Risk assessment for reopening our church building for public worship and private prayer.

## **St Lawrence, Bradfield March 2021**

### Revision history

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| 11/7/20 | First draft produced |
| 12/7/20 | Reworked draft following consultation with wardens. |
| 25/8/2020 | Modified advice around face coverings in line with the latest government and Church of England guidance. |
| 21/10/2020 | Modified section 4 to reflect the latest restrictions around ‘the rule of six’ and household mixing.  Updated section 11 (Communion). Modified section 6 to allow use of service books.  Modified section 5 and added a new section (23) to cover singing by a small group. |
| 29/10/2020 | Modified section 5 to allow hymns and worship songs to be played instrumentally. |
| 17/03/2021 | Modified to take into account current procedures and revised Church of England guidance issued 13/01/2021 et seq.  (Q R Code, singers set currently at 3, ventilation, and church decoration/candles) |

**A note on face coverings.**

Face coverings are currently mandatory for those attending a place of worship, including ministers, worshippers, staff, volunteers, contractors, and visitors, where there may be other people present; remembering that they are mainly intended to protect other people, not the wearer, from coronavirus COVID-19 and that they are not a replacement for physical distancing and regular hand washing.

With this in mind, and recognising that we have a clear call to love one another, we are therefore insisting that, unless someone is otherwise exempt, all visitors (including volunteers, congregants, contractors, and others) must wear face coverings at all times. A document outlining what a face covering is, and how to wear them (as well as listing exemptions), will be displayed at the entrance of the church building, and one-use face coverings will be available at the registration desk for those who need them. To allow for those who rely on facial expressions and lip reading, those who are leading services or events in a place of worship, and those who assist them (including reading the lesson, preaching, leading prayers, or singing where permitted) do not necessarily need to wear a face covering, unless physical distancing cannot be maintained or while moving around the church, and during communion.

