

**Closed church of South Hylton St Mary: Schedule and Statements of Significance and Needs**  
**Faculty Petition OFS Application Ref: 2025-123170**  
**Ground investigations to churchyard and installation of new water pipe.**

**SCHEDULE OF WORKS OR PROPOSALS:**

- i) Investigations into soil, churchyard wall foundations and drainage in the closed churchyard, by Sunderland City Council, in response to formation of sinkhole and ground subsidence.
- ii) Laying of a replacement water pipe through the south and east parts of churchyard.

**Statement of Significance and Needs:**

This petition seeks faculty for Sunderland City Council to undertake investigations into soil, churchyard wall foundations and drainage in the churchyard, following subsidence impacting the churchyard and former church. Investigations will determine a future programme for structural rebuild of the retaining churchyard north boundary wall and improvements to belowground surface water drainage serving the church. This petition also seeks permission to lay a replacement water mains supply to the property and confirms the infilling of an external sinkhole that appeared directly below the church north wall foundations.

The church of South Hylton St Mary was closed for worship 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019 through a scheme made by the Church Commissioners under the Mission and Pastoral Measure 2011. The former church (vested in Durham DBF) has since remained unoccupied in the 'use-seeking period' and marketed for sale, as the diocese and Church Commissioners seek to secure an appropriate new use for the property. The churchyard, owned by the incumbent of the benefice of Sunderland St Mary, St Thomas and St Oswald, was closed for burials by Royal Order on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1856, some thirty years before construction of the present church. Sunderland City Council are the legal maintaining authority with responsibility for maintaining the churchyard and its walls.

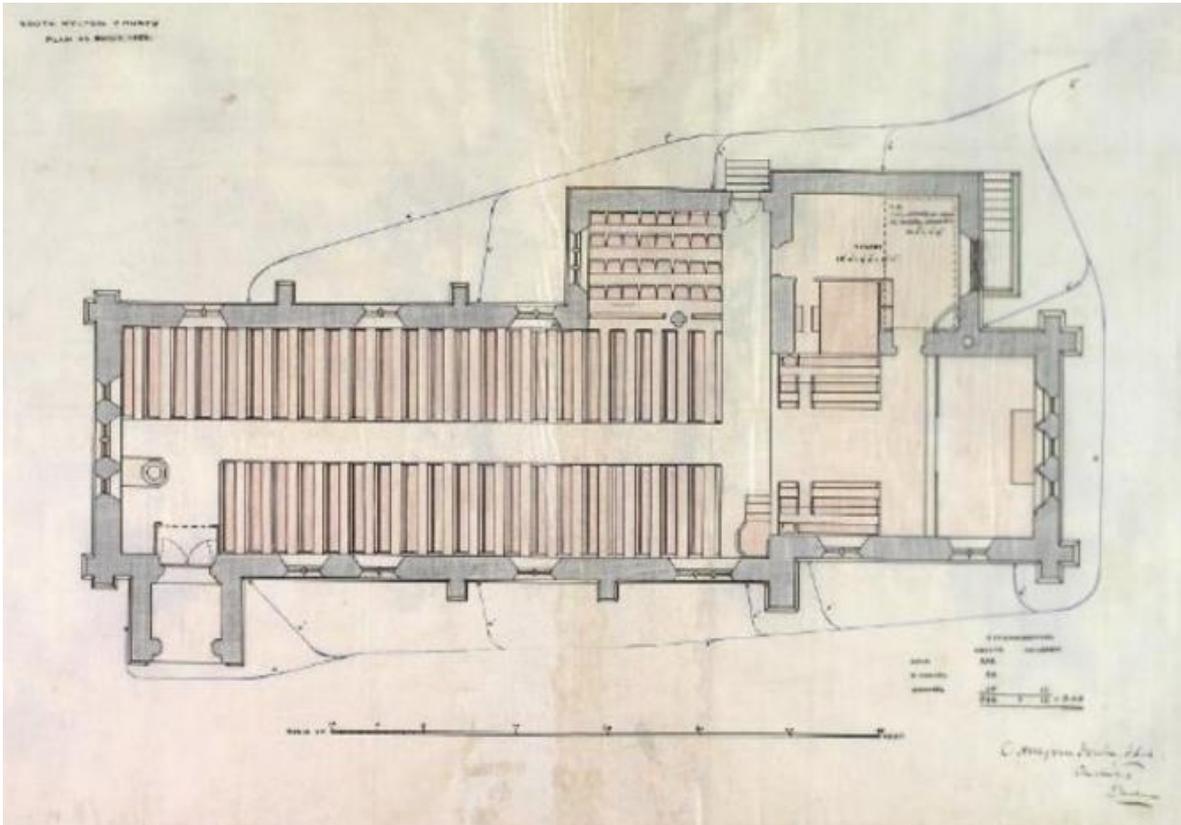
**The Closed Church:** [\[Photographs here.\]](#)



