

## RISK ASSESSMENT FOR INTERMENT OF ASHES – ST. NICOLAS CHURCH BOOKHAM

The purpose of this risk assessment is to help determine whether or not changes and adaptations in the preparations and procedures for the interment of ashes in the churchyard are sufficient to allow these to take place safely given the current restrictions as a result of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

The risk assessment follows the general order of preparation and procedures for the interment of ashes pre Covid-19, which incorporate usual health and safety considerations to prevent incidents and accidents. Rationale for risk scoring is based on a likelihood and impact model, as set out in Appendix 1. Individual decisions about attending services in Church will depend on their own vulnerabilities and decisions, on which a summary of government guidance is also provided in Appendix 2.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july/covid-19-guidance-for-the-safe-use-of-places-of-worship-from-4-july>

Action No:	Actions	Comments	Risks	Risk Score < mitigation	Mitigation	Risk score > mitigation
	<b>Arrangement of interment</b>					
1.	<b>Liaison with relatives and undertaker to arrange the interment</b>	<p>The procedures are the same as for the arrangement of funerals, and, indeed, in some case the arrangements for the interment of the ashes can be made at the same time as a funeral. There need be no physical contact: all the arrangement can be made by telephone, Zoom or email.</p> <p>Pastoral visits to the home of relatives are now permitted subject to the agreement of the relatives concerned but these are not essential and carry significant risk for both</p>	<p><b>Person to person contact</b> Risk only exists if there is a visit to the home of relatives to arrange the interment.</p>	<b>9</b>	<p><b>Person to person contact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Given the risks a home visit should only be arranged if there is a strong pastoral case for it.</li> <li>• If a visit is arranged, it should be explained in advance (either by telephone or email) that strict social distancing must be observed during the visit. In particular, the minister should sit at least 2 metres from the relatives.</li> </ul>	<b>6</b>

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		the person conducting the interment and the relatives.	<p><b><u>Cross contamination</u></b> Risk only exists if there is a visit to the home of relatives to arrange the interment.</p>	<b>9</b>	<p><b><u>Cross contamination</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hand sanitiser should be used immediately before and after the visit</li> <li>• Minister should avoid touching anything unless absolutely necessary.</li> <li>• Anything documents handed over should have been handled to the minimum and with appropriate precautions – freshly sanitised hands; quarantined for 3 days, if possible</li> <li>• Refreshments should be politely declined.</li> </ul>	<b>6</b>
<b>2.</b>	<b>Handling of ashes prior to the interment</b>	The ashes are usually delivered to the church office in a cardboard box in the week before interment. The risk is no greater than with an Amazon delivery but appropriate precautions should be taken to minimise risks to church staff and volunteers.	<p><b><u>Person to person contact</u></b> Risk exists at the handover of the ashes from the undertaker to the parish administrator or whoever receives the ashes.</p> <p><b><u>Cross contamination</u></b> Handling the box containing the ashes poses a risk of cross contamination if anyone who has handled it previously has the virus.</p>	<b>6</b>	<p><b><u>Person to person contact</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 metre social distancing should be observed during the handover of the ashes.</li> </ul> <p><b><u>Cross contamination</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ideally the undertaker should be asked to put the ashes on the filing cabinets in the corridor outside the office, thus avoiding the need for the</li> </ul>	<b>3</b>
				<b>6</b>		<b>3</b>

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			If the strewer has been used in the previous 3 days by someone else there is a risk of cross contamination.		<p>church administrator to handle the box.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If possible, the ashes should be delivered at least 3 days before the interment to allow for quarantine. Failing that the box could be sprayed with anti-bac spray and handled with gloves.</li> <li>• Ideally, to avoid cross contamination as a result of handling the strewer, interments should be at least 3 days apart. If that is not possible the strewer should be cleaned with anti-bac spray.</li> </ul>	
3.		The minister needs to collect the strewer from the sacristy and load the ashes in it, return the strewer afterwards and enter the details in the service and burial books.	<p><b><u>Person to person contact</u></b> No risk if this is done (as it usual is) midweek when no one else is using the sacristy</p> <p><b><u>Cross contamination</u></b> A risk exists if others use the sacristy within 3 days before or after.</p>	6	<p><b><u>Cross contamination</u></b> The minister should wash their hands and put on gloves prior to opening the sacristy and keep the gloves on until they have locked it again.</p>	3

