

Risk Assessment for Holding Services at Hanney Chapel during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Version History

1. Initial baseline assessment 29th June 2020
2. Revised due to updated guidelines regarding face coverings
3. Revised due to updated guidelines regarding place of worship
4. Revised in light of research on singing
5. Revised in light of the 'Rule-of-Six' and other risk assessments
6. Revised following end of National lockdown and guidelines on Tiers, Christmas and Singing
7. Revised building exit routes when parallel meetings taking place (e.g. Sunday Service with Explorers Sunday School)
8. Revised due to Oxfordshire entering Tier 4 (Stay at home) restrictions
9. Updated due to the new National Lockdown: Stay at home restrictions
10. Updated due to implementation of Roadmap out of Lockdown Step 2: Stay local
11. Updated due to implementation of Step 3 of the Roadmap

Assessment Date	20 th May 2021
Valid From	20 th May 2021
Review Period	Annual (or when governmental guidance changes)
Approved By	Hanney Elders & Deacons

SCOPE

This Risk Assessment (RA) applies to the Hanney Chapel, East Hanney, OXON, OX12 0HX for the purpose of keeping the building COVID-Secure to facilitate the safe holding of public worship services or prayer meetings during the coronavirus pandemic. This will be achieved by adhering to recommendations and advice provided by the WHO (World Health Organisation) [1] and given in Government Guidelines [2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13] (the latest of which at the time of writing this RA was the 17th May 2021).

SUMMARY OF RELEVANT CHANGES

The National Lockdown: Stay at home restrictions began to be eased on 8th and 29th March with the first phase of the government's **Roadmap out of Lockdown** [13]. The 12th April saw Step 2 implemented with the Rule of Six / Two household's measure being introduced for groups meeting outside and the allowance for children's activities to be permitted inside. Step 3 was implemented on 17th May and permits a group of up to 30 people to meet outside and the Rule of Six / Two household's measure indoors.

It continues to be permitted to hold communal worship services in either an outdoor or indoor setting so you can attend a local place of worship for a service. **However, whilst inside the building,** you must not mingle in groups larger than 6, except when everyone present is from no more than 2 households (including support bubbles). **You must wear a face-covering (unless exempt) and you should maintain social distancing between groups at all times.**

Note, although a minimum social distance of 1m+ is permitted (i.e. 1m with mitigation measures such as the wearing of face-coverings), **Hanney Chapel is operating with (≥ 1.5 m) social distancing measure.**

The Sunday School and most other youth activities, including Toddlers, have recommenced physical meetings inside the chapel building.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 (a.k.a. SARS-CoV-2) coronavirus is a newly discovered and highly infectious and acute respiratory disease that has rapidly spread to over 200 countries world-wide. It has the potential to cause a range of symptoms including (but not limited to) a dry persistent cough, fever, shortness of breath, loss of the sense of smell (anosmia) and distortion or loss of the sense of taste (dysgeusia or ageusia). In severe cases there may be loss of life.

The onset of the disease is fairly rapid (of the order of days) and the severity of the symptoms that anyone with COVID-19 may exhibit, vary from person to person. These can range from expressing no symptoms at all (potentially an asymptomatic carrier who is still capable of shedding the virus), to feeling very unwell with flu like symptoms, to requiring emergency hospitalisation and mechanical assistance with breathing (ventilation). Most people infected with COVID-19 will experience only mild to moderate respiratory symptoms and will recover without requiring special treatment.

The demographic of an individual (e.g. their age, gender, blood type, ethnicity etc.) can play a significant part in how they respond to the virus. For example, those that have A blood type, or those over 70 years old, or those who have underlying health conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disorders or cancer, are generally believed to be more prone to suffer acute symptoms, though deaths have also unexpectedly occurred in much younger and healthier individuals.