**Church Description (CBC Report PM 2456):**

*"Parish church by Charles Hodgson Fowler, 1879-80, on site of chapel of ease 1817 founded by Admiral Maling destroyed by fire in 1878. Porch on S side of nave replaced by tower and spire in 1930 by G E Charlewood; tower door in cast aluminium by Ronald Sims, 1970. Stained glass by Veronica Whall, Eadie Reid and Leonard Evetts. Of moderate significance overall... stained glass in particular has a local history*

*The church stands in a small churchyard near the centre of South Hylton, The environs of the church retain a village atmosphere, recalling that South Hylton was relatively recently absorbed into Sunderland. The church provides considerable townscape value and interest; indeed, along with the river, it is the principal visual asset of the neighbourhood. All the boundaries are marked with Marsden limestone rubble walls, with some failures to the pointing here and there. Repairs occasionally made by the local authority. A buttress was added on the N side to stabilise the wall. On this stretch, the churchyard is around 1.5m above the neighbouring property.*



Plan signed by signed by Charles Hodgson Fowler, c1878-80; from Lambeth Palace Collection (ICBS08348)):

The **grade II listed** former church of St Mary's is does not lie within a conservation area but is notably one of the few listed buildings South Hylton and, despite closure in 2019, retains significance for the area.

**The church site plan:**



**Historic England gII listing:** ([1390829](https://www.gov.uk/1390829)); *“The plan is simple... Nevertheless this is a well preserved early example of the architect's work, with some particularly fine Arts and Crafts style stained glass and very few alterations. It is a well preserved and good example of the Victorian Gothic Revival style.”*



**Future of the closed church:** The church building is currently undergoing structural monitoring due to ongoing structural movement. Structural engineers’ reports determined site ground subsidence caused by a number of factors and the inability of the churchyard north retaining wall to resist the applied lateral loads. There is interest to secure the future of the former church by putting it to a new community and educational use but, before this proposal can be further developed, the Diocese seeks to support Sunderland City Council undertaking investigations and a resulting programme of structural works to stabilise the churchyard site.



**1. Investigations into soil, churchyard wall foundations and drainage in the closed churchyard, by Sunderland City Council, in response to formation of sinkhole and ground subsidence.**

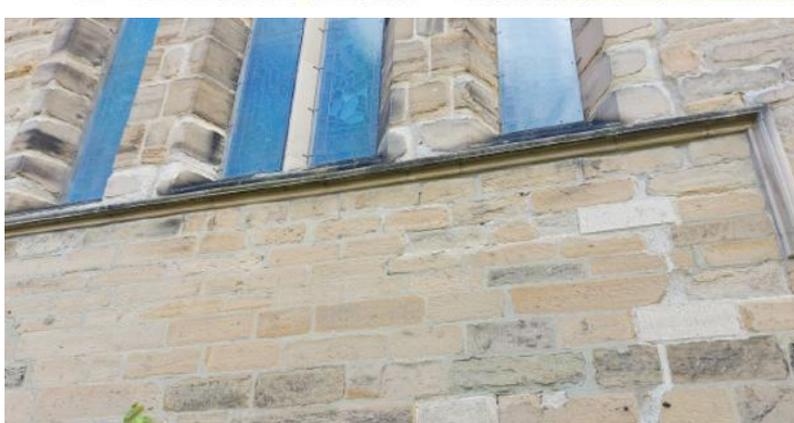
**Engineers' Report:** Diocesan appointed engineers' investigations and studies into current and historic structural cracking, as well as evidence of ground movement and formation of sinkhole, was undertaken by Clach Conservation Engineering and Soil Structures (report attached). These concluded on a cause of:

*"Ground subsidence driving the pattern of structural activity on the building – i.e. the highly unusual plan movement of whole walls, moving with the formation soil...Ground movement seems to be on-going, and the condition of the earth-retaining wall at the N boundary is serious, and appears to be related to the movement of the ground about the W gable, N end of the nave and N transept. Urgent risk mitigation works are recommended to stabilise the retaining walls bounding the site. Further movement of the church building is anticipated. The retaining wall would also need major intervention, comprising sheet piling behind it to admit temporary works, with the wall being demolished and rebuilt on a new piled foundation. Soil anchors which tie the rebuilt stem into the clay subsoil would also be envisaged. There is about 50lm of wall to the N of the building to deal with... 4.12 In addition to the above, the site would need designed land drainage to draw down the water content reaching the clay subsoil. Either way this constitutes a major intervention for a listed building and place of worship, but the ongoing and possibly progressive nature of the problem means that doing nothing is not an option we can recommend either."*

[Tech note addendum: 4.7-5.11]



- 2m deep sink-hole formation below n. wall of church.
- Historic and continuing structural cracking and rotation of the chancel around the organ and chancel arches.
- Previous structural pinning and repair of w. end.

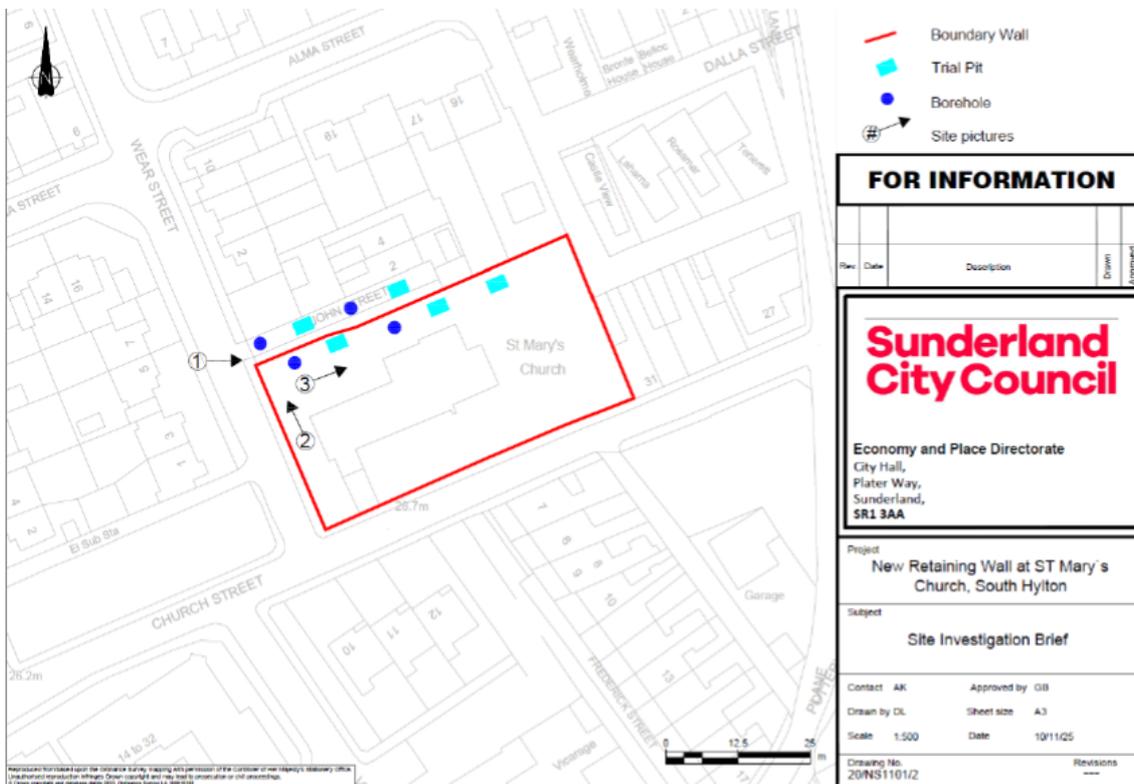




- Structural cracking of n. transept window apex, mullions and sill. Structural monitoring in place since 2023 and continue following pointing and packing of the cracks.
- Faculty records from 1950 and 2000 refer to structural repairs and pinning of the organ arch, n. wall, and w. end of church.
- Structural underpinning was proposed but understood not to have been undertaken.
- Northern Division of the Coal Board paid for repairs c.1950 but DDBF appointed engineers agree with National Coal Authority's current assessment of there being no shallow mines, and no evidence subsidence caused by deep seam mines in this area.
- Engineer's assessment identified a former clay mine immediately to north, church built on poor clay, (ash) fill strata and a perched water table. Surface water from grounds and building being the main 'driver of change'. North boundary retaining wall unable to withstand the lateral loads.

