



**Quinquennial Inspection**

**Church of St Helen,  
Low Fell**

**For  
St Helen Parish Council  
February 2022**

## QUINQUENNIAL REPORT

Church: Church of St Helen, Low Fell.  
Archdeaconry: Durham  
Diocese: Durham.  
Deanery: Gateshead  
Date of inspection: 11 January 2022  
Weather: Dry and sunny

The Church of St Helen is a typical cruciform plan form with nave, transepts and chancel, without side aisles. A square tower sits above the south porch.

The Church of St Helen is a grade II \* listed building. Listing description:

*Parish Church to new Parish formed out of St John's. 1876 by John Wardle. Built at a cost of £13,000, the gift of Edward Joicey of Whinney House, Durham Road (qv). Large, solid Early English style. Coursed, rock-faced stone with ashlar dressings. Graduated lakeland slate roof. Cruciform with short apsidal chancel having cross-gabled vestry, large transepts and south-west tower with stone broach spire; north-west balancing porch. Stepped buttresses, lancets single and grouped, tower doorway with mouldings and nook-shafts.*

*Interior of snecked stone with ashlar dressings. Arch braced timber roof on carved corbels. Carved stone reredos, pulpit and font. Interesting glass:*

- 1. Chancel, 5 lancets, style of Morris & Co. Miracles. Transfiguration, Sermon on Mount.*
- 2. N & S transepts, evangelists and prophets, possibly Kempe.*
- 3. Nave, north side, Burne-Jones designs, saints.*

*One window in south transept signed G J Baguley, Newcastle, 1902. Brass plate to Edward Joicey, the donor.*

The parish has subsequently clarified the windows in the north and south transepts are understood to be by Bacon Bros. and two windows in the south elevation by Kempe.

**Repair works since previous inspection** (excluding general maintenance)

	General maintenance throughout the period.
June 2016	Boiler pump changed to reduce noise level.
June 2016	Internal lighting to Chancel replaced: 10 no Collingwood LED's
July 2016	Speaker fitted near organ console
April 2017	Lectern microphone installed, along with a hand held microphone and transmitter purchased.
May 2019	Repointing to lean stonework joints with lime mortar, generally and in particular to the spire
April 2020	Brass socket cover fitted adjacent to lectern
Sept 2020	Macrolon installed to replace discoloured polycarbonate
Feb 2021	Electrical issues with heating controls due to high relative humidity. 1 no. new switch and 1 no. new pump installed
Sept 2021	5 no Chancel leaded stained glass windows replaced with laminated glass.
Nov 2021	Issues with organ pedals sticking. Resolved along with tuning.
Dec 2021	3 no. chancel leaded stained glass re-fitted.
	PAT testing carried out annually.
	Fire extinguishers checked annually

## **B - THE INSPECTION**

The inspection of the church and environs was undertaken by Kevin Doonan of Doonan Architects Ltd. On 11<sup>th</sup> January 2022. Kevin Doonan is a registered architect and an Architect Accredited in Building Conservation (AABC). Doonan Architects Ltd is also a Chartered Practice registered with the RIBA

The weather was fine and sunny.

Viewing was predominantly from ground level using binoculars where appropriate. Higher level external inspections were carried out only where this was possible and safe to do so. The tower was inspected internally to all its levels with the exception of the final stage. Access was unsafe from a timber unsecured ladder. No floorboards were lifted nor construction voids opened up.

No manhole covers were lifted nor drains inspected.

Each defect/item identified is followed by a brief outline of recommended repair/works. The schedule of defects and recommended repairs will assist the user to compile a programme of prioritised repair works. This is not intended as a specification. The user is urged to seek appropriate specialist advice for any issues which arise. It is recommended that the user should contact Doonan Architects or similarly qualified architects when ready to proceed. The architect will advise on the appropriate action/procedure in drawing up specifications, seeking quotations and inspecting work carried out on site. Some of the works outlined below may require Listed Building consent.

The repair works are prioritised as follows:-

- A** – Urgent, requiring immediate attention.
- B** – Requires attention within 12 months
- C** – Requires attention within 18-24 months
- D** – Requires attention within the quinquennial period
- E** – A Desirable improvement with no timescale
- M** – routine maintenance

The indicated costs are budget estimates provided by the architect to give a broad indication of the potential costs associated with the recommended works. The costs for each item will be dependent on the scale of work undertaken and needs to be read cumulatively per trade within each priority category. If many items are undertaken there will be savings due to economies of scale, i.e. with contractor's

preliminaries, scaffolding, welfare facilities etc. In some instances the full scale of the repair will not be known until further investigations and opening up is undertaken.

