



## Closed Churchyards

### Cornwall

Cormac Solutions Ltd for Cornwall Council

## BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Community Engagement Project Award*

### Project overview

Since 2020, Cormac Solutions Ltd have been working with local church wardens, friend's groups and volunteers to ensure that their churchyards are maintained to meet local aspirations and Cornwall Council service requirements to make space for nature creating havens for wildlife that bring joy to visitors and our community.

### What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?

The churchyards were predominately grassed areas that were heavily mowed with little focus on supporting wildlife. Changes to local government funding meant Cornwall Council reviewed the frequency of grass cutting in closed churchyards. Its new master maintenance programme saw older sections of Churchyards that were seldom visited, reduced to 3 cuts a year, with the intention to cut more sympathetically to support wildlife, whilst entrance areas, grassed footpaths and areas used for wedding photographs for example were to be cut on a monthly basis, up to 8 times a year over the growing season.

### What were the reasons behind this project ?

Following the changes to Cornwall Council maintenance standards across all public areas, Ludgvan Churchyard's Vicar and Parochial Church Council felt these new maintenance prescriptions were not satisfactory. Despite supplementing the Council's programme of work with their own local arrangements, several complaints were made at which point the Vicar contacted Cormac's Environment team. The aim was to see if there was any flexibility in Cormac's works programme to enable closer working together for the good of the Churchyard.



*Cake and rake volunteer day*



*Grillo 'cut and collect' operator talking to local resident*



### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

In 2019/20, Cormac's Environment team opened up a direct a line of communication with the Vicar and Churchwardens, firstly by attending a weekend volunteer day to build relationships and understand the opportunities and potential of working together.

The local team listened and gathered the ideas and aspirations expressed locally and clear objectives were established. To take matters forward, Cormac's local Works Manager and Supervisor prepared a presentation for the Council's Client Team to explain the position and how the positive relationships had developed in the community. A 'pilot' at Ludgvan was recommended to see what could be achieved through making adjustments to the maintenance programme, adopting a more flexible approach, and to work with the community and to accommodate requests and facilitate ideas. The Client Team was impressed and approved a 'pilot' initiative to test and monitor the value of this approach.

Listening to the Vicar, the parochial church council and volunteer groups, Cormac developed a site-specific management plan for Ludgvan Churchyard. A plan was developed for an alternative cutting regime; to keep and encourage the wildflowers; supporting the volunteers by assisting with moving green waste to a composting area, where 'cut and drop' areas have been identified and has taken place; and developing and administering an annual treatment plan for the Japanese Knotweed on site. There was a strong interest locally with people keen to get involved. The volunteer group were encouraged to speak to the Cormac Works Supervisor as a direct point of contact and a series of site visits took place to discuss and review the outcomes of the management plan.

As part of the Annual Planning process, the Council extended the pilot scheme arrangements to include 15 closed churchyards across Cornwall with the successful method of work from Ludgvan Churchyard replicated within their management plans.



*Grassed pathways into wildlife areas and Living Churchyard areas*



*Lily of the Valley joined unusually in 2022 by the rare Common Spotted Orchid. St Uny is the orchids only know location in West Cornwall, photo by David Brown*



### Further information

By engaging, listening and responding to a passionate group who were in desperate need of cooperation, the holistic 'total site' community led cohesive approach to Churchyard maintenance in Ludgvan and St Uny has resulted in the following community focused gains;

- A reduction in grass cutting complaints and enquiries helped by the management plan which is communicated locally – standards, routines and any changes are promoted
- Advocates in the community for the Council and Cormac's ability to listen, adjust and support local initiatives.
- Local Volunteer Ecologist mapping the gains in biodiversity.
- The Churchyard is very well maintained.
- As well as a peaceful place for contemplation, the sites are now a haven for wildlife.
- The joint approach and proactive community engagement has been designed to help 'shape the place' that local people enjoy.
- Each individual site plan recognises all the local intricacies.
- Health benefits in being active and involved in volunteering sessions.

The benefits for all include:

- Unlocking the full potential of volunteer groups to achieve their aspirations and turn ideas into actions
- Building confidence with local communities that they can influence how their community spaces look and are maintained
- Support for community initiatives, with local projects designed to educate, increasing pollinator friendly planting and biodiversity net gains even further.

The abundance of wildflowers at Ludgvan and St Uny that have become established are a testament to the co-operation and methods of work adopted by Cormac and the volunteer group. Evidence of the species was supplied by a local volunteer ecologist.



*St Uny Facebook page May 2022 and Star of Bethlehem found in 2021, photos by David Brown*



*Extensive area of Large Scabious flowers in June 2022 attracting the very rare Lar Scabious Mining bee, photos David Brown*



### **Project Team**

- Client: Cornwall Council
- Delivery: Cormac Solutions Ltd
- Stakeholders: Local church wardens, friend's groups, individual volunteers

### **What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?**

Cormac's Environment team managed closed churchyards as per Cornwall Council's maintenance prescriptions. By working with and building relationships with Vicars, the Parochial Church Council and volunteer groups, they have gone above and beyond to ensure local ideas and aspirations have delivered on site with evidenced increased abundance of biodiversity by following these new management plans.

The dynamics associated with differing local needs together with the varying resources and activities have fed back into Cornwall Council's benefit and cost analysis, which in turn can inform future arrangements for these sites to work with communities and make space for nature.