

Minster Exchange (MX)

Minster Gardens

As part of the Minster Exchange (MX) scheme, the closed churchyard of Cheltenham Minster – the town’s oldest building – has benefitted from renovation and restoration works.

Now known as Minster Gardens, the project has received £229,000 of funding from the England European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).



European Union

**European Regional
Development Fund**



HM Government

The investment has helped rejuvenate this historical conservation area and cultural core of the town centre. What was a dark and unwelcoming space has benefitted from a number of improvements, including the creation of more social space, additional paths and lighting across the gardens, and a range of seating so that everyone can enjoy the grounds of the Grade I Minster. Also included is an additional path with a seating area that links to the entrance of the new Minster Exchange (MX) building, which is in the final stages of construction, next to the gardens behind the Children’s Library.



As part of the project, urgent and necessary conservation work on a number of historically significant memorials has been carried out, including the churchyard's cross base (a scheduled ancient monument) and the Grade II Listed gate piers that mark the entrances to the Gardens. Numerous listed headstones and table tombs have also received conservation work, one of the best examples of which can be found nestling in the corner of the gardens, next to Cheltenham House. The Grade II listed ornate overthrow with integral light at the entrance to Famous alleyway has been brought back to its original glory, whilst several of the listed dragon and onion lamp posts have also received conservation attention. Many locals are aware of the brass markers set within Processional Way and the project ensured that these were carefully lifted, cleaned and replaced exactly where they were found.

The mature lime trees that characterise the gardens have had their crowns lifted to allow more light to infiltrate the space and encourage 'natural surveillance' from the surrounding buildings, opening up the views across this beautiful area. Due to their poor condition, two trees required replacing and in their place two new cork oaks (*Quercus suber*) have been planted to diversify the species on site and to provide better resilience to climate change.

A dusk survey for bats identified common pipistrelle bats visiting the churchyard and roosting opportunities for local bats has been incorporated into the site through the installation of bat boxes. Existing lights has been modified and new lighting designed sensitively to create low-level lighting and minimise potential impacts on bats. Several bird boxes have also been introduced to encourage nesting birds.

The Gardens have also benefitted from an extensive planting scheme, with hundreds of bulbs having been planted, along with a variety of annual and perennial plants. A flowering meadow has been established on the west side of the Gardens, with a blend of ornamental, annual and perennial species, specifically selected to supply pollen bearing flowers to benefit bees, butterflies and other pollinating insects for the longest period possible, from spring through to early autumn. The gabion-backed benches give small animals and insects the opportunity to take refuge and hibernate in winter and once fully established, the planting scheme will boost existing habitats and thus increase wildlife and biodiversity, whilst conserving the history of the site.



The Cheltenham Civic Society has helped establish a volunteer working group for the Minster Gardens.



Gloucestershire County Council assisted the scheme by funding upgrades to existing paths and lighting.

[What is the MX?](#)

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[The MX and Minster Gardens project FAQs](#)