

St John & St Stephen's Reading, Land Management Plan



Then the Lord God planted a garden in the east (Genesis 2.8)

St John's is a 45 year old church built in red brick and with some of the buildings and car park shared with the St John's Infant & Junior School.

In 2000 the area in front of the church, adjacent to the pavement and road was redesigned with a garden and forecourt which includes 3 murals and a sitting area.

We do not encourage cars onto the forecourt (with the exception of hearses and cars used by the disabled). It is managed by the PCC and we aim to create a pleasant welcoming green outdoor environment for the community. During term times the area is often used at lunchtimes by students from Reading college, parents who have dropped off children at nursery and others.

Current situation

The front garden is managed in an environmentally friendly way;

- Plants are chosen that are drought-resistant and butterfly friendly
- There is an area out of sight where composting and cut and pruned branches are put to be 'insect friendly'
- Berries provide a valuable food source for birds and are left where possible.
- We have a friendly street cleaner who comes and clears the bins once a week, and we try to put rubbish left around into the bin whenever we see it.
- No insecticides or herbicides are used.
- Teams of volunteers from the church meet on a Saturday morning 2-3 times a year to prune, clear and weed the gardens
- We try and keep the paving stones and bricks clear from weeds by manually weeding (ie not using herbicides).
- Gardener Jack Stacy joins us for the 3 gardening mornings and advises us fully supporting our aim to be environmentally friendly.
- Native wildflowers are encouraged at the edges of this patch which has a very English woodland look to it.

We created an additional garden in the courtyard between the school and the church five years ago.

- The first phase of this was a waist high border with perennials chosen to attract pollinators and provide colour through the year and a small herb 'table'. This is managed with advice from Jack Stacy.
- A much lower raised bed, installed at the same time, was for a long time untended but this has now been sown and planted with wildflowers, along with a small number of garden perennials to create long term structure. This needs to be constantly managed to remove the bindweed and rosebay willowherb that will crowd out the other plants. Other 'volunteers' are thinned out but not eradicated in order to build up the mix of wild plants present. This needs to be kept under review as it is very visible from the school and at the moment is only really beautiful for a comparatively short period of time.

- There is a bird-feeding station in the centre of this bed which is kept topped up with food and water by the church administrator.
- The second phase has been introducing pots of flowers, fruit and vegetables. Most of the flower pots were sown/planted by the Sunday School children who regularly water the courtyard garden. The tomatoes, peas and strawberries were planted by the school's gardening and eco clubs.
- The weeds between paving stones here are also removed by hand rather than with herbicide. Butterflies, damsel flies and other insects are regularly seen in this garden.
- We have a nesting box in the courtyard garden and will consider putting more up (possibly swift boxes on the taller school buildings). There are no suitable tall or significant trees in the front garden.
- We did have a duck nesting in the courtyard garden and had to shepherd her ducklings and her to the nearest canal within a day of the last one hatching. As far as we know there are no other birds nesting in the garden.
- There is a 'bug hotel' positioned facing the sun for bees.
- A water butt has been installed. We are mindful that further steps need to be taken to reduce water usage in the garden eg reconsidering the position of some planting, ensuring all pots have trays under them, reducing the number of plants in each pot.

Plans for the future

- We are working with Reading College to revitalise the front paved area, specifically with new murals but possibly additional features such as more attractive bins. This has experienced a few delays but there is now a group working on this and we hope to see it completed by the end of the academic year 2023/4
- When the courtyard garden was created, it was the intention that eventually greenery should cover the entirety of the wall on the church side. Some tubs have been acquired to begin this process for progress through 2024.
- The old St Stephen's font has been made safe and cleaned to be turned into a feature – there are currently flowers in it and a larger pot needs to be purchased to improve the appearance. A plaque to explain its history is due to be installed later in 2024.
- The remains of the pallet that the font stood on have been saved and will be supplemented to create a more extensive 'bug hotel' beside the wildflower garden. Completion planned summer 2024.
- We have tried to build a more regular relationship with the school gardening and eco groups but at present the teachers are just too busy for this. It is something we will continue to encourage in the hope that a new teacher will be found to engage.
- Sunday School children to be involved in sowing/planting out some of the edible plants as well as repeating their involvement with pollinator plants.
- Mindful of Reading Climate Action Network's strategy for creating more shaded areas to mitigate the effects of climate change, discussion is needed on whether we can contribute to this.

Plan approved by PCC 18th September 2023

Future plans updated by EcoChurch group April 2024 – will be shared with PCC in September

For revision September 2026