

The St Mary's Churchyard Management Plan 2008



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PART I: WHERE WE ARE NOW

INTRODUCTION:

What is a park management plan?

Management Plans are an important aid to the efficient and effective management of a site. A plan forms part of a process for evaluating performance against agreed standards, consulting and involving people, strategic planning and providing continuity. Individual plans will be specific to each park and will deliver aims and objectives specific to the needs of the local community who will be directly involved in its formulation.

A Park Management Plan also provides an excellent opportunity to collate a wealth of information relating to the park that the management authority possesses, into a single comprehensive document.

Name of Site: St Mary's Churchyard

Address: John Wilson Street, Woolwich, SE18

If you require any further details about this plan please contact:

Address: Parks & Open Spaces:
Shooters Hill depot
Opposite Eaglesfield Rd
Woolwich
SE18 4LX

Tel. 020 8856 0100

Email parks@greenwich.gov.uk

This park is allocated a technical officer who can be contacted for any further information (using the contact details provided above).

Purpose of this management plan

As well as developing a Green Space Strategy, the production of individual management plans for each park is good practice and is in accordance with the Council's commitment to providing Best Value. Each management plan will have duration of five to ten years.

The new Management Plan will provide a vital resource for parks staff in maintaining and developing St Mary's Churchyard as a resource for the community and visitors to the area and as such will be under constant informal review, with an annual review of progress and continuing management prescription and a 10 year comprehensive review in 2016.

It is hoped that this plan will help to encourage relationships between the Council and the community and provide access to information on the management approach to this site.

It is envisaged that the plan will provide a framework around which any future decisions concerning this site will be taken.

In addition, it is hoped that the management plan for St Mary's Churchyard will assist with allocating existing and securing additional resources for developments on this site that this management plan specifies.

Future actions/priorities for this site are identified in the Action Plan to this document. This management plan therefore provides a benchmark against which future progress can be measured.