It should be noted that although some medication and treatments are available to alleviate the most significant symptoms, worldwide in approximately 2.1% of cases (2.8% in the UK), the disease is fatal. Three vaccines (from Pfizer / BioNTech, Oxford / AstraZeneca and Moderna) have been approved for use in the UK and being rolled out as quickly as possible. It will take many months to vaccinate all adults but it is already appearing to have a positive impact on the spread of the disease.

However, the virus continues to mutate with some variants more easily transmitted than the original strain and no vaccine gives 100% protection so even if vaccinated everyone must still take precautions.

GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES

Due to the constantly changing knowledge of the extent and impact of the virus in the general population the 'rules of engagement' determined by the government are constantly under review and subject to change at short notice.

As of the 4th July, the government permitted a limited set of individuals / households to meet together. However, for the purposes of this RA - holding public worship services or prayer meetings - the key restrictions are that singing is an activity that is strongly advised against in corporate meetings and that social distancing measures should be maintained between those of different households. The social distance has been reduced to "one metre plus" (1m+) and what this means in practice is that 1m to just under 2m is seen as acceptable so long as additional "mitigating measures" such as the wearing of personal protective equipment (PPE), not sitting face-to-face, or, protective screens are in place.

As of the 8th August it was mandated in law that face coverings are to be worn inside places of worship. There are however some exemptions to this requirement on the grounds of age, mental or physical health or a physical disability. For example, children under the age of 11, those with breathing difficulties or a physical disability that makes putting on or wearing a face covering difficult, are exempt. A fuller list can be found in the latest government guidelines on the wearing of face coverings [3] which indicates that service leaders (whether employed by the Church or acting on their behalf) are also to be exempt from the need to wear a face covering.

As of 14th September 2020 the government legislated that there must not be social gatherings of more than 6 people though there are exemptions for already larger households or support bubbles. Places of worship were also being permitted to meet so long as groups are still maintaining social distancing and do not mingle.

Due to increasing numbers of cases, a National Lockdown started on 5th November which - amongst other restrictions that were brought in - closed places of worship except for the purpose of broadcasting a service. The lockdown ended on 2nd December 2020 with Oxfordshire being placed in the Tier 2: (High alert) [10] and with churches able to be open again. However, due to rapid increases in COVID cases due to new strains of the virus having significantly higher transmissibility, from the 26th December 2020 this was upgraded straight to the Tier 4: (Stay at home) [11] restriction level and this was subsequently superseded by the National Lockdown: Stay at home regulations [12].

As noted above, churches can remain open for communal worship in all Tiers as well as during the National Lockdown.

The effect of the National Lockdown and vaccine rollout to a large percentage of the population has brought the infection rates down significantly and from the 8th March 2021 the phased **Roadmap out of Lockdown** [13] began which each phase at least 5 weeks apart. As of the 17th May, we are in Step 3 with further relaxations expected in Step 4 which is hoped to be from the 21st June (at the earliest).

RISK ASSESSMENT

The coronavirus is currently the subject of an intense level of research but it is thought to be most readily transmitted from one person to another by infectious pathogens being carried by airborne particulates (respiratory droplets generated by coughs, sneezes or speaking) and by direct contact with contaminated surfaces.

In normal conversation any large droplets expelled from the (unmasked) mouth will rapidly fall to the floor within about 2m but research by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology has shown that some uncontained coughs can project fine aerosol particulates up to 6m and sneezes up to 8m away.

It should also be noted that a recent preprint study from the University of Bristol on the effects of singing compared to either breathing, or, to normal speech [4], indicates that singing, in and of itself, increases the exhaled aerosol particle count by a factor of two. However, this is the case for similar volume levels and increasing the volume (whether spoken or sung) significantly increases the amount of aerosols exhaled. It was found that an individual singing heartily can generate 20 to 40 times more mass of aerosol particles than singing or speaking quietly. There are some modest differences seen between male and females but the issue generally scales-up with the size of group.

