

# **12th Century landmark could be closed to public forever if funding isn't secured, group warns**

**Vandals have also caused a headache for heritage group which runs the attraction**

**A 12th Century Leicestershire landmark could be closed off to the public forever unless funding for those who maintain it is secured.**

**The bleak warning was made by the chairman of The Friends of Grace Dieu Priory, David Whitt, who warned that serious funding concerns could mean that access to the priory, near Coalville, could be lost forever.**

**Mr Whitt said that, for now at least, volunteers on the site were “working hard, but were struggling” amid the serious concerns over its financial position.**

**“I don’t like to say it, but there is a very real risk that we won’t be able to open the site anymore. It’s that serious,” he told LeicestershireLive.**

**“We have some money to tide us over for a few months and we’ve dipped into our reserves, but that will only go so far. No-one has a bottomless pit of money.”**

**For years, The group has secured money from the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) which paid it for school trips it had organised around the historic ruin.**

**However, the RPA funding is due to expire next year, while the ongoing pandemic has meant school trips and other funding avenues have been stopped in their tracks.**

**“We are worried, of course we are”, Mr Whitt added.**

**"We have given more than 20 years to helping maintain and preserve the site and to lose it now is a concern.**

**Expenses such as grass-cutting that The Friends pay the county council to undertake and insurance for those on the site regularly totals to around £3,000 a year.**

**With finances already stretched, the group was hit by vandals who caused more than £1,000 worth of damage to fences around the site last month.**

**The incident, which Mr Whitt called “demoralising”, could be further compounded with the need to create a new access to the site.**

**A culvert has been discovered under the path to the priory with fears that it is eroding away. Plans are now in place to remove the path altogether, leaving The Friends with the reality of building a new footbridge.**

**This could set them back by a further £40,000.**

**“It sounds a lot but it will become necessary, especially if we are to create wheelchair access and safety for all involved,” said Mr Whitt.**

**“People wrongly assume we are funded by the council but we are not. We rely solely on funding from others, including the public.”**

**“Without that, we will not be able to operate. All these things add up and make finances tight.”**

**The vandalism will cost more than £1,000 to repair (Image: Friends of Gracedieu Priory)**

**Following the recent vandalism, The Friends have set up an online fundraiser in a bid to secure much-needed money.**

**Without substantial donations, the Priory as a venue to visit is on borrowed time.**

**“We are working hard as volunteers to do all we can for the site, but we are struggling,” said Mr Whitt.**

**“Anything and anyone who can help us in any way will be appreciated so much. This site should be kept for years to come.”**

**“It’s been around since the 1100s, we’ve had it only 20 years or so. It wouldn’t be right to lose it now.”**