



Delivering Services to Coxhoe
and Quarrington Hill

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Sent by Email

1 December 2021

Proposed closure of St Paul's Churchyard, Quarrington Hill
Reference CC/OCT21/016

Dear Sir/Madam

Thank you for the letter and associated documents emailed on 16 November. I am sending this response on behalf of Coxhoe Parish Council.

Coxhoe Parish Council has made great attempts to work in partnership with Cassop cum Quarrington with Bowburn Parochial Church Council (PCC) during the last two years, which has not been reciprocated. Regrettably no meeting has ever taken place, despite many requests, and the Parish Council does not feel that enough discussion has been held to warrant the application for full closure being made at this time.

The only meetings that have taken place to discuss the issues at the churchyard were a public meeting in August 2019 about the temporary closure to visitors attended by 80 residents of Quarrington Hill who vehemently opposed initial suggestions to close the churchyard almost unanimously. There has been no consultation by the PCC with residents since. The PCC agreed to fund a survey to inform their decision, but this didn't happen. The only other meeting was one called by the then MP shortly after on behalf of a local resident.

The PCC have not consulted on their proposals. They have resisted all calls for a meeting with the Parish and County Councils. There have been numerous telephone

exchanges and email exchanges, however, these have almost exclusively been one way requests for information and updates from the Parish Council. The Parish Council has not been consulted. Seven requests for details of the proposed works by the Coal Authority to restore the churchyard to a safe standard to allow re-opening to visitors (and a condition that the PPC believe to be an acceptable standard for the Parish or County Council to take over maintenance if the Churchyard is closed) have been ignored and not even acknowledged. It appears clear that the PCC have not flinched from their original proposals which were resoundingly rejected at the August 2019 public meeting.

Coxhoe Parish Council has been clear that it would prefer to see technical investigations completed in the Churchyard and, if it is assessed as safe, for the Churchyard to be re-opened to visitors as soon as possible and without delay and remain open for burials.

Coxhoe Parish Council arranged for a local geologist who has published works on the specific geology around Quarrington Hill and Cassop to walk a group from the PCC, Diocese, local councils and Tarmac (operators of the adjoining quarry) through local geological features ending up in the Churchyard, and talk through his personal experiences of them over a number of decades. Those present recognised that these prominent features were not replicated in the churchyard.

Indeed, Tarmac offered to do some ground movement surveys within the Churchyard, and ended up funding the Wardell Armstrong report on the Churchyard to expedite conclusion of this matter which has caused considerable public distress. They also funded research and mapping of all coal works around the Churchyard. The PCC have not contributed at all to investigations into the issue, and even stopped funding regular maintenance in the churchyard in 2019, and now focus all of their activities in one of neighbouring villages of Bowburn, where the church was moved to when St Paul's closed. It was also reported at the public meeting that Parish funds are very limited and there are only 4 contributing parishioners from Quarrington Hill.

The Wardell Armstrong Report does recommend a further study in paragraph 5.3.2: *'It is considered, therefore, that this type of collapse [collapse of bridging strata above shallow bedrock fissures] and associated surface subsidence may be expected to continue for the foreseeable future ... For the purpose of new internments, it is recommended that further investigatory works are undertaken ... It is difficult to identify the presence of fissures beneath the surface without wholesale excavation of superficial deposits ... it is possible that a non-intrusive geophysical survey may identify the presence of near-surface bedrock fissures ... It is recommended that a geophysical survey be undertaken'*. Coxhoe Parish Council offered to contribute towards the cost of the recommended further survey. When this was rejected by the Parochial Church Council, the Parish Council offered to fund the whole survey. This was also rejected.

This survey would have provided a report on the balance of risk at the Churchyard, allowing further decisions to be made about the future of the Churchyard, with a

much fuller picture of the actual situation. It could have provided evidence about which areas of the Churchyard were safe for use. It could also have shown that the Churchyard was not safe, and provided the community with some comfort as they knew all efforts to keep the Churchyard open had been exhausted. It is disappointing that this survey has not taken place.

The Parish Council is in little doubt about the support of the community for keeping this Churchyard open.

In October 2020 Coxhoe Parish Council carried out six community surveys including a survey on the Quarrington Hill churchyard to which 165 people responded; a good response bearing in mind that there are only around 300 homes in Quarrington Hill. 87% did not want the Churchyard to be closed to future burials. 97% believed that remedial works should be carried out as soon as possible to enable the Churchyard to be opened again for visitors to graves.

Quarrington Hill is a small ex-mining village with a strong community. Being small, it may not have a great range of amenities, but the support for retaining its open Churchyard should not be underestimated.

Coxhoe Parish Council will be more than happy to provide any further explanations to the points raised in this letter and to discuss this matter further.

Coxhoe Parish Council hopes that those making the decision will understand the nature of this community and the importance that people attach to their Churchyard. The Parish Council believes that with further research, this Churchyard has the space and capacity to safely continue for burial purposes for many years, which is a view supported by many residents.

Yours sincerely

Claire Llewelyn
Parish Clerk