Notes following Consultation Meeting about the management of the Castlemorton Churchyard. 28/9/23

The public meeting was convened by Castlemorton Environmental Group (a sub-committee of the PC) and the Parochial Church Council to discuss the future management of the churchyard in a more environmentally friendly manner.
The meeting was widely publicised in advance and about 35 people attended.

The meeting was chaired by Don Lupton. Roger Bates (naturalist), Mark Lister (Churchwarden) and Richard King (Colwall St James Church) helped respond to the questions.

The meeting started with a Powerpoint presentation on Churchyard Conservation including the problems of nature depletion and the decrease in natural pollinators, how churchyards can help, and the involvement of the charity God's Own Acre, before moving on to specific proposals for St Gregorys. These included planting areas with bulbs, long grass to promote hay meadow type flowers, areas sown with wildflower pollinator seed mix and short mown areas and paths.

The meeting was then opened for discussion and the following points noted:

- The proposal was generally welcomed and it was suggested the committee visit Burlingham and Kempley churches which are renowned for their wildflower displays.
- Concern was expressed that some existing family graves which are still visited would become over-grown and a desire to maintain the status quo. It was stated that the current regime cost £3000 per year and that this was not sustainable financially. Also that the small PC contribution towards this is unlikely to continue based on current guidance.
- It was asked where paths would be located and agreed that the existing defined paths would be retained and mown paths added to give access through the areas of long grass. The exact location of these paths could be developed based on usage. It was asked if families could cut their own paths to their plots and agreed that was no problem but it should be co-ordinated with the overall plan to avoid duplication. Also people may mow their family plots if they wish.
- It was suggested that the short mown area to the North of the church was not well targeted and that it would be better to include some well visited graves behind the church and have more long grass in front of the church. The area around the war memorial and access to it should be short mown.
- The successful initiative at Colwall was discussed and it was explained that they were currently operating at no cost with 8 volunteers and help from community service offenders with supervision from the probation service.
- How will the cut long grass be disposed of? Not known at this time, perhaps a local farmer might volunteer?
- It was asked if the use of chemicals to clear gravel paths would be allowed. It was explained that the plan is not intended to be proscriptive.

- Concern was expressed that the churchyard would become overgrown and unkempt. It was explained that the grass will indeed get long and have little interest in the autumn. This would improve with time and with the possible introduction of Yellow Rattle. As fertility decreases, finer grass species and wildflowers replace the coarser grasses.
- The large Horse Chestnut trees along the Southern boundary were criticised as being too large, in poor health and inappropriate. Post meeting note: these trees were planted by a parishioner as a memorial so sensitivity is needed with respect to their management.
- General comments were supportive along the lines of the churchyard being viewed as a community asset and involving the wider community and school.
- Important to publicise the project widely and continue to do so.

The meeting ended with tea and biscuits and much more chat.

20 people signed up for further involvement in the project.

DL 9/10/23