There is also scope for a number of simple and straight forward tasks to be undertaken by volunteers. However, the user should be mindful of health and safety issues associated with such tasks and their potential responsibilities and duties under the Construction, Design Management Regulations 2015 (CDM). The costs do not include professional fees associated with monitoring, investigations, specification, approvals, seeking tenders or contract administration. The costs do not include VAT.

This report should not be considered as a replacement of a structured maintenance plan. The latter will ensure that minor defects, eg slipped roofing slates are identified and dealt with quickly to avoid serious difficulties developing.

The church is generally in very good order. This is testament to the quality of the original construction and the enthusiasm of the parish to maintain it to a high standard. Recent repairs to the roof and rainwater goods was a very worth while investment for the long term protection of the fabric. More recently the parish should be applauded for raising funds for the conservation of the stained glass to the chancel along with its improved lighting installation.

Access to the church is restricted and does not comply with DDA requirements. There are steps at the main entrance, the internal lobby arrangement is awkward for disabled users (as it is for funerals), and the sanitary arrangements are very poor for general use, and unusable for a disabled person. It is understood the parish are currently considering how this can be improved.

The external environs to the church are in need of attention. The tarmac footpaths are heaving under the pressure of tree roots, and the boundary walling, particularly to the north, is suffering movement from tree growth.


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**INTERIOR**

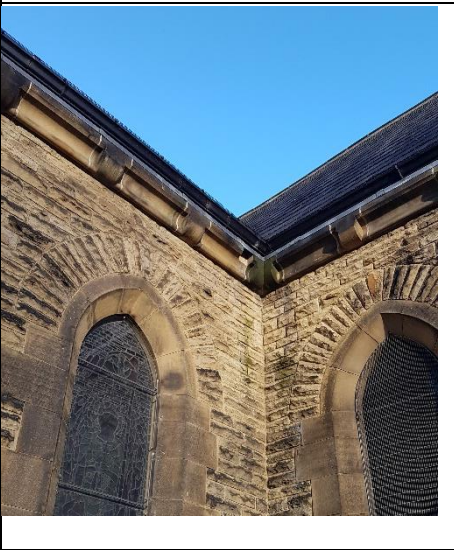
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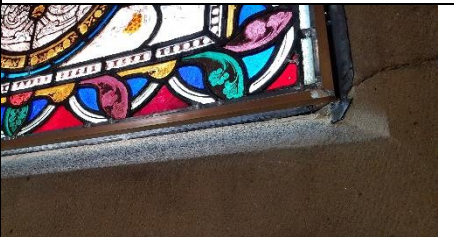
	<b>EXTERIOR</b>			
<b>1.0</b>	<b>Roof coverings.</b>			
1.1	<p>The Spire:                  Very fine original stonework to spire. Lean joints reported in previous QI have been repointed. All generally in sound condition. Some minor joints are open, but no urgent action required</p>	<p>Monitor the stonework and wait till there is sufficient repointing required to warrant issuing instructions to a contractor</p>	E	
1.2	<p>The church roof is finished in Westmoreland green slates in traditional reducing courses. The roof has been reslated/overhauled in recent years and is generally in good order. The hips are formed with lead rolls, all of which seem in good order. Original ridge tiles have been rebedded. The valleys are all lead lined and sound. The original gutters were lead lined gutters to wall head. Presumably the original gutters did not have adequate capacity and the roof was re-aligned to accommodate cast iron ogee gutters sitting on the original.</p>			

<p>1.3</p>	<p>The organ pump house has a shallow pitched roof finished with asphalt. Appears generally sound.</p>			
<p>1.4</p>	<p>The canopy over the 'Joicey door' is constructed in corbelled stonework with exposed 'vault' internally. There is daylight showing through internally, though it should be stressed this is minor.</p>	<p>Monitor the stonework and wait till there is sufficient repointing required elsewhere to warrant issuing instructions to a contractor Point up fine joints using a lime putty for the fine joints.</p>	<p>E</p>	