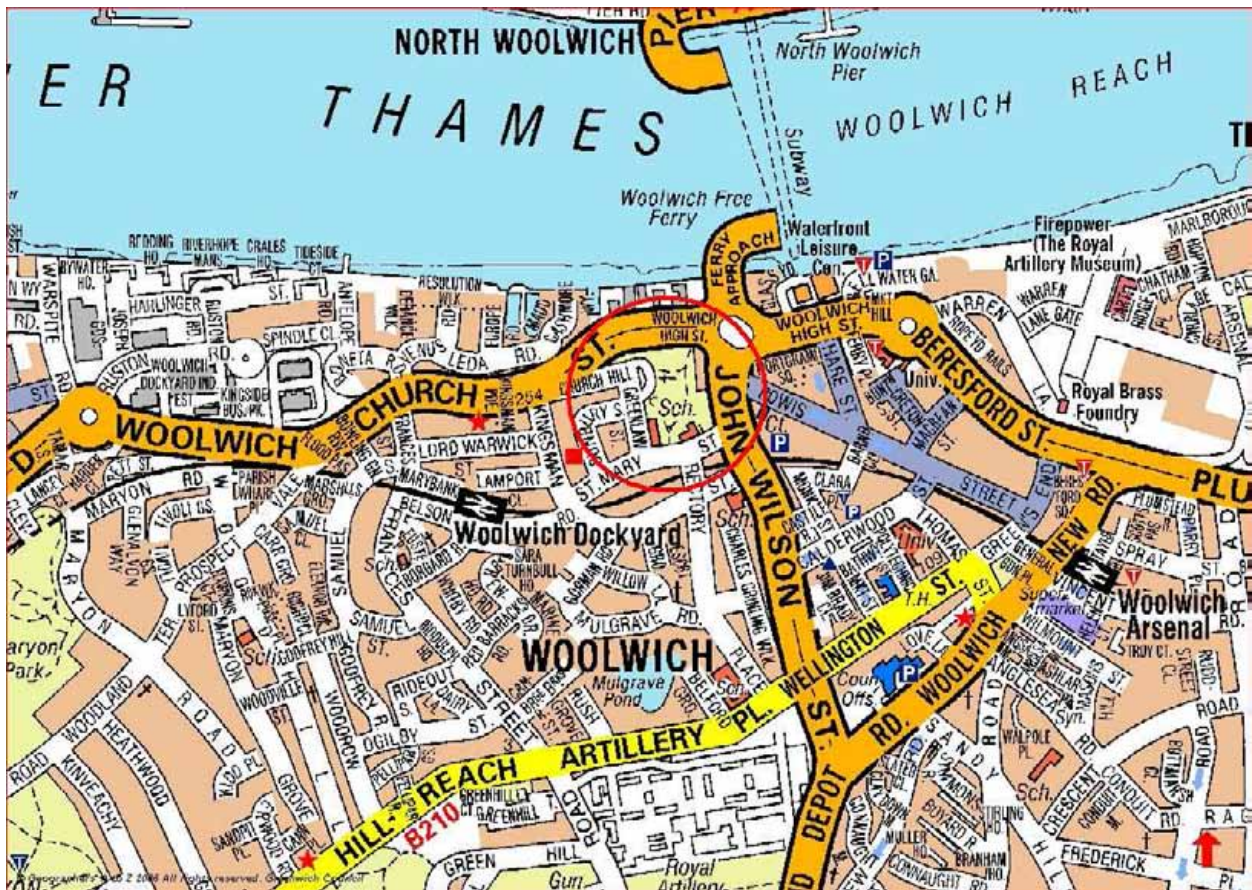
SITE DESCRIPTION AND INFORMATION BASE

Wider Policy Context

The Management Plan has been written within the context of a wide framework of national, regional and local policy statements and strategies.

A number of strategies have been considered in the production of this document to ensure that the priorities identified in this plan deliver and compliment the appropriate aims and objectives identified in them.

The main documents impacting on the development of this plan are listed in Appendix I.



General Summary

St Mary's Churchyard gardens are a 19.09 hectare ornamental garden situated on the bank of the River Thames in the Greenwich borough area of Woolwich and located at grid reference TQ431 791.

The Churchyard was used as a burial ground until it was full to capacity and then cleared and developed into an ornamental garden. The Local Government Act 1972 gave parochial church councils authority to request a particular parish or community council to take over the maintenance of a closed churchyard and Greenwich Council is now responsible for the maintenance of the churchyard. There are two paved areas at the Northern end of the park that provide areas for viewing the Thames that are also part of this park. A fourth area forming a strip between two streets is also part of the St Mary's Churchyard Gardens. There is an enclosed play area located close to the church for use by Under 5's crèche who meet in the Church's crypt.

The Church of England, Diocese of Southwark, and Parochial Church Council of St Mary's Woolwich owns the Church and Churchyard.



Tombstones have been cleared to the side

The Church

The Church occupies approximately 939 sq meters of this park site and is situated roughly in the middle. It is thought that there has been a church in this location since the 9th century. The present church was built between 1727 – 1739 and opened in 1739. The Church has an English Heritage grade II listing meaning it is an important building with more than special interest.



The Church

Biological

The Churchyard is laid out in a mixture of shrubs, grass areas, trees and flower-beds.

The shrub beds are mostly mature shrubs probably planted in 1968 and are mostly conifers and ground plants.

The grass areas are box-mowed making for high quality lawns. The subsistence of the graves in some areas creates an undulating surface.

The flower beds are a mixture of colourful plants. One of the flower-beds was designed by the local park's maintenance team and has a nautical theme.



Flower Bed with Nautical Theme

The concrete walls between the Gateway House (formerly the Odeon and now the New Wine Church) and the park also provide a habitat for some scarce ferns.



Scarce Ferns

The memorials in the Churchyard that remained after the Churchyard became a public garden were moved in 1968 and now only the memorial to Tom Cribb (1781 to 1848) a resident of Greenwich, who was a notable bare knuckle boxer, credited with being champion of England. The Tom Cribb memorial is in the form of a lion and is in good condition.



Tom Cribb Memorial

The geology underlying of the park is Thanet sand. Thanet sand is generally porous but tends towards clay and to be more impervious at the base. The Church and Churchyard are on a chalk plough.

