



VENTNOR CENTRAL: CURRENT USAGE

TOWN COUNCIL MEETING

REPORT 91/19

11 NOVEMBER 2019

The purpose of this Report is to ask Members to adopt a recommendation from the Town Council's Assets and Services Working Group for the current use of Ventnor Central following receipt of the updated Fire Risk Assessment of the building.

No. DETAILS

1) BACKGROUND

- a) Uses of the building until a final decision about its future development is made have been varied across all three of its floors and enquiries about use by other groups continue to be received.
 - b) The questions that arise have been considered at several meetings of the Assets and Services Working Group culminating in the decision at its meeting of 1 October to ask Fire Risk Assessor Harry Prior to revisit the site and update his 2014 Fire Risk Assessment.
 - c) The updated Assessment is dated 17 October and a copy is attached for Members' information.
-

2) PERMITTED ACTIVITIES

- a) The Risk Assessment makes clear that both the Ground floor and the Mezzanine level should be cleared of all current contents and access to them prevented.
 - b) The Upper Hall can continue to be used but only by relatively small groups of not more than 40 and only during daylight hours.
-

3) ASSETS AND SERVICES GROUP'S RECOMMENDATION

The Assets and Services Working Group's recommendation is that the use of the Upper Hall should be solely for the Baby Box Project in view of the service it provides and its need for significant storage that should now be moved into the Upper Hall from the Mezzanine area.

4) RECOMMENDATION

The Town Council is recommended to endorse the recommendation of the Assets and Services Working Group.

VENTNOR YOUTH CENTRE BUILDING
VICTORIA STREET
VENTNOR
ISLE of WIGHT PO38 1ET



FIRE SAFETY REPORT

This report has been prepared following the request from Mr David Bartlett Ventnor Town Council Clerk, requesting advice on the suitability (fire safety wise), for using the ground floor (Victoria Street level) for Community activities during the day time only.

Current situation:

As the building is, has or is being used for community activities, due to the age and condition of the building it is understood that there may be the potential for the building to be demolished at some time in the uncertain future.

The Council would like some form of confirmation that the floor level accessed from Victoria Street only, was safe to use for limited numbers of persons during ‘Day Light – Day time hours only’.

This includes occupancy by very young persons. With the assurance that the two lower levels would be unoccupied including for storage use only.

A Fire Risk Assessment was carried out on the 24th November 2014 with no evidence that any follow up review(s) had been under taken.

These premises are owned by the Isle of Wight Council and Managed by Ventnor Town Council.

Relevant Legislation & Fire Safety Guidance:

The controlling fire safety legislation for these premises is ‘The Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005. Within this legislation, and recognising the building will be used to accommodate young persons. (A young person means any person who has not attained the age of 18 years).

SCHEDULE 1 Part 2 of this Order sets out the matters to be taken into particular account in risk assessment in respect of Young Persons.

Other legislation will apply when the Local Authority (The Isle of Wight Council) inspects those premises when applicants are applying to use the premises for accommodating young persons.

The Fire Safety Guidance Publication issued by the Governments for determining suitable and appropriate fire safety standards to be applied for this premises, is contained within the ‘Fire Safety Risk Assessment – Small & medium Places of Assembly’ publication Including, Community and or Youth Centres.

Description of the Premises;

There are no appreciable changes to the description of the building as set out in pages 3 – 6 in the 2014 Fire Risk Assessment report.

One of the middle floor office fire doors has been removed with the office now used for storage purposes.

The original fire loading of combustible contents in the lower ground floor level (including the separate internal garage) and the middle floor level has been considerably increased, with the amount of combustible storage and the Artist Workshop Materials in the main lower Ground floor rooms including, what appears to be containers of flammable oil based decorating materials.

Housekeeping & Storage:

At the moment, the quantity of combustibile materials in the building is placing an ‘unhealthy’ fire loading upon the building.

In the event of a fire breaking out in either the lower ground floor or, any of the rooms on the middle floor level, it is professionally considered that the building would not survive a virtual total destruction before the fire can be being fully extinguished.

All the upholstered seating and chairs in the Victoria Street floor hall floor level do not appear to have any labels or other indications to confirm that these items of furniture conform to the current ‘Furniture and Furnishings (Fire) (Safety) Regulations 1988.



The dried foliage placed in the upper hall front windows are considered to be very combustibile, unless they are there for a particular purpose, it is recommended that they are removed from the building.



Mains Electrical Installation and Portable Appliances:

The buildings mains electrical installation does not appear to have been regularly inspected to ensure 'safe for use'. The cupboard containing the mains electrical equipment in the corner of the upper hall level, is not to a fire resisting standard or, that the door is being kept locked shut

There appears to be no mains electrical portable appliances testing procedure in place including, those appliances brought in by users of the hall.

Some of the present electrical appliances were found to be damaged.

Installed Fire Safety Provisions;

At present, the following fire safety provisions are installed and maintained under contract.

The records for the maintenance and servicing of these provisions are currently kept in the Clerk to the Town Council's offices.

