

## Somerset communities encouraged to make space for nature in their local churchyards and burial grounds

*Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Diocese of Bath and Wells invite more communities to join in with the 'Wilder Churches' initiative and take action for nature through a special online workshop, supported and attended by the Bishop of Bath and Wells.*

- 'Wilder Churches' supports communities to work together to find ways to make more space for nature in their local churchyards, burial grounds, or other church land.
- The initiative has been running since 2021, and over 100 communities have already been taking action for nature in churchyards across Somerset and beyond.
- The first event of 2025 will take place on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> March, attended by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, who will be answering questions, providing inspiration, and sharing his vision for a greener, flourishing Diocese.

'Wilder Churches' is a partnership initiative between Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Diocese of Bath and Wells, which has been **encouraging communities across the county to take action for nature in their local churchyards and burial grounds since 2021**. Through community action, these often-overlooked natural areas can become more valuable spaces for nature and support a wide range of diverse plant and animal species.

**This year, new communities are encouraged to get involved** and help transform their local churchyard or burial ground into a haven for wildlife. Those interested in learning more are invited to join **a special online workshop on Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> March**, which will be attended by the Bishop of Bath and Wells, Michael Beasley. Bishop Michael will be sharing his love for the natural world, including stories from his own woodland and the importance of preserving precious wild habitats. This is a unique opportunity for people across Somerset and beyond to support their local community, ask questions about the initiative, and gain inspiration for creating wilder churchyards.

### **Pippa Rayner, Wilder Projects Coordinator at Somerset Wildlife Trust says:**

"Wilder Churches has now been running for over three years, and since then, we've seen incredible support for the initiative, with communities discovering wildflowers they never knew were there, running community events, building bug homes, collecting grass cuttings, planting for pollinators and more besides! As well as being valued by people, churchyards can offer important habitats for wildlife, including precious wildflower-rich grassland, which has 'hung on' in many churchyards whilst the vast majority has been lost from the surrounding countryside (due mainly to intensification of agricultural practices). Ancient trees, hedgerows, walls, woodland and planted areas can also give a variety of wildlife somewhere to feed, nest, shelter or hibernate, so finding out 'what they've already got' has been exciting for many communities (and us!). Every churchyard is different and although some currently hold little value for wildlife, with community support there is so much that can be done to turn this around. That's why Wilder Churches is all about supporting local people to come together and take positive, evidence-based action for nature in a way that also works for their community. We've already seen incredible results through this initiative, but if we're to reverse the staggering loss of biodiversity in the UK, we need more communities to

get involved, which is why we're hosting a special welcome event in March this year, and we're inviting anyone interested to come along and find out more!"

**Sara Emmett, Climate Justice & Environment Advisor for The Diocese of Bath and Wells, adds:** "A quarter of our churches across Somerset are now part of the Wilder Churches initiative, working with their communities to care for God's creation – it's been wonderful to see. We are thrilled that Bishop Michael will be joining us for our first online event of the year, and we'd love you to join us. Everyone is welcome, whether you attend church or are part of the wider community, whether it's your first time or you are a regular Wilder Churches' attendee, if you are just curious, or passionate about the environment and nature."

The 'Wilder Churches: an event with the Bishop of Bath and Wells' webinar is being held online on Tuesday 20 March from 19:00 – 20:30. Everyone is welcome – for more information, or to book your place, visit: [www.somersetwildlife.org/events/2025-03-20-wilder-churches-event-bishop-bath-and-wells](http://www.somersetwildlife.org/events/2025-03-20-wilder-churches-event-bishop-bath-and-wells)

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### Editor's notes

#### **About Wilder Churches:**

'Wilder Churches' is a partnership initiative between Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Diocese of Bath and Wells. The initiative supports communities to get to know the wildlife in their local churchyard, other church land, or burial ground and work together to find ways to increase the value of these special places for wildlife. You can find out more [here](#).

#### **About Somerset Wildlife Trust:**

Somerset Wildlife Trust is a nature conservation charity. Its purpose is to restore and protect the populations of species across the county and the habitats they call home. Climate change is one of the greatest threats to nature, natural habitats and the ecosystems that support our life on earth. Our aims are to help address both the ecological and climate crises and put nature back into people's lives.

Nature reserves and protected sites on their own are not enough. In order to reverse the decline in species diversity and abundance, and create resilient landscapes and habitats for wildlife and for people that can adapt to climate change, **we need to:**

- Encourage and support landowners to manage their land positively for nature; create more space for nature.
- Connect wildlife-rich spaces across the wider landscape to create a robust Nature Recovery Network for Somerset.
- Create a movement of people – at least 1 in 4 – that take action for nature's recovery across Somerset as part of Team Wilder.

This is at the core of our new 10-year strategy. Nationally the Wildlife Trusts are calling for at least 30% of land to be managed positively for nature by 2030. What we do in Somerset

must contribute to that national ambition. You can read our full 10-year strategy **Wilder Somerset** [here](#).

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