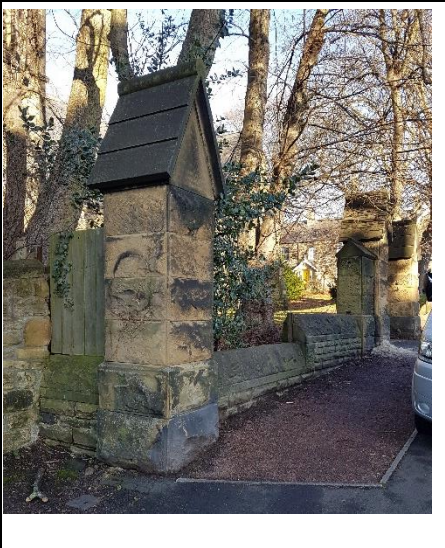



<b>2.0</b>	<b>Rainwater goods and other external pipes.</b>			
2.1	<p>Generally these are all relatively new cast iron ogee gutters with round rainwater pipes connected via hoppers with short lengths of lead sleeves. The gutters sit over the original lead lined stone gutters (presumably replacing the latter as they could not accommodate the flow). All operating satisfactorily apart from at the junction of the south transept and nave. There is evidence of an original (or intended new outlet) when it was lead lined.</p> <p>The new cast iron rainwater goods are protect5ed with 'smart water'</p>	<p>Adapt the junction of the gutters, install a hopper and new rainwater pipe discharging to a new gully connecting to a new soakaway.</p>	C	
2.2	<p>The existing gutters have mesh guards to prevent leaf collection. These seem generally operable but are subject to being dislodged.</p>	<p>Monitor the performance of the guards as part of general maintenance.</p>	M	
2.3	<p>Evidence of minor build up of vegetation in gutters.</p>	<p>Clean out any vegetation as part of general maintenance.</p>	M	

<p><b>3.0</b></p>	<p><b>Walls</b> Generally coursed split faced stonework of fine quality. Dressed stone ashlar buttresses. Rubbed finish ashlar quoins, splayed plinth string course. Fine dressings to window jambs. Carved original gutter (now superfluous with cast iron guttering). Decorated gutter to chancel.</p>			
<p>3.1</p>	<p>The stone external walling is generally in sound condition. The stonework pointing recently overhauled. There remains a very minor number of joints, typically at ground level, which will require attention.</p>	<p>Monitor the stonework and wait till there is sufficient repointing required elsewhere to warrant issuing instructions to a contractor</p>	<p>E</p>	
<p>3.2</p>	<p>The organ pump house walls are rendered externally. The render is breaking away at the base, though appears to be long term damage.</p>	<p>Monitor and re-render if the render deteriorates further within the next 5 years</p>	<p>D</p>	
<p>3.3</p>	<p>A potentially dislodged coping stone kneeler to the sacristy roof was pointed out by the parish.</p>	<p>Check on stability of the kneeler and stabilise if necessary.</p>	<p>C</p>	



4.0	<p><b>Windows</b></p> <p>All the windows have stained glass apart from the west end and some minor windows to the transepts. The stained glass windows are generally dedicated to war dead of 1914-18, parishioners who died in South Africa in early 20<sup>th</sup> C, personalities associated with either the parish or the building of the church, most notably the fine window to the south gable of the south transept dedicated to Edward Joicey.</p>			
4.1	<p>Windows are all protected externally with either mesh grilles or in more recent repairs with polycarbonate.</p>			
4.2	<p>The windows to the chancel were undergoing restoration at the time of the QI. One had been restored and re-instated set in a brass frame, complete with polycarbonate to original glass line and providing a ventilation gap. The other stained glass had been removed and was being restored in a workshop. Between the on site inspection and writing up the QI, the stained glass had been re-installed and was now complete.</p>	<p>Complete the conservation work to the stained glass panels</p>	B	
4.3	<p>One window in each of the transepts have plastic sheet protection internally. Presumably this was installed for draught proofing. Fortunately, these are both plain glass leaded windows, and whilst there is a possibility of condensation there should only be a minor risk of damage.</p>	<p>Monitor to check on condensation as part of regular maintenance</p>	M	
5.0	<p><b>External Doors</b></p>			
5.1	<p>The main entrance doors are the original doors. Solid construction and in good condition. They</p>	<p>Consideration should be given to provide access for disabled users/visitors to the church.</p>	C	