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|  | Hazard | Risk level (low/med/high) | Mitigations / precautions taken | New risk level |
| 1 | Transmission risk in the churchyard through people standing within 2 metres of each other. | Medium | Posters on each entrance asking people to maintain social distance. During opening times, a trained steward will be outside the main entrance to welcome people to church, to prevent entry until a space is available, and encourage correct social distancing. | Low |
| 2 | “Pinch points” in the church building, where there is increased transmission risk due to people having to be within 2 metres of each other. These points include the lobby area, the aisle, the vestry, and the areas around seating in the transepts. | Medium | People will enter the church building via the main door in the lobby and exit through the south door (the ‘flower’ porch) to minimise crossover. Information posters will be displayed in critical areas, asking people to keep moving when they are in the aisles, and informing them that they must wear face coverings at all times, except if exempt, in the church building.Stewards will manage the flow of people around the key areas, especially during arrivals and departures. People will be asked by the service leader to move directly to their destination, to minimise time spent in these pinch points. Only one person will be allowed in the vestry at a time. | Low |
| 3 | Risk of transmission for stewards, service leaders, and other volunteers, especially where there is a need to get within 2 metres of others.  Risk of Transmission if volunteer blows out candles. | Medium | Face coverings must be worn by all people inside the church, except where exemptions exist, including the following people: the steward outside; the steward showing people to their seats inside; and the service leader when they have to get close to others (for example, during communion). Those leading the service, preaching, giving the reading, leading prayers or those permitted to sing are exempt unless physical distancing cannot be maintained, while moving around the church, and during communion. A large clear screen will be positioned on the registration desk. If candles are to be used during a service, a single designated person will extinguish them using a snuffer. | Low |
| 4 | Risk of transmission due to people from different family groups / bubbles sitting too close during the services. | Medium | Only certain seats / pews are allowed to be used. Clear signage will be provided in all seating areas. A diagram showing the seating arrangements will be displayed on the registration desk, and provided to the steward inside. A trained steward will show people to their seats (liaising with the outdoor steward to prevent people coming in too quickly, or when the space is at capacity). Pews and other areas which are not for public access will be roped off. The building will not be opened when we do not have three volunteers present: the outdoor steward; the indoor steward; and the registration steward.  Under current restrictions we will only allow people from different households to sit together if they are in a bubble, and no groups of more than six will be allowed. At no point will people from more than one household or bubble be allowed to sit within two metres of others. | Low |
| 5 | Risk of transmission during services due to people speaking in raised voices / singing etc. | High | Liturgy with minimal congregational response will be selected. Congregation will be encouraged by the service leader to speak without raised voices when they respond. No congregational singing is allowed. Areas which may have been contaminated by speaking (notably the screen by the registration desk and the microphone used by the service leader) will be cleaned with anti-bac products before each service. The building will be left empty for more than 72 hours following the service. If this is not possible, a thorough clean will take place before the next service, following Church of England guidelines.  Although no congregational singing is allowed. The latest Church of England advice (January 2021) permits up to three singers, provided appropriate safeguards are in place. See section 23 for more details. | Low |
| 6 | Transmission risk due to surfaces being touched by multiple people. | High | Key areas of touch to be identified. Hand sanitizer will be provided at access and exit points to the building. All access doors (where possible) will be propped open to minimise touch. All high-risk surfaces will be cleaned with either anti-bacterial wipes or spray before services / times of access (and the building will be left empty for more than 72 hours after access). These surfaces will include door handles, pews, and other seats. Service books will be placed in areas of available seating, and attendees will be asked to leave them in situ when they leave. The period of time between handling these books must be more than 72 hours (in other words, they can be left out after one service and used at the next, or permanently left out if that is preferable).  The toilet will be kept open, but will be cleaned thoroughly – see next point. | Medium |
| 7 | Transmission risk due to surfaces in the toilet being touched by multiple people. | High | Paper towels will be supplied. Anti-bacterial wipes will be provided to all users of the toilet, who will be asked to wipe down all surfaces they have touched after use. Toilet areas will be cleaned with anti-bacterial spray and other cleaning products before services and times of public access . The building will be left empty for 72 hours after access – see paragraph 5 above if this is not possible. | Medium |
| 8 | General transmission risk due to the building being in use. | Medium | Clear signs will be displayed at all access points telling people not to come inside if they are displaying any symptoms of Covid-19. Building will be locked between services, and a period longer than 72 hours will have passed before the next time of public access (see also paragraph 5 above). The NHS Track and Trace QR Code will be available at the church entrance and people will be encouraged to use this. For those unable to use this method, registration documents will be kept recoding each person attending the service, including those using the QR facility (each sheet only to be handled by the registration steward and the person who needs to look up records in the event of tracing being necessary, or when disposal is needed). These documents will have the date, time, name, and telephone number of anyone in attendance (including stewards and service leaders), and people will be asked to agree to a GDPR privacy statement before they provide their details. The registration document will be stored in the vestry for 21 days before being shredded. | Low |