- i) Fire Extinguishers,
- ii) Emergency Lighting,
- iii) Fire Warning & Detection arrangements,
- iv) Fire Exit & Fire Safety Signage,
- v) Limited 'No Smoking' Signage

Comments on the buildings Fire Safety Arrangements:

The buildings fire alarm control panel is located on the lower ground floor.

The fire alarm does not appear to be regularly tested on a weekly basis.

The fire alarm panel was showing that the mains electrical supply was healthy.

Fire alarm call points are positioned at each floor level adjacent to each exit door. Some call points are fitted with 'accidental actuation' prevention covers

The provided Fire Procedure notices although displayed at each floor level, do not appear to include information on the Assembly Point; this informs the occupants in the building as to where they are to assemble in the event of an evacuation.

There was no information indicating that all those persons/organisations hiring the building are provided with the buildings fire procedures including, information for calling of the Fire Service.

The fire extinguishers in the upper hall would be better positioned adjacent to the main entrance doors.

Means of Escape in Case of Fire Standards:

Published guidance on fire safety for buildings states that in general, there should normally be at least two escape routes from all parts of the building including each floor level, but a single escape route may be accepted in some circumstances (e.g. a part of the building accommodating less than 60 persons or, where the travel distance is limited).

Where two escape routes are necessary and, to further minimise the risk to the occupants becoming trapped, the 'Responsible Person' should ensure that the escape routes are completely independent of each other.

All exit doors on escape routes and final exit doors should normally open in the direction of travel. The width of the escape route, stairs and doors should be wide enough (not less than 21 inches) for the required number of persons to pass through.

This standard does not appear to be compliant for the internal staircase at the far end of the Victoria Street floor level hall.

The Council should recognise that although the halls front double outward opening exit doors being 1.8m wide when both fully open, there is only an 88cm clear width between the edge of the two doors and the side railings.

Thereby, the available clear exit width around one exit door for persons to access onto the ramp down to the pavement level is considerably reduced.



Victoria Street forms part of the towns 'one way' traffic system where it accommodates a considerable volume of traffic of all sizes, it is also recognised that the speed of the traffic can be up to and over the permitted speed limit, the Surveyor also recognises that there will be occasional part pavement parking of vehicles.



Persons with Mobility Assistance need, Parents and Young Persons in perambulators, Buggies etc:

The only exit doors that are considered suitable for use by persons with mobility needs and those young persons in buggies etc. Is the front of the upper hall front entrance doors and the lower ground floor main entrance doors?

The rear staircase and internal exit route down from the upper hall down are considered 'barely' suitable for normal mobile persons.

Due to the 'neglected' external routes from the lower ground floor rear and side existing two fire exit doors, at the moment must not be considered.



Maximum calculated Numbers of Persons permitted in the Upper floor level:

With an open floor area of 187 sq. m, this will on paper accommodate not more than 175. However, with no suitable alternative fire exit staircase/route provided including, suitable for use by persons with mobility assistance, young person's etc. The maximum safe number of persons should not be more than half this number.

Given that there may be vehicular obstructions on the pavement outside the front doors and sloping ramp, including taken into account the speed of passing traffic.

It would not be seen as best practice to exit numbers of persons and children into this environment.

So with no possible suitable alternative fire exit from the upper hall, the safe numbers of persons using the upper hall, you will have to considerably reduce the numbers even more including, the users of this hall.

Recommendations to improve the Fire Safety if the Upper Hall is to be Useable:

- i) Ensure regular weekly testing of the fire alarm system,
- ii) Include information on the buildings fire evacuation assembly location,
- iii) Ensure all organisations are aware of the buildings fire safety procedures and evacuation plans,
- iv) Remove all storage (combustible or not) from the lower ground and middle floor levels,
- v) Enclose the staircase with fire resisting materials located at the rear of the upper floor hall,
- vi) Consider replacing the upholstered furniture with approved fire safe standard furniture,
- vii) The mains electrical installation should be checked and tested by a competent electrical engineer,
- viii) All mains portable electrical appliances should be regularly checked and tested,
- ix) Where hall users bring their own mains portable electrical appliances in to the building, these appliances should be checked and tested before use,
- x) The mains electrical cupboard in the upper floor hall should be enclosed with fire resisting materials and the door kept locked shut,
- xi) A 'Keep Locked Shut' notice and a mains electrical hazard notice affixed to the mains electrical cupboard door,
- xii) Improve the number of 'No Smoking' signs,
- xiii) The provided fire extinguishers in the upper hall should be re-positioned to adjacent the front entrance doors,
- xiv) Reduce the use of the upper hall to no more than 40 persons including persons with mobility assistance and or young persons.

Potential Using of other areas of the building:

We have highlighted the problems and limitations of using the hall at the upper floor level. As this building still has a potential to provide a facility for use by the community – albeit for a limited time. The Surveyor recognises that with the removal of all the storage at all floor levels, several achievable and less expensive improvements, this could enable the Council to consider using the lower ground floor especially for ‘Mothers & Young Persons’ instead of using the upper floor level hall.

This is considered to be possibly a better option, for use especially by young persons and persons with mobility assistance.

However, the upper hall could still be used as an indoor sports facility only (occupied with a limited number of able bodied persons).

Harry Paviour

Fire Safety Surveyor

17th October 2019