Tree Survey

Tree surveys in Greenwich parks are conducted when time and money permits. A tree survey of St Mary's Churchyard was conducted in 2004. This identified the number of trees, classified them according to age, recorded the tree's measurements, located any tree wounds and made a recommendation for action depending on the tree's health.

The trees are a mixture of common species. There is a good example of a native American Indian Bean tree (*Catalpa bignonioides*) located to the left of where the path from John Wilson Street forks. A weeping willow (*Salix x chrysocoma*) also exists in the park. This is unusual because the park is on a hill and this tree usually grows near waterways. Other trees in the park are mature lime trees (*Tilia euchlora*) and London planes (*Platanus x acerifolia*)

This tree survey identified 148 trees. This is quite a large number for a park of this size and there are possibly too many trees in the park. Previously the extensive shade from the trees has caused the grass to die back in areas. This required the trees to be thinned out in order for the park to be opened up.

Over 35 different species exist in St Mary's Churchyard.

Some of the frequently occurring trees are:

- *Betula pendula* (silver birch)
- *Tilia europaea* (common lime)
- *Acer species* (maples)

25 trees were recommended for ongoing monitoring of their condition but overall the majority of the trees were found to be healthy and of good vigour.

Fauna

Common birds, squirrels and other mammals can be found in this park



Wildlife in St Mary's

Buildings and Structures

Staff Mess Room, Yard and Garages

The staff mess room is no longer used but is still in good condition. Despite the metal grills on the windows and doors, vandals have on occasion gained entry. No records have been found on the construction of the mess room but the design and style indicates the early 1960's. The yard is used for storing and growing plants.

Enclosed Play Area

The enclosed play area is approximately 5 x 7 meters in size and is for use by the Under 5's Project that occupies the crypt of the church. The crèche have their own 'mobile' play equipment to use in the enclosed play area.

Toilets

There are staff toilets within the staff mess room (not accessible to the public).

Pathways

There are several networks of pathways within the park. These are tarmac and suitable for wheelchairs and mobility vehicles although some areas are inaccessible because of steps.

Park Furniture and Fencing

Lighting

For the autumn and winter months lamp columns light the pathways. There are approximately 10 lamps within the park.

Signage

The access points all have signage indicating the name of the park and up to date contact information. The signs are graffitied on occasion. No-cycling and no-dogs signs are located at all of the entrances to the park. There are no signs on the neighbouring streets to indicate the location of the churchyard.

Fences

The perimeter of the gardens is bordered by iron railings and gates which are in reasonable order although some are quite old now and the paint is peeling in places. Fences have been placed on top of the brick walls between the park and the St Mary's Street properties as people were entering the park over these walls. In 2001 anti-clime paint and signage were installed on the fences as a further deterrent.

Rubbish Bins

There are approximately 15 bins within the park which appears sufficient to meet the requirements of the park. The Thames River viewing areas is where most littering occurs (there are about 5 bins in this area).

Dog Bins

St Mary's Churchyard is a dog free park and there are no dog bins in this park. Occasionally dogs are brought into the park particularly around the Church Hill pathway and Thames River viewing areas. Dog litter does not appear to be a problem.

Park Benches

Within the Churchyard and the viewing areas are approximately 15 park benches. These are a combination of wooden and steel benches are in satisfactory condition. The quantity of benches appears sufficient for an area of this size.



Mature trees and park furniture

Drainage

The pathways within the gardens have gully pots and presumably soak-aways although this is not certain. The drains may be connected to the main sewers in the streets but no records of this exist. There are several foul sewers within the gardens; two for the church and one for the staff mess room. The sewers have needed repairs in the past. The sewer, which runs from the east end of the church in the general direction of the Woolwich Ferry, was repaired in the summer of 2001 as it kept blocking due to root damage from the trees. The other sewer to which an inspection chamber is located to the left (north) of the west door of the church in a lawn gets blocked on several occasions a year.

Access and Circulation

The perimeter of the park of the Churchyard is fenced and the gates are opened and locked each day. The Thames River viewing areas are fenced on the river side only.

