

DIOCESAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

SCHEDULE OF DOCUMENTS

1. **Statement of Significance** (Statement of Significance.pdf)
2. (Statement of Need Leylandii trees.pdf)
3. **Photograph 1** (Height of trees.jpg)
4. **Photograph 2** (Etiolated trees and poor grass growth.jpg)
5. **Photograph 4** (View over Ivinghoe Beacon.png)
6. **Photograph 3** (Tree overhangs path & little lower growth.jpg)

TO THE CHANCELLOR OF  
THE DIOCESE OF ST ALBANS

24/02/2021

VIEWED by the St Albans Diocesan  
Advisory Committee



# Church of St Mary the Virgin, Eaton Bray

## Proposed work to trees in the churchyard

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE



#### **The village and the location of church within it**

Eaton Bray, a village of about 4300 population, is situated on the western border of Bedfordshire where it adjoins the county of Buckinghamshire. It lies just below the Dunstable Downs and on the edge of the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The village straddles the main village road for about a mile and a half. Houses are of mixed ages and styles. Many of the modern homes were built during the 1980 & 90s on the site of a former nursery and market garden but there are many older homes remaining, including former farmhouses some still with land attached used for agricultural purposes. The church is situated fairly centrally adjacent to the Village Hall (built on church owned land), near to the main residential areas, village shops, the school and the last remaining public house.

#### **Statement about the church**

The church is built of a local stone, quarried in Totternhoe, the next village. It is a chalk-like stone with a greyish tinge, soft and easy to carve, but notoriously vulnerable when exposed to the weather. From the outside most of the visible features suggest a date at the very end of the 15th century, when the church was rebuilt, the roof raised, transepts and porches added and the windows renewed. The Church, which dates from 1219, has been the Parish Church since 1975 when the Parishes of Eaton Bray and Edlesborough were combined.

It is in an excellent state of repair around £300,000 having been spent on the roof and stonework in recent years.

### **Description of exceptional architectural features**

St Mary's Church, 13<sup>th</sup> century in origin, has several exceptional architectural features, descriptions and photographs of which are to be found in all the defining books on English Parish Churches. The arcades, in particular the north arcade, have intricately stiff-leaf carved capitals which would not be out of place in a much larger church or cathedral.

The 13<sup>th</sup> century font is similarly carved and also architecturally significant. Another 13<sup>th</sup> century feature of note is the amazing scrollwork hinges on the south door thought to be by Thomas de Leighton, most famous for his work on the tomb of Queen Eleanor in Westminster Abbey.

### **Recent improvements**

The interior of the church has not been neglected in modern times.

A new organ was built and installed by Peter Collins in 1991. The church has been equipped with a comprehensive sound and lighting system and new flexible seating has replaced the former uncomfortable linked chairs. A new pulpit carved by a local craftsman was installed and dedicated in 2009 and the ancient font restored in 2011. A bespoke portable altar, made by Nick Clarke of Heath & Reach, was introduced to the north chapel in 2013; this adds flexibility to our worship as it may also be used at the chancel step.

In 2017, an extension to house an accessible toilet and give space for storage and an office area, was completed. In the same year a kitchen in a cupboard was built in the NW corner.

In 2020, superfast broadband was installed which enables services to be live-streamed and creates other opportunities for outreach and participation.

All these recent developments have added to the church's ability to welcome visitors, hold a variety of events in the church, and take us forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

# Church of St Mary the Virgin, Eaton Bray

## Felling eight Leylandii in the churchyard

### STATEMENT OF NEED AND OUTLINE OF PROPOSED WORK



#### 1. Description of Churchyard

St Mary's churchyard was closed for burials in 1882 and is cared for by the Parish Council. Church volunteers also help by clearing the paths and gullies around the church and maintaining the flower beds.

The churchyard was remodelled in the 1970s when kerbstones, footstones and some headstones were removed and placed against the wall in the north-east corner. This has created a pleasant open space with benches at intervals for visitors and local residents to spend a few quiet moments. An area alongside the High Street is set aside as a Garden of Remembrance for the burial of cremated remains. A stone memorial erected in 2004 provides for the commemoration of those whose ashes are interred there. Some large Victorian headstones remain, adding historical interest to the churchyard.

