

## Churchyard Wall Repairs

### Statement from St Peter's Parochial Church Council (PCC)

St Peter's is the parish church for everyone living in the village. We work hard to extend our welcome to all and to maintain our wonderful Grade 1 listed building for services, concerts, meetings, education, and quiet reflection. Our churchyard is closed to new burials and its main use now is as open space for the many visitors who come every day to enjoy its peace, beauty and views of the surrounding countryside.

In 2017 we handed maintenance responsibility to South Staffordshire District Council (SSDC) in accordance with the 1972 Local Government Act so they could keep it safe for public enjoyment. As part of that maintenance responsibility the District Council has independently let a contract for the repair of the entirety of the Churchyard boundary wall. While we support the District Council's aim of maintaining public safety we have serious concerns about the scale and cost of the work proposed. We will continue to work with the District Council to try and ensure that any work undertaken is appropriate and does not place an unnecessary financial burden on the people of Kinver.

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### **Why is the Council responsible and not the Church?**

The responsibility of District Councils to maintain closed churchyards has been common practice in its current form for half a century. This reflects the fact that closed Churchyards are open green spaces belonging to the whole community and keeps them from being restricted just to churchgoers. It is a common and expected part of the responsibility of District Councils and is nothing new or unusual.

#### **Did the wall need repairing before St Peter's Church handed over responsibility?**

St Peter's Church is required to have our highly experienced church architect undertake a Quinquennial Inspection (QI) which is a detailed survey of the entire church and churchyard every 5 years identifying areas for maintenance and repair. In the QI surveys in 2013 and 2018, either side of the handover of maintenance responsibility, no structural issues were identified with any of the boundary walls. The only related items were the removal of some ivy and an ash tree which were done by SSDC in 2018. St Peter's PCC does not believe that we handed over responsibility to SSDC with the walls in a state of disrepair.

#### **Has the Parochial Church Council refused to contribute financially?**

Although the responsibility for maintaining the Churchyard lies with the District Council, during this calendar year St Peter's Church has done approximately £24k of improvement work to the Churchyard, including some of the wall. This was funded by the Church, with support from local charities and legacy donations, and we do this gladly in order to ease the financial burden on our parishioners. On top of that there are countless volunteer hours put in by members of the Church and community who support the SSDC Streetscene team in maintaining the Churchyard to an award winning standard.

#### **The Church of England has billions of pounds, why doesn't it pay?**

The funds held by the various central Church of England bodies may be considerable, however the majority of the income from this goes towards clergy pensions, with the remainder supporting dioceses, cathedrals, and parishes in focussed ways, especially in areas of deprivation. With some 16,000 historic Church buildings, most of them listed, it would be impossible for the Church of England as a whole to fund repairs like these, and that is just not how the Church of England works.

#### **What is the Church doing to resolve this situation**

We are continuing to engage with SSDC on this issue to try and ensure that any work undertaken is necessary and appropriate. Despite repeated requests we have yet to see the report which said the walls were dangerous, nor have we seen the tender specification that determined the shape of the bids invited. It must also be stressed that our architect's last Quinquennial Inspection in 2018 did not recommend any structural works be done to the boundary walls and St Peter's Church has not requested any such work.

We will continue to advocate on behalf of the residents of Kinver and are grateful to all those who are engaging with the District Council. If you would like to discuss this further I run a Vestry Hour at St Peter's Church from 6-7pm every Monday where I am available to book weddings and christenings, or to discuss any matters of concern to the Church or community. Rev'd Rich.