St Mary's Churchyard is bordered by roads on three sides. The Thames riverside of the park has a narrow pathway (Church Hill) between the park and the Thames viewing area of the park. Each side of the park has access points.

There are five access points to the park. Three of the access points are accessible for wheelchairs and mobility vehicles. The two access points from the Churchyard onto Church Hill and the Thames River viewing areas have steps but these areas are accessible by other means. Two of the access points are suitable for vehicles although the only vehicles permitted in the park are Council vehicles.

Parking spaces are available on the some of the neighbouring streets.

Public Transport Links

This area has strong public transport links. Woolwich Dockyard Railway Station linking Woolwich with central London is approximately 10 minutes walk. The ferry connecting Woolwich with North Woolwich is close by on the Thames waterfront. Bus stops are also located nearby. Several transport initiatives are planned for the area.

Summary of main uses, recreational facilities, visitor attractions and activities

Wedding Photography

The Churchyard is regularly used by couples for wedding photographs. Permission for this is granted by Parks and Open Spaces.

Thorough Fare

There are access points to the Churchyard from each of the streets that surround the Churchyard, therefore, the park often gets used a thorough-fare or shortcut.

Passive Relaxation Activities

The undulating landscape and views of the River Thames means one of this park's main uses is passive recreational activities such as relaxing, sitting and walking.

Under 5s Project

The Under 5s Project (a registered charity), use the crypt on a Monday to Friday basis and provide a nursery and day care facility for children over 2 years old.

Working with Words

'Working with Words' (also a registered charity), also use the Church buildings.

Anti-social Behaviour

The anti-social behaviour that occurs in this park is mostly drinking and occurs along Woolwich Church Street mostly in the Thames River viewing areas that are not fenced and locked at night. This occurs despite a drinking ban being in operation on Woolwich Church Street.

Who uses the site, where they come from, patterns of use and behaviour

The site lies to the South of the Woolwich Town Centre and is adjacent to John Wilson Street, Church Hill, Greenlaw Street, and St Mary's Street. Pedestrian crossings are on John Wilson Street.

The area is urban with a mix of residential dwellings and light commercial properties. The resident population of Woolwich Riverside, as measured in the 2001 Census was 12,767, of which 6,176 were male and 6,591 were female.

Ethnicity in Woolwich Riverside was 64.39% White, 21.59% Black or Black British, 5.62% Asian or Asian British, 4.65% Chinese or other ethnic group and 3.74% were mixed ethnicity.

The 2001 Census indicated that the people in the 20 – 44 age bracket represented the highest proportion in this ward's population and 16.21% were in the 5 – 15 age brackets. 36.64% were in

full time employment. This compared to 40.84% in Greenwich overall and 42.64% in London overall. Approximately 54% of this ward had no car or van.

Local Parks and Play Areas

The Sunbury Street Play Area on a nearby street is the closest play area to St Mary's Churchyard. There is a designated Children's Play Area at Royal Arsenal Gardens, approximately 15 minutes walk away, but this has no play equipment in it.

The closest Metropolitan Open Land is Woolwich Common where there are grassland areas, a playground and some sport facilities. However, as noted above St Mary's is within an area lacking accessible wildlife sites and Woolwich Common is over a kilometre away. Royal Arsenal Gardens is close-by and has a skateboard park and some grassy areas for passive recreation. It has been designed with ecology in mind and has hay meadows which encourage many birds.

List of Stakeholders

Greenwich Council

- Strategic Planning (Property Services, Planning Control)
- Chief Executives (Communications, Events)
- Neighbourhood Services (Neighbourhood Panels/Representatives)
- Culture & Community Services (P&OS, Libraries & Museum Services, Arts)
- Educations
- Children's Services

Agencies

- (Police, Fire & Rescue Service),
- Greenwich History Museum

Community

- Park users
- Local residents
- Parishioners
- Crèche
- Working with Words group

Politicians

- Local MP
- Ward Members

Current Management Arrangements, Policies and Procedures

The management of the park described in this management plan is the responsibility of the Parks & Open Spaces service within Greenwich Council. This is shown in Appendix II

The Parks and Open Spaces Service is located within the Directorate of Culture and Community Services. The Parks and Open Spaces Assistant Managers (Operations & Technical) are jointly accountable for the overall management responsibility of the Service.

