

St John the Evangelist, Ashton Hayes (July 2024)

Statement of Needs for Installation of a Handrail for the Vestry Steps

Prepared by Dr Alan Downen on behalf of the Incumbent, Church Wardens and PCC.



Vestry history and location

The “Vicar’s Vestry” was added to the southern aspect of the church during the early part of the 20th Century by the Johnson Family who owned the Ashton Hayes estate and were, at that time, patrons of the church. It was intended as a place where the clergy could robe and valuables could be stored safely – originally it also included a urinal for the vicar’s use (by the mid 20th Century this had already been removed).

The interior of the vestry was significantly modified during the re-ordering of the interior of the church in 2020 which also marked a time when the building became available for social use by the community outside normal times of worship.

The justification and need for a handrail for the vestry steps

The access to the, slightly elevated, exterior vestry door requires 2 steps. Originally, these steps were of standard size and traffic through the door was low – initially just the incumbent.

Since the re-ordering of the interior of the church the vestry door has become a secondary emergency exit and the principal access route to the church – the main church door is unlocked from the inside having gained entry through the vestry. However, in addition to being designated as an emergency exit, the vestry door has also become the main means of access for groups using the building for social purposes – the church choir, the WI, the Gardening Club, the women's Thursday Group are just examples – and many of the members of those groups are elderly. Because of this "change of use" the vestry steps were enlarged and now consist of a step and a "landing area" so that members of the public can step out of the vestry before descending but this also means that, whilst the steps are descended, there is nothing that can be held on to for stability. There have already been a couple of reported "near misses" when elderly members of the public have stumbled during their descent and there have been requests for a handrail to be provided.

The PCC consider this to be a significant Health and Safety issue and are seeking permission to attach a simple handrail, similar in design and finish to the existing handrails located on the main church steps and at the car park, to the exterior wall of the vestry.

Photographs



Vestry steps prior to the re-ordering modifications



Vestry steps post the re-ordering modifications



Approximate position of the proposed handrail