By analogy with other epidemics of similar diseases such as the SARS (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome) and MERS (Middle Eastern Respiratory Syndrome) it is believed that, outside of a host, the virus has a lifetime of no more than 3 days (72 hours).

Although with mitigation measures in place the risks to health can be significantly reduced, it should be noted that overall, the risk of exposure to COVID-19 cannot be totally eliminated or guaranteed to be zero.

MITIGATION OF RISKS

Physical Measures at the Chapel

- There must be a Venue Manager (normally an Elder or Deacon) responsible for the management of the chapel.
- At the Chapel's main entrance there must be signage (easily visible from outside) listing the symptoms of COVID-19 (i.e. new cough, fever, breathlessness, loss of smell / taste) and requesting that anyone exhibiting any such symptom of the virus should not enter the building but should follow the government's self-isolation guidance and to contact NHS 111 for further advice.
- There must be signage warning that face coverings must now be worn (unless legitimately exempt from doing so).
- Hand sanitizer will be made available at the entrance and exits of the building and must be used by all.
- There must be signage displayed in the building encouraging people to maintain social distancing and not to touch anything unnecessarily.
- No refreshments (water, squash, tea, coffee, biscuits etc.) will be served.
- The only consumables supplied will be the elements for the Lord's Supper and strict hygiene rules will apply. The temporary removal of face coverings will be permitted in order to consume the bread and wine. The safe methodology of how to administer this is the subject of a separate risk assessment "COVID-19 Risk Assessment for holding Communion Services at Hanney Chapel Issue 2" [6].
- Due to social distancing, the crèche facility will not be permitted to operate.
- Except when National Lockdown or Tier 4 (Stay at home) restrictions are in force the Explorers Sunday School classes can operate in the chapel building subject to its own COVID-Secure Risk Assessment [5] but because no extra room or private home is safely available, Bible Class / Bible Class Plus will be held online.
- Entry to the Chapel building will normally be through the main front door.
- If the chapel toilets need to be used during the service then it will be permitted to directly return to the main hall so long as the walkway is empty.
- As it is not expected that there will be anyone still coming into the building at the end of a service, an appropriate exit (either the front door or the rear fire exit) can be chosen based on one's location and the room occupancy at the time. E.g., on a Sunday morning when the Explorers Sunday School is taking place in the side rooms, then with care, exit from the main hall can be back through the front door whereas those in the side rooms should leave via the rear fire exit.
- Anyone who has particular mobility issues should exit via the front door and ramp. In the case of an emergency evacuation, the nearest safe exit should be used.
- The seating will be pre-arranged prior to any meeting and positioned so that households can maintain social distancing. It should be noted that when moving to and from the seats, visiting the toilets or exiting from the building, that there may be brief moments where people travelling along a walkway may pass other occupied seating and be close to someone from another household.