	<p>retain their original ironmongery with the exception of a modern bolt to restrain the drop bolt.</p> <p>There is a gap at the bottom to the door with a risk of vermin access.</p> <p>Externally there are 2 steps up to the doors providing poor access for disabled visitors.</p>			
5.2	The original vestry door (off the Chancel) is in good condition as is the new Vestry (to rear of church) door.			
5.3	The boiler room door is serviceable but a bit shabby	Clean down and decorate	M	
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Environs</b>			
6.1	<p>The boundary originally had stone walling with coping finished with cast iron railings. Apart from the north boundary wall the railings were removed sometime ago.</p> <p>The parish provided a copy of comprehensive arborologist report dated December 2019. It is understood the parish has implemented the recommendations of the report.</p>			


<p>6.2</p>	<p>South boundary: The wall is complete along with two gate posts and corner posts. The former are leaning slightly but not to cause a concern at this stage. One coping is broken at a 'step' in the wall.</p>			
<p>6.3</p>	<p>West boundary: The coping/walling appears to have survived but is now partially buried. Historic action of tree growth has deformed the wall. The boundary has a timber fence supported off steel posts. The latter is in reasonable condition but is out of alignment because of the deformed wall.</p>	<p>Monitor the state of the fence for further movement.</p>	<p>D</p>	


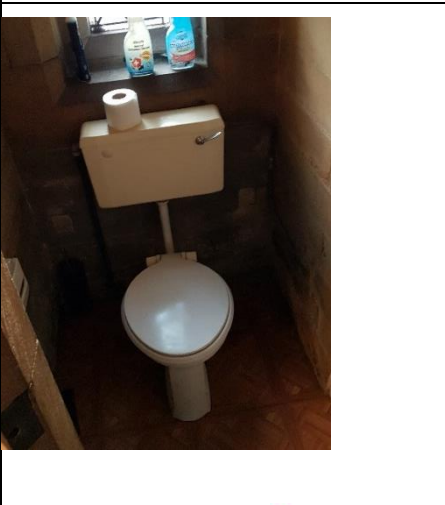
<p>6.4</p>	<p>North boundary:                  This has the best surviving original boundary treatment. The wall and railings are intact. However, historic action of the tree growth (in neighbour's property) has distorted the walling which in turn has distressed the railings. The copings have cracked at 'steps' in the walling. Surviving gate to the Joicey home to the north. Whilst the distortion of walling and railings is unfortunate, it is still stable, however, there will be continuing pressure from the trees.</p>	<p>Discuss responsibility and/or liability of damage caused by the neighbour's tree.</p>	<p>A</p>	
<p>6.5</p>	<p>East boundary:                  Wall and coping intact. Railings missing apart from 5 no surviving posts.</p>			




<p>6.6</p>	<p>2 no plinth features in the garden to the south side, presumably remains of external gas lights.</p>			
<p>6.7</p>	<p>Tarmac foot paths to south side of church. Heavy moss has established, presumably thriving from the shade of the trees. The tree root pattern is clearly visible distorting the tarmac. This will need attention soon , as it will be a trip hazard if/when the tarmac breaks down. There is a gully at the east end of the path.</p>	<p>The tarmac should be replaced with correct falls to the existing gully.</p>	<p>C</p>	
<p>6.8</p>	<p>The boiler room is accessed from a set of external stone steps protected with a stone wall complete with cast iron railings. All sound, though the stone steps can be slippy, requiring regular maintenance.</p>	<p>Monitor as a part of general maintenance.</p>	<p>M</p>	

	<b>INTERIOR</b>			
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Ceilings and roof structures</b>			
7.1	The main body of the church along with the transepts has an open roof structure exposing arched trusses, purlins, rafters and sarking boarding. All evenly stained to a very pleasing dark brown. All appear in good condition.			
7.2	The rear choir vestry has an open roof structure, exposing the rafters, high collars, and 'V' jointed sarking boarding. All appear in sound condition.			
7.3	The front Vicar's Vestry has a boarded ceiling in sound condition.			
7.4	Tower entrance ceiling exposed soffit to floor boarding 4no. heavy timber beams, all in sound condition.			


