

Accessibility Strategy

The Parochial Church Council (PCC) of Berkswich

Introduction

This policy is a result of discussions with the Diocesan Enabling-Church Advisor and a site visit to look at all three of our church buildings in summer 2018. The paper is designed to provide guiding principles in respect of accessibility within the parish, our buildings and our work. It lays out general principles which we will guide our practice as well as looking at more specific strategies for our 3 church buildings with a view to making them as accessible as possible.

The document is a guiding strategy and purposefully does not go into specific detail on some of the necessary adaptations required. However, the policy does represent a general “direction of travel” and it is hoped that more detail can be added to the document in consultation with the relevant people following consultation processes.

General Principles

Definition of Accessibility

All too often accessibility is seen in terms of purely physical impairments, and in turn the term disability has become synonymous with poor mobility and wheelchairs. However, we want to expand the definition of accessibility within Berkswich Parish to include a definition of disability that is as wide as possible, as well as incorporating diversity. Promoting equality means accepting, understanding, valuing and respecting differences and ensuring that all people are treated equally, regardless of their background, in the Christian tradition so that our parish work, and the buildings used for this, are truly open to all.

Facilitating Change and Ensuring Everyone has a Voice

We know that changes can affect people and sometimes people feel powerless. We will therefore explore ways of gaining meaningful feedback on any changes within the parish so that everyone is given a voice. We will ensure that our feedback methods are as accessible as possible and incorporate good practice, taking into account different preferences and abilities.

Minimum standards

Our minimum standards will always aim to be the most accessible option for everyone. We will work towards ensuring that we do not stigmatise the accessibility needs of individuals and we will aim to promote equality throughout all our work.

Written Materials

We will aim to produce all printed materials in a size, font and colour which promotes maximum accessibility. We will dispense with alternative versions of information for people with specific needs and instead have one standard for all.

Publicity

We will seek to ensure that any publicity materials promote a wide range of individuals and take into account the rich diversity of the parish. Any images used around the parish, or on social media, will seek to promote diversity, inclusivity and our commitment to accessibility.

Supporting Sensory Impairments

We will seek professional advice on the best ways to ensure that individuals with sight, hearing and other sensory impairments are fully included within our services and within our buildings

Communion and Other Services

We will seek to make communion as physically accessible as possible, and promote a choice for individuals to be able to receive communion whilst seated. Anyone attending a service will be given the option of standing, sitting or kneeling, as they feel most comfortable, for their own worship. This will be highlighted within pre-ambls from ministers and within written information.

Sides-People will be trained in supporting individuals to receive communion at their seat and will be able to ensure that personal choices are recognised and acted upon during services.

General Signage

We will aim to have clear signage to guide people within all the church buildings and consider the use of graphics to support individuals who may not fully understand written English

Dementia Friendly Church

The parish will seek to move towards being a dementia friendly church. In addition to the obvious advantages of support parishioners with dementia, many of the procedures of being a dementia friendly church (such as clear signage and name badges) will be seen as good practice generally, and will aid our move to maximum accessibility. As part of these initiatives we will move towards providing a Dementia Friendly Service.

Health Issues

We will seek to fully include individuals with both physical and mental health issues in all our services and groups. We will seek professional advice where appropriate and aim to train sides-people and others in the best ways to support individuals.

Specific Strategies with Respect to Church Buildings

Buildings

Our three churches are wonderful examples of architectural styles, but are not always the most physically accessible buildings and we need to consider how we can best make them fit the needs of everyone. We need to consider how best to make our churches serve the diverse needs of our parish so that they continue to thrive as beacons in the community.

Sensory Adaptations

We will work to ensure that all our church buildings have any adaptations to make them suitable for people with sensory impairments through the use of hearing “loops” and visual aids where appropriate. We will take professional advice on the best ways of doing this.

Holy Trinity

We will work towards the Church being an example of an Open Church and a focus for the local community, as well as working towards it being a fully accessible building for people with physical disabilities. We would like the church to be a centre of activity for the community and to expand the range of activities held within the church building itself. However, to do this we need to look at creating some new areas which will facilitate greater usage of the building and maximise accessibility. In particular, we will need to prioritise the creation of an accessible toilet by expanding the current one. This will mean losing the current kitchen area but we will look at creating a new kitchen area in the Transept so that it can better serve activities held there. We will consider ways in which we can utilise this new transept area for the greater benefit of the community and how we can ensure that it is safe for all ages.

We will also look at how we can minimise barriers to physical accessibility around the church and we will consider the use of bespoke fitted ramps by the “social area” to improve access, and avoid the step.

St Thomas’s

We will work towards the church being a hub for the local community and school and we will look at ways of maximising the ways in which the church building can be used. In particular, we will look at ways of using the meeting room as a hire-space and opening the church during the day so that we maximise its accessibility for the local community.

In terms of specific modifications, we will continue to look at ways of making the entrance and pathways at St Thomas’s suitable for people with poor mobility. In particular, we will look at the surface of the pathways around the church, which are currently gravel topped, and we will look at ways of resurfacing this to make them more accessible to people with physical disabilities. We will also continue to look at options for an entrance ramp, and look at creating something that is safe and inclusive for all. We will also consider the use of bespoke fitted wooden ramps inside the church porch to make the entrance-way more accessible. We will also consider ways in which the current toilet arrangements can be utilised to make them more accessible for people with physical disabilities and we will seek professional help with this.

Brocton

We will investigate ways of creating more room for people using wheelchairs by removing some of the pews within the church. We will also ensure that these spaces are signed as accessible spaces for people using wheelchairs or buggies.

We will investigate how to upgrade the toilet facilities so that they better meet the needs of people with physical disabilities. This may require widening the openings and changing the way the toilet door opens and we will take professional advice on this.

We will ensure that there is signage for the car park to direct people who may have physical disabilities and we will consider having accessible parking spaces designated. We will also ensure that signage and arrows are used to direct people to “overflow” parking nearby

Summary

This consultation paper is designed to set out some guiding principles to support ways in which Berkswich parish can be as accessible as possible for all. It takes into account recommendations made by the diocese disability advisor as well as areas of accepted good practice. The paper sets out some general principals which it is hoped will guide our work in the future and it is hoped that more detail can be added to some of the generalised recommendations through effective consultation over time.

Declaration

This strategy was approved by the PCC on the 10th October 2018

Incumbent

Churchwarden (signed electronically).....

Churchwarden ... (signed electronically).....

DATE