FORM 4 (Rule 5)

Section 8 of Care of Cathedrals Measure 2011
Public Notice on application to the Fabric Advisory Committee

PUBLIC NOTICE

TAKE NOTICE that the Chapter of the Cathedral Church of:

The Cathedral and Metropolitical Church of St Peter in York

has on this date: 11 November 2021

applied to the Fabric Advisory Committee of the said cathedral for approval of the following proposal:

The Chapter of York proposes to undertake repairs to the plinth and stonework of a statue niche on the West front of the Minster in preparation for the installation of a new sculpture of Queen Elizabeth II.

Summary of the nature of work and its extent (and materials) [or in the case of an object, a short description of it and details of the proposal]

The repair and conservation approach will be ‘conservative’: retaining and conserving historic fabric and the evidence of past repairs. Works will also include the re-instatement of the decorative top band, as well as careful cleaning of the stone work.

Plans, drawings, specifications or other documents

Copies of the plans, drawings, specification and other documents accompanying this application may be examined online at

https://yorkminster.org/about-us/statutory-applications/

From this day: 11 November 2021

and until: 09 December 2021
REPRESENTATIONS

If you wish to make representations about the whole or any part of the proposal described in this Notice you should write to the Secretary of the Fabric Advisory Committee: insert postal and email address.

Mr David Demack
Westbury House
142 Fox Lane
Leyland, Lancashire
PR25 1HD
FAC@yorkminster.org

So that it reaches the Secretary not later than: insert a date ending 28 days after the time of the commencement of the period for representations.

09 December 2021

DIRECTIONS TO CHAPTER

1. This public notice (or a copy of it) must be displayed for a continuous period of 28 days in a prominent position inside and outside your cathedral where it is readily visible to the public.

2. A copy of this notice must be sent as follows:

(a) to the Cathedrals Fabric Commission, and
(b) if the proposal is of a kind described in section 2(1)(a) of the Measure—
   (i) to Historic England (formerly English Heritage)
   (ii) to the national amenity societies as applicable (see list on Form 3)
   (iii) to the local planning authority.
York Minster:
The Queen’s Statue Commission

Consent application for Plinth and Stonework Repairs

November 2021

Rev. A 00_10.11.2021
1. INTRODUCTION

This paper supports the application by Chapter to the York Minster FAC for CCM consent for the repairs and conservation to the masonry of the statue niche on the West front of the Minster, especially to the plinth. The paper covers the statement of need; describes the conservation rationale and justifies the approach to be adopted.

The context will be familiar to the FAC, with CCM applications now granted by the CFCE for the new statue of Queen Elizabeth II which will be placed in this West-front niche. The CFCE devolved to the FAC the detailed consideration of repair requirements to the existing stonework of the niche.

This application should be read with the Stuart Harrison appraisal of the West Front, incorporating Christopher Norton’s evaluation. It is notable especially from an historical perspective that the niche plinth stonework is an inserted addition into the medieval masonry; thus suggesting that the plinth was a ‘special’ decorative element that is not replicated elsewhere on the Minster. Based on this supplementary research paper and the findings of the Minster CMP, the West Front as a whole and the niche specifically must be considered to be of exceptional or international historical significance.

Also to be read with this paper are the drawings of the record of the existing condition and the proposed scope of conservation and repairs proposed by the master mason and lead conservator.

The CCM for the statue included the following proposed scope of work to the niche.

Repairs to the Existing Stonework & Plinth to the Niche. Afforded the opportunity for access to the buttress and niche to install the scaffold, there will also be a programme of minor masonry repairs. The niche stonework is broadly in a satisfactory and stable condition but we anticipate undertaking some conservative stone repairs and making good to the decorative capitals, the plinth tracery and other architectural elements, all in accordance with the current adopted Stone Practice. These repairs will mostly comprise ‘plastic’ stone repairs using proven materials and methodology by our conservator-masons, potentially with some local poultice cleaning and carefully judged shelter-coating of any fragile weathering elements. The works will be specified and agreed under the direction of the Surveyor once full access is erected. The scope of these minor repair works will comprise the West-facing niche and the two side return niches of the buttress, which will be accessible.

Closer inspection of the stone from the scaffold has revealed that the condition of the decorative detailing is not ‘broadly satisfactory’ and is markedly decayed and in many areas displays quite unstable damage. Thus, in addition to the approach indicated above, we are also now proposing consolidation measures and some judicious stone renewal as described further below.

Detailed condition surveys have been undertaken with Head Conservator Lee Godfrey and Master Mason John David. This paper appends Lee Godfrey’s close observation notes, from which our proposals for this consent have been developed for approval.
2. OVERVIEW AND SUMMARY

It must first be stated that the repairs, conservation and cleaning will all be undertaken within the framework and using the methods and materials of the Minster Stone Practice policy document. There are no divergences from this tried, tested and approved approach.