7.5	Boiler room has a double vaulted ceiling. Evidence of historic render repair to the vaulting, though all seems sound.			
8.0	<p><b>Walls</b></p> <p>The walls internally are constructed of very fine dressed ashlar. The main body of the church has a stone string with smooth rubbed finish below and punched finish above. Smooth dressings to window and door opening. Carved corbels to truss supports.</p>			
8.1	The entrance lobby. Evidence of minor erosion through damp particularly at the mural stair door opening.	Monitor as a part of general maintenance, and review at next QI	M	


<p>8.2</p>	<p>The Chancel has a carved limestone plinth with marble spindles/columns. Evidence of very minor low level erosion presumably from damp penetration.</p>	<p>Monitor as a part of general maintenance, and review at next QI</p>	<p>M</p>	
<p>8.3</p>	<p>WC/Utility room. Evidence of damp in the walls.</p>	<p>It is understood the foul drain from the wc discharges to the basement via a lead pipe and its final discharge is unknown. This should be investigated to ensure the drainage is effective. Consideration given to providing a DDA compliant WC for congregation use.</p>	<p>A</p>	

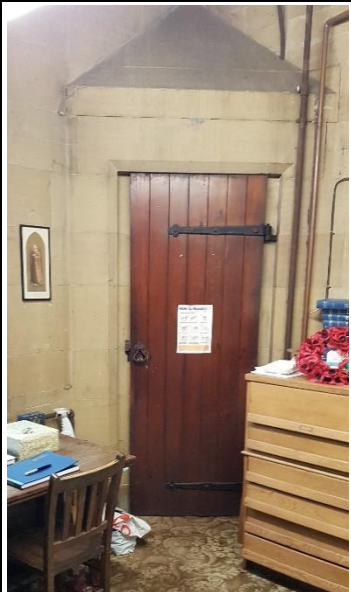

<p><b>9.0</b></p>	<p><b>Floors</b> A chequerboard pattern of red and white sandstone flags to entrance lobby, rear and front of nave along with the main processional route. Sandstone flags to east and west aisles.</p>			
<p>9.1</p>	<p>Main entrance. The flags are slightly worn but still perfectly serviceable.</p>			
<p>9.2</p>	<p>Signs of flags delaminating. These have created 3 no. deep pockets which may become a trip hazard. However, they may have been in this state for some time.</p>	<p>Monitor as a part of general maintenance, and review at next QI</p>	<p>M</p>	
<p>9.3</p>	<p>Chancel steps and altar plinth in marble. All sound</p>			
<p>9.4</p>	<p>Rear Choir Vestry and Front Vicar's Vestry both have carpeted solid floors, presumably stone flagged. No evidence of any defects.</p>			
<p>9.5</p>	<p>Suspended timber floorboarding beneath the pews. All sound.</p>			


<b>10.0</b>	<b>Tower</b>			
10.1	<p>The mural stair is constructed with fine dressed steps. All in excellent condition. It has a rope handrail which is perfectly serviceable. Solid wrought iron handrail and balustrade to top landing. The top window has a leaded light with a broken pane.</p>	Repair the broken leaded light pane	C	
10.2	<p>First floor chamber. Sound timber floor. Walls of dressed masonry: all sound. Ceiling above (Bell Chamber floor) has 4 no solid beams supported on stone corbels complete with floorboarding: all in sound condition. 2 no leaded lights with top hung casements in sound condition. An aluminium ladder provides access to the bell chamber. This is secured to the wall and sound to use. Exposed metal electrical conduit is corroding in places.</p>	Ensure electrician includes for checking the state of the electrical wiring and conduit as part of their regular inspection	B	
10.3	<p>Bell Chamber: Ceiling above (Upper Spire Chamber floor) has timber beams and floorboarding which seem sound. The walls are exposed dressed stonework with evidence of very minor shaling. The louvres are appear to be sound sealed internally with galvanised mesh screens to prevent access to birds. The bell frame appears sound.</p>	Brush off any loose shaling to the stonework.	D	







10.4	Upper Spire Chamber, accessed via an old timber ladder. This is not fixed and is a health and safety risk. Consequently the chamber was not inspected. This was also noted in the previous QI.	Replace the ladder with a metal ladder securely fixed to the wall, and inspect chamber at earliest opportunity.	A	
<b>11.0</b>	<b>Internal Doors</b>			
11.1	The lobby is divided with a glazed screen with stained/leaded Lobby screen and solid timber construction. 2 no doors. Parish advise that general access is very awkward particularly for funerals.	The Parish has ambitions the screen could be adapted for improved access	D	
11.2	Mural stair door is the original with its ironmongery all still serviceable.			

11.3	The lobby/nave door is the original of solid timber construction. All the ironmongery is the original and still serviceable.			
11.4	Rear Choir Vestry door is the original with its ironmongery, all still serviceable.			
11.5	Chancel Vicar's Vestry door is the original with its ironmongery, all still serviceable.			