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4.	<p><b>The interment</b></p> <p>The service is short and take place where the ashes are to be interred – either in the garden of remembrance or in an existing grave in the graveyard. The minister usually meets the family outside the tower (there is no church service) and leads them to the interment site.</p>	<p>It is rare for more than a dozen to want to attend and interment so social distancing should be possible. The risks arise from mourners wanting to greet and comfort one another.</p> <p>There is normally no one from the church other than the minister to supervise those attending. This isn't normally an issue if the attendance is small. It is, however, a reason for setting a limit on the number attending.</p>	<p><b>Person to person contact</b></p> <p>Risk from people standing too close and greeting and comforting one another.</p> <p><b>Cross contamination</b></p> <p>Should not be an issue as the interment is outside and there are no objects that those other than the ministers touch.</p>	6	<p><b>Person to person contact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When the minister meets the family they should remind them that the 2 metres social distancing rule should be observed both when walking to the interment site and during the interment.</li> <li>• Although the memorial garden is reasonable size there is a limit on the number who can stand around the interment site and maintain the 2 metre separation. <b>For this reason the number attending should be limited to 12.</b></li> <li>• As the interment is entirely outside and the service is short it should not be necessary to wear masks.</li> </ul>	3

## APPENDIX 1: RISK SCORING MATRIX MODEL

Risk has been scored using a simple model of 'likelihood' and 'impact' with specific reference to transmission of Covid-19. It is recognised that risk of transmission cannot be eliminated, not least because of variables that are out of the direct control of those preparing for and supporting services in Church. In particular, if individuals choose to attend despite government guidance not to meet with groups indoors if they are among more vulnerable groups, as set out in Government guidance for places of worship, summarised in Appendix 2.

Covid-19 infections range from being asymptomatic with the vast majority being treated at home. Most do not resulting in serious illness requiring hospital admission, serious long term effects on health or death. The likelihood of increased risk of serious illness or death must be considered alongside Government guidance for vulnerable groups and individual decisions to attend services. For these reasons, it is not possible to attribute a full range of impact scores because of the multiple variables. An impact score of 3 has therefore been applied throughout the assessment.

- *Likelihood* = How likely risk is to result in cross infection (from minimal to extremely likely)
- *Impact* = The potential seriousness of an individual contracting Covid-19
- *Risk Score* = Likelihood score multiplied by Impact score

The matrix below provides a guide to assigning degrees of risk depending on the score.

		Impact				
		1	2	3	4	5
Likelihood	1	1	2	3	4	5
	2	2	4	6	8	10
	3	3	6	9	12	15
	4	4	8	12	16	20
	5	5	10	15	20	25

**Risk score 1-7** – suggests that risks sufficiently minimised to proceed

**Risk score 8-12** – suggests some further mitigation may be required or advisable

**Risk score 15 and above** – suggests that high risks persist unless significant mitigation is applied

## **APPENDIX 2: Government Guidance for Places of Worship and individual decisions to attend services**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing>

### **Vulnerable Groups**

In Section 5, Government guidance reiterates general guidance for individuals aged 70 years and over attending a place of worship.

"Certain groups of people may be at increased risk of severe disease from COVID-19, including people who are aged 70 or older, regardless of medical conditions. Individuals who fall within this group are advised to stay at home as much as possible and, if they do go out, to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside of their household. You should consider informing these groups in particular of the symptoms of COVID-19 and current stay alert and social distancing guidance."

The guidance also states in Section 5, that:

"Shielded patients are currently advised not to meet more than one person from outside of their own household, and therefore not currently advised to attend places of worship. From Monday 6 July, those shielding individuals may choose to gather in groups of up to 6 people outdoors and form a support bubble with another household, they will therefore still be advised not to attend places of worship indoors."

It goes on to say:

"Advice for both the clinically vulnerable and extremely clinically vulnerable is however advisory and they can choose how to manage their own risks."

The Government offers this as advice under the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020 and not as legal requirements.

This risk assessment has been undertaken and appropriate measures to reduce risk of spread of infection to others introduced within St Nicolas Church. This includes reduced numbers of people to attend services and through a pre-booking system; provision of hand sanitizers; carefully considered advice prior to attending and on arrival to the Church; and systems for movement of people within and through the Church.

Individuals aged over 70 looking to attend places of worship should take this guidance into consideration together with local measures to minimise risk adopted by St Nicolas Church and consider how they should best manage their own risks. Each Sidesman and Welcomer volunteering to assist in preparation and during services has received a letter and invited to advise whether or not they wish to return to resume their duties now or in due course when they feel safe to do so. Individual decisions will be fully respected and return to rotas at a later date warmly welcomed. On booking places at services, each person receives confirmation that includes request not to attend if showing symptoms of Covid-19 or contact with anyone with symptoms in the previous seven days.

All considered, everyone must consider their own situation and make their own decision as to when the time is right to come to the Service in Church or to continue to enjoy the service online, and also when it would be appropriate for them to be involved in various roles once again.