Individual management functions are devolved and key functions are identified as follows:

- Horticultural Maintenance

- Park Keepers, Rangers and Parks Security
- Parks Development
- Fixed Equipment Playgrounds
- Ecology & conservation
- Tree & Woodland maintenance
- Administration – Sports lettings, complaints monitoring

Horticulture Operations

Currently it is not possible to identify expenditure specifically related to St Mary's Churchyard, as finances generally come from a central fund.

Infrastructure Budget

The corporate budgets for both planned and responsive maintenance of the Council's property infrastructure are held by Greenwich Property Services in the Directorate of Strategic Planning. Planned works are carried out on a strict basis of corporate priorities and, as a consequence, P&OS has to compete against other service departments for a share of the limited funds available. Responsive repairs are carried out for minor items as and when they arise.

Grounds Management and Maintenance

St Mary's Churchyard is managed as a mobile site. Mobile sites are inspected and litter picked on a rotational basis. The frequency is determined by the availability of staff, but usually between two and three times per week. The mobile sites are also locked and unlocked on a daily basis.

Marketing information, activities and approach

There is no marketing budget for the Parks Service although information about local parks is available on the Greenwich Council website.

PART II: WHERE DO WE WANT TO GET TO

VISION

The vision for St Mary's Churchyard is to continue to provide a quality local park, with continuously increasing focus on the history of the park and to support and be led by the local community and other stakeholders. Consultation with stakeholders will be on-going with a view to achieving/meeting a recognized standard.

General Objectives

- To reduce Anti Social Behaviour in the park
- To improve the health and well being of visitors and residents by offering a well maintained and quality park for active recreation and/ or relaxation
- To protect biological assets and increase biodiversity
- To realize the potential of the park as a cultural and historical place to visit through a programme of publicity, information and events
- To work with the local community in identifying local priorities for funding of the park
- To ensure that the activities and events in the park celebrate and promote the borough's rich diversity and that it is accessible to everyone

ANALYSIS & ASSESSMENT

Ecology

St Mary's Churchyard is a mature and stable environment with an established flora and fauna. The occurrence of scarce ferns on the vegetated walls makes this park more significant than other ornamental parks and a site of borough importance. Tree surveys are an effective parks management tool and St Mary's Churchyard is one of the few parks within Greenwich where a tree survey has been conducted. In the tree survey the trees' health and age were identified and recommended actions were recorded. No study of the flora or fauna has been carried out but it is not anticipated to be highly significant.

As one of the few parks in the local area, St Mary's provides a valuable open space for residents in the locality.

Heritage

The age of the church and the Tom Cribb memorial give St Mary's Churchyard some heritage value. The heritage is documented on the Internet (see <http://www.parishofwoolwich.org.uk/> and www.parkexplorer.co.uk) although is not widely known.

Sport & Recreation

St Mary's Churchyard provides plenty of space for passive recreation, but there is little or no scope for sport or recreation development, without significantly altering the site which would not be appropriate given the nature of the site.

STRENGTHS

- Small, well maintained park
- Mature, stable ecology with some scarce ferns
- One of the few green spaces in the area
- Provides viewing area of the Thames
- Has heritage and faith benefit

CHALLENGES

- Limited scope for development because of small size and nature of park
- Some ASB

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Undertake consultation with Diocese of Southwark, Church representative and local community to explore issues such as barriers to use/identification of priorities for improvement
- Continue with actions identified in the tree survey
- Reduce ASB
- Investigate possible creation of Friends of Group to include possible representatives from the church, to assist with management and maintenance

PART III: HOW WILL WE GET THERE?

