

Fire Risk Assessment

Shepton Mallet Parish Church & Peter Street Rooms

Please ensure you have read and understood the contents of this booklet.

If you have any questions or concerns about any aspects of our Fire Risk Assessment or Health & Safety policy at Saint Peter and Paul's Parish Church, or the Parish Rooms, please contact one of the persons named in this booklet

(Revised February 2019 v1)

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Fire Risk Assessment

The Parish Church of St Peter and St Paul, Shepton Mallet & Peter Street Rooms (revised February 2019)

Responsible Persons: Mr Nicholas Bennett (Churchwarden), Mr Vaughan Ives (Churchwarden), Revd Jonathan Hunter Dunn (Rector)

Competent Persons: Mrs Helen Bennett (Benefice Administrator), Mr Robert Goodhand (PCC Secretary)

Description of Sites

The church comprises two sites in close proximity to each other and to the town centre: the Church Building itself and the Parish Rooms (also known as Peter Street Rooms).

1 Church Building

The church building is a substantial stone construction of Saxon origin and is known to be the oldest building in Shepton Mallet. It is in active use as a parish church providing seating accommodation of about 400 persons for regular Christian worship, funeral and wedding services and occasional concerts and other events.

1.1 Identified Fire Risks

1.1.1 Heating System and Electrical Wiring

The body of the church is heated by a modern gas-fired boiler system comprising four individual boilers mounted at high level in an adjoining vestry. This system and its associated pumps provide heated water to radiator pipes feeding most areas of the church. Approximately ten fan-assisted radiators are employed to boost the warm airflow to ensure adequate coverage of the building.

These radiators are not covered or blocked and have adequate airflow. However the unit at the west entrance to the church has a table containing promotional literature located beneath the grille. It is felt that the air temperature is never high enough for combustible items placed on or near this table to ignite. In any case, during services, this area is staffed by sidesman and churchwardens who would ensure that this potential danger is minimised.

Additionally, prior to a service or other event when the heating is on, the church is generally occupied by verging staff, clergy, and other persons associated with the administration of the church, who take it upon themselves to check that radiators are not blocked or covered.

The church's electrical wiring is inspected every five years by reputable and NICEIC Registered electrical contractors. Any defects or improvements highlighted by these inspection reports will be remedied by such contractors, when deemed appropriate by the PCC. The contractors will ensure that electrical switches, isolators and other components conform to current HSE and IET standards and therefore constitute a low fire risk.

1.1.2 Other Fuels

No other fuels are used or stored on the premises.

1.1.3 Candles and Candle-lit Services

The very nature of a church environment requires that lit candles are present during most services and during some other events.

During regular services, altar candles and, very occasionally, candles processed by servers are used. Adequate training is given to anyone who acts as a server (acolyte) or to anyone carrying a lit candle to ensure that they understand the potential risks of allowing candle wax to fall onto clothing or other combustible surfaces such as pews or carpets. They are also made aware of the risks of allowing their hair to come into close proximity to open flames.

Fire extinguishers suitable for operating on non-electrical and electrical fires are kept at several points in the church. During major services, there are at least two churchwardens or stewards present who are familiar with the operation and location of these appliances and would be called upon to operate them if required. Furthermore, we endeavour to apprise resident and visiting clergy of the location of the fire extinguishers for use during services when other officials are not present.

At services at certain times of the year, candles are issued to all members of the congregation and it is possible that upwards of several hundred individual candles may be lit at one time. We acknowledge that this presents considerable risk of fire or personal injury should candles be dropped onto combustible materials such as bags and clothing.

For these services the following extra safety procedures are carried out to ensure that:

- There are extra stewards on duty within the body of the church who are briefed on dealing with an outbreak of fire, extinguishing and evacuation. A first aid kit is available. Where possible and appropriate, volunteers from the Red Cross or St John Ambulance are asked to attend.
- Extra fire extinguishers are brought out into the body of the church and that a hand-held extinguisher is available by a steward to be deployed immediately an incident occurs.
- At the start of the service or at some other appropriate point the congregation is briefed by the clergy or another church official on the potential dangers of hand-held candles and in particular the risks of allowing small children to hold them unassisted by an adult. This person will also point out all available exits and procedures for evacuation. Furthermore, he or she will instruct the congregation that standing or movement about the church is not allowed during the period of the service when candles are lit.
- Water and wet rags are made available to smother a person's hair should this be an issue.
- All available doors that can be used as exits are unlocked and cleared of obstructions.
- The period of time during a service or event where candles are lit and held by members of the congregation is kept to a minimum.
- No candles or open flames of any description are left burning when the building is unoccupied or unattended.
- Stewards at main candle-lit services are now asked to wear a yellow hi-vis tabard.