<p>11.6</p>	<p>Vicar's Vestry utility door is the original with its ironmongery, all still serviceable.</p>			
<p>12.0</p>	<p><b>Fittings</b></p>			
<p>12.1</p>	<p>Reredos to altar in carved marble with a carved oak shelf.</p>			
<p>12.2</p>	<p>The altar has moved to a forward position. Now a timber table (unlikely to be original).</p>			

12.3	Choir stalls and timber panelling all sound.			
12.4	Timber altar rail and gate sound.			
12.5	Original pulpit: carved limestone with oak handrail and brass balusters.			
12.5	<p>Organ inaccessible.</p> <p>The parish provided a 2022 report from Harrison and Harrison setting out their findings on the <i>'drawstop action that operates the sliders for the Pedal Bordon and Violoncello stops'</i>.</p> <p>They provide two alternatives and recommend installing 'electric motors in place of the present draw stop mechanism'</p>	Carry out repairs to the organ as recommended by Harrison and Harrison	C	

12.6	Very fine brass ambo.	It would be prudent to check on insurance for such pieces	A	
12.7	Vestry cupboards all serviceable.			
12.8	Church safe/cupboard, serviceable			

12.9	Side chapel in south transept. A relatively modern intervention (dedication 1987)			
12.10	North transept has a modern dividing timber partition to provide a storage area. This is a useful space as the church has limited storage space. However, this is an intrusion and the storage area is a little unsightly.			
12.11	Brass monuments throughout the church dedicating war dead, parishioners and notable persons associated with the church, including a dedication to Edward Joicey.			
12.12	Font at rear of church is in finely carved stone and in good condition.			
<b>13.0</b>	<b>Electrical Installation</b>			
13.1	Electrical installation tested by Lewis Harvey Ltd 13 <sup>th</sup> September 2021			
13.2	PAT testing carried out in April 2019	Carry out a PAT test		



<b>14.0</b>	<b>Mechanical Installation</b>			
14.1	The boiler in the basement is serviced annually. Boiler appears relatively new. Pipework well insulated. There is a sump in the floor with a pump to handle any ground water seepage.			
<b>15.0</b>	<b>Lightening conductor</b>			
15.1	Lightening conductor tested by Stone Technical Services January 2021.			
<b>16.0</b>	<b>Fire fighting equipment</b>			
16.1	All tested February 2021: 6 no AFFF 5 no carbon dioxide 1 no fire blanket 1 no dry powder			

<b>SUMMARY OF COSTS</b>		
<b>A</b>	<b>Urgent, requiring immediate attention.</b>	
6.4	Commission arborologist for condition of boundary trees	£1200
8.3	Investigate foul drainage	£1500
10.4	Install a safe ladder access to the upper spire chamber	£2000
12.6	Check on insurance for fixtures and fittings	<i>More info needed</i>
<b>B</b>	<b>Requires attention within 12 months</b>	
4.2	Complete the chancel stained glass conservation	<i>More info needed</i>
10.2	Electrician to check on rusting spire conduits as part of periodic inspection	£0
<b>C</b>	<b>Requires attention within 18-24 months</b>	
2.1	Install improved roof drainage to south nave/transept junction including below ground drainage	£3000
3.3	Check on stability of gable kneeler	<i>More info needed</i>
5.1	Consider access at the main entrance for DDA compliance	£8000
6.7	Repairs to tarmac footpaths	£7000
10.1	Repair mural stair window	£750
12.5	Organ repairs	£1993
<b>D</b>	<b>Requires attention within the quinquennial period</b>	
3.2	Repair rendering to organ pump house walling	£750
6.3	Monitor condition of west boundary fence	<i>More info needed</i>
11.1	Consider improving the access within the main entrance lobby, particularly for funerals.	£5000
<b>E</b>	<b>Desirable improvement with no timescale</b>	
1.1, 1.4, 3.1.	Monitor pointing	<i>More info needed</i>

<b>M</b>	<b>Routine maintenance</b>	
2.2	Monitor gutter guards	
2.3	Clean out gutters	
4.3	Monitor secondary glazing	
5.3	Decorate boiler room door	
6.8	Monitor boiler room steps	
8.1	Monitor entrance lobby stonework	
8.2	Monitor chancel stonework	
9.2	Monitor stone flags	
10.3	Brush off loose stonework shaling	