

Access Statement for St John's (Kingsdown) Village Hall

This statement gives the reader an overview of adjustments the Trustees have made, and outlines the plans we have for future implementation of the review's recommendations.

In October 2012, the Hall Trustees commissioned an Access Review of the premises from an experienced Access Consultant in order to establish what our key access issues were with regards to the disability duties of the Equality Act 2010. The act says that organisations must make 'reasonable adjustments' to the key barriers to access for disabled people.

There is a common misunderstanding that "compliance" with the Act can be achieved or that a building or piece of equipment be seen as "Equality Act compliant." The Equality Act Code of Practice states the following:-

"A service provider must take such steps as it is reasonable to take to avoid putting disabled people at a substantial disadvantage caused by a physical feature" and that "avoiding a substantial disadvantage caused by a physical feature includes:-

- removing the physical feature in question
- altering it; or
- providing a reasonable means of avoiding it"

We cannot 'remove the physical feature', but we are working towards 'providing a reasonable means of avoiding it' in both the short and the long term, with the potential to alter the approach from the road.

There is no step free access to the hall.

The Trustees cannot take account of each person's individual needs, as it is not always possible to anticipate them, but we have improved accessibility to meet the generic needs of people with a wide range of disabilities.

We suggest that visitors with mobility impairment contact our booking secretary for more information, and suggestions of alternative venues available locally.

The Hall was built in 1843 and is located in the conservation area of the village.

The building is set back from the road with no parking associated with it. The nearest public parking is the on-street parking in Upper Street. Visitors can park here, and those individuals with mobility impairment would need to be dropped off at the gate by the steps on the approach to the Hall. The steps have now been painted with white and yellow paint to aid their visibility and to make the steps easier to see and safer to use. Security lighting with automatic sensors has been installed in the forecourt.

The entrance to the hall is approximately two metres higher than the road. The double doors are easily opened, and each has an effective clear width (ecw) of 860mm. The main area in front of the Hall is used as a children's play area and has been refurbished with a safety surface and some play equipment.

The hall itself is on two main levels. We have removed the front entrance step, and there is now a short sloping concrete ramp into the main entrance. **The main hall** is up eleven wide steps, (with tubular steel handrails either side of the steps and one central one). We have altered the top step, which is now at the same level as the main hall, have painted each step with non-slip paint, and added grey/yellow colour contrast to make the steps easier to see and safer to use. The main hall is spacious and there is a kitchen, WCs including a dedicated WC for the disabled, storage, and a further twelve steps up to an open plan mezzanine office area.

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The lower hall is down five narrow steps from the level of the main entrance doors and the steps have had the same treatment as the main steps. We have recently installed a hand rail. The lower hall comprises a small meeting room, WC and a kitchenette.

The **two Emergency Exits** are the main entrance doors and a side door off the upper hall leading out onto neighbouring land which is currently under development. There is an internal step (140mm high and 800mm wide) up to the Emergency Exit from the upper hall, which is clearly marked with black and yellow tape.

The rear Emergency Exit door is 700mm wide with a 100mm threshold, and a weather bar. The developer, as part of the planning permission granted by Dover District Council in 2017, has erected a fenced passageway with five sets of two steps, with grab rails, leading into the forecourt. The Trustees added emergency lighting in 2018, at each set of two steps.

There is a unisex WC off the lower Hall and Men's, Women's, Child's and an accessible WC off the upper Hall. In February 2016, the taps in all the toilets were replaced with user-friendly lever taps, along with the hand-wash sink in the kitchen, and the main kitchen sink..

An induction loop system has been installed in the hall, and there is a PA system. Standard stacking chairs are available for use in both halls.

The Trustees sought professional advice regarding the **provision of a chair lift**. This was not considered essential because in the event of an emergency evacuation, the main exit down the eleven steps would be narrower than at present, and since September 2018, we can also use the rear fire exit. Recommendations will be implemented following fire drills held in 2018 by several user groups.

The Trustees have achieved the ACRE level 3 Hallmark award, valid until 2020. Few halls in Kent have reached this highest level of administration. ACRE's report regarding the use of the hall by disabled visitors states the following:-

'It was previously suggested that a stair lift might be installed from the Entrance Lobby to the Main Hall, but there really is insufficient room for such equipment and the Fire Brigade have already indicated that both staircases are adequate for an emergency evacuation of the building.'

Professional advice was sought for the construction of a 'drop-off' lay-by.

The hall is in the Conservation area of the village and there is limited line of sight on to Upper Street. The Trustees have decided not to pursue the option of a lay-by, as it was felt this would be very costly and planning permission would probably be denied.

Future plans

These include

- Securing the ownership of the rear fire exit pathway into the forecourt
- Investigation of step free access from Upper Street
- providing some chairs with arm rests
- painting the walls behind all sanitary ware with a colour contrast to help those with visual impairment
- redesigning the disabled toilet
- providing grab rails in all toilets