St Mark's Church
Living Thinking Loving Faith
St Mark's Church, St Mark's Crescent, S10 2SG

Access and Inclusion Policy

This document has been prepared in accordance with the provision of the Equality Act 2010 and the regulations made under it.

A General Statement

The Parochial Church Council is committed to offering inclusive worship at St Mark's Church, and this includes ensuring that the church building, church services and facilities are as accessible as possible on Sundays and throughout the week. We aim to create an atmosphere and access that is welcoming for all, and we aim to take remove barriers, visible and invisible, which might be a deterrent to those with particular needs.

This Accessibility Policy is consistent with, and a component part of, St Mark's stance as a member of Inclusive Church. As an Inclusive Church we aim to be a church "which does not discriminate on any level, – on grounds of economic power, gender, mental health, physical ability, race or sexuality." (inclusive-church.org.uk). We aim through this Accessibility Policy to ensure that we welcome and serve all people, expressing the length, breadth, depth of God's love.

The Accessibility Policy is a work in progress which we will review annually and develop in the light of experience, and having regard to any changes to our building or activities.

B Equality Act 2010

Under UK law the Equality Act (2010) protects anyone who has a disability from discrimination on the grounds of disability, and also protects anyone who has previously had a disability from discrimination based on their past condition. (*Equality Act 2010: Guidance May 2011).*

Under the Equality Act 2010, a person is disabled if they have a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to do normal daily activities.

In addition to physical and sensory impairment disability includes mental and cognitive health issues and learning disability, as well as hidden disabilities such as epilepsy, diabetes, arthritis, autism, and various conditions which may cause chronic pain.

Strong emphasis is given in the legislation to **involving** disabled people in consultations about changes or developments to buildings. As well as consulting with those in the congregation, we will invite the wider community to have their say.

Churches are required to do all things **reasonable** to remove barriers to people with disabilities, or to provide services in a different way which makes them accessible, taking into account different needs.

The legislation also requires us to be **anticipatory**. We need to think ahead about who might come to our church, whether for a service or as a visitor or tourist, and how the needs of our present congregation may develop in the future.

The principle which the Equality Act upholds in relation to access is that it should have regard to **independence**, where this is appropriate to the individual's age. We may want to help a wheelchair user down the steps into church, but this should be avoided if at all possible; apart from being a safety risk to all involved, it can diminish the independence and dignity of the person.

The PCC will ensure that the Parish complies with its duty under the *Equalities Act 2010* and that its policies and related strategies and procedures are implemented. The Vicar and Churchwardens will be responsible for the implementation of the policy and ensuring all other PCC members are aware of their responsibilities, and given training and support where necessary. We will record discussion and decisions about Accessibility matters in PCC minutes, to show that we are aware of our responsibilities and have taken reasonable steps to meet them.

C Policy

We will seek to create a worshipping community where all people are affirmed in their identity as part of the body of Christ, made in the image of God, and in which no individual's personhood is undermined.

- We will encourage a positive attitude to include all people as equals, and so enable their full and equal participation in sharing and leading worship.

- We will seek to maximise the accessibility of our building and services, responding appropriately to the needs of our congregation and other users of the building. These needs will be assessed on an annual basis (usually in September of each year).

- When recruiting for both paid and voluntary positions we will have an inclusive application, interview and appointment process. We will seek to make reasonable adjustments for staff and volunteers with disabilities, to ensure that they are able to fulfil their roles.

- We will seek to create a safe environment where individuals feel able to express their needs and experiences.

D Detailed Considerations:

1) Worship

The opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of worship is central to the experience of the worshipper. Among other considerations this includes the opportunity to share Communion. Therefore, wherever possible the altar rail should be fully accessible for Communion for all individuals.

We will:

- Provide assistance where necessary to help people to the altar rail.
- Provide chairs for those unable to stand to receive Communion.
- Take Communion into the congregation to those unable to get to the altar rail.
- Provide Home Communion for those who are unable to attend church.
- Provide large-print service sheets, and print-outs of any material being projected onto a screen.
- Work towards training celebrants and chalice assistants in how to respond to adults and children with different needs in the distribution of Communion.
- Enable those with disabilities to partake fully in worship if they wish by including them in rotas for reading / intercessions / personal prayer / worship group / administering communion / welcoming. Work towards having written role descriptions available.

2) How do people find St Mark's church?

We all learn and take in information in different ways – some people prefer maps, others prefer descriptive directions, some people need directions with pictures or photos of the place they are trying to find. On our church website and on our signage we will try to offer directions and location information in as many ways as possible. We aim to provide information about public transport, where this is realistic, and also instructions about where to park, as some people need this information beforehand. This is the remit of the Communications Team of St Marks.

3) How do people get here?

We will encourage car sharing, walking and cycling for journeys to church. We take Home Communion to those who cannot get to our services.

