

# St Nicolas Church, Hail Weston

## Disability Access Appraisal

### Introduction

St Nicolas Church is a beautiful, simple country church (Grade II\* listed) which has been at the heart of the small village of Hail Weston since its first service was held in 1209. It is owned by the Church of England and within the Diocese of Ely. The Restoration Group's purpose is to raise funds to develop and modernise the church so that it can be used as a community meeting space which is fit for purpose for everyone in the village and local area to use on a regular basis, accessible to all and available for use throughout the week.

We want our church building, worship, activities and people to be welcoming and helpful to everyone who comes into the building, whether to use the building for worship or for community activities. This appraisal has been carried out to try and ensure that as far as possible, we are fully inclusive and welcoming to everyone, especially people with disabilities, mental health challenges, hearing or visual impairment or on the autistic spectrum, and to try and make the building fit their needs as far as possible.

### The Purpose of this Appraisal

The reason for carrying out this Appraisal is because we are currently making funding applications for the re-ordering and renovation of the church building, to make it accessible as a community space so that it can be used and enjoyed by everyone in the community, whether for church services, or community activities. In order to do this, we need to provide some essential facilities which are currently lacking, mainly to provide a kitchen with running water in it, a disabled toilet and disabled access between the main body of the church and the extension housing the new facilities. Through carrying out this disability access appraisal, we want to identify what is already available to support everyone who uses this church building, what simple changes we can to improve disability access and how we can ensure that the new facilities will be designed so that they benefit everyone.

### The Parish of Hail Weston

The parish of Hail Weston has some 600 inhabitants (adults and children) and, whilst most of them are not necessarily regular attendees at Sunday services, they do tend to turn out in impressive numbers for special services such as Christingle, Harvest Festival and Plough Sunday for example. Two community-led plans have both had very positive responses from the local community about the importance that they place on having the church in the village, and also their desire to use it for community activities, as well as for church worship. Members of the local community have been extremely supportive of the Restoration Group plans to sympathetically modernize the church so that it can be used more widely and inclusively by everyone by improving facilities, including disabled access, a disabled toilet, a kitchen and, in the longer term, better and more cost-effective heating and lighting, a more flexible space at the back of the church and improved seating. When the plans went to the local District Council for planning consent, the Council received 119 letters regarding the plans, of which 117 were in full support and one was merely concerned about how any building work would affect the village whilst it was being carried out. As the village is so small, fund-raising is difficult, so the whole restoration project has been broken down into Phases. Phase 1 – disabled access into the church via the North door, has recently been completed, and has been extremely well received by local inhabitants.

### Current Issues, Concerns and Projects

A lack of basic facilities in the church means that it is currently not fit for purpose as a wholly inclusive building. The church, a vital public resource for the village, cannot presently meet everyone's needs and the high levels of demand because there are currently no toilet or kitchen facilities available. The village has no other community space where individuals and groups can meet regularly, which would be available throughout the week and be able to hold large numbers of people and support a wide range of activities. Many older people, and parents with young people, as well as people with disabling challenges, feel excluded because of this, and

the Restoration Group has been tasked with delivering an overall project (broken down into separate phases) to remedy as many of these problems as possible, within the limitations of the building itself.

## **Legal Responsibilities Under the Equalities Act 2010**

We understand that the term “Disability” is much broader in context today. Disability is now defined as: “a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on the ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.”

We need to be proactive, rather than reactive as to who might come into the building and the barriers that they might face. With this in mind, we have looked closely at our church and church building to see what we do well, and where there are gaps in provision. We have also consulted with those who use the church and those who would like to, to help us to draw up this document.

We have looked at specific areas in and around the church building to assess the level of disability access.

### **Locating the church**

The church can be located on the website “A church near you.” There is also a Benefice website <https://swhw.co.uk> with a tab for St Nicolas Church, Hail Weston. The website for St Nicolas has clear print, a photo of the church and simple information about the church.

### **Car Parking**

There is no car park at the church, so people have to park on the left-hand side of the road on the village High Street. If somebody requests disabled access in advance, traffic cones are used to reserve a space for them right in front of the entrance to the church.

### **Outside Notice Board**

When the Church is open, there is a sign placed on the gate which says “Church Open” in large black type on a yellow background. There is also a noticeboard in the churchyard, near the start of the path, with notices on it about services and events in the building. There is also a contact phone number so that if someone who is deaf wishes to access the church, they can text the church warden.