**Proposals for intrusive ground investigations in the churchyard (soil and foundation investigations):**

The schedule by Sunderland City Council proposes five trial pits (1mx1mx1.2m depth) and four deep core (small diameter) percussive and rotary boreholes of 10-15m depth on the north and south sides of the north boundary retaining wall. (Separate permissions with party wall agreement to be sought from the owner of No. 2 John Street). Stand pipes for gas monitoring will remain in place within the test pit locations for up to 6 months. Results of testing and core samples will assist Sunderland City Council in forming design proposals and costs to construct a replacement sheet pile and masonry retaining north boundary churchyard wall, to arrest the subsidence impacting the churchyard site. [Refer to St Mary's Church South Hylton Report]



[St\_Marys\_Church\_251110) – St Mary's Church South Hylton Report - Sunderland City Council Engineer]



### Archaeology and buried remains:

Mitigation is required in respect of archaeology as the works present the risk of impact on the burial ground and a risk of harm to unknown location of buried remains. The churchyard pre-dates the current church and there have been burials since its consecration in 1821. The specification states Existing known graves will be monitored and an archaeological watching brief will be in place. The Tyne & Wear Archaeology Service specification proposes:

*“trial pit excavation to be monitored by an archaeologist to observe and record the presence (or absence) of any archaeological remains. If archaeological remains are encountered that may be so significant as to merit preservation in situ, the appointed contractor should liaise with the principal contractor to pause the works and seek advice... any burials should be recorded and left in place and the trial pit relocated if necessary. Disarticulated human remains including any bone found within the arisings of the boreholes should be retained and reburied in the churchyard, preferably in the backfill of the trial pits”.*

[MON20344 WB spec. – Tyne & Wear Archaeological Services]

The specification proposals have had DAC recommendation but await further directions from the Consistory Court. There is no known burial plan for the churchyard. The majority of gravestones have previously been cleared or relocated by the Council.

### Proposal for Sinkhole:

This petition confirms that the churchyard sink hole, which formed below the church building’s north wall (7m from west corner) in July 2024, was filled-in with a lean mix concrete, (a low-strength mix, consisting of 1 part cement to 7 parts aggregate and hand-vibrated to remove air pockets). This was to ensure the void provided with a non-structural fill and to prevent further loss of soil, further water ingress and an increased likelihood of further structural defect to the church structure. This was on the advice of Clach Conservation Structural Engineers following completion of their assessment and report.

