

## Shopland Churchyard

### 1 MANAGEMENT PROPOSALS

- 7.1 Low level maintenance of Shopland Churchyard has contributed to its naturalistic character, and whilst continuing this approach will maintain character in the short term, a management plan for the trees and hedge is required to prevent further encroachment and loss, in accordance with guidance from the Diocesan Advisory Committee for the Care of Churches<sup>1</sup>. This management plan should be informed by a long term strategy for the site as a whole, considering issues of access and future uses of the churchyard.
- 7.2 There are three options that would be appropriate for Shopland Churchyard in its rural setting.
- Management to maintain the *status quo*, preventing further encroachment of scrub resulting in continuing loss and damage to the overall form, and to key gravestones and the site of the church.
  - Management for wildlife, maximising the potential of the churchyard as a wildlife habitat by allowing grass and wild flowers to grow up, but identifying key gravestones to be protected from further loss and encroachment, and respecting the site of the church. The Essex Churchyard Conservation Group could be requested to assess its importance for wildlife.
  - Reuse as a burial ground, in particular for woodland or green burials to maintain the value of the churchyard as a naturalistic space and avoid formal arrangements of headstones. There may be unmarked graves on the site which would be disturbed through re-use, but given the peaceful, natural character of the churchyard, it could provide an attractive local solution to the growing pressure on existing burial grounds as they reach their capacity.

### Signage and Access

- 7.3 Whilst anonymity has undoubtedly contributed to the peaceful and isolated character of the Shopland Churchyard, some low-key signage of a style appropriate to its rural setting both at the Shopland Road junction and at the entrance to the Churchyard would increase awareness of its existence.

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<sup>1</sup> See Practical Notes on Trees in Churchyards (Chelmsford Diocesan Advisory Committee, 1995)

- 7.4 Bearing in mind that strictly speaking there is no vehicular access to the churchyard, local footpath signs and published walks could be used to encourage pedestrian access.
- 7.5 At present the absence of any utilitarian intrusions such as litter bins, signs and furniture contributes to the naturalistic appearance of the churchyard. However it is a valuable public amenity space, and the addition of a single appropriate style of bench would provide seating to encourage dwell time and enjoyment of the space without detracting from its special character.
- 7.6 Although the original position of the church is visible in the shallow earthworks and masonry, this would benefit from clearer, but low key, indicators, perhaps with corner stones to act as markers.