

St Nicholas Church Hall, Marston

Disability Assessment and Policy

Issue 2

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Marston Church Properties

Preface

St Nicholas Church Hall is a former 19th century village school which has been adapted for use as a church hall and community centre. It belongs to Marston Church Properties (MCP), a registered charity and limited company which was set up to manage the hall following its conversion from the former school use. Attached to the hall is a small cottage which is let to a tenant. MCP uses the income from the cottage and lettings of the hall to maintain the property and subsidise its use by community groups.

The hall is used on a daily basis by a wide range of groups within the local community. In addition it is a popular venue for ad hoc meetings (eg parish consultations) and parties for children, weddings, funerals and christenings.

The hall includes a large meeting room (divisible into two) downstairs and two small meetings rooms upstairs. It is equipped with a modern kitchen, sound system, furniture and rather outdated WCs. Outside there is a small enclosed yard. The capacity of the hall is about 60 people (seated).

A substantial proportion of hall users have some form of disability, including limitations to mobility, sight, hearing, chronic physical or mental illness. Many, though not all, of these disabilities are associated with the infirmities of age.

General Statement of Policy

We will do our utmost to make the hall accessible to people with disabilities so that they can take as full a part as possible in the various community activities which are held there.

This policy will be implemented by means of the arrangements set out below and will be reviewed by the trustees at least once every five years.

1 Legislation and Guidance

The key legislation in the UK is the Equality Act 2010. This extends the previous Disability Discrimination Act. It defines disability as:

“a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on an individual’s ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

This includes the many “hidden” disabilities, for example epilepsy, arthritis, deafness, dyslexia, diabetes, autism (to some extent), and also many different conditions which cause significant levels of pain.

The government has published a summary in: Equality Act 2010: What do I need to know? Disability Quick Start Guide.

The diocese of Oxford has published more detailed guidance for churches in the document "Welcome, Inclusion, Respect: A Commitment to a Church open to all" and our policy is based on its recommendations.

2 Diverse needs

We use the term “people with disabilities” as a shorthand, but it needs to be understood very broadly. “People with disabilities” are all very different, all very individual. People with the same impairment will have differing needs and views. Within the last decade users have included people with the following impairments:

- mobility, some using wheelchairs and many having some degree of difficulty in walking, standing or sitting eg due to arthritis, stroke or other illness
- vision, some being blind and many suffering from impaired vision making it difficult to read
- hearing, many with impaired hearing
- mental health, including effects of stroke, Alzheimer's disease, mental illness and inborn disabilities

In addition there are people with less obvious chronic conditions, including diabetes, heart disease and allergies, and specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia. The total proportion of users with disabilities of some sort almost certainly exceeds the proportion of 20% in the general population.

We also need to consider and accommodate, so far as possible, the potential needs of visitors and new users which may be different from these.

3 Accessibility

3.1 Getting to the hall

The hall is reasonably accessible by public transport; there is a bus stop just adjacent which is served about once every 30 min. There is a shelter with a seat on one side of the road.

Car parking is on the street; there is no special provision for disabled access and in many places access is difficult due to high kerbs. A drop-off point is kept clear near the entrance. There is a ramp from this point to the main door which is suitable for wheelchairs. The hall is within a controlled parking zone which restricts parking for non-permit holders to 2 hours between 9 am and 5 pm Monday to Friday but with exemption for blue badge holders.

3.2 Within the hall

Accessibility to the ground floor meeting room is reasonable, though the entrance lobby is restricted.

There is a WC which is suitable for wheelchair access.

The stairs are fitted with clearly visible nosings for the benefit of users with limited mobility or visual acuity.

A stair gate is provided as a safety precaution when toddlers are using the building.

The upper floor, including storerooms and office, are not accessible to wheelchair users or people with limited mobility

3.3 Summary

Provisions we have made	Things we could improve
Drop-off point close to entrance, can be marked with cones if needed	
Renovate WCs to make them more accessible, especially for wheelchair users.	
Reasonable access to main entrance by ramp	
Nosings provided to stairs	Install additional handrail to stairs

4 Visibility

Light levels are good and adequate for users with limited visual acuity.

A good modern projection system is available and is useful for presentation of materials (songs, pictures etc) for users who have difficulty with reading printed material.

Provisions we have made	Things we could improve
Good light levels	
Good quality projection system	

5 Audibility

There is a relatively high level of background noise in the room when large numbers of people are gathered. This can be a problem for people with hearing impairment, especially tinnitus.

We have installed a good quality sound system with radio microphones and an induction loop for hearing aid users. This is particularly helpful for elderly people.

There are no signing provisions for deaf users; this would need to be arranged by individual groups.

Provisions we have made	Things we could improve
Sound system with T loop	Consider measures to reduce ambient noise levels at next redecoration cycle

6 User Groups

To a large extent, the specific needs of individual users will be addressed by the leaders and other members of the group to which they belong or attend. Many of the groups are particularly involved with elderly people. They include members with professional training in the care of and provision for people with disabilities who can assess their own needs.

The trustees of MCP will support these groups and are willing to make such modifications to the building and facilities as are reasonable and practicable with the aim of making access as wide as possible.