

HALLS, CEMETERIES & ALLOTMENTS COMMITTEE

Date: Monday, 6 November 2023

Title: Cemeteries & Closed Churchyards 2024-25

Contact Officer: Operations Manager

Background

Under the Local Government Act 1972, the council (Witney Town Council) maintains the walls and fences of both Holy Trinity and St Mary's Church as closed churchyards. The definition of maintenance is to be kept in decent order.

Church representatives for Holy Trinity have contacted the council and requested the council carry out repairs to the arch and supporting pillars as you enter Holy Trinity's churchyard. The metal archway and retaining stone pillars need repair; the pillar capping stones need replacing and the metal arch requires work to secure it back in place.

Current Situation

From a health and safety perspective, the arch is currently safe, and the issues are just aesthetic for the church. However, it will continue to deteriorate in its current state and become unsafe. If the arch were to be left it would simply be removed by Witney Town Council staff and stored to remove the risk of injury.

Environmental impact

Having declared a Climate Change Emergency at its Council meeting on 26 June 2019 – with this in mind Councillors should have due regard to the environmental impact of any decisions they make with regard to its facilities and services it operates.

Risk

In decision making Councillors should give consideration to any risks to the Council and any action it can take to limit or negate its liability.

The council could receive negative press if it is found responsible for not maintaining the historic churchyard. This would become evident if the arch did have to be removed for health and safety reasons.

Financial implications

Described here or as stated in the report above.

- The Closed Churchyard maintenance budget 4036/303 annually is £11,000.00, £10,000.00 is rolled into a budget for the repairs to St Mary's boundary wall leaving £1,000.00 for closed churchyard maintenance.
- The cost to have the stone pillars recapped, arch removed and reinstalled is quoted at £3,150.40 ex VAT.
- The cost to have the arch repaired is estimated to be around £2,000.00.

Recommendations

Members are invited to note the report and consider the following:

1. An increase to The Closed Churchyard maintenance budget 4036/303 of £5,000.00 to £16,000.00 for the 2024-25 financial year only.