4) Approach to the church building

We aim to ensure our church building is fully accessible. There is step free access through the church car park, and a sign at the main entrance to indicate the step free access. We aim to have no trip hazards of broken or uneven paving slabs or stones, or gravel on the paths to the church entrance. We aim to have all external steps, changes of level and edges

of ramps clearly painted, taped or otherwise marked on both horizontal and vertical edges of steps.

5) Car parking

In our car park we provide two disabled parking spaces with step free access from those parking places to the church entrance. On Sundays and after 6.30pm on other days parking is permitted on the Crescent. There are flights of steps from there to the building.

6) External signs and notice boards

We aim to consider those driving past and those with visual impairments, as well as pedestrians. Our notices and signage are printed clearly with sharp colour contrast (black or a very dark colour on white or a very pale colour, or the reverse). We aim to make them as concise and clear as possible. We have included the area code for local phone numbers, both for those using mobile phones, and for deaf people and those with hearing impairment using texts rather than landlines.

7) Entrance

The main entrance to the church is the same one for everyone and has level access.

8) Lighting

We aim for effective lighting in all areas, with lighting levels being even and constant throughout the building. We are working towards replacing all lights with LED types.

We try to ensure that people who are reading / speaking / leading worship are not standing with their back to the light, as this makes it difficult to see the face and lips clearly. At special services with low levels of lighting, for example our candle-lit carol service at Christmas, we aim to consider what effect this will have for people who are partially sighted and include this in our risk assessment for the service. We aim to ensure that instructions about the service are given beforehand in good lighting.

9) Hearing loops

We have a hearing loop system in the main worship area, in the Lounge and the Upper Room, but not the Chapel. We check regularly that it is working well.

10) Moving around inside the church

Most of the ground floor of St Mark's is step and hazard free. There is a single step at the entrance to the sanctuary. Those who do not feel able to come forward to receive Communion can receive it in their own seat.

There are steps in the sanctuary and an immovable cross behind the altar, and these limit accessibility for those conducting and taking part in worship. It is possible instead to use a portable lectern for readings and sermons and/or a nave altar on occasions when this is needed. The chapel sanctuary has one step; however services can be conducted in the centre of the chapel.

We accept that people who need to be able to move around in church during a service should feel free to do so. They may wish to stand at the back or go in and out of the worship area.

11) Seating

We want everyone to feel comfortably seated. Most of the seating is on pews with a cushioned seat. There are individual chairs available which are upholstered and have arms, if this is preferable. Blankets and cushions are available for those who would like them. There is space for wheelchairs or buggies at the outer end of most pews, or at the front and back .Children and families often use dedicated space at the back, or on occasion at the front.

We aim to be understanding of individual needs during church services, including those who prefer to sit throughout the service, those who prefer to sit on their own, those who enjoy the security of always being in the same seat, those who are extremely anxious and those who may behave differently and might shout out during the service.

12) Orders of service, notice sheets, hymn books and screens

We are aware that we use a lot of words in our worship, and this is part of the rich liturgical tradition of St Marks. We aim to consider how accessible this is for people with different needs, and in particular for people with visual impairment, people with specific learning difficulties or dyslexia. We will work towards making our language accessible and inclusive.

Any service booklets and typed material use a minimum font size of 11 point in a clear sans serif font (Gill Sans), on a white or pale background. We produce a large print version of all material (in 16 point) on a pale coloured background, for those who find it difficult to look at the screens and for those who need to see the whole service before it starts so that they know what is going to happen. We aim to provide service booklets for download prior to the service and screen reading, from our website and we also aim to email booklets in advance if requested.

13 Communion

Everyone is invited to receive the bread, and wine if wished, or a blessing. People may stand or kneel or use mobility aids to come forward. The bread is dairy-free and gluten-free wafers are available.

14 Toilets

St Mark's has toilets for men, toilets for women and two accessible, gender-neutral toilets, one of which is on the first floor. All these have step free access. The accessible toilets meet building requirements and have taps that are easy to turn; the mirrors are placed at the appropriate height, and the emergency alarm cords are in place with the right fittings. The emergency alarms are regularly tested.

Signed on behalf of the PCC by:



Beth Keith Vicar

Stuart Bennett
Churchwarden

Frances Gray Churchwarden

Date: 15th September 2026

Review Date: September 2027

E St Mark's Church Access Audit – categories to be considered

The Access Audit is to be completed annually, usually in September and preferably including in the appraisal someone with lived experience of disability. Please report in the sections below on what barriers there are to inclusive access, and what reasonable adjustments could be made. If no barriers are found please record this.

1	**Worship**
2	**How do people find St Marks**
3	**How do people get to the church?**
4	**Approach to the Church Building**
5	**Car Parking**
6	**Signs and Notice Boards**
7	**Entrance**
8	**Lighting**
9	**Hearing loop and audibility**
10	**Moving around inside church**
11	**Seating**

12	**Printed and screen-based materials**
13	**Toilets**
14	**Current projects** (Renovation or re-ordering of the building. Has inclusive access been considered?)
15	**Specific requests received from the congregation about access**

Date:

Conducted by:

(Please contact Church Office (266 3613) if you wish to ask questions or discuss anything arising from this document.)