

# St Peter & St Paul Langham church yard wildlife project – Annual Report April 2023 to April 2024

## Introduction

The Langham St Peter and St Paul church yard total area is approximately 1.5 acres of which the eastern part (~0.6 acre\*) is managed by volunteers for biodiversity net gain, prioritising native wildflowers and butterflies. The boundary hedge at Church Street has also been rejuvenated in recent years from thick ivy to mixed hawthorn, holly, crab apple and dogwood. It is an Ecochurch and received the Rocha Silver award this year. The church yard is a safe space to support a wide range of species which are struggling with the effects of climate change, habitat loss and pesticides.

\* This is double the area since 2023 due to agreed change in mowing by RCC.

## Highlights of 2023- 2024

In June volunteers met Christine Wise and Oliver Hemsley of Rutland County Council in person in the church yard to discuss the council mowing plan. It was agreed for the council to mow a strip alongside the eastern stone path, a strip from the stone path to the eastern side of the church to connect to the northern side of the church yard and all the grass to the west of the stone path. Church yard volunteers will take on cutting the rest as a late summer cut and collect for meadow management. The sward has marigolds, hawkbit and plantains.

In August the meadow was scythed and the cuttings collected. This time was selected as it is the traditional Lammastide Day for collecting the first grain harvest of the summer. A mosaic system of different patches of grass height is being developed, with one section adjacent to Well Street never cut, some areas left uncut for one year, some patches cut annually and some patches with short grass all year. This mosaic approach is better for creating as diverse a habitat as possible for wildflowers and invertebrates.

In October the two oak wood benches were cleaned and treated with linseed oil to preserve and protect them. A water fountain large bowl was added to the meadow area for drinking water / bathing for birds and insects. It is large enough to keep filled with rain water most of the time whilst having shallow edges.

In March 2024 the swift box and calling device was installed into the church bell tower. We will wait to see if it gets occupants.

In April 2024 the White Comfrey plants in the Church Street hedge were found to have Scarlet Tiger Moth caterpillars feeding on them. These are beautiful caterpillars that like sunbathing on the tops of leaves just before they pupate for May. The beautiful red, white and black adults will be flying in June. They are at the northern edge of UK range here in Langham but are expanding north.

This April is Five Years since a group of volunteers started the living church yard project. The increase in biodiversity recorded is evidence of the success of this change in management of the church yard.

The wildlife sightings are reported to the Naturespot website for verification. This organisation is dedicated to the Vice County VC55 for wildlife records and are issued to the Leicestershire Record Office as a permanent record. As at March 2024, the church yard has 154 species recorded which is a new 39 species found

in the last year. This included the gorgeous pink Elephant Hawk Moth adult and the less glamorous but still pink Hoary Plantain. There is a wild places page to look at records and photos: [https://www.naturespot.org.uk/Wild\\_Place/Langham\\_Churchyard](https://www.naturespot.org.uk/Wild_Place/Langham_Churchyard)

### Plans for 2023-2024

- ♣ New noticeboard for wildlife area to show monthly wildflower and wildlife star species to find and upcoming events
- ♣ Add wildflower seeds to older graves with raised gravel beds and carved stone surrounds.
- ♣ Add all plant species present to the Naturespot website to provide one place for all records.
- ♣ Annual cut of parts of meadow in August
- ♣ Sow yellow rattle seed in Autumn.
- ♣ Clean and treat oak wood benches with linseed oil.