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## Summary

### Introduction

St John's churchyard is a local asset that encapsulates over eight centuries of history in the heart of Hackney. The grounds provide the setting for two important listed buildings, the Georgian church of St John at Hackney and St Augustine's Tower, which is all that remains of the original medieval church.

In July 2000, the Hackney Society and Groundwork Hackney appointed a team of consultants led by TELLUS 42. Their task was to investigate the issues that impact on St John's churchyard, and to consult with the owners, St John at Hackney key stakeholders including the Local Authority, relevant voluntary sector agencies, schools and local residents.

This report provides an overview of the findings of the consultation and suggests a framework for delivering a regeneration programme for the churchyard gardens. The original research for the consultation remains on file and will be made available to any group wishing to drive the project forward in the future. We would like to thank all those who gave their time to the project for their ideas and enthusiasm.

### The heart of Hackney

The St John at Hackney churchyard is a unique historic space in the Heart of Hackney, which performs three key functions:

**a public open space:** containing ornamental gardens, play areas, war memorials, public seating and grassed areas under a canopy of mature trees.

**a pedestrian and cycle thoroughfare:** the site provides an important route linking areas to the east and west, north and south.

**consecrated ground:** though most of the headstones have been moved to the boundary walls, the churchyard retains in situ a wide collection of table tombs and family vaults.

The mix of recreation, movement and contemplation gives the churchyard a strong identity. Yet the research revealed some serious problems. The space is no longer maintained to former standards and there are perceptions that parts of the churchyard are unsafe – particularly in the evenings. These and other problems were explored in detail with stakeholders and some creative solutions were proposed.





Lithograph by GJ Greenwood, published about 1853

## Key objectives & priorities

The consultation revealed four key objectives for the regeneration of the churchyard. These are to:

- **develop a management structure for the regeneration and maintenance of the churchyard.**
- **conserve the churchyard as a historical collection of quiet areas including open meadow, formal memorial garden, walled garden and play area.**
- **make the churchyard safe for all**
- **encourage more activities in the churchyard**

## The status of the churchyard

The church and churchyard is private land, whose freehold is vested in the incumbent/rector the Rev Dr John Pridmore. The Rector's views and support (and those of his successors) are of central importance. Proposals for the churchyard will need to recognise its function as a disused burial ground, open to the public. Nothing can be built on the land without a Faculty granted by the Ecclesiastical or Consistory Court. This protects any remains, and ensures that they are safe for posterity.

There is a legal Care and Maintenance Agreement between the church and Hackney Council (dating back to 1924) that covers all matters regarding the upkeep of the churchyard gardens. The maintenance of the churchyard is the responsibility of the Council, and some areas, like the north garden (or 'recreation ground') and the play area on the southeast corner, have been granted specific public use. LB Hackney has no rights of ownership or access and the land remains a disused burial ground that is open to the public.



## Next steps

The importance of developing and implementing a successful "early win" project, which has a positive and visible impact on the churchyard, cannot be over-emphasised. Too often regeneration initiatives fall at the first hurdle because local stakeholders cannot see any tangible outcomes of all their hard work and the long-term rewards are too distant to be meaningful. A suggestion for an effective and up-lifting early win project could be the implementation of a lighting project for the churchyard, which would literally help put the churchyard 'on the map' and would generate additional local and political interest.

Some elements of a regeneration programme will take longer to research, plan, fund and implement. A steering group of representatives from the local community and key voluntary and statutory agencies will need to be prepared to work over the long-term (between 3-5 years) to see the programme through to completion.

St John at Hackney and its churchyard have long been the heart of Hackney – always adapting to reflect changing social needs and conditions. Today it is necessary to redefine the importance of the churchyard as public green space, a pedestrian thoroughfare and a burial ground – a complement to the urban bustle of Mare Street.

The Hackney Society and Groundwork Hackney will work to support local people in carrying this project forward, providing the technical assistance needed to ensure success.

For further information contact:

The Hackney Society on 020 7254 0212

or Matthew Carrington at

Groundwork Hackney on 020 8985 1755.



## Action plan

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### OBJECTIVE 1

#### Develop a management structure

- set up a steering group
- identify a lead officer within Hackney Council
- win support for regeneration proposals
- develop a funding strategy

### OBJECTIVE 2

#### Conserve the churchyard

- prepare a detailed maintenance and management plan
- commission a historic landscape survey and restoration management plan
- commission a monument survey
- explore management options for car parking

### OBJECTIVE 3

#### Make the churchyard safe

- improve sight lines
- improve visibility into the walled garden
- commission a lighting strategy for the churchyard
- encourage new development on the boundary to contribute to community safety
- investigate proposed CCTV scheme

### OBJECTIVE 4

#### Encourage more activities in the churchyard

- assess educational and training potential of the churchyard
- commission a feasibility study on the potential for income generation on the site
- develop a visitor strategy with key stakeholders
- investigate wider use of St John's church