1.1.4 Smoking and Matches

As of 1st July 2007 smoking is not allowed in any public building in England. Prior to this date it was extremely rare to witness smoking in a church even when the building was left open and unsupervised. However, we are aware that children, persons under the influence of alcohol and general 'mischief makers' may enter the building at anytime to smoke, play with matches and start small fires. To minimise the risks of a small fire escalating, several fire extinguishers are available in prominent positions for use by the perpetrators or members of the general public on discovering smoke or flames. Furthermore, we encourage members of the congregation to visit the church as often as possible when in the locality in order to give the church an air of busyness.

1.2 Fire Detection

The church has no automatic fire detection system. Therefore there is no requirement for regular fire alarm tests and evacuation drills. However, as mentioned in section 1.1.3 above, during large public services or concerts which involve a congregation of several hundred or more, and especially where naked flames are used, a briefing on evacuation procedures will be given at the commencement of the service.

The church is generally open to the public during the hours of 08.30 until about 17.00 daily. During this time it is largely unsupervised by Church officials, although occasionally at certain times of the year, usually during school holidays and after periods of vandalism against the building, a stewarding scheme is operated. This entails members of the church or other volunteers being present in the church on a rota basis to cover all aspects of security.

During services, concerts or other events, if a fire is detected, a churchwarden, steward, member of the clergy or other church official will call the emergency services. They will also attempt to tackle the fire if considered safe to do so. They will initiate evacuation procedure and ensure that no one re-enters until safe to do so.

However, when the church is empty, we rely on the vigilance of visitors, passers-by and our commercial and residential neighbours to detect the early signs of fire and alert the emergency service by the usual means. Small fires, if detected early may be tackled by deploying the fire extinguishers available in the church.

1.3 Escape Routes

There is no emergency lighting system in the church. However, there is powerful sodium lighting that remains on during services even in the daytime during summer months. Consideration will be given to having several powerful torches available in the adjoining vestry, which could be deployed in an emergency. In the event of smoke causing poor visibility, stewards would indicate escape routes by the use of these torches.

The church has three major entrance and exit routes. The main entrance/exit is to the west and there are further doors to the north, and south. All lead out onto the churchyard and away from the property allowing prompt evacuation. Furthermore, there are two doors to the outside at the south-east corner of the building, access to which is through the adjoining vestry. For security reasons, these external vestry doors are general kept locked and bolted, but consideration will be given to unlocking them before major services and events and especially when naked flames are to be used.

Regulation Fire Exit signs are installed above the three main escape routes.

1.4 Fire Fighting Equipment

The church building does not have an automatic fire fighting system such as spray jets. There are no hose reels. Several fire extinguishers are available in the body of the church for tackling small fires.

1.5 Regular Checks of Equipment and Training

The church has a maintenance contract with Bristol Fire of Yate, Bristol. An annual inspection is carried out by this company to ensure that the extinguishers employed in this building and on our other sites are maintained in accordance with BS 5306 part 3.

Regular checks of the extinguishers are made by the churchwardens and vergers to ensure that devices have not been discharged or become unserviceable.

We endeavour to hold regular discussions with key members of the church staff such as vergers, clergy and other administrative staff on all aspects of fire safety and fire risk assessment. The Parish Administrator also helps to ensure that regular checks are made on equipment and maintenance contract visits are carried out. Prior to major services and events, especially when naked flames are to be used, extra stewards are utilised to assist with the safe running of the event and to assist in evacuation procedures should this become necessary.

1.6 Effects of Fire On Other Buildings

The church building is self-contained and detached from any neighbouring building. There is, perhaps, a slight risk that during a major fire, burning roof materials could be blown onto nearby properties.

