



Heene Cemetery site management guidelines

The following guidelines are those that the Friends try to follow when working in Heene Cemetery. Many of these are subject to ongoing discussion.

Brambles

There are several large patches of [brambles](#). In broad terms, they are allowed the areas they occupy. They harbour a range of wildlife and are also valuable as host to a range of insects and invertebrates. The general aim is to prevent these patches from increasing in size.

Periodically the cutting of narrow walkways through these patches in carefully selected places is good practice as this increases the surface vegetation which butterflies value for egg-laying.

Chemicals

No chemicals (weedkillers, pesticides, fungicides or bleaches) are used in the Cemetery.

Graves

Aside from the seasonal strimming, graves are periodically cared for manually by volunteers. Some volunteers have their chosen work areas. In advance of Open Days, the heritage team identify graves that will be the focus of any presentation. We try to apply the following guidelines (to 'soft' and 'hard' graves alike):

- Any [sycamores](#), brambles or [ivy](#) on the grave should be removed (which may involve them being uprooted).
- Any grasses that are obscuring a headstone inscription can be cut back (but not pulled up). Flowering plants, except those mentioned above, should be left untouched.

Grave 'tidying' that happens outside the strim and pre-Open Day periods needs to maintain a balance between the desire for 'tidiness' and 'abandonment', which should take into account the following:

- Grave soil should not be dug or tilled. Ant hills that have grown to an unusual height could be dealt with; please bring any of these to the attention of a site co-ordinator.
- Plants should be left untouched. Strimming at the agreed times of the year will deal with the majority of the plants in the Cemetery.
- Plants that can be removed should be: saplings, brambles and ivy or recognised invasive species plants. These are: [Hybrid or 'Spanish' Bluebell](#) (which are difficult to tell from the non-hybrid bluebell even when flowering), [Montbretia](#), [Three-cornered Garlic/Leek](#) and [Virginia Creeper](#). There are only these four in this category.
- Coarse grasses can be cut back, but shears or secateurs should be used instead of plucking and tearing.
- Curb stones may be made more visible by cutting down long grass (but not flowers). When doing this, please use secateurs or shears, rather than by plucking or tearing. If soil has accumulated such that it obscures a grave's curbs, it can be gently cut back.
- Where two graves have abutting curb stones, please don't insert tools in the gap, as this risks destabilising the stonework.
- If in doubt, volunteers should seek the advice of one of the site co-ordinators.

The five graves that are managed by the **Commonwealth War Graves Commission** are subject to a different regime and have been granted exemption from the 'no tidying' regime adopted by the Friends. These graves are maintained along traditional CWGC guidelines.

Endowed graves (of which there are 121) are not exceptions to the above set of guidelines. The provision of cut flowers that might have been specified in any endowment lapsed long ago, there being no budget for this; and the grass cutting and tidying that any endowment specified has since been given a different meaning, as outlined above, in keeping with the Cemetery now being a Local Wildlife Site managed for the promotion of biodiversity.

Families of anyone buried in the Cemetery are at liberty to request a graveside visit. If the grave in question is smothered by brambles, the Friends will endeavour to make it accessible if at all possible.

Headstones

Headstones have in the past been the focus of the Council to ensure that any instability does not pose a safety risk to volunteers, Council workers or visitors. Remediating any that pose a risk is the responsibility of the Council. If you think a headstone may pose a risk, please mention this to a site co-ordinator.

A very few volunteers have taken to scrubbing headstones, an activity that has been discouraged by lichenologists. However, a compromise can be obtained by following these guidelines:

- Chemicals should not be used.
- Gentle cleaning with a brush of only the part of a headstone that contains lettering is acceptable if the objective is to make the inscription more legible.
- Other surfaces of a headstone should be left alone.
- If a headstone's metal lettering is coming loose, it is acceptable to tap individual letters back into the stone using a rubber-faced mallet.
- Lettering should not be painted.

Leaf litter

Leaf litter is a rich source of nutrient that should be allowed to percolate into the undersoil throughout winter and spring. It also harbours invertebrates which are valuable in their own right, not just as food for birds. It contributes to the health of the Cemetery's soil below ground, a subject that can be read in detail in a blog post [The Soil Profile of Heene Cemetery](#).

Paths, however, need to be cleared of leaf litter. This is not only a health and safety requirement but needs to be done to prevent the paths from becoming bald. Raking is best done with a plastic rake, rather than a metal one, to avoid excessive damage to fungi or flowers. As a general policy, graves should not be cleared of leaf litter unless it obscures an inscription.

Paths

The central area of paths are mown periodically by the Council just before the Friends hold Open Days, deliberately leaving uncut about 30cm verges on either side. This should be enough. Brambles, ivy, sycamore and other saplings, found in these uncut verges can be carefully uprooted. (For leaves, see the section on Leaf litter.)

Strimming

This is done by the Council twice a year:

- In specific areas (usually part of the north-east and part of the south-east areas) in late June/early July; this simulates grazing.
- In all cleared areas (those not containing brambles or coppices of young trees) at the end of summer (typically in late September); arisings are left for several days before being lifted, allowing seeds to be dropped; this simulates harvest.

With a strimmer of our own (scheduled for purchase in 2025), a different, more subtle and varied regime may be possible, as recommended by visiting botanists and butterfly specialists, one which involves a mosaic approach of strimming in smaller patches at varied times of the year.

Trees

Preventing the Cemetery turning into woodland is essential if some of the original meadowland character of the Cemetery is to be preserved. This was recommended in a Sussex Wildlife Trust report of 1996 and has been restated on various occasions since. It requires intervention as follows:

- Saplings need uprooting before they become too tenacious to easily manage.
- From time to time, excessive overhanging of branches from trees in St Michael's Road may need to be thinned.
- A good proportion of young [Elm](#), [Willow](#), [Holm Oak](#) and [Hazel](#) trees that are beyond saplings need to be felled or have their lower branches thinned out. Some of this will require support from the Council.

This document was last updated on 22nd January 2025.

For the current version is available at <https://www.heenecemetery.org.uk/heene-cemetery-site-management-guidelines>.