

Community and Town Promotion Meeting: February 2018

Report for Agenda Item 12: Request for financial support and administration assistance in delivering an exciting project to undertake a geophysical archaeological survey of the grounds around the Abbey.

Overview:

At the highly successful William of Malmesbury day organised by Malmesbury History Society in 2017 it was mooted that it could be of great interest to the understanding of the history of the development of Malmesbury Abbey if a geophysical survey could be undertaken of the grounds around the Abbey. It may show how the use of the Abbey grounds has developed over time, for example, the transition from Saxon chapels and churches to the current Abbey, confirm the layout of the cloisters and associated buildings and help identify how the grounds have been used for the burial of religious and secular citizens. The Cloister Gardens, of course, are currently let by Abbey House Gardens to the Town Council on a reducing 99 year lease.

Malmesbury History Society has already organised a trial geophysical survey in part of the Abbey Grounds. This has shown that a meaningful geophysical survey is possible (results based on penetration to a depth of 2 metres appear deliverable) and a cost estimate of £4,000 plus VAT to undertake a full survey of the Abbey Grounds, including the cloisters and to produce the report of findings, has been obtained.



The other groups actively supporting the survey, led by Malmesbury History Society and including Malmesbury Civic Trust and Friends of Malmesbury Abbey are raising funds and significant donations have already been received; for example £2,000 has been donated by two of the academics speaking at the William of Malmesbury Day. A Crowdfunding appeal is also being considered. The Wiltshire County Archaeologist is also involved.

Support requested from the Town Council

Malmesbury Town Council is being asked by Malmesbury History Society to assist the project in three ways. (i) By expressing its public support for the endeavour and, in effect, identifying itself as a stakeholder in the project alongside the organisations noted above., (ii) By making a contribution of £100 towards the cost of the survey, which will entitle the Town Council to receive and make appropriate use of the report. This is relevant to the Town Council from the Town Promotion point of view and as the current leaseholder of the Cloister Gardens, and (iii) To assist the management of the project, and recognising the direct interest of the Town Council in this project as the leaseholder of part of the area that it is planned to survey, by holding the funds donated via Malmesbury History Society and, when sufficient funds have been received and deposited with the Town Council, making the order with the supplier selected by Malmesbury History Society to undertake the survey and ultimately paying the supplier the agreed cost for the survey and report.

It is proposed the £100 contribution is allocated from the 4071 Projects budget or 4243 Promotions budget. The Town Clerk has advised that the administration support may be offered provided the Town Council is not exposed to unfunded costs, which is why it is being stated that sufficient funds must be deposited with the Town Council in advance of agreed spending being undertaken.

Campbell Ritchie