WORK PLAN

Timescales as given in this document are as following;

Short Term – Within one-two years from adoption of this plan

Medium Term – Within three-four years from the adoption of this plan

Long Term – Five years and more from the adoption of this plan

Recommendation	Action	Timescale (Long/Medium/Short Term)	Responsibility	Reviewed
Undertake consultation with Diocese of Southwark, Church representative and local community to explore issues such as barriers to use/identification of priorities for improvement	Carry out user surveys/questionnaires Make draft plan available	Short Term		
Reduce ASB	Work with police to enforce drinking ban	Ongoing		
Continue to undertake work identified in tree survey	Develop a tree survey policy and schedule that prioritises parks	Short/Medium		
Investigate creation of 'Friends of Group, to include possible representation of Church, to assist with management and maintenance		Medium		

PART IV: HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN WE'VE ARRIVED

MONITORING AND REVIEW

The St Mary's Churchyard Management Plan will be fully reviewed and updated every five years by Parks Management Staff responsible for St Mary's Churchyard.

A working document copy of the Management Plan will be kept within the parks office so that issues and changes that arise can be documented.

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APPENDIX I: POLICY CONTEXT

As highlighted earlier in the plan, Greenwich Council's Parks & Open Spaces department operates within a wide framework of national, regional and local policy statements and strategies. The main documents impacting on the development of this plan are listed below.

The Greenwich Strategy

The Greenwich Strategy sets out the vision for Greenwich Borough as being the place to live, work, learn and visit. This vision underpins all of the strategies produced by Greenwich Council and directly impacts on all service plans and service delivery.

The Cultural Strategy

Parks & Open Spaces is one of six 'areas' considered by the Cultural Strategy. The Strategy has five over-arching themes: - Equality and Access, Sustainability, the Cultural Economy, Achievement and Excellence and Partnerships. All of these aims are relevant to this management plan and have been considered in developing the opportunities and priorities for this site.

Green Space Strategy

The Green Spaces Strategy sets out the Council's strategic intentions for its green assets and its vision of the positive contribution that Greenwich's open networks make to our lives.

The thematic objectives (community safety, biodiversity, education and culture, culture & events, tackling inequality, sport, health & well being) are all relevant to the management plan for St Mary's Churchyard.

Parks & Open Spaces Service Plan 2006-7

The Parks & Open Spaces department aims to develop, manage, ensure accessibility and maintain to a high standard the borough's Parks, Open Spaces, Woodlands, Tree Stock, Cemeteries, Playgrounds, Sports Pitches, Allotments and other outdoor facilities. To meet the needs of the community and deliver the Council's core objectives where applicable to the service, and specifically regarding the provision of a clean and well cared for environment and supporting Health and Quality of Life for the local community.

ISO 9001:2000 - Quality Management System

Quality Management System ISO 9001: 2000 is used by organisations to manage their activities and resources to guarantee a quality service. This management system is based on eight quality management principles:

- Customer Focus
- Leadership
- Involving People
- Process Approach
- System Approach to management
- Continual Improvement
- Factual Approach to decision making
- Supplier relationship, which benefit both sides.

The Parks & Open Spaces department is currently ISO 9000 accredited.

Unitary Development Plan

Local Councils have a duty to prepare a Development Plan by law. The Greenwich Unitary Development Plan (UDP) sets out the vision for use of the land in the Borough, and provides the main guidance for making decisions on individual planning proposals. The document is intended to cover the period 2001 – 2011 (or 2016 in some instances) it is a legal document with the following purposes

To provide a framework of acceptable uses within the Borough, defining areas where development is not desired or where it needs to be carefully directed and;

To provide a detailed basis for the control and development

The UDP may be viewed at the Directorate of Strategic Planning, Planning Department, Peggy Middleton House, Woolwich, SE18, or alternatively at a local library.

Community Open Space

The UDP refers to St Mary's Churchyard as Community Open Space.

Policy Reference O7 in section 2.4 of the Greenwich UDP refers to Community Open space. Policy O1 refers to MOL policy.

O7 Public and private open space areas defined as Community Open Space on the Proposals Map will be safeguarded from built development. New buildings and extensions to existing buildings will only be permitted where they are ancillary to the existing land use, are limited in size and extent, sensitively sited, and are compatible with neighbouring development.