- Use of shared reusable equipment is to be avoided and this veto includes the coat hooks. No general use will be made of the chapel hymn books or bibles but order of service sheets will be provided or the words projected on a screen. In exceptional circumstances a visitor may be allowed to use a chapel bible but this would then have to be bagged and set aside for at least 48 hours before reuse.
- Access to the chapel stationery cupboard for pens, pencils, crayons, paper etc. is forbidden except when specifically required for the Sunday School classes.
- Government guidance permits an unmasked, socially distanced choir to sing in front of worshippers in an indoor setting.
- Members of the congregation are still being advised against singing although as volume increases risk more than the act of singing itself and as the members of the congregation will be; wearing face coverings; socially distanced between households; relatively small in number; and largely made up of the same families of church members each week, it is believed that the risk is no worse than having a choir, particularly when also encouraged to sing more quietly than normal.
- Care must be taken to ensure that a face covering remains in place, covering both nose and mouth and fitting the face.
- Cash offerings are to be discouraged and the offering box removed. Gloves must be worn if needing to handle cash offerings.
- Weather permitting, doors and external windows should be opened to facilitate a flow of fresh air. To prevent noise from the Explorers Sunday School from interfering with the service taking place in the main hall, the internal windows to the classrooms can be kept shut and the skylight in the toilets, kitchen, storeroom and crèche opened instead.
- There should be a written register taken to capture names of those present though it should be noted that this is with an individual's consent. It is strongly suggested that consent be given but if anyone for personal reasons does not want to have their name registered, they can opt-out. The register must be kept for at least 21 days in case of a need to assist the NHS Test & Trace.
- There will be a NHS QR Code poster available at the entrance and exit to the building for users of the NHS Covid-19 smartphone app to scan and "check-in".
- 1st aid – when treating anyone, the responder should use gloves and mask and preferably a face visor.
- After any corporate meeting, and the congregation has left, appropriate equipment (disposable gloves, mask, aprons and cloths) will be made available for the cleaner(s) to clean & disinfect the frequently touched / communal areas of the building concentrating on door handles, hand rails, chairs, lectern, piano, PA equipment and toilets. All disposable PPE used should be bagged, the bag dated and securely set aside for at least 3 days before being disposed of in the normal rubbish. Reusable cloths should be washed at a high temperature (at least 60°C).
- Ideally, the chapel should be left empty between meetings so as to allow any viral infections to die off. Any access to the chapel building during the week must be agreed with the Elders beforehand and the visit logged. Any group activity will require its own COVID-Secure Risk Assessment.

Actions by visitors

- No one who is exhibiting any symptom of COVID-19 should enter the building.
- Everyone must sanitize their hands on entry and exit (with either their own or the provided hand sanitizer).

- Care must be taken not to touch anything unnecessarily (e.g. a chair that's allocated to another household).
- The wearing of gloves is optional but the wearing of face coverings is now mandated in law (except for legitimate exemptions).
- All attendees must observe social distancing between households even when wearing a face covering.
- You must not mingle in groups of more than 6 or two households when you are indoors.
- The positioning of the chairs must not be altered.
- Any order of service sheet taken must be removed by the user and disposed of at home.
- If the use of a bible is required then members and regular attendees should bring their own.
- All attendees should consider bringing their own supply of bottled water / drink.
- Parents / guardians of young children are responsible for ensuring that the children do not run around and that they comply with the social distancing requirements.
- Attendees must not enter the kitchen, storeroom or crèche.
- Everyone must ensure that any item brought into the chapel building (e.g. toys, pens, paper, notepads etc. and including coats and jackets) are to be kept with them and removed again on their departure
- For those choosing to use the NHS COVID-19 smartphone app, there is a venue check-in NHS QR Code available in the entrance lobby and on the inside of the rear emergency exit door.

REFERENCES

- [1] WHO <https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus>
- [2] Safe use of a place of worship <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-during-the-pandemic>
- [3] Face coverings <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own>
- [4] University of Bristol research on breathing, speaking and singing https://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/itempdf74155353254prod/12789221/Comparing_the_Respirable_Aerosol_Concentrations_and_Particle_Size_Distributions_Generated_by_Singing_Speaking_and_Breat_v1.pdf
- [5] http://hanney-chapel.org.uk/policies/COVID-19_Explorers_Risk_Assessment.pdf
- [6] http://hanney-chapel.org.uk/policies/COVID-19_RA_Communion_2.pdf
- [7] <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/local-restriction-tiers-what-you-need-to-know>
- [8] <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-the-christmas-period>
- [9] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-suggested-principles-of-safer-singing/covid-19-suggested-principles-of-safer-singing>
- [10] <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tier-2-high-alert#visiting-venues-including-shops-restaurants-pubs-places-of-worship-and-public-buildings>
- [11] <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tier-4-stay-at-home#places-of-worship>

[12] <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-lockdown-stay-at-home>

[13] <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-response-spring-2021/covid-19-response-spring-2021#roadmap>