

Fire Risk Assessment

Stratford St Mary Village Institute

February 2026 v1

Compiled by EBarrell

Review History

Date reviewed:

Reviewed by:

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1. Premises Details

1.1. Premises Identification

Name of premises:

Stratford St Mary Village Institute and Field (“the Institute”)

Address:

The Row, Stratford St Mary, Colchester, Essex, CO7 6JU
what3words: ///rams.absorb.solid

1.2. Site and Grounds

The Institute comprises approximately one acre of land, including:

- a hard-standing car parking area to the west of the building;
 - a short-cut grass field;
 - a fenced play area;
 - fenced boundaries to the southern and eastern edges;
 - a soft tree boundary to the north, adjoining privately owned land known as “Thomson’s Field”.
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1.3. Building Description

The main hall building dates from the 1920s, with later additions:

- western (front) extension comprising entrance hall and toilet facilities;
- eastern extension comprising additional storage rooms;
- northern extension comprising kitchen and annex, with rear emergency exit.

The building is single-storey throughout.

1.4. Internal Layout

The building comprises:

- an entrance hall with:
 - women’s cloakroom with two cubicles and wash area to the right;

- a disabled toilet and services area (electrical boards, coin meter, Wi-Fi) to the left;
 - men's urinal area and single cubicle beyond.
 - a main hall accessed from the entrance hall, with:
 - an emergency exit door on the south wall leading to the grass car park;
 - two storerooms at the far end used for tables, chairs, and village equipment;
 - two doors on the north wall leading to the kitchen and annex.
 - a kitchen and annex connected by an open archway:
 - the annex has a further emergency exit leading to the playing field to the rear;
 - the kitchen is equipped as a domestic "reheat-only" kitchen.
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1.5. Use of the Premises

The Institute is managed by the Trustees of the Stratford St Mary Village Institute Hall Charity.

Its charitable purpose is the provision of recreation, assembly, and community facilities for residents of Stratford St Mary and neighbouring parishes.

In practice, the premises are used as a community hall and grounds for:

- regular and occasional hires;
- private and public events;
- village community events such as commemorations and social gatherings.

1.6. Occupancy and Patterns of Use

- Maximum occupancy:
 - approximately 75–80 seated;
 - up to approximately 120 standing.
- Most bookings involve fewer than 20 attendees.
- Larger events occur infrequently (typically around once per month).

The hall is used predominantly during mornings and evenings, with more frequent weekday use. Regular weekend events also occur. Evening parties end at 11pm normally. It is not used overnight.

2. Scope and Method

This Fire Risk Assessment applies to Stratford St Mary Village Institute and Field (“the Institute”) and covers all areas of the building and grounds under the control of the Institute, together with their normal and reasonably foreseeable use.

The assessment considers fire risks arising from:

- the structure and layout of the building;
- fixtures, fittings, and equipment;
- activities carried out within the premises, including use by hirers, volunteers, contractors, and members of the public.

The assessment has been undertaken in accordance with the principles of the **Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005**. It identifies fire hazards, people who may be at risk, and the fire safety measures in place, and evaluates whether those measures are adequate and proportionate to the nature, scale, and use of the premises.

The assessment is qualitative and risk-based. It is intended to support practical fire safety management and trustee decision-making, rather than to provide a technical audit of fire safety systems.

This Fire Risk Assessment operates alongside the Institute’s Fire Safety Policy and Risk Management Framework. It may inform trustee decisions, including whether additional controls are required or whether issues should be recorded and managed through the Risk Register.

The assessment is reviewed when there are material changes to the building or its use, following any fire incident or near miss, or periodically as part of governance assurance.

3. Identification of Fire Hazards

3.1 Sources of ignition

The primary sources of ignition within the premises arise from the use of electricity.

Electrical installations and equipment include:

- a main electrical distribution board located in the entrance hall area;
- fixed electrical socket outlets distributed throughout the building;
- ceiling-mounted radiant electric heaters, comprising:
 - eight units within the main hall;
 - one unit within the women's toilet area;
- electrical equipment associated with kitchen use, including:
 - a domestic four-ring electric hob and oven;
 - microwave oven;
 - electric kettles;
 - an electric tea urn;
 - a domestic refrigerator;
- portable electrical equipment used for hall activities, including:
 - a plug-in tea hostess trolley;
 - a projector;
 - additional portable electric ovens used during specific classes or events.

The Institute does not permit the routine use of gas appliances or combustible fuels within the building, including indoor or outdoor fireworks.

Open flames are not normally used. The use of candles is not expressly prohibited, but their use is infrequent and typically associated with specific events rather than routine activity. Hirers are aware of the smoke / heat detectors in the building and risk of setting them off.

Electrical equipment is used during occupied periods only and under supervision.