[Refer to photographs of sink hole attached.]



### Proposals for Investigations into rainwater drainage:

Permission is requested for shallow excavations in the location of drain gullies to break into heads of drains for rodding and CCTV survey purposes where required. All drainage to be repaired and reinstated.

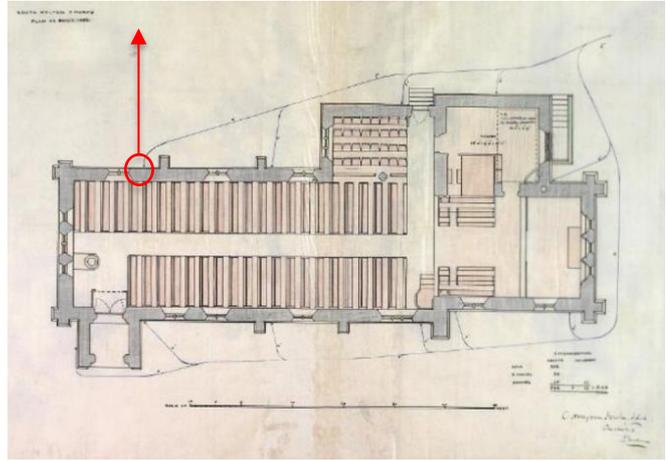
Engineers’ structural reports identified rainwater (particularly rainwater soakaway drainage from the former church building into the churchyard burial ground), as being one of the primary ‘drivers of change’ to the site strata. The report concluded on:



*“A possible perched water table is implied, whereby rainwater from the site is percolating through the poor quality upfill, and sitting on the clay subsoil, softening it and driving the differential settlement and rotational components also observed at the building. The site would need designed land drainage to draw down the water content reaching the clay subsoil.”*

[Tech note addendum: 4.7-5.11]

In 2024, gas pipe replacement work to the church property uncovered and located salt-glazed clay soakaway drain serving the northeast corner of the church, suggesting soakaway drains directed to the northeast corner of the churchyard site, as per the original Charles Hodgson Fowler site plan.



However, initial drain survey undertaken by Sunderland City Council and DDBF has indicated at least one gully on the north side (west end) drains through the churchyard and north boundary retaining wall. (Red arrow superimposed on CH Fowler site plan and as indicated on Sunderland Council annotated aerial plan...)



[Sunderland CC Initial Drain Survey Sketch]

The drain can be identified with cast iron outlet passing through the retaining wall onto the north side of John Street. The drain itself was found to be blocked with only a little water issuing from the pipe and the majority assumed to be “leaking from the pipe at one of the collars upstream” [Report by Sunderland City Council Service Delivery Manager (Drainage)].

There are no other drainage outlets through the north retaining wall, leading to the assumption that, in addition to this defective drain, all other soakaway drains from the church building terminate within the churchyard boundary. Whilst ground water weepholes are located along the north retaining wall these are dry and do not appear to be providing any effective drainage to the retained churchyard burial ground.





Weep holes along north boundary wall on John Street historically dry, some with nesting birds.



(left) Limited surface water draining from the church building western RWP gully through outlet in north wall.  
 (right) NWL drainage asset plan illustrating combined inspection chamber no.3008 in northwest area of churchyard.

Refer to *NWL drainage asset plan*. NWL suggest a combined sewer inspection chamber (no.3008) located within the churchyard burial ground, to the northwest of the church building. This chamber cannot be located by survey and does not appear to exist. Sunderland Council’s survey confirmed of this combined sewer: “The sewer does not seem to go under the church wall as plotted. It turns approx 90 degrees as shown” [Sunderland CC Initial Drain Survey Sketch]. For clarity, the combined sewer runs downstream, from west (Wear Street) along John Street to inspection chamber 3005 and then turns 90 degrees (to the north).