Vehicular access to the church is generally good, although because of the nearby street market at certain times of the week, there are occasional obstructions by other vehicles. Signs are located on the churchyard railings to advise people about careless parking.

We enjoy a good relationship with the members of the local retained fire service. They are familiar with the church and its unique construction and are pleased to advise on all aspects of fire safety and fire risk assessment for which we are grateful.

2 Parish Rooms (Peter Street Rooms)

2.1 Identified Fire Risks

The Parish Rooms comprise a suite of large and small meeting rooms, kitchen, toilets and store rooms. The building is of stone and brick construction over three storeys with a cellar that was once used for meetings and young people's activities. This cellar is no-longer in use, but contains certain items for storage. The Parish Office is located in the Wells Room on the first floor.

2.1.1 Heating System and Electrical Wiring

The rooms are heated by a gas-fired boiler system which feeds hot water to fan assisted radiators in each of the rooms. The boiler is located in a storeroom and is kept clear of combustible materials such as paper and fabrics, although this type of material is stored elsewhere in the room. All efforts by the churchwardens and Parish Administrator are directed towards ensuring that the boiler is not obstructed, neither are the fan heaters in all rooms. Notices to this effect are placed in rooms where chairs may be inadvertently stacked against heaters.

The church's electrical wiring is maintained by reputable and NICEIC Registered electrical contractors. The Churchwardens visually inspect the installation for defects and deterioration annually. Any defects or improvements highlighted by these inspections will be remedied by the above contractors, when deemed appropriate by the PCC. The contractors will ensure that electrical switches, isolators and other components conform to current HSE and IET standards and therefore constitute a low fire risk. The Parish Office contains electrical equipment and is kept locked when unattended. The photo-copier is located outside the Parish Office on the first floor landing area and is switched off when the Parish Office is unattended.

2.1.2 Other Fuels

Apart from the very occasional short-term storage of tins of paint and brush cleaning fluids, no other fuels are used or stored on the premises.

2.1.3 Candles and Candle-lit Services

It is exceedingly rare to conduct a meeting or service in the Parish Rooms where candles are issued to Church members or visitors to hold. Candles may occasionally be lit on tables for Lent Courses and informal worship sessions, but these rare occasions are considered a very low fire risk. No other naked flames are used by members of the church or by visiting groups. Matches may occasionally be used for lighting the gas cooker or for the lighting of birthday cake candles

2.1.4 Smoking and Matches

External users of the Rooms are made aware of the conditions of uses which stipulates that smoking is not permitted anywhere on the premises. Furthermore, as of 1st July 2007 smoking is not allowed in any public building in England and appropriately placed signage reinforces this rule.

2.2 Fire Detection

The Rooms have no automatic fire detection system. Therefore there is no requirement for regular fire alarm tests and evacuation drills. However, we will endeavour to ensure that during large gatherings such as AGMs or parish parties, a briefing will take place to inform everyone of the available fire exits and location of extinguishers.

We are not obliged under current legislation to install an integrated smoke detection and alarm system. However, we have installed independent (domestic style) smoke detectors on each floor and at other strategic points within the building. It is considered that this will enable persons meeting in closed rooms to be alerted by audible means if smoke is detected elsewhere in the building.

The Rooms are generally locked and not open to the public. Visiting groups have access to the Rooms for their various events and meetings. During this time the Rooms are largely unsupervised by church officials, although during Church meetings and events it is common for at least one Responsible or Competent Person to be on site.

During occupation, if a fire is detected, the onus is on those present to call the emergency services. They will also attempt to tackle the fire if considered safe to do so. Small fires, if detected early may be tackled by deploying the fire extinguishers available at the various locations within the Rooms. They will initiate evacuation procedure and ensure that no one re-enters until safe to do so. The priority will be on the safety of people not property.

However, when the Rooms are empty, we rely on the vigilance of passers by and our residential neighbours to detect the early signs of fire and alert the emergency service by the usual means.

2.3 Escape Routes

There is an emergency lighting system in the Parish Rooms. This will come into effect only when the mains electricity fails as it is not interlinked with any fire or smoke detection system. The emergency lighting is checked regularly by disconnecting the incoming mains supply to the building at the master switch.

