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Full Council Meeting

Date: 29th July 2021

Agenda Item: FC044 Report on North Lychgate, Church Street, Cuckfield

1. Introduction

This report is intended as evidence of immediate repair and maintenance to the above structure.

2. Approach

I visited the site this afternoon 20th July 2021, a month after the Parish Council had been informed of the dangerous state of the roof coverings. This report is requested by the Conservation Officer for Mid Sussex District Council as the North Lychgate is a Grade 2 listed structure. Their permission is sought whilst the works are about to start, and their attendance and inspection are requested.

3. Survey

The Lychgate is shown on the accompanying photos. The roof extends 5.20 metres in width and 2.90 metres in depth. The height to eaves is 3.20 metres. The structure as a whole is sound and robust, having been built in a day when cost was not a consideration. The oak columns and beams together with the under roof boarding show little signs of aging, the exception being a couple of the oak columns that have significant splits and evidence of previous repairs.

The roof covering of heavy Horsham stone has shown signs of slippage on the north elevation. This is unexpected as it is the least exposed elevation to the prevailing weather patterns. It appears the battens and or nails together with any lime mortar have rotted or crumbled over the years.

A church warden familiar with the history of the church and its environs is unaware of any work to the roof since its construction 126 years ago.

4. Risks

This Lychgate is a 'choke point' in the village. It is the most used gateway into the church, the cemetery and the Old School, which is accessed by the path immediately to the right of the Lychgate.

The adjoining nursery/play school enhances the risk of injury to children. Whilst the heavy stone slates have only 3 meters to fall which could seriously hurt an adult, the same stone falling would be more damaging to a small child. These are not small clay tiles but substantial stones of varying sizes but each one heavy.

The inconvenience to the community is of growing concern as is the observation of the impending fall of loose stones with no action in hand.

5. Proposal

A contractor is willing to start and carefully lift and set aside the stone slates with a view to replacing them to the north elevation only. He will check the method of fixing, be it battens and nails or mortar or both, replace with matching materials and refit the slates in the sized courses as original. He will also replace and lead flashings damaged by the work.

He will also take opportunity to check the remaining elevations to ensure similar collapses are not imminent. He will be visited regularly as work progresses to ensure the quality of the original work is maintained.

A day rate of £400 has been quoted; it is unknown how much work will be required to make the repairs.

Update:

Upon further examination it has been determined that scaffolding and a pavement licence will be required to complete the works to the roof.

Scaffolding & licence will be £750 + VAT

Furthermore, I have been advised by Brian Cutler that a Direction for Minor Works fee will be payable to the Diocese to complete these repairs, of £138.

Current estimate is the works will take 2 days to repair, which would be £800 + VAT

A total for these repairs will be £1,688 (+ VAT).

6. Summary

Cuckfield has a rich history and heritage which the Parish Council is eager to maintain where it has that responsibility. This work will be carried out with that in mind and ensure the village community has the access and ability to enjoy these very special memorials to Caroline Emily Maberly, the wife of a Vicar who was responsible for the Victorian splendours in the reordering of the church interior during his term of office.

This application for listed building consent seeks a rapid response to address the continuing hazard and significant inconvenience to the local community.

Andrew Symonds FRICS, MICArb,
Parish Councillor