

Conservation of the Market Cross

Notes for A presentation to the LBTC Policy and Finance committee by the Townland Trust Charity on the 25th July 2022.

The Market Cross is of great importance to the town.

To many the Cross is the image that represents the Town. The Cross is its Brand.

The Townland Trust is a charity with local Trustees two of whom are here today: Michael West and Nick Whitehouse. The charity originates from the ancient ecclesiastical charities. Its remit is to take ownership and care of the Market Cross and to give charitable support to the townsfolk of Leighton Buzzard.

Urgent expenditure on the Market Cross is required beyond the normal care and maintenance that the trustees have been providing in recent years

Whilst maintaining the Cross the Charity works closely with the Officers of LBTC. This maintains the common objectives of preserving the setting of the Cross and to our mutual and communal benefit.

The Market Cross is a Scheduled Ancient Monument and as such attracts the highest level of legislative control and in particular the involvement of the Government department Historic England.

A history of the Cross can be read about in the many excellent books that have been published about the history of the Town. It has a colourful history and has witnessed the growth and changes to the town and to local society.

It is generally agreed that the cross was erected in the 15th century through funding by Alice Chaucer at a time when Leighton was prosperous.

The Cross has had many repairs and interventions over the years. The most significant was by the Victorians. Some recent interventions have not been undertaken with appropriate materials or with appropriate care.

There is no doubt about the affection that the public has for the cross. It is a meeting place, a seat in the sun or shade, a focal point for events. Sadly in the past there has been some vandalism, graffiti, and unsympathetic treatment by market traders. Pigeons continue to be a problem

In recent years the trustees have been following expert advice in maintaining and conserving the fabric of the structure. A major review was considered desirable and it has become apparent that more preventative specialist intervention will be required.

Using current conservation techniques longevity should be achieved

To inform what action should be taken the strategy of the Trustees has been to seek out appropriate expertise to help commission a condition report, plus the associated research and testing that may be needed,

The Architect Rena Pitsilli-Graham has been appointed to represent the Trustees. She is an expert in building conservation and has delivered award winning projects in this particular area of conservation. She is highly respected by the authorities which is helpful in gaining agreement and consent.

To date the Trustees have received an initial condition report, a Geological assessment; an Archeological report; a detailed set of drawings; a digital survey; a photographic survey. In addition samples have been sent for analysis at a Geomaterials Research Laboratory.

The Architect has used this data to commission an estimate of cost for further trials and investigations from a specialist conservation contractor. This should provide the information needed to seek approvals from the interested Authorities and agree the scope of conservation work required.

We are confident that the preparatory work to date is good and appropriate.

The costs to date have been in excess of the Charity's normal expenditure. The Trustees will be seeking help in funding the expenditure for the trials and investigations. These have been costed in an estimate.

The eventual programme of conservation work will be informed by the trials and investigations as will estimates of cost and time. Again the Trustees anticipate seeking help in funding the work.

Please, are you able to help the Trustees deliver excellence in conserving this jewel in the crown of Leighton Buzzard?

NW&MW 14.07.22