**Second phase faculty drainage proposals:**

To rectify the impact that site surface water drainage is having on the site and contributing to subsidence, the structural engineers’ reports conclude: “The site would need designed land drainage to draw down the water content reaching the clay subsoil.” Sunderland City Council agrees with DDBF towards working towards rectification of the surface water drainage by way of relaying the surface water drainage pipes from all church building gullies and connecting to the combined public (adopted) sewer. The existing vestry foul water drain from the sink has always drained into a SW gully.

Ultimately, putting the property to a new community use would require the addition of WCs and foul drainage and so it is envisaged that, following investigations, a second faculty petition is to be made for reinstatement of the new structural retaining north boundary wall to the churchyard that will accommodate a combined drain connection passing through it, to connect into the existing combined sewer on John Street.

Northumbrian Water Ltd have confirmed that a new combined drain connection into existing inspection chamber 3005 would require an application to their New Developments Team, for making a new connection.



## 2. The laying of a replacement water pipe through the south and east parts of churchyard

DDBF is also seeking to give permission to Northumbrian Water Ltd to replace the defective (Victorian) lead pipe water main with new blue Medium-Density Polyethylene (MDPE) pipe in a hand excavated trench to 750mm depth. This work is to be funded by NWL as part of their commercial 'lead free' project. [Refer to NWL Lead Pipe St Mary's Survey Page 1 & Page 2]

Northumbrian Water Ltd have provided sketch proposals for Option 1 and Option 2.



**Proposal:** Two routes were identified for a new pipe passing through the churchyard. Whilst a new chamber with stopcock was fitted on the main supply entering the property in 2023 (Church Street – towards east end of churchyard), NWL surveyor was not satisfied with Option 1 which would involve entering below the south boundary stone wall, due to their concern for the stability of the wall and the proximity of mature trees.

**NWL preference and proposal is for Option 2:** a new mains supply entering the property from Church Street at the west (footpath) end and then running east through the churchyard along the south side of the church building – avoiding burial slabs and gravestones. This despite the longer route and NWL being aware there are unmarked burials dating back to 1821 and the possibility of a hand excavation required.

Proposed depth of trench is 750mm. Whilst NWL stated preference for a grundomat mole between excavated pits. **The DAC advised it recommended Option 2 subject to the trench being excavated by hand.**



**Option 1 (not preferred by NWL)**  
From location of existing mains supply stop cock on Church Street.





July 2023 mains water leak in the east end of the churchyard. The original lead supply pipe was turned off at the new chamber and stop-cock installed on Church Road.

Option 2 would take alternative site entry below churchyard path at the west, avoiding passage below the south boundary stone wall, but would ultimately follow a similar route to the cellar at the east end.