Changes of use of existing buildings in ancillary use will be considered in the light of Policy O1.

Where existing built development within parks and public open spaces becomes surplus to demand, the Council may allow the sites to be redeveloped for specialist sporting development (which combine the use of outdoor and indoor space), subject to the criteria set out in Policy O1.

Community Benefits

O10 The Council will seek to secure improvement and enhancement of existing parks and public open spaces, where major development places increased demand on existing areas, and, where appropriate, the creation of new parks and public open spaces in line with Policies O9 and C3, through planning obligations and conditions on planning permissions in line with Policy SC2.

Park Facilities

O12 The Council will seek to enhance open space by the provision and encouragement of appropriate park facilities (e.g. seating, children's play equipment, refreshment facilities, outdoor tennis courts, pitch and putt, sports pitches and changing facilities and Arts, Culture and Entertainment facilities, such as open air performance spaces, sculpture and visual imagery and areas for cultural exhibition and study) within suitable parks and public open spaces. Facilities should be of a high standard of design and quality and respect local nature conservation interests. Such facilities should be safe to use and accessible to all. (See Policies D5, D6 and D7).

Archaeological Potential

St Mary's Churchyard lies within a larger area that is designated by the Greenwich Council UDP as an area of Archaeological Potential.

D30 The Council will expect applicants to properly assess and plan for the impact of proposed developments on archaeological remains where they fall within 'Areas of Archaeological Potential' as defined on the constraints Map 10. In certain instances preliminary archaeological site investigations may be required before proposals are considered. The Council will seek to secure the co-operation of developers in the excavation, recording and publication of archaeological finds before development takes place by use of planning conditions/legal agreements as appropriate.

Areas Lacking Accessible Wildlife Sites

St Mary's Churchyard is located within an area identified in the UDP as lacking accessible wildlife sites (generally areas more than 1 kilometre from a site of Metropolitan or Borough Importance for nature conservation) St Mary's Churchyard is one of the few green spaces within this area.

The Bio Diversity Action Plan

The Greenwich Biodiversity Action Plan will be the first co-ordinated approach to conserving Greenwich's biodiversity. The aim of the plan is:

'To ensure the conservation, enhancement and public appreciation of the biodiversity of the London Borough of Greenwich'.

The Biodiversity Action Plan focuses on locally important habitats and species and has actions drafted to ensure that they cover all relevant habitats and species. Initially actions may be focussed on those under the most pressure or where most advantage can be gained. However, it allows for all important habitats and species to be covered.

The Biodiversity Action Plan has been developed in partnership with local and regional groups and organisations and is currently in a draft stage. Once the final draft is agreed it will be released for wider consultation before a final plan is adopted.

Legislation

The Parks & Open Spaces department operates within the frameworks set out by the following legislation, and therefore, the legislation may impact upon the delivery of service of the Parks and Open Spaces department both financially, through planning and human resources. This is not a comprehensive list but is indicative of key pieces of legislation relating to P&OS.

Alcohol Consumption in Public Places Order 2003
Clean Neighbourhoods Act 2004
Control of Pesticide Protection Act 1986
Country Code 1981
Country side and Rights of Way Act 2000 and increments
Countryside & Right of Way Act 2000
Disability Discrimination Act 1998
Health & Safety at Work Act 1998
Litter Act 1983

Ministry of Housing and Local Government Provisional Order Confirmation (Greater London Parks & Open Spaces Act)1967

Occupiers Liability Act 1957

Road Traffic Act 1988 (as amended 1991)

The 2004 Country Code

The Anti Social Behaviour Act 2003

The Dangerous Dogs Act 1991 & Dogs Act 1871??

The National Parks & Access to the Countryside Act 1949

The Weeds Act 1959

The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981

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APPENDIX II: Site Heritage and History I

A public garden made from churchyard of St Mary Magdalene and opened in 1894 although there has been a Church since the time of the Domesday Book in 1086. It was rebuilt in 1727-39 when the 12th century church was in danger of falling into the Thames.

