

Report from CSC to 2024 VGS AGM

Put together by members of the CSC steering group:

Cherishing Sidmouth Cemetery Volunteers have been working at the cemetery since January 2024. At the present time there are 11 volunteers but weekly attendance rates can fluctuate due to other commitments. The regular day for volunteering is a Thursday morning. There is the option to volunteer on a different day but the VGS need to be notified to allow the volunteer to sign in digitally and therefore be covered by VGS insurance.

In addition to the regular volunteers the 1st Sid Vale Explorer Scouts with their leaders and some family members helped to clear some of the brambles on a Saturday earlier in the year.

The volunteers have a variety of backgrounds and reasons for volunteering. They range from interests in the social history, the natural history with a view to improving biodiversity and those with a personal connection to the cemetery. The common theme that holds the group together is wanting to play a part in ensuring the cemetery is a respectful place for all those buried and interred and a pleasant environment for all visitors.

The volunteers have had positive feedback and comments from members of the public, in person and via social media and this has included generous donations from some individuals and organisations.

At the beginning of the year the volunteers concentrated on raking grass, weeding, mulching, planting in the borders and tidying the entrances and driveway. EDDC have kindly supplied some plants and mulch and taken away the weekly arisings. In recent weeks more time has been spent uncovering plots in the older area and we have rediscovered the graves of several notable people.

As we come to the end of our first year the group would like to recognise and thank Mary for all she does in her role as Webmaster and Jeremy as VGS Secretary in supporting the volunteers.

Looking forward to the next 12 months the volunteers would like to see improved communication and acknowledgement from East Devon District Council. The main council contact with the volunteers has been through the Horticultural Officer. Unfortunately this role has no line management responsibility for the Streetscene team. In order for the volunteers efforts to continue, the streetscene team and East Devon District Council need to actively engage with us and follow through actions agreed. When they don't keep to commitments e.g new signage regarding dogs in the cemetery and 8 months later nothing has been done, combined with a reluctance to engage when meetings are requested it is no surprise that volunteers become disillusioned. They need to recognise that the most important outcome for the volunteers, council and the town is a cemetery that is "cherished."

Finally we are a friendly group and we would love more volunteers to join us so the improvements can continue.



CHERISHING SIDMOUTH CEMETERIES

MANAGED BUT NOT MANICURED