The village War Memorial adjoins the High Street, enclosed by pleasant flowerbeds.

There is a delightful mix of trees in the churchyard including two specimen blue Cedars which are probably more than 150 years old. There are also five large horse chestnut trees, four of which are on the south boundary of the churchyard overlooking Church Lane. There are several sycamores and yew trees and in 2019 we planted a whitebeam to commemorate the 800<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the church and a visit by HRH the Duke of Gloucester.

We regard the churchyard as a community amenity; it is used as a path through to the village hall, local footpaths and dog walking routes. In summer we make use of it for Messy Church activities; parents sit in the shade of the trees while waiting for their children to finish activities in the Village Hall and in autumn local children collect conkers from the large horse chestnuts. Last year we hosted a socially distanced Macmillan coffee morning in the churchyard.

## **2. Statement of Need**

### **2.1 The Problem**

There are eight overgrown and etiolated Leylandii conifers on the south-west boundary of the churchyard. They have grown to a height of approximately 40 feet.

It is clear they have not been cared for as there is no evidence of pruning, or any attempt to form them into a hedge.

Nobody in the church can remember them having been planted so it is likely they are 40 – 50 years old; It is debatable whether they were an appropriate addition to the churchyard.

One of the trees, the largest of the eight, overhangs the path providing handy perches for birds whose droppings create a nuisance on the path and the handrail.

### **2.2 Action recommended by the Parochial Church Council with the agreement of the Parish Council.**

We wish to fell the Leylandii and plant in their place a hedge of mixed native species which will be of benefit to wildlife. We have recently started on the road to become an Eco-Church and so are very mindful of how we can use the churchyard ecologically.

We will take advice as to the best species to plant in a hedge and have made an enquiry with the Woodland Trust, which currently has a scheme to provide free trees and shrubs for community projects.

What we have in mind is a mix of native species such as hawthorn, blackthorn, hazel, crab apple, dogwood and dog rose but we will of course be guided by professionals.

The Parish Council is in agreement with this proposal and has offered to help us with the cost of felling the trees.

### **2.3 Summary of points**

- The trees are not attractive and have not been well maintained.
- They cast shadows in the churchyard, making it dark and gloomy and affecting the growth of grass in that area.
- If the trees are felled, an attractive view over Ivinghoe Beacon will be opened up and it will increase the ambience of the churchyard and its advantages as a community resource.
- It will be necessary to make a decision about the trees sometime, perhaps at a time in the future when the church is likely to have fewer funds and the Parish Council less able to help.
- Bird mess on the path creates a potential slip hazard and is unhygienic as some of the mess is inevitably trodden into church.
- The handrail is fouled by droppings which makes it unlikely to be used and so not effective as a disability aid for those who need it.
- Felling the trees will not compromise the security of the churchyard as there is a row of bollards parallel to the trees.

### **2.4 Proposed schedule of work:**

- To fell eight large Leylandii trees and grind the stumps to ground level.
- To plant a hedge of mixed native species which will be of benefit to wildlife.

### **3. Details of contractor**

The tree surgeon will be Neil Shadbolt of Neil Shadbolt, Tree Surgery Ltd., Dunstable <https://neilshadbolt.co.uk/>. He has a long-established practice in South Bedfordshire and is well known in the local area. All his employees have appropriate qualifications, and Health & Safety is a prime consideration.



#### **4. Permissions**

This work will require planning permission from Central Bedfordshire Council Planning Authority as the churchyard is in a conservation area. The Parish Council is in the process of applying for permission to carry out the work, having included it in their application for other tree work in the churchyard.

#### **5. Cost**

Felling: The cost of the work to St Mary's PCC will be £1225. An equal sum will be borne by the Parish Council.

Planting hedge: We hope to get the plants free of charge from the Woodland Trust and to use voluntary labour to plant them.

18.02.2021





Photos shows height of trees against the village hall.



More telegraph poles than trees! Poor grass growth in their shadow.





View over Ivinghoe Beacon and Edlesborough Church would be opened up.





Trees over hang path and handrail. There is little growth at lower level