| 9 | Transmission risk due to service leader projecting voice. | Medium | Microphones will be used, which will be wiped down after services (if to be used again within 72 hours) and left set up between them to minimise contact with surfaces. Service leaders will stand as far as is possible from the nearest attendees. | Low |
| 10 | Transmission risk due to food / drink being served. | High | As this is still considered to be high risk, we will not serve any food or drink during or after services at the present time. | Low |
| 11 | Transmission risk during the giving / receiving of communion. | High | Communion is an essential aspect of our faith, and is central to our worshipping life together. Because there are transmission risks associated with it, however, there are a number of things we must do in order to make it as safe as possible:   * The preparation of the vessels and other elements should be done entirely by the presiding priest. Likewise, after the service, only the presiding priest should touch the various vessels and elements (including to clean them). The presiding priest should thoroughly clean their hands before handling any of the vessels or other elements used. * We will not share the peace physically before receiving communion. * The common cup is currently suspended (i.e., the priest alone will receive wine). * Wafers will be used rather than bread, and will be covered during the eucharistic prayer (until the point of distribution). The elements that the priest consumes can be left uncovered (and lifted, broken, and so on) – but *only* the presiding priest may consume these elements. * At the moment of breaking the bread, *only* the priest’s wafer should be broken (all other wafers should remain covered). * The presiding priest should speak the words of distribution *before* uncovering the wafers (or, if preferred, after everyone has taken their wafer back to their seats), and the actual distribution should be done without words, at the front of the nave. * Before the distribution, the service leader will explain how people should come forward to receive communion. The verger will ask individuals and family groups to come forward one at a time (following the plan displayed in the church buildings and any specific instructions from the service leader). When people come forward they should wear masks, and must avoid pausing in their journey. * If singers are occupying the choir stalls during the service, the service leader will distribute the communion to them (and to the organist if present) either at the altar rail or where they are positioned. * The presiding priest should consume the priest’s wafer and all the wine before distributing wafers to others. * The presiding priest must sanitise their hands before handling any elements at all (in other words, before preparing the table), and must sanitise their hands again after they have received communion themselves (before distributing wafers to others). They must also wear a face covering in order to distribute wafers. * The wafers will be distributed from the area at the front of the chancel (between the leader’s and preacher’s chairs), to minimise narrow points and contact with rails etc. Communicants are asked not to kneel. * Each communicant should hold their hands out at arm’s length, and the priest should drop the wafer in (likewise, at arm’s length). At no point should any physical contact be made. If physical contact does occur, both parties should immediately sanitise their hands. * After the communicant has received the wafer, they should step back slightly (or, if preferred, return to their seat) before removing or lowering their mask to consume it.   All this must be done without speaking. The organist may play some gentle music during this time. | Low |
| 12 | Risks associated with the use of the room. | Medium | At the current time, the church room will remain out-of-bounds and unused for any purpose. | Low |
| 13 | Transmission risk due to people ‘mingling’ before and after services | High | The building will only be open at specific, advertised, times, and only then when there are three stewards available. The stewards and service leader will work together to ensure that the flow of people in and out of the building is well managed, and people will be asked to go straight to their seats without pausing. In the undesirable circumstance that someone refuses to do so, they will be asked to leave. | Low |
| 14 | Risk of transmission due to people spending long periods of time in a confined space with poor ventilation. | High | Main entrance and exit doors will be propped open (where this is practical) throughout the period of usage, and, where possible, windows will be left open too. In accordance with Government advice and Church of England guidance, services should be conducted in the shortest possible time. People will be asked to leave promptly at the end of the services. | Medium |
| 15 | Risk of transmission of virus through monetary offerings. | Medium | People are encouraged to give via Direct Debit or other contactless methods. If this is not possible, a plate will be placed near the entrance of the church during times of worship and private prayer, with clear signs asking people not to touch the plate as they make their offering. The indoor steward will place the offering plate into the safe at the end of the service, without touching the contents, and said contents will be counted at the start of the next service (which is more than 72 hours later). The steward will wash their hands, or use hand sanitizer, after handling the plate or the offerings. | Low |
