



Sutton St. James

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Open Meeting

Consultation about the Church Graveyard on the 8th September



by [Rev Anna](#) on 9th Sept 2021

On Wednesday evening a good number of people from the community of Sutton turned out to talk about the future of the graveyard at St. James Church. It is safe to say that it was a difficult and emotive subject for discussion; however the meeting was conducted well and, I think, with a positive result.

The meeting was opened by David Potts one of the Church wardens and then followed by Rev John Harries outlining the current situation with the graveyard; the Glebe land, field 1 and 2; and outlining a possible option of a memorial garden. (The whole address is below).

The meeting was then opened to the floor for questions.

The following conversation included support for both a further look into the viability of Glebe field 2 for burial and for a space for scattering of ashes in a memorial garden.

Some technical questions were asked about burial near watercourses and the survey done in 2006 and some emotional comments about the worry that this topic would split the village.

It was concluded that the burden of this issue could no longer be carried by the church congregation alone and that a working group of community and church volunteers would take on future work including options for closer partnership with the parish council.

It was acknowledged that it would have been better for the church to have raised this issue with the community earlier and that moving forward it would become a more open issue.

It was commented that though the church congregation may be diminishing the community still values the church as important.

The meeting ended with volunteers signing up to help in a variety of ways.



Churchyard Open Meeting Address

by **Rev John** on 8th Sept 2021

Our current situation:

Only a few new grave plots are left for burials. We do have sufficient space for interment of ashes and there is space in many family graves for both full burials and interment of ashes. Going forward we want to give members of the community a sense of assurance that in 50+ years there will still be a place for them to be remembered here in Sutton Churchyard. This is a challenge for as you are no doubt aware grave space is now a national issue. Graveyards

and Churchyards are becoming full and many are closing. Almost 30 years ago the church purchased two glebe fields from the diocese to prevent them being used for development and with the intention of using one as an extension to the churchyard. At the time, these fields were purchased without any survey being conducted as to their suitability - this was done later in 2006 prior to planning permission being granted for the present churchyard extension in Glebe field 1. If I may for the sake of clarity I would like to address the two fields separately.

Glebe Field 1.

The survey highlighted that the present area of the glebe field was the best bit in terms of drainage and it was anticipated it would be sufficient for 30 years. However, we are at the point where it is almost full in half that time. There was an idea to extend this area further back but the ground is simply too wet most of the year and drainage into the river is a problem.

Based on our current rate of occupancy we would need an area 3 to 4 times the present extension just to cover the next 50 years. The present glebe field cannot meet this because of issues associated with drainage and maintenance. The cost and the work required to maintain any further extension of the churchyard in this field is beyond the resources of the Church family. Currently just maintaining the grass in the churchyard costs us £6000 a year and that is without work on hedges and trees, headstones and other memorials.

Glebe field 2.

This is the field accessible from Judy Lane and currently leased to a local farmer for rearing sheep. No survey has been taken of this land and we feel there are significant issues that also would need to be considered, in addition to the costs of maintenance as for field 1. Judy Lane is not designed for significant traffic and we believe there would need to be an enlarged driveway and turning circle suitable for a hearse etc. Walking from the church down the road to Judy Lane with a funeral procession would require closing the road on every occasion. Practically one would also need some limited area for parking for those who would find it difficult to make their way from the present car park to Judy Lane. In all this, we do not want to make promises we cannot keep or offer services we cannot provide, because that is doing everyone a disservice.

One Possibility:

We can use part of Glebe field 1 to create a memorial garden of similar size to the present extension, where people could remember loved ones and find peace, where ashes could be scattered, trees planted and benches installed.

The meeting is now open for questions.



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