No conservation problem is the same and therefore we are duty bound to articulate our thinking and approach in each and every circumstance. In this instance and in relation to the niche there are some principles and objectives that need to be articulated by way of setting the scene as a ‘statement of need’.

1. The statue niche is at relatively low level on the Minster Façade, thus we would normally approach this sculptural and architectural object on the basis of a return period of 25-30 years, which would typically indicate a relatively light touch approach, addressing matters of safety and stability of the carved forms as the first priority. Works at higher level, where the return period may be 100+ years, generally require (careful and sympathetic) conservation and renewal work that would be more ‘interventive’. Given the nature and prominence of this niche, we suggest that there is a case for an approach which applies the principles of care usually applied for the longer return period, which then informs the scope

2. The repair and conservation approach will be ‘conservative’: retaining and conserving historic fabric and the evidence of past repairs. We suggest that in this instance there is a need and justification to re-instate the missing and badly weathered decorative detail band and the two complex decorative corner buttresses in new stone. The primary supporting justification is that we are catching the unique details of this niche plinth just at the point that the carving and decorative forms are disappearing permanently. There is loss of highly significant, valuable detail that should now be re-carved, so the forms are not lost forever.

3. The proposed re-instatement of the decorative top band has a functional purpose: this band will resist the water shedding from above and will serve to protect the fragile weathered forms below, which will be retained.

4. There is also a need for some careful cleaning work; this is for conservation and protective reasons. Close inspection of the niche capitals shows that these are encrusted with black pollution and gypsum deposits. There is clear evidence that these impermeable deposits are causing blistering and breakdown of the most exposed decorative detail. Similarly there are decay pockets in the plainer stone of the lower plinth which appears to have been treated with a linseed oil (or similar) consolidant historically. Whilst we cannot remove the penetrating material, we can sacrificially repair the blistered areas in a weaker mortar repair to hold the edges of the historic stone.

5. There are only two elements of what might be deemed discretionary conservation, which we recommend are justified in this context:
   a. We are proposing that we should restore the broken and lost tracery lines of the niche blind arcade, using mortar repairs, to reinstate the architectural lines.
   b. We also seek consent for some careful shelter-coating which, in addition to the protective benefits to the most fragile elements of carving, will also play a part in bringing some aesthetic unity to the niche base.

In summary, there is a clear rationale for repair and conservation that is applied, following the principles of the Stone Practice policy, to this significant niche. Preserving and caring for the unique significance of the niche stonework is the primary goal; there are some carefully judged aesthetic touches which are justified given the overarching need for the new statue commission and the niche to work together as a key visual event in the architectural hierarchy of the West front.
3. LOCATION AND KEY PLAN FOR THE APPLICATION

Location plan (not to scale – see scale bar)

Location elevation - part elevation of West front (not to scale – see scale bar)
4. BIRD PROTECTION MEASURES

We seek approval for necessary bird-protection measures to the niche and new statue with the fixing of very discrete netting across the front of the niche in stone-coloured fine mesh, with reversible fixings. Fixings and the edge of the netting will be on the line just outside the edge of the niche shafts, running along the commensurate line under the lower order of the hood profile. Samples of the coloured mesh will be available for inspection by the FAC. The fine/thin stainless steel fixings will only be made into joints (bed joints or perpends) in the stone.

5. DETAILED WORKS ILLUSTRATED

The following selection of photographs show the existing condition and describe the proposed works

General view of the upper part of the niche plinth. Note the complete loss of the two corner decorative pinnacle buttresses. Also the complete loss of the upper naturalistic foliate band. This loss of the weathering edge concentrates weather and water damage onto the fragile weathered stone below. The eroded stone will be retained. Also the historical indents will be retained.

The retained fragile weathered stone will be stabilised with nano-lime application and subtly shelter-coated. (See conservator notes below)
General view of the lower part of the niche plinth. Note the yellowing finish of an historical consolidant application (possibly linseed oil). The losses of the vertical lines of decorative tracery are proposed for reinstatement in repair mortar. On the right there is a large unstable blister – caused by the consolidant. This will be conserved with soft repair mortars which will stabilise the edges of the retained stone. The scaffold fixings will be removed. Following small-scale trials, there will be a subtle application of shelter-coat to unify new repairs and to tone-down the yellow treated stone visually.

Rather crass rusting scaffolding fixings will be removed and made good with mortar repair.
Close up view of the weathered upper decorative detailing and tracery. The historical indent seen in the centre will be retained; the surrounding weathered stone will be consolidated. The blister in the tracery head (centre) will be conserved with a sacrificial mortar repair, but we will not attempt to reinstate the lost detail. The upper foliate band will be renewed in new stone, which will help to shelter the fragile stone below.
Close up view of the northern capital, showing the (generally good) condition of the stonework. The black impermeable crusts will be removed using poultice methods. Soft mortar repairs will be applied to the weathered edges of the decayed areas of carving; but not to reinstate lost detail. The bird netting will be fixed in the shaft angle seen on the left of this photo; thus the capital will be within the line of the fine netting.

