteers are usually working in the churchyard Wednesday mornings throughout the year.

How to apply for an individual Faculty:

If you would like to personalise the grave you tend with an item currently not allowed by the Churchyard Regulations, you can apply for an individual Faculty. You will need to write to The Registrar for the Diocese of Rochester, The Diocesan Registry, Minerva House, 5 Montague Close, London SE1 9BB, and you will be sent the appropriate forms and with an explanation of the process.

How to contact the Parish Office

If you would like to contact the Parish Office, you can do so by writing to The Parish Office, St Mathew's Church, Drewery Drive, Wigmore ME8 ONX, by phone 01634 231736, or by email southgillinghamparish@outlook.com (*email is only checked during office hours*). The office works part time but has a 24 hour answerphone for you to leave a message.

A note on unauthorised items that were removed by volunteers and stored:

Those unauthorised items that were removed from graves by volunteers and not disposed of, and that haven't been claimed, have been stored during the period of the consultation awaiting contact from family.

These items will be made available for collection over the next 4 weeks from Tuesday 8 February until Tuesday 8 March. Items will be left in a closed box for access in or around the churchyard entrance (we will communicate exact location). These items must not be placed again on graves but can be taken home by the families.

Please apply for an Individual Faculty for any items not currently allowed but do not install or introduce those items until the Faculty is granted. The PCC receives a copy of every Faculty granted for the churchyard.

Unauthorised items will be removed and disposed of (even if glued on).

Please note: some items went missing during periods of vandalism in the churchyard and were not removed by our volunteers – it was after this vandalism that the CCTV was installed – we do not have those items in storage as they were not removed by the volunteers.

A Final Message

While this consultation has been about the very practical maintenance, understanding and future of the Churchyard, we are fully aware of the pain and suffering that bereavement brings to people.

We understand that for some, taking part in this process has been a very difficult and emotional experience, triggering painful memories and feelings.

Throughout this consultation and all throughout lockdown our ministers, ordained and lay licensed have continued to minister to the dying and bereaved, conducting funerals, burials, interments of ashes, cremations and memorial services, and have also experienced personal bereavements during the pandemic time.

We are aware of the strain and stress that unresolved grief can bring, and the pain it can cause to others and to the person themselves. Within the parish we have networks to support the grieving, and there are also trained professional grief counsellors for when life gets on top of you and grief seems unsurmountable.

Do not suffer alone – speak to your local minister for Christian prayer and support groups, or to your GP who will point you in the direction of appropriate support for your circumstances.

We also know that the journey to this point has not always been easy. We deeply regret this and continue to hold all those affected by this matter in our prayers.



Designed and printed in the Parish of South Gillingham for the Public Session to share the outcomes of the Consultation regarding the Churchyard at St Peter's Church in Bredhurst, 4 February 2022.

Prepared for the PCC of the Parish of South Gillingham.