Externally the only possible sources of ignition which are common with most buildings are the mains electricity cable running into the building, the parking of cars in the carpark adjacent to the building and mature tree hedge line to one side of the building.

3.2 Sources of fuel

Potential sources of combustible material within the premises include furnishings, stored materials, and items introduced through normal use of the building.

Within the main hall:

- window blinds are installed; these are modern drop-down blinds compliant with fire-retardant standards;
- seating comprises a mix of hard plastic chairs and padded chairs manufactured to fire-retardant specifications;
- decorative materials are minimal:
 - one internal notice board in the main hall measuring less than one square metre;
 - a smaller notice board located externally near the front entrance;
- there are no routine decorative displays within the main hall, and only a limited number of framed items within the anteroom.

The building has been recently renovated and inspected under Building Control. The construction of walls, floors, ceilings, and insulation reflects modern building standards and compliant materials.

Storage areas include:

- a hall user storage room containing a mix of materials, including paper, wood, fabric items, sports equipment, and hall equipment;
- the storage room is not used as an occupied space and is accessed only for storage purposes;
- electrical provision within this room is limited to a single fixed light fitting, with no socket outlets present.

Within the kitchen:

- typical domestic kitchen fittings are present, including cupboards and drawers;
- kitchen equipment and consumables are stored in a manner consistent with routine community hall use.

Waste materials are managed as follows:

- small internal plastic waste bins are located within the kitchen;
- larger waste and recycling bins, provided by the local authority, are stored externally and away from the building.

Housekeeping arrangements aim to limit the accumulation of combustible waste and unnecessary materials within occupied areas.

3.3 Sources of oxygen

Sources of oxygen within the premises arise from natural ventilation.

Ventilation is provided through:

- opening windows located throughout the building;
- underfloor ventilation openings;
- ceiling vents providing ventilation to the roof void and external air.

No mechanical ventilation systems, oxygen enrichment systems, or specialist air-handling equipment are present.

4. People at Risk

The premises are used by a broad range of people, reflecting the Institute's role as a community hall and venue for hire.

People who may be present within the premises include:

- members of the public attending events or activities;
- hirers and attendees who may be regular users of the hall;
- hirers and attendees who may be unfamiliar with the layout of the building and its fire safety arrangements;
- children and young people, including infants, attending activities or events;
- older people, including elderly users and attendees;
- volunteers involved in activities or events;
- Trustees attending meetings or carrying out governance activities;
- contractors and the caretaker carrying out maintenance or operational tasks.

Some users may require additional consideration in the event of a fire, including:

- young children;
- older people;
- individuals with mobility, sensory, or other impairments;
- people unfamiliar with the premises or attending infrequent or one-off events.

The assessment recognises that occupancy and user profiles vary depending on the nature of the activity or event taking place. Fire safety arrangements are therefore intended to be suitable for mixed use and for users who may not be familiar with the premises.

5. Evaluation of Fire Safety Measures

5.1 Means of escape

Means of Escape

The premises are provided with multiple means of escape from occupied areas, appropriate to the size, layout, and single-storey nature of the building. This has been confirmed by previous inspections.

Escape Routes and Exits

The principal escape routes and exits comprise:

- the main front entrance door serving the entrance hall and toilet block via internal doors;
- a side emergency exit door from the main hall;
- a rear emergency exit door from the annex area, leading to the playing field via internal door.

These exits provide alternative escape routes from the main occupied areas of the building.

Travel Distances

Travel distances from occupied areas to a place of safety have been considered and are judged to be appropriate for the ground floor layout, scale, and use of the premises, and for the typical occupancy levels and user profiles.

No areas were identified where escape routes would be excessively long, complex, or indirect for expected users of the building.

Door Operation and Internal Routes

- The main front entrance comprises a double external door operated by lever handles, with a corresponding internal double door providing access to the main hall.
- External emergency exit doors serving the main hall and annex are fitted with push-bar mechanisms and open in the direction of escape.
- Internal doors to ancillary areas, including toilets, kitchen, storage rooms, and annex areas, are fitted with simple twist or lever handles.
- Toilet cubicles are fully enclosed rooms with internal twist-handle doors.

No internal doors on escape routes are locked during occupation of the premises.

External Exit Conditions

Access from the external emergency exit doors serving the main hall and annex involves a small step down to external ground level. This condition has been previously assessed and is considered manageable for ambulatory users, including those with reduced mobility, when using the premises under normal conditions.

The exits open directly onto external open space, allowing onward movement away from the building.

Signage and Lighting

Escape routes and exits are clearly identified by fire exit signage incorporating emergency illumination. Signage is positioned to assist users who may be unfamiliar with the premises, including during evening use or reduced lighting conditions. Evacuation Point signage exists to clearly direct users to muster at the children playground well away from the building and road.