| 16 | Risk of people ‘crossing over’ as they seek to access the toilet facilities. | Medium | Clear signs will be displayed near the toilet to explain the process. A steward will be appointed to manage the access to the toilet, and people will only be allowed in on a ‘one-in, one-out’ system. People will be asked to wait in the lobby or tower area until the toilet is free, and the outdoor steward will prevent people from accessing the building through the lobby until the toilet has been vacated. | Low |
| 17 | Transmission risk due to building being contaminated during a previous visit. | Medium | Clear signs explaining that people with any of the Covid-19 symptoms must not enter will be on display. The building will be cleaned before each service / time of private prayer by the stewards and service leader. This will include wiping down all high-use surfaces with anti-bacterial cleaner, ensuring that the toilet is cleaned, and vacuuming the carpeted areas. The building will not normally be in use for at least 72 hours after each service / time of private prayer. | Low |
| 18 | Transmission risk due to the building being inadequately prepared for public worship / private prayer or when decorating the church. | Low | The building will be thoroughly cleaned, including use of anti-bacterial products, before reopening for Easter 2021 to the general public. The Church of England’s Risk Assessment template has been used to perform this preparation, and that document will be displayed, alongside this one, on the registration table and on our website. Church of England guidance (January 2021) states that only individuals (or those in a ‘bubble’) should arrange floral decorations (or similar) in church. If this activity occurs less than 72 hours before a service of public worship in the church, any touched surfaces should be thoroughly cleaned, following Church of England advice. | Low |
| 19 | Risk of areas being overlooked in our risk assessment process | Medium | This risk assessment has been prepared in collaboration with the Wardens, and the PCC has agreed it. We will review it periodically in the weeks following reopening, until such time as all Covid-19 restrictions are lifted by the government and the Church of England. Where risk items are identified which are not on this assessment, please inform the church office in writing as swiftly as possible, by emailing info@manningtreebenefice.co.uk. | Low |
| 20 | Risk of people in clinically vulnerable groups attending the services / times of private prayer, and being exposed to transmission risk. | High | Many of our regular congregants are in the clinically vulnerable groups, and we recognise that some of these people will wish to attend services / acts of private prayer. In our advertising on social media, via email, letter, or in other ways, we will encourage those who are in clinically vulnerable groups to continue worshipping through our online services and via the weekly telephone service, rather than coming to the building. Posters encouraging the vulnerable to do this will also be displayed on or near the entrance of the church during service times / times of private prayer. However, the decision to come or stay away rests with the individuals concerned. | Medium |
| 21 | Risk of people in clinically vulnerable groups being among the volunteers needed (service leaders and stewards) | High | We recognise that many of our volunteers and clergy are in clinically vulnerable groups, and without some of these people our buildings cannot reopen. However, all volunteers will be asked whether they are in a clinically vulnerable group (as stated in the list / information available on the Church of England website[[1]](#footnote-1)). Those in the extremely vulnerable category will not be accepted as volunteers, while those who are in the vulnerable category will be asked to prayerfully consider whether they would like to volunteer. They can discuss volunteering arrangements with either the incumbent, wardens or church administrator, who will explain duties in more detail so that they can consider the kind of activity they are able to undertake. | Medium |
| 22 | Risk of children transmitting infection through close proximity to others. | Low | Children are welcome, but should be accompanied at all times by their parent(s) or guardian(s), who are responsible for ensuring they maintain the correct 2 metre distance at all times (or, where this is not possible, moving them swiftly to another place where it is). | Low |
| 23 | Risk of transmission through choral singing or other music groups playing together. | Medium | Although congregational singing is not currently permitted, we are able to allow an individual or a small group of singers to perform a piece, accompanied. There are risks associated with both movement around the building, and with the possibility that singing increases the infection risk from projection of particles. To minimise these risks, the following points must be observed: as recommended by the Church of England and the RSCM.   * March 2021 Currently it is recommended that no more than three singers may perform together. * The singer(s) must be seated in the choir stalls throughout the service. They should be seated socially distanced from each other and the organist, (minimum of 2 metres apart, unless in a bubble) * When singing they should turn and face the nave. * Singers should only remove masks when singing. * When singers are involved in a service, the service leader must sit in one of the chairs in the main body of the church rather than the leader’s chair. * If singing is performed by an individual singer they may move forward to the centre of the chancel in order to be visible, but must remain more than 2 metres from all other people. * No microphones will be used, to minimise the risk of contact transmission, trip hazards, and obstruction during communion. * Instrumental accompaniment is permitted, but is limited to either the organ, piano or instruments which are not brass or woodwind (to minimise transmission risk). For example, a guitar or ukulele may be used. Players must be 2m socially distanced when playing unless with others in a bubble.   The congregation must not sing along with the performance, and if this happens the service leader must stop the performance at once. |  |

1. <https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2020-06/Personal%20Risk%20Factors%20for%20Clergy%2C%20Church%20Workers%20and%20Volunteers%20v1.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)