

Report of the Interim Strategic Director

ST HELENS CHURCH GATES – REPAIR AND REFURBISHMENT1. Purpose of report

To consider works to repair and refurbish the main entrance gates at St Helens Church, Stapleford.

2. Background

The churchyard at St Helens is classed as a closed churchyard and the grounds together with the boundary are maintained by the Borough Council under Section 215 of the Local Government Act. A report to the Leisure, Parks and Cemeteries Committee on 22 November 2016 updated members as to the Council's responsibility in relation to closed churchyards. Historically there was no formal inspection regime for the boundaries at the Closed Churchyards maintained by the Borough Council. This has now been addressed and an annual inspection is undertaken by the Senior Public Buildings Maintenance Officer. All Closed Churchyards have now been inspected and a series of repairs undertaken with the work contained within the revenue budget for Cemeteries and Closed Churchyards. At this site however, concerns about the condition of the gates have been identified. Given the gates listed status and concerns relating to their safety, assessments have been undertaken by specialist contractors experienced in restoration and repair of such structures. Estimates have been obtained for their renovation and repair with the lowest price being £15,000. The historic background to the gates and the issues identified by the contractors are detailed in the appendix.

3. Financial Implications

There is presently no provision within the 2018/19 capital programme for the estimated £15,000 cost of the proposed works. An allocation could be made from capital contingencies of which £38,000 is currently available.

Recommendation

The Committee is asked to RECOMMEND to the Finance and Resources Committee that £15,000 be allocated within the 2018/19 capital programme for the works to repair and refurbish the gates at St Helens Church, Stapleford to be funded from capital contingencies.

Background papers

Nil

APPENDIX

Background details relating to the gates

The gates provide the main entrance to the church at the top of Church Lane and are a focal point as you exit Stapleford on Church Street. The ornate gates are grade 2 listed and have significant stone piers with matching panels of fencing either side of the gates.

The gates, whilst not original to the site, were located in their present position in 1922. Unfortunately they are now in a very poor condition and attention is required to prevent the loss of this significant feature in Stapleford. Many gates and railings around churchyards and cemeteries were removed during the Second World War. Nearby Stapleford Cemetery is an example of this which no longer has feature gates or railings on the frontage of the cemetery.

The gates are suffering from extensive corrosion with weathering to such an extent that sections have been lost. There have been “well intentioned” but inadequate repairs with weld and mild steel in the past.

Failure to undertaken maintenance could result in the gates having to be removed on the grounds of safety. There is also the possibility that the council could be served notice to undertake the works given their grade 2 listed status. This is something that the Council should look to avoid given the potential bad publicity this could generate.

Having consulted specialist contractors the proposal would be for the gates and all associated metal works to be temporarily removed from site to allow the missing features to be re-cast and replaced. The gates would then be repainted and refitted in position. The existing stone pillars would be repaired as part of the restoration works.

The Church of England have been made aware of the condition of the gates and asked for their views. In response they confirmed that it was a matter for the Borough Council but there would need to be discussions with the Parochial Church Council (PCC) as faculty permission would be required for the works. This faculty application would need to be made by the PCC.

In terms of external funding various options have been explored but there seems little scope, with most funding providers for works to Churchyards restricted to either:

- Grade 1 listed sites
- Funding for charities
- Funding for community groups
- Work to churches in sparsely populated villages

The WREN (Waste Recycling Environmental) Heritage Fund no longer operates. Advice from WREN is that repairs and restoration to gates would not be eligible from their Community Action Fund.