

HORSTED KEYNES PAROCHIAL CHURCH COUNCIL

7.0 Safe Access to the Tower at St Giles Church

A fixed steel ladder, located in the tower, reaches from a fixed steel platform at approximately 2.3m above finished floor level to a timber trap door in the ceiling of the tower at a height of approximately 6m above finished floor level.

The steel platform is accessed via a removable aluminium ladder that is located in the vestry.

The tower needs to be accessed periodically for the purposes of occasional maintenance and periodic operation of the church clock.

The risks assessed are as follows:

- Unauthorised persons could enter the church to gain access to the tower. (This risk has already been reduced by removing the ladder from its former storage position beneath the tower and storing it in the locked vestry).
- If an unaccompanied person were to use the ladder and fall from it and injure themselves it could be a considerable time before they were found and the emergency services alerted.
- If a person attempts to carry tools up the ladder for the purposes of undertaking maintenance they would not have both hands free to grip the rungs of the ladder and this could lead to them falling from the ladder.
- The access hatch in the ceiling needs to be unlocked when standing on the ladder. This could cause the person ascending to lose their balance and fall from the ladder at its highest point.
- When resetting the clock the weight on the winding mechanism can fall rapidly and could hit the operator on the head.
- Persons working in the tower could inadvertently step backwards falling through the open hatch or knock materials/equipment down through the opening, hitting persons below.
- The fixed ladder is located abutting the wall making it impossible to ascend/descend in the normal manor with both hands on the outside of the ladder side rails.
- The fixed ladder does not project above the floor height at the upper level preventing persons from stepping off the ladder whilst still holding the ladder.
- The rungs on the fixed ladder are constructed from small diameter steel rods which offer poor grip; this could lead to a person's foot slipping off a rung and causing them to fall from the ladder.

The following improvements and procedures have been adopted in order to minimise the above risks:

- The churchwarden and fabric committee are to be responsible for authorising competent people who have a need to access the tower.

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- A register of personnel authorised to use the access ladder is kept in the vestry desk drawer
- A sign is located adjacent to the fixed platform advising people that: **“The use of this access ladder is strictly for authorised persons only”**
- Authorised persons are instructed that they are only to use the access ladder in the presence of another person.
- The access ladder is to be kept locked in the vestry when not in use.
- Authorised persons are instructed that if it is necessary to carry small tools up the ladder these are to be carried in a small rucksack thus leaving both hands free to grip the ladder.
- If it is necessary to carry larger tools than can be placed in a small rucksack then a separate job specific risk assessment should be prepared for that operation.
- A counterweight has been installed to make the hatch easy to move.
- The Church portable phone must be carried.
- Operator to stand well clear of the weighted winding mechanism when resetting the clock.
- Ladder to be ascended/descended with one hand on the side rail and one hand on the rungs.
- At least one hand to be held firmly on the ladder at all times, including when unlocking and opening the access hatch.
- A grab rail has been secured against the wall and positioned above the ladder to assist persons stepping on and off the ladder.
- Access hatch door to be lowered whilst operatives are working in the tower in accordance with the signs on the right hand (east) wall and above the entry hatch.
- Sensible footwear with soles that offer good grip to be worn by persons using the ladder.
- In the event of an accident summon help by use of the Church portable phone. There is a first aid kit in the vestry.

A copy of this risk assessment to be issued to authorised persons listed below.

Authorised personnel register

A minimum of two people are required for this task. These need to be competent persons authorised to climb the ladder to the tower.

Only approved competent persons those working under their supervision or contractors working to their own procedures and on information provided are authorised to climb the ladder to the tower. A list of approved persons is displayed in the South Transept (sacristy).

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