



Risk Assessment to Re-open Woodlands Evangelical Church Building, Derby

September 2020

Purpose

The government guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic requires a COVID-19 risk assessment to be carried out for every building and site open to the public. This document provides details of the risk assessment undertaken within the Woodlands Evangelical Church building in Derby.

Scope

We are thankful to God that the building in Allestree is used by a wide range of groups across our community, often visited by over 500 individuals during a week. We praise God that He has built His church in our community with men and women with the gifts, skills and abilities to serve Him using this building. The large numbers of people entering the building does therefore raise the risk of the spread of COVID-19 infection between individuals, many of whom maybe considered as vulnerable. From March 2020 the building has been largely locked down in line with government guidelines. Since July, Church buildings have been legally permitted to open for purposes of public worship where measures are in place for social distancing. (*gov.vo.uk, COVID-19: guidance for the safe use of places of worship during the pandemic- Updated 4 August 2020*).

We all have responsibility to protect others and love our neighbour (Matt 22:39) as well as respecting those in authority (Rom12:1-7). This risk assessment and its outworking can help us to reduce the risk and reopen the building to begin to meet together again. However, it is only part of the answer. No risk assessment can eliminate risk, nor guarantee complete safety, it is still vital that the necessary hygiene and social distancing precautions are kept in place by ALL those entering the building, and that anyone entering the building does so having first considered the impact on others when assessing their own health and wellbeing.

Whilst a risk assessment will allow us to begin to use the building again, we must also consider how we as a church family need to adapt to how we “do” church in the future given the changes we all need to make and the community we live in. Lessons will be learnt, along with changes to government guidelines so there is opportunity for everyone to help shape how we serve other and show Christ’s love to our community.

Methodology

When considering reopening the church building, thought and care was given to how, when and who can use the space given the range of groups the building hosts. As a first step, a Risk Assessment Team were convened, a team comprising of church leaders, trustees, and people with experience of undertaking risk assessments in their own places of work. Prior to undertaking the risk assessment, advice and guidance was considered from a range of sources, including the Government, Christian organisations, legal bodies, other local churches, and through personal experience of undertaking this type of work. The purpose of this risk



assessment relates to opening up the church building to staff and those entering for public worship, with the expectation that the building will be used for a weekly service in the first instance, with consideration to other uses in due course.

Risk assessment approaches often use a structured risk ranking method to determine whether risks are acceptable or not, considering the likelihood and severity of a risk event occurring. Having reviewed guidance relating to COVID-19 risk assessments, discussions amongst experienced risk assessors and guidance for opening places of worship, the Woodlands Risk Assessment Team have not used this approach; the reasons are outlined in **appendix 1**.

The risk assessment teams approach was to firstly identify the overarching COVID-19 risks, these being:

1. Transmission of Coronavirus to an individual direct from infected person
2. Transmission of Coronavirus to an individual via a contaminated surface/item (excluding toilet facilities)
3. Transmission of Coronavirus to an individual via toilet facilities
4. Transmission of Coronavirus to an individual via contaminated waste
5. Transmission of Coronavirus to an individual via working in the church building

Once the risks were determined, the specific activities relating to a “typical” Sunday service were identified, this was done using a walk-through approach and capturing the key steps undertaken.

Having identified the activities and risks, work was then undertaken to mitigate these risks, with practical solutions. Where activities were identified as either being prohibited by current legislation or where the mitigations to reduce risk outweighed the practical outworking of the activity, these were excluded from any proposed new plan.

A series of actions to be undertaken to mitigate the risks were then generated and worked through in order to be able to re-open the church building. The spreadsheet identifying this work can be found in **appendix 2**.

Impact of the Risk Assessment

The spreadsheet in **appendix 2** provides a detailed record of the risk assessment process, however, in order to translate the detail into a format that anyone visiting the building for a service can use, a Frequently Asked Question sheet has been developed, **appendix 3**.

Whilst the risk assessment has been conducted with the focus on Sunday worship, this approach means that any group or meeting being held within the building can be assessed according to their own specific activities. Many of the mitigations put in place for the Sunday service will be consistent across all uses of the building. It is important that before any other groups begin meeting in the building that a specific risk assessment is undertaken for that activity, for following reasons:

1. The activity is legally permitted
2. If permitted, the activity is conducted in line with guidelines for that group



3. Any risks identified by conducting the activity do not adversely impact on other groups or activities taking place within the building.

The template used to undertake this risk assessment can be utilised for other groups and activities. The six risks identified, and many of the mitigations put in place to reduce risk within the building can be translated to other activities, with the specific activities for that group identified and risks mitigated. A template can be found in **appendix 4**.

It is the view of the risk assessment team that in order to implement and continually manage the safe use of the building there needs to be involvement across all teams, covering the entire weekly schedule. This is particularly important as the interaction between activities held will often require shared facilities, equipment and influence the numbers of people entering the building.



Appendix 1

Reasons for not using a risk ranking methodology

- a) Explicitly estimating the likelihood and severity of various outcomes, imprecise at the best of times, is extremely difficult to do for COVID-19 because we are still learning new information about the disease and its spread. Therefore, any ranking runs the risk of being arbitrary.
- b) Compliance with guidance is a much easier criterion to test when determining if the risk level is acceptable and is traditionally accepted as the basis for legal defence in health and safety cases involving other 'strong guidance' from the government or regulatory bodies.
- c) Risk ranking approaches can lead to a temptation to 'engineer' the results to meet the requirements for acceptability.
- d) The pro-forma COVID-19 risk assessment template on the HSE website (<https://www.hse.gov.uk/simple-health-safety/risk/risk-assessment-template-and-examples.htm>) does not use risk ranking.

(points (a)-(d) taken from the FIEC risk assessment template www.fiec.org.uk)

Appendix 2

Sunday service risk assessment document



WEC Sunday Service
Risk Assessment

Appendix 3

Frequently Asked Questions Document



Sunday Service
FAQs v1 Sept 20.pdf

Appendix 4

Risk Assessment Template



Risk Assessment
Template v1.xlsx