The Rooms have two ground-floor entrance and exit routes. The main entrance/exit is to the north, which leads into Peter Street and there is a further door to the south, which leads into a courtyard, with two further exits leading away from the property. There is also another little-used entrance/exit to the east, which leads into a shared access area with the adjoining property. During occupation the main door to Peter Street is usually kept unlocked; during Sunday coffee-time occupation and during other gatherings the secondary door to the south (to the courtyard) is also unlocked. However, for smaller gatherings and use by outside groups, this door is often kept locked for security reasons.

In addition to the main exits mentioned above, the large room on the ground floor (The Somerset Room) has a push bar emergency exit at the north wall, which leads directly onto Peter Street. The equivalent room on the first floor (The Den or Mendip Room) has a push bar emergency exit to the west of the building, which leads directly onto a fire escape staircase. The uppermost room in the building (Dorothy Eggleton Room) also has a push bar emergency exit that leads directly onto the external fire escape staircase. The cellar is accessed internally from the ground floor hallway by the south door, and has fully maintained emergency lighting (permanently illuminated exit light above the fire escape door). There is a push bar emergency exit in the cellar, which leads from the cellar's kitchen area via an external stone stairway to the rear courtyard at the south of the building. This cellar room is no-longer used for meetings.

The other emergency exit doors in the Parish Rooms are regularly checked by Churchwardens and the Parish Administrator for operation to ensure they are in full working order and any defects are rectified immediately by builders, where appropriate, in consultation with the PCC. The external fire escape stairway is also checked for integrity and obstruction, as are internal stairways, landings and corridors. We have recently installed an external CCTV camera overlooking the fire escape landing to ensure there is no fly-tipping or refuse causing any obstructions to the escape route.

Regulation Fire Exit signs (illuminated by a maintained supply where appropriate) are installed above the main escape routes.

2.4 Fire Fighting Equipment

The Parish Rooms building does not have an automatic fire-fighting system such as spray jets. There are no hose reels. Appropriate type fire extinguishers are available on each floor of the building and in the kitchen where there is also a fire blanket. The appliances are mounted in accordance with European law and the appropriate advice cards are mounted alongside.

There are fire advice cards mounted at strategic points within the building (see below).

2.5 Regular Checks of Equipment and Training

The Church has a maintenance contract with Bristol Fire of Yate, Bristol. An annual inspection is carried out by this company to ensure that the extinguishers employed in this building and on our other sites are maintained in accordance with BS 5306 part 3.

Additional regular checks of the extinguishers are made by the churchwardens and Parish Administrator to ensure that devices have not been discharged or become unserviceable.

We endeavour to hold regular discussions with key members of the church staff such as vergers, clergy and other administrative personnel on all aspects of fire safety and fire risk assessment. The Parish Administrator also ensures that regular checks are made on equipment and maintenance contract visits are carried out.

Other users of the Rooms (other than Church groups) are asked to ensure that they appoint their own Responsible Person and familiarise themselves with the location of the fire fighting equipment, emergency exits and evacuation procedures. This requirement is written into the hire agreement of the rooms.

There are laminated cards at strategic points in the building indicating the procedures for dealing with the outbreak of fire. These cards conform to the standard layout and give advice on what action to take on discovering a fire, evacuation procedures and how to contact the emergency services.

2.6 Effects of Fire On Other Buildings

The Parish Rooms building is semi-detached and party adjoins a residential property to the east. There is, perhaps, a risk that during a major fire, the adjoining property could be compromised although party walls are of thick stone construction. Burning roof materials could be blown onto nearby properties.

Vehicular access to the front (north side) of the building is good, however the rear of the property can only be accessed by emergency services via a gate (west side) or via the churchyard (north) through a series of gates and steps.

We enjoy a good relationship with the members of the local retained fire service. They are familiar with the Parish Rooms and are pleased to advise on all aspects of fire safety and fire risk assessment for which we are grateful.

Updated February 2019

Nick Bennett

Churchwarden & PSR Trustee
SS Peter & Paul, Shepton Mallet