

Report to Council – St Mary’s Churchyard Wall Repairs
Originally presented to the Wymeswold Parish Council meeting on 3rd July 2023 –
Amended for submission February 2024

Background:

St Mary’s Church forms a central focal point within Wymeswold. The location is such that nearly all traffic which moves through the village passes the Church. The wall of St Mary’s Churchyard (on the Church Street boundary) has fallen into a state of disrepair. There have been two incidents in which linked sections of the wall have fallen into the road (Church Street), necessitating repair. This needs to be repaired to return the wall to a safe structural state and also to ensure that the visual appearance of the wall for the historic significance of the Church and Churchyard is reinstated for the village. The Parish Council investigated and clarified (with legal support) that resulting from legislative powers the Parish Council had been passed responsibility for the maintenance of the Churchyard (and wall) from the Diocese when the Churchyard became closed to burials in 1881. Based on this confirmed responsibility, the Parish Council has followed the required path to investigate the most appropriate approach to complete the repairs.

Process:

Having commissioned a specification for the works, the Council engaged a Church Architect to act as our project lead, who has previously worked with the Leicester Diocese. The Council have secured Faculty approval (a similar process to planning permission) for the works from the Diocese and have undertaken a public procurement exercise to secure a suitable and qualified contractor to proceed with the works.

The chosen contractor can start the work around April 2024 and the Council is moving to complete the process as soon as possible.

During this process the Council discovered that the wall had not been insured in a way which would have allowed the Parish Council to claim the cost of the required repairs. Moving forward, the Parish Council has investigated and has now obtained insurance for the Churchyard wall to negate future situations such as this one.

The costs of the works (including Contractor fees, Architect fees, road closure costs etc) will be approximately £60,000, and the Parish Council do not have the reserves which would cover such a level of expenditure. We have explored several options for funding without any success. This leaves the preferred option as the Government Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) to secure the funds.

After seeking external advice and confirming that we are liable for the cost of these repairs, the Council believes this is the most appropriate method to fund the works.

We therefore propose to raise an application to the PWLB for the funds to complete the repairs to the specification approved by the Diocese. Importantly, this will not require a direct increase in the Parish Precept to cover the repayments.

The following Resolution will be presented to the Parish Council meeting being held on February 5th 2024 at the Sports Pavilion, Burton Lane at 7pm (as always parishioners are welcome to attend the meeting to voice any thoughts or concerns) and will read as follows (if approved):

'At the Wymeswold Parish Council meeting of 5th February 2024, it was RESOLVED to seek the approval of the Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities to apply for a Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) loan of £60,000 over the borrowing term of 40 years for the repairs required to St. Mary's Churchyard wall. The annual loan repayment will come to around £5,000. It is not intended to increase the Parish Council precept for the purpose of the loan repayment.'

The Council recognises that after seeking legal advice, it is liable for the works to be completed, however, in the spirit of transparency for our parishioners and to follow the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Loan approval process, the following question needs to be published even though these necessary works have to be undertaken. Given this scenario, as always, any parishioner comments will be discussed prior to the resolution being made by the Council in the context of this situation.

Are you in favour of Wymeswold Parish Council proceeding with the Repairs of St Mary's Churchyard Wall? YES / NO

Comments can be emailed to the Clerk by Friday February 2nd 2024 to: wymeswoldpc@hotmail.co.uk or alternatively parishioners can attend the Wymeswold Parish Council Meeting on Monday February 5th 2024 at 7pm at the Sports Pavilion, Burton Lane.