**Option 2 (NWL preferred and proposed route)**

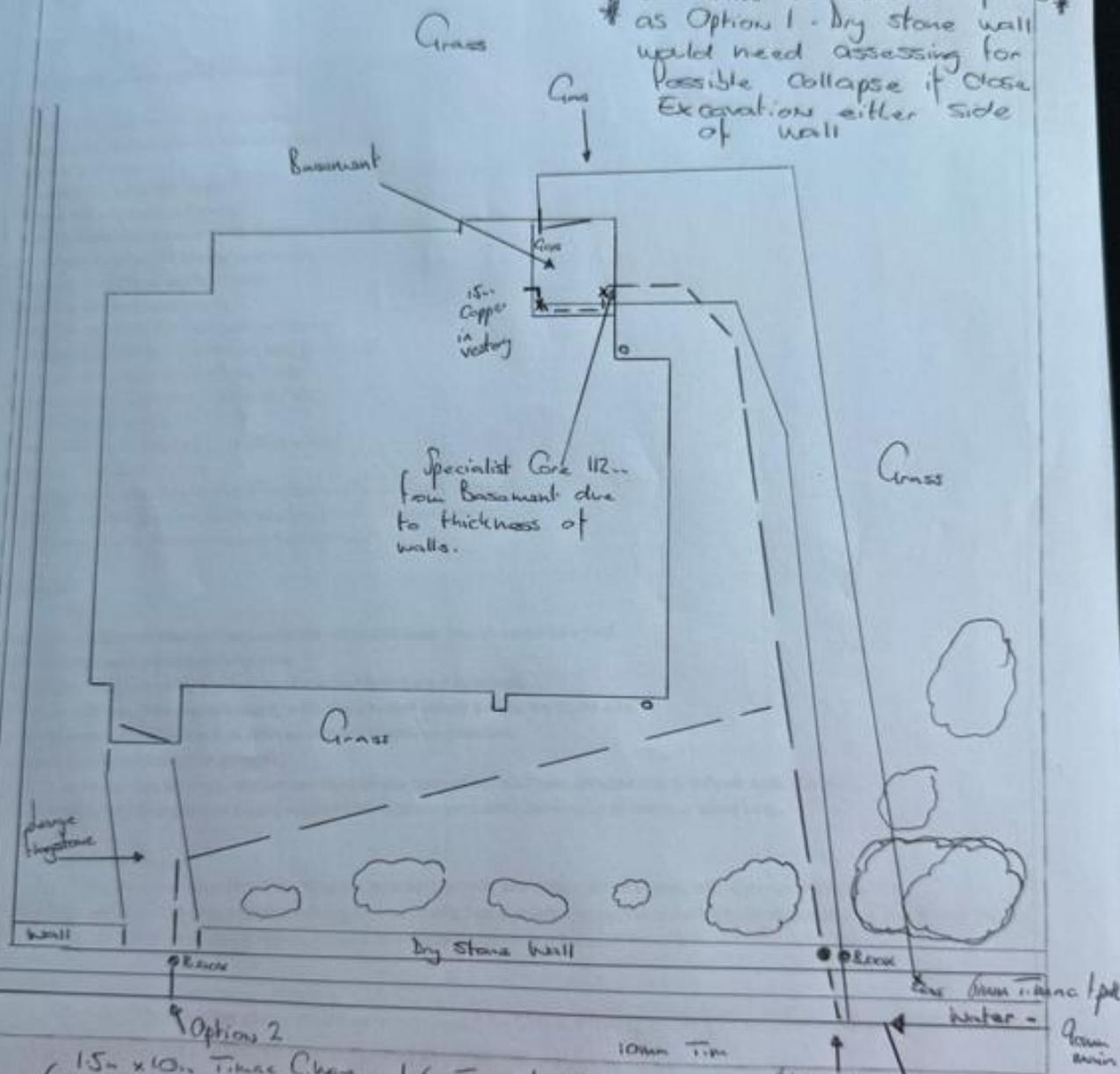


Refer to document [*Notes Record\_Burst Water Main in Churchyard*] for details of the 2023 burst water main at the east end of the churchyard and NWL's work to install a new external water chamber and stop-cock, located in the Church Street footpath (south), towards the east end of the churchyard. The water supply has been turned off since July 2023 and the ground at the east end of the churchyard has since dried out.



Additional Comments:

UL + NW to discuss options as Option 1 - Dry stone wall would need assessing for possible collapse if close excavation either side of wall



- Options 2
- 15m x 10m Terrace Gully + 1x 6m Terrace 1/pt for Drainage section
  - 2 x 6m Terrace 6-pt all the floor
- Survey Name: .....
- 5m x Private Fings
  - 35m x Grass
  - 15m x Grass
  - 7m x Grass to PoE

Internals = .....

Date: 2/12/25

Specialist Core Drill 112 -

- 4" Duct + log + Plug ends
- 25-15 S.tap
- 15 Double Check valve
- 4.5m x 15m Copper - log + clip to wall
- link into 15m Conex Tee

- Options 1
- 15m x 10m Terrace Gully
  - 3.5m x 6m Terrace Epitall
  - Dry Stone Wall -
  - 7m x Unmade - Trees/Bushes
  - 15m x Grass
  - 7m x Grass to PoE

[NWL Lead Pipe St Mary's Survey Page 2]

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