Woolwich became a riverside fishing village in the Middle Ages, the name coming from 'wul wic', a wool landing place, and became prominent when the Royal Dockyard was established nearby by Henry VIII. Industry developed from the early 17th century with glassworks and then the Arsenal from the late 17th century. It began to develop up the hill after the military were established at Woolwich Common in the late 18th century. Closure of the Dockyard in 1869 led to unemployment in the area.

Monuments in the church show the parish connections with the army and navy. One of the monuments is a plain sarcophagus for Mrs Maudslay, wife of an inventor and manufacturer. There is also a memorial north-east of the church to Thomas Cribb (d.1848) a famous bare knuckle boxer once Champion of England, his memorial has a lion with its paw on an urn inscribed with the words 'Respect the ashes of the dead'.

It is believed there has been a church or a place of Christian worship on or near this site for 1000 years. District references go back as far as the Norman's. William the Conqueror's son Henry I gave the land to the monks of Rochester in about 1100.

The first recorded church building was in the 12th century. The Church prior to the present church was nearer to the river and during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I it had a spire. The fall of this spire was the first indicator that all was no well with the Church's foundation due to the sand being dug from the hill for ships' ballast.

The Church was formally dedicated to St Lawrence but was redirected to St Mary Magdalene by the bishop of Oxford on 25 June 1825. The present church was one of 50 churches funded by the Fifty New Churches Act 1711. It was built in 1727 by the bricklayer Matthew Spray and was completed in 1739. It was enlarged in 1884 and again in 1894. The Church had major restoration in 1961. The closure and sale of a daughter church Holy Trinity Beresford Square funded these repairs and alterations. Holy Trinity was sold to the local authority for £26,3000 and the council agreed to move the calvary (large crucifix) to its present site on the green outside the west door of St Mary's. The restoration was the idea of Rev Nicholas Stacy. The wings, balcony and crypt were converted for office accommodation, coffee bar and lounge. This meant the church could be used for community projects as well as a place of worship. Quite a radical decision for the time!

There is a stained glass window in memorial to Frederick Whomes and 590 other people who died in Princess Alice disaster of 3 September 1878. The pleasure steamer the Princess Alice, returning from a pleasure trip from Southend on Sea collided with Bywell Castle of Tripock Point. The victims died not so much from drowning but from pollution in river, both industrial and sewage waste. This disaster led to the changes for the better in the rules of navigation and the introduction of better sewage treatment methods.

¹ http://www.parkexplorer.co.uk/park_intro.asp?ID=grn30 and Draft Management Plan 2004 by Jeremy Shearmur

Early drawings show the semaphore telegraph on the tower used to communicate with the ships on the river. The church is entitled to fly the Red Ensign on ceremonial occasions due to its past importance as a navigation point for the river.

The Churchyard was closed in 1865 along with the other London churchyards that had become overused. St Mary's churchyard became overgrown and in poor condition. The gardens were set out by the Metropolitan Public Gardens Association and opened to the public. The opening was in May 1895 by the Duchess of Fife. In 1900 a drinking fountain was added and funds for the maintenance of the garden were provided by John Passmore Edwards, editor of a leading London newspaper, MP for Salisbury and benefactor and a philanthropist (see www.passmoreedwards.org.uk). At this time the gardens were known as Woolwich Gardens.

On what is now lawn, adjacent to John Wilson Street, buses used to turn around and foundations of this can be found under the flower bed.

Until the late 1980s there was a glass house in the staff yard for growing the bedding plants. There was also a plot of land behind the New Wine Church now a lawn where bedding plants and shrubs were grown.

The present retaining wall and slopes between the gardens and Woolwich High Street were built in 1966 as part of the construction of new terminals for the Woolwich Ferry. During construction a plague pit was discovered. Council gardeners who landscaped these banks after the retaining walls and hard landscaping had taken place found several lead coffins which were left in situ.

APPENDIX III: References

Park Explorer website: http://www.parkexplorer.co.uk/park_intro.asp?ID=grn30

Parish of Woolwich website <http://www.parishofwoolwich.org.uk>

Shearmur, J, 2003 Draft Management Plan of St Mary's Churchyard

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