### **The Approach to the Church**

There are small, wrought-iron hand gates at the bottom of the path that leads off the village High Street and up to the church. These are easy to open, with a simple latch at waist height. The footpath leading up to the North Door of the church (the main entrance that is always used to access the church from the village High Street) is at least 1 metre wide and has recently had the gradient reduced to enhance disabled access. (The recently completed Phase 1 of the Restoration Project). When the bonded path is reinstated (part of Phase 2 of the restoration project), there will be completely level access into the building. There is currently rubber matting over the newly laid gravel to assist wheelchair users, people who use disability ‘walkers,’ those with prams and push chairs, and the elderly to access the church safely during the restoration.

### **Entrance into the Church**

New, level, disabled access has recently been installed in the church, finally removing the need for a ramp. The path leading to the entrance has been lowered, making the entrance doorway much higher than in the past, and access therefore very much easier. There is a contrast between the natural stone threshold and the dark red carpet beyond, which makes it easier for the visually impaired to access the church.

### **Lighting and Lip Reading**

New, improved lighting and heating is planned for Phase 3 of the restoration. In the meantime, those with impairments are accommodated and assisted to access.

### **Moving Around Inside the Church Building, and seating**

Currently access is limited to the High Altar and Sanctuary, but the Vicar will bring communion to those who wish. After the planned restoration, there will be moveable seating in the back half of the church which will accommodate wheelchairs and those who need more space around them. There will also be easy access to the disabled toilet and kitchen. The existing pews at the front of the church will also be spaced more evenly to allow more legroom, making them easier for people to access.

## Hearing Loop

A hearing loop is provided in the church.

## Printed materials

There are large print hymn books available in the church. We will print a few more large print service sheets so that they are available for the visually impaired. The service sheets and hymn books have black printing on white/light cream paper. Church Service sheets can be downloaded in advance from the Benefice website. <https://swhw.co.uk>. This is designed to help those who are visually impaired, have hearing impairment or suffer from anxiety and want to know exactly what will happen during a service, prior to attending. (Note: The monthly calendars may need to be reviewed for print size).

## Signs and Signage

When Phase 2 of the restoration project is completed, we will use illustrated signs for the disabled toilet and kitchen, directions where to sit, and fire exits. In the meantime, in services and at concerts and other social church events, people are always on hand to welcome and assist.

## Welcome for people with learning disabilities, autism, or mental health needs

There is always a welcome for everyone who comes into the building. However, if the signs are that they want to be left alone, there are places in the church where they can sit.

## Welcome for Children with Additional Needs

All children are very welcome. Toys, books, crayons, and colour paper are currently available, and there are plans for a "Feely Box," musical instruments and sensory stimulation equipment to become available shortly. Once Phase 2 is complete, not only will there be disabled access within the church (apart from the High Altar and Sanctuary), but there will also be a raised changing mat and disabled toilet.

## Toilet

Full disabled facilities will be provided when Phase 2 of the restoration project is complete, including a raised changing area for children. We will follow decorating guidelines to reassure those with impairments.

## Consultation

We have consulted on the needs of the local community through two community-led plans that have been five years apart. In addition, since its formation in 2016, the Restoration Group have had a stand at the Village Fete (which normally takes place every two years) where people can come and discuss what they feel the church lacks to make it a useful community space and put their ideas forward. A representative of the Restoration Group also attends the public sessions of the Parish Council where they are on hand to provide updates on the whole Church restoration project and answer any queries or hear about any problems that people have with accessing the church. This work is in addition to the original Disability Access Audit that was carried out by the Parochial Church Council (PCC) of Hail Weston in 2011. Over the years, the PCC has received numerous comments on facilities that are urgently needed to make the building more accessible to all. As a result, the St Nicolas Church Restoration Group was formed to address these issues, and this is ongoing.

This Access Appraisal was reviewed and updated by the following:

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| 1. Reverend Nicki Bland | Vicar of St Nicolas Church, Hail Weston       |
| 2. Mrs M Deacon         | Verger of St Nicolas Church, Hail Weston      |
| 3. Mrs A-M Hamilton     | Chairman, St Nicolas Church restoration Group |

Signed .....  .....

Vicar of St Nicolas Church, Hail Weston

18<sup>th</sup> November 2022