Close up view of the southern capital, seen from above. This capital is more deeply weathered and needs to be conservatively cleaned with holding repairs to areas of decay in mortar repair.
6. HEAD CONSERVATOR CONDITION RECORD AND SPECIFICATION NOTES

The stones comprising the pedestal base niche have in the past been coated with linseed oil. This treatment has caused large areas of the stone detail to deteriorate with many areas of cavernous decay.

The upper stones of the pedestal base are decorated with seven pediments and six crocketed pinnacles. The stones also exhibit areas of sheltered decay and gypsum crusts. In sheltered areas the stones have advanced areas of active decay.

The upper masonry decorative foliate cornice and its carved finals are in an advanced state of decay and close to being unintelligible and to the extent that most of the detail has weathered away.

In the lower tracery a number of mullions that have been coated with linseed show areas of sheltered decay: some of the blind mullions are missing entire and have lost the visual line.

The ornate masonry and carving of the upper pediments and pinnacles have two sections of stone work which are pieced in historically – date currently unknown.

There is also nicely executed more recent renewal on the second pinnacle from the left (north) which is abutted by a section of cornice decorated with a finial. This was carried out in the late 1990’s in Cadeby magnesium limestone by a mason named Peter Marris. The pinnacle is carved with two small figurative heads. One holds a model of the Minster. Whilst the other has an inscription, which is still just legible (but we haven’t yet decoded the Latin).

To the left of the upper ornate masonry an indent may be original. Unfortunately, the pinnacle above no longer remains.

In my opinion the stone is in an advanced state of decay. Much of the original detail in the upper quarter of the carved masonry is a weathered shadow of its original form.

The carved crockets all exhibit large areas of active decay which I would suggest are beyond treatment with lime shelter coats. Treatment with IP25 Nanolime is proposed, as used successfully in past conservation. This would be followed by a number of lime repairs possibly with a casein additive.

In my opinion the advanced rate of weathering has been caused by high levels of water washing over the unsheltered areas of the stone. The linseed skin, once penetrated, traps magnesium sulphates which eventually cause the linseed surface to exfoliate.

The significance of the base stones has been increased by the proposal to install a new sculpture of Queen Elizabeth the Second in the niche above. As such, the shape and form of the stones will be under scrutiny by the public and academics. This means that any repair or conservation of the stones will also have to involve an element of conservation.

The stones which are pieced in on the left (north) of the upper course of masonry would in my mind warrant replacement in new stone. The existing joints would facilitate removal and replacement.
I would also suggest that replacement of the ornate cornice would be beneficial from a functional point of view, with the new stones shedding water from the stones below. In addition the new cornice would have an aesthetic value, marrying the new statue above to the base below.

The masonry comprising the three lower courses of the base would benefit from rebuilding in a repair mortar. In my mind this could be in a traditional lime based mortar; with the finer details repaired with a restoration mortars (St.One and Keim) selected as appropriate for the element and substrate.

The top course of weathered historical stones would benefit from an application of shelter coat. However, due to the previous linseed treatment the application of a shelter coat to the lower three courses would be superficial and ephemeral, but may help to visually harmonise the niche with the new statue at the outset of its life on the Minster West Front.

Lee Godfrey; Head Conservator, with Oliver Caroe, Surveyor. Based on surveys taken September/October 2021.

7. CONCLUSION

Taken with the condition survey, the proposed drawings and these detailed observations, there is a clear scheme of work which is primarily justified as an appropriate scheme of preventative conservation for masonry of the highest significance. The case for support for the scheme of repair and conservation is particularly indicated by the significance of the historic niche masonry which, without intervention now, would decay to the point of irreplaceable and irrecoverable loss of unique decorative detail.

With good judgement (and some thoughtful trials) the discretionary works also are clearly justifiable within the context of the prominence, focussing and framing of the Queen Elizabeth statue project.

The FAC is therefore asked to evaluate the proposals primarily as necessary, essential conservation with the added weight of the statue project as background to a sensible scheme of repair work and, in this case, to determine this application with an approval. It does not seem necessary to suggest that there should be conditions applied to the consent, but FAC members will be kept informed of the final tests, trials, conservation judgements and application of the methods proposed.

Oliver Caroe: RIBA AABC Surveyor of the Fabric. November 2021
Top weathering surface of 1000s cap stones planed off to provide level surface on which to seat statue

Proposed repairs

- New magnesian limestone insert
- Nanolime consolidation with lime mortar
- St. One restoration mortar
- Fractures/cracks pinned and consolidated