Overall Assessment

The means of escape provided are considered adequate and proportionate for the nature of the premises, its layout, and its pattern of use.

5.2 Fire detection and warning

Fire Detection and Warning

The premises are provided with a fire detection and warning system appropriate to the size, layout, and use of the building.

Fire warning is provided by a manual fire alarm system, operated by a single pull-point alarm. Activation of the alarm provides an audible warning throughout the premises and also activates the emergency illumination of the fire exit signage within the hall.

In addition, the premises are fitted with linked fire detectors comprising:

- a heat detector located within the kitchen area;
- a smoke detector located within the main hall;
- a smoke detector located within the front entrance hall near the electrical distribution board.

These detectors are interlinked to provide coordinated warning within the premises.

The fire alarm and detection system is maintained and serviced annually by a competent contractor. User checks are carried out weekly to confirm correct operation.

Overall Assessment

The fire detection and warning arrangements are considered adequate and proportionate for the nature of the premises, its layout, and its pattern of use.

5.3 Firefighting equipment

Firefighting equipment is provided within the premises in locations appropriate to the risks present.

Fire extinguishers are located:

- in the front entrance hall near the electrical distribution board;
- within the main hall;
- within the kitchen area.

In addition, a fire blanket is provided within the Kitchen.

The extinguishers provided are appropriate for the foreseeable fire risks associated with each area of the premises.

Fire extinguishers are inspected, serviced, and refreshed or replaced annually by a competent contractor. In addition, visual checks are carried out weekly to confirm that extinguishers are present, accessible, and show no obvious signs of damage or misuse.

Firefighting equipment is intended for use only by persons who feel confident to do so and where it is safe to attempt first aid firefighting.

Overall Assessment

The provision, siting, and maintenance of firefighting equipment are considered adequate and proportionate for the nature of the premises and its pattern of use.

5.4 Emergency lighting

The premises benefit from good levels of natural ambient lighting within public areas due to the number and size of windows throughout the building.

In addition, emergency illumination is provided to fire exit signage, which activates automatically upon operation of the fire alarm system. This illumination is intended to assist occupants in identifying escape routes and exits in the event of reduced lighting conditions.

The level of emergency lighting provided is considered appropriate for the size, layout, and pattern of use of the premises, taking into account the single-storey nature of the building and the presence of clear, direct escape routes.

Overall Assessment

Emergency lighting arrangements are considered adequate and proportionate for the nature of the premises, its layout, and its use.s

5.5 Structural fire precautions

The building is of single-storey construction and has been subject to Building Control inspection in connection with previous works, including more recent renovation. The premises have also passed previous fire safety inspections relevant to their use.

Structural fire precautions have been considered at a non-intrusive level, appropriate to a fire risk assessment, and include:

- walls, floors, ceilings, and insulation consistent with modern building standards following renovation;
- internal layout that provides separation between principal areas, including hall, kitchen, storage, and ancillary spaces;
- internal doors that are capable of forming compartmented areas, although it is not normal practice for these doors to be kept closed during routine use;
- external exit doors from the main hall and annex fitted with panic-bar mechanisms to allow rapid release in the direction of escape;
- the main front entrance door remaining unlocked during periods of occupation.

No visible defects were identified that would indicate compromised structural fire separation or an increased risk of fire spread beyond that expected for a community building of this type and use.

In terms of external controls, the Charity maintains the mature hedge to the side of the building to prevent overhang. The designated parking is along boundary lines along either side of the property and not designated directly against the building. We also encourage users to ensure free access to emergency vehicles to the rear of the building.

This assessment does not include intrusive inspection or technical verification of fire-resisting construction, which would require specialist assessment if concerns were identified.

Overall Assessment

Based on observable condition, building layout, and inspection history, structural fire precautions are considered adequate and proportionate for the nature of the premises and its pattern of use.

6. Fire Safety Management Arrangements

Fire safety at Stratford St Mary Village Institute is managed through a combination of trustee oversight, routine monitoring, contractor servicing, and controls applied to the use of the premises.

Governance and Responsibility

Overall responsibility for fire safety rests with the Trustees of Stratford St Mary Village Institute, who act collectively as the Responsible Person.

Trustees are responsible for:

- ensuring that a suitable and sufficient Fire Risk Assessment is in place and kept under review;
- ensuring appropriate fire safety measures are provided and maintained;
- reviewing fire safety matters following incidents, changes in use, or material concerns;
- taking proportionate action where fire risks are identified.

Day-to-day tasks may be delegated, but accountability remains with the Trustees.

Routine Monitoring and Checks

Routine monitoring of fire safety conditions is carried out through regular caretaker checks, which include observation of:

- means of escape and exit routes;
- fire alarm and detection indicators;
- firefighting equipment accessibility and condition;
- general housekeeping affecting fire risk.

