

## Statement of Significance – St Mary’s Church Studham: reuse of western and north western sections of the churchyard for full burials

### Section 1: The church in its rural environment

#### **1.1 The Setting of the Church**

The Church of St Mary the Virgin is a grade 1 listed building, first consecrated in 1220. It is set in a remote rural location at LU6 2NW, at the end of Church Road, approximately ¼ mile from the residential area of Church Road. Nearby are only the original Manor House, now fully modernised and two recently modernised cottages.

Though the Electoral Roll of the church is small (65 in April 2024), the church is valued by the local community at special services for Christmas, Easter, Harvest and Remembrance and for important life events, weddings, baptisms and funerals. Work with children is a priority within the PCC’s Mission Action Plan and there is a monthly Children’s Church, a Kids’ Club which meets six times a year and an occasional youth group. There are also strong links with local organisations such as the Friends of Studham Church, the Friends of Studham Common and the local Cubs and Scout Groups.

The fabric of the medieval church building will not be impacted by the proposal to reuse sections of the churchyard. The proposed sections are not close to the building so there is no problem of limiting space for maintenance work and scaffolding, or of interfering with underground pipes and cables.

The proposal will reassure the community that burials can continue in Studham, close to family, friends and villagers who have been buried there for many years.

#### **1.2 The Living Churchyard**

A large and beautiful churchyard surrounds the church building and is a significant part of church and village life in Studham.

There is a strong attachment to the churchyard. It is maintained by a small group of dedicated volunteers most of whom are not regular churchgoers. Routine mowing and weeding are supplemented by occasional working parties which are supported by a wider group of volunteers and by village groups such as the Friends of Studham Common.

Mature trees grow on the south western, western and northern boundaries of the churchyard; none has a tree preservation order, they were professionally surveyed and pruned in 2018 and would not be affected by this proposal.

### **1.3 Social Significance**

Local people greatly value the churchyard. They are able to sit quietly on one of the four wooden seats for private prayers and reflection and enjoy the peace and beauty. For several families the churchyard became a place of pilgrimage during the Covid pandemic. The churchyard is well used by walkers and dog walkers, local people and people from further afield. A grass footpath crosses the churchyard which would not be impacted by this proposal.

St Mary's registered as an ECO Church in 2021 and has achieved a silver award. There are now two wild flower patches in the sunny central part of the churchyard and local people support church members in recording the species which increase in number year by year and attract insects, bees and butterflies. The PCC has planted flowering plants such as buddleia and foxgloves on parts of the boundary to attract bees and butterflies and in the spring of 2024 the local Cubs group kindly made and donated seven bug hotels which are now located around the churchyard. None of these environmental initiatives would be impacted by the proposal.

The southern part of the churchyard leading to the church's main door was cleared of headstones many years ago and is now an area of grass used by the PCC for social and fundraising events, such as coffee mornings, concerts and BBQs. The proposal would not be detrimental to these events.

## **Section 2: The significance of the area affected by the proposal**

### **2.1 Parts of the churchyard which will be affected by the proposal**

The churchyard was divided into sections when the details of the graves were first recorded on an Excel spreadsheet in the 1990s.

All sections of the churchyard have been used for burials over the centuries. Recently full burials have taken place in the eastern and north eastern sections and ashes have been buried in the Garden of Remembrance in the south east.

The PCC now propose to reuse the western and north western sections for full burials. These areas are not used at the present time. The few old headstones would remain in situ with new graves located in between them. New graves would not obstruct the existing grass footpath.

The proposal is a significant one for the church and the local community, enabling St Mary's to continue to reach out and to respond to local needs.