



MIDHURST
PARISH CHURCH

Midhurst Parish Office
St Ann's Hall
St Ann's Hill
MIDHURST
GU29 9EW

vicar@midhurstparishchurch.net

Telephone: 01730 815356

**A Statement from St Mary Magdalene & St Denys Church, Midhurst
(The Church) About the Lychgate on the Market Square**

Dear parishioner,

You may be aware that safety barriers have been erected around the wooden gated structure to the South of the parish church, preventing access to the gate.

This structure is known as 'The Lychgate', and it an ancient gateway to the graveyard of the church.

The Church was made aware on the morning of Tuesday 19th November 2024 that the Lychgate appeared to be leaning to the South. A visual inspection by council staff and the vicar of the church later that day identified numerous indications of structural weakness; such as supporting gables having become detached from their housings, supporting timbers appearing to show signs of physical stress, supporting walls showing signs of 'bowing' and detachment of the Lychgate roof housing from the supporting timbers.

This initial assessment drew council staff and church to conclude that the structure may be structurally unsafe and we made the decision, in the interest of public safety, to cordon off the Lychgate from both the South (on the market square) and the North (from the church).

The responsibility for maintenance and upkeep of the graveyard, it's surrounding walls and structures, such as the Lychgate, was transferred to Chichester District Council in 1972 as a result of the Local Government Act (1972) legislation pertaining to 'closed' graveyards.

Consequently, we have contacted Chichester District Council and reported our concerns. Chichester District Council, upon a preliminary inspection of the Lychgate on Wednesday the 20th November, have concurred with our assessment and accordingly have installed a more robust safety barrier to ensure public safety in this well-used communal space. The barrier has been installed to protect members of the public should the structure suffer further deterioration or even collapse.

The maintenance and repair of such a unique and ancient part of our shared heritage is not a simple matter, and we are now working with Chichester District Council, the Diocese of Chichester's Advisory Council and the church architect to determine the cause of the Lychgate's 'lean' and decide what needs to be done to make the structure safe. This may well involve engaging with surveyors and other specialists in the field of the restoration and maintenance of historic buildings. The first steps in this process are already underway. The first priority is to assess the structural condition of the lychgate and, from that, to determine what we need to do to prevent further 'movement'. Once that has been done, we will look to reduce the impact on users of the market square if, and only if, we can be satisfied that our responsibility to public safety can adequately be managed.

We are presently unable to give any indication as to how long it will take for a determination as to the underlying cause(s) of the structural stress to be made, nor how long it will take for repairs to be effected. We do not anticipate a resolution this year, and it is with considerable regret that we expect that the lychgate and immediate surrounding area will be out of use well into 2025.

We are very aware of the detrimental impact this will have on users of the market square. We are actively working with all stakeholders – such as market traders, Midhurst Town Council, Midhurst Town Trust, Chichester District Council and local residents - to minimise the impact on users of the Market Square as much as is possible.

We thank you in advance for your patience and understanding.

Should you have any enquiries or comments on the progress of these works we invite you to contact the Chichester District Council's Parks team via their webform: [CDC Parks Team](#).

Marcus Collie, Vicar, Midhurst Parish Church