Issues identified during routine monitoring are:

- addressed locally where minor and appropriate;
 - reported to Trustees where significant, recurring, or unresolved;
 - considered for inclusion in the Risk Register where they represent material risk.
-

Fire Alarm, Detection, and Emergency Lighting Maintenance

Fire alarm, detection, and associated emergency illumination systems are:

- subject to **weekly user checks** to confirm correct operation;
- **serviced annually by a competent contractor**;
- faults are recorded and rectified without undue delay.

Records of servicing and checks are retained as part of the Institute's fire safety records.

Firefighting Equipment Maintenance

Fire extinguishers provided within the premises are:

- **inspected, serviced, and refreshed or replaced annually by a competent contractor**;
- visually checked during routine monitoring to confirm they remain present, accessible, and undamaged.

Electrical Safety and Portable Equipment

Electrical fire risks are managed through a combination of fixed installation arrangements and equipment controls.

- Portable electrical equipment owned by the Institute is subject to **annual portable appliance testing (PAT)**.
 - Hirers are required to ensure that electrical equipment brought onto the premises is new, in good condition, or appropriately tested.
 - The Institute provides **PAT-tested, fused extension leads** for use where required, providing an additional level of protection between user equipment and the building's electrical system.
 - Unsafe or damaged electrical equipment is not permitted for use within the premises.
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Hirers and Use of the Premises

Hirers and users of the premises are expected to:

- comply with fire safety instructions and signage;
- keep escape routes and exits clear at all times;
- avoid introducing significant fire hazards;
- follow any fire safety conditions applied as part of the booking process.

Where judged appropriate, Trustees may require additional information or assurances relating to fire safety before confirming a booking.

Incidents, Review, and Escalation

Fire incidents, false alarms, or near misses are recorded and reviewed.

Trustees consider whether:

- the Fire Risk Assessment remains suitable;
- additional controls are required;
- matters should be escalated and managed through the Risk Register.

The Fire Risk Assessment is reviewed when circumstances change and periodically as part of governance assurance.

Records

The Institute maintains proportionate fire safety records, which may include:

- the Fire Risk Assessment and review records;
 - contractor servicing certificates;
 - routine monitoring outputs;
 - records of incidents and trustee decisions.
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Overall Management Assessment

Fire safety management arrangements are considered appropriate and proportionate for the nature of the premises, its pattern of use, and its governance structure.

7. Risk Assessment for Fire (Jan 2026)

Taking account of the nature of the premises, its layout, and its pattern of use, the overall risk of fire is considered by the trustees:

Likelihood of Fire

The likelihood of fire occurring is considered **low**.

The primary ignition sources are electrical and are subject to routine inspection, maintenance, and control. The use of gas appliances and combustible fuels is not permitted, and open flames are not routinely used. The premises are occupied only during supervised use.

Potential Consequences

The potential consequences of a fire are considered **manageable**.

The building is single-storey and provided with multiple escape routes, clear exit signage, and audible fire warning. Occupancy levels are generally modest, and users are able to evacuate directly to external open space.

Fire detection, warning, emergency lighting, and firefighting equipment are provided and maintained, supporting early alert and safe evacuation.

Overall Risk Judgement

Having regard to the hazards identified, the people who may be at risk, and the fire safety measures in place, the overall risk of fire is considered **acceptable for the nature and use of the premises**.

No significant deficiencies were identified that would require immediate remedial action beyond routine management and monitoring.

8. Action Plan (if required)

No additional fire safety actions are required at this time.

Existing fire safety measures are considered adequate and proportionate for the nature of the premises and its current pattern of use. Fire safety will continue to be managed through routine monitoring, maintenance, and review.

9. Review and Monitoring

This Fire Risk Assessment will be reviewed to ensure it remains suitable and sufficient for the premises and its use.

Review Triggers

The assessment will be reviewed:

- if there are material changes to the building, layout, or fabric;
- if there are changes to the use of the premises or occupancy levels;
- following any fire incident, false alarm, or near miss;
- if routine monitoring or inspection identifies recurring or significant concerns;
- periodically as part of trustee governance assurance.

Review Frequency

In the absence of material change or incident, the Fire Risk Assessment will be subject to a **periodic review**, normally on an annual basis, to confirm that it remains current and appropriate. This review may confirm that no changes are required.

10. Record of Assessment

- Assessed by (name and role): Sasha Lawrence
- Evidence of competence (if applicable): Risk Assessor, Industry
- Date of last review: March 2025
- Reviewed by (name and role): Emily Barrell (chair) and Duncan Horlock, advisor
- Outcome of review (no change / updated): no change

Supporting Evidence

- Fire alarm servicing certificates
- Fire extinguisher servicing certificates
- Routine monitoring records
- Incident or near-miss records which would be considered through the Risk Register protocol.