

27th November 2022

Dear Councillor Bates,

I am writing to you on behalf of St Peter's Church, Kinver with regards to the ongoing situation with the proposed churchyard wall maintenance in Kinver.

As I am sure you are very aware the letter dated 9th November 2022 which was sent out to residents of Kinver outlining the current proposals has generated a considerable amount of strong feeling and ill will in the community towards both the District Council and the Parish Church.

I understand from Councillor Allen that you are willing to re-engage with discussions around how we move forward, and I am grateful for that. I would like to briefly outline the situation from our perspective, and suggest a possible way forward that would enable the council to fulfil its statutory responsibilities towards maintaining closed Churchyards, while minimising the financial burden to be placed on the people of Kinver.

At the heart of the matter, from the perspective of St Peter's Church, is the question of what work is required and how it should be carried out. As a former Church Warden I'm sure you know that the usual process when it comes to any significant church or churchyard maintenance project is to consult with the Diocesan Advisory Committee (DAC) at the earliest possible stage so that expert advice can be sought on the nature and scope of the work required.

It is our understanding that the DAC have not yet been formally approached by yourselves with regards to this work, although we have endeavoured to keep the DAC secretary in the loop as the situation has progressed. We have yet to see the survey which was presumably commissioned by the Council to identify the work required, so in the absence of that St Peter's PCC has three documents from which to work.

The first is the Quinquennial Inspection report from 2018 by St Peter's' Conservation Architect Robert Kilgour which did not identify any major work that was required with the boundary wall. We are in the process of engaging Robert to undertake a further survey of the churchyard wall in advance of next year's Quinquennial Inspection.

The second is the report from Historic England which I understand that you have also seen. This is focused on the section of wall at the West end of the churchyard behind the council's Heras fencing. Their report does make some recommendations for repair, but describes the wall as "structurally stable" and it "does not appear to be showing any signs of significant structural distress". The report counsels against the significant dismantling and rebuilding approach intended by the council, instead preferring a conservation engineering approach.

The third is the council's own schedule of works outlining the scope of the proposed repairs. Some of this is no doubt necessary, including some repointing and replacement of perished stones. However we have serious concerns about several of the elements, in particular items 5-12 which detail the complete dismantling to several feet below ground level of the section of retaining wall adjacent to the burial of ashes area. The proposal to "excavate as required at the rear of the wall" is both practically and pastorally impossible as this area is consecrated and continues to be used for the burial of cremated remains.

With all of this in mind, and following discussion with the Diocesan Registrar, St Peter's PCC is not prepared to support any faculty application for the work as currently proposed, and such a faculty would almost certainly not be granted meaning the work is unlikely to go ahead as currently proposed.

We do, however, want to continue to support the District Council in their ongoing maintenance and public safety responsibilities and would like to suggest a potential way that we can move forward on this in a more united fashion.

St Peter's PCC is willing to work with Kinver Parish Council and other local groups to seek grant funding to support SSDC's maintenance of the churchyard wall. This will help to alleviate the financial burden intended to be placed on the people of Kinver by the imposition of a special expense. We are also willing to provide SSDC with support where we can with any faculty applications required for agreed necessary work, including sharing the recommendations of our upcoming QI report as and when they are received.

However we are only prepared to do this work if the District Council are willing to revisit the details of the proposed maintenance, going through the proper channels with the DAC this time, and taking into account expert conservation advice including that of Historic England and St Peter's Conservation Architect as to the nature and scope of the work. This will ensure that any work undertaken is necessary and appropriate to the historic fabric of this special place.

We would be very happy to meet with you to discuss this further, and again we are grateful for your willingness to revisit the proposals in the light of the public response to your letter. I have no doubt that we can work together to find a solution that enables the people of South Staffordshire and the wider area to safely enjoy our beautiful Churchyard for many years to come, without placing an unnecessary financial burden on the people of Kinver in these difficult times.

I look forward to hearing from you at your convenience.

Yours sincerely,



Rev'd Rich Clarkson
Rector of Kinver and Enville

