

CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL

BUSINESS CASE- OFFICER REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL- DECISION REQUIRED

Meeting Date: 30 April 2026

Subject: Victory Hall Fire Escape Pathway

Executive summary

This report presents a business case for the installation of a compliant fire escape pathway at Victory Hall, addressing a longstanding Health & Safety Action relating to evacuation and accessibility.

Three surface construction options have been assessed: Concrete, Eco 40 Permeable Gravel System, and Tarmac. The assessment considers legal compliance, safety, accessibility, cost, deliverability, environmental sustainability, and operational impacts.

The report recommends adoption of the Eco 40 Permeable Gravel System, alongside associated lighting, fencing, and signage, as the most proportionate, compliant, and cost-effective solution.

Purpose

The purpose of this business case is to:

- rectify a documented health and safety deficiency,
- ensure safe and accessible emergency evacuation for all users,
- meet statutory fire safety and equality obligations and
- support informed decision-making by Full Council.

Background

Victory Hall is a Council-owned community facility hired for a wide range of activities. The venue is regularly used by wheelchair users and other individuals with mobility needs.

The building provides:

- one double-doored main entrance with level access; and
- one double-doored emergency fire exit.

Although the fire exit opens at ground level, it currently discharges onto uneven paving slabs and an uneven grassed surface, creating:

- a significant risk during emergency evacuation.

- an accessibility failure for disabled users and
- a lack of a defined, illuminated escape route.

This issue has been formally recorded as an outstanding item on the Council's Health & Safety Action Plan and therefore requires resolution as a matter of priority.

Options

Option A- Concrete Pathway In-situ reinforced concrete pathway with a brushed finish and formed edging.

Estimated Cost (excl. VAT): £6,328.79 (contracted installation)

Benefits:

- Very high durability and long lifespan
- Low ongoing maintenance

Disadvantages/Risks:

- Non-permeable surface
- Higher embodied carbon
- Requires contractor delivery

Environmental Impact:

- High carbon footprint from cement production
- Increased surface water runoff
- Long life partially offsets environmental impact

Option B- Eco 40 Permeable Gravel System (Preferred Option)

Description:

A stabilised, permeable gravel pathway using Eco 40 ground stabilisation sheets, laid on a prepared sub-base and infilled with disability-compliant aggregate.

Estimated Cost (excl. VAT):

£4,835.44

Delivery:

- Installed by the Council's Open Spaces Team
- Estimated programme duration: approximately 5 working days

Benefits:

- Wheelchair-compliant when correctly installed

- Sustainable drainage solution
- Natural appearance suitable for civic open spaces
- Lowest capital cost

Disadvantages/Risks:

- Requires periodic inspection and topping-up

Environmental Impact:

- Lowest carbon footprint of all options
- Fully permeable, supporting groundwater recharge
- Reduces surface water runoff and local flood risk

Option C – Tarmac (Asphalt Surface)

Description:

Asphalt surfacing laid over a Type 1 sub-base with concrete edging.

Estimated Cost (incl. VAT):

£10,156.92

Benefits:

- Smooth, fully accessible surface
- Durable and weather-resistant

Disadvantages/Risks:

- Highest cost
- Requires specialist contractor and plant
- Non-permeable

Environmental Impact:

- Moderate-to-high carbon footprint
- Non-permeable surface
- Partially recyclable at end of life

Additional Safety Measures (Essential Works)

Irrespective of pathway surface, the following essential safety works are required to achieve compliance:

- Installation of two sensor-activated floodlights, battery-backed for use during power failure
 - Estimated cost: £750

- Installation of fencing and directional evacuation signage
 - To ensure evacuees are guided safely to the front of the building

These measures are necessary to:

- provide a clearly defined means of escape.
- ensure safe evacuation during hours of darkness; and
- meet fire safety and accessibility standards.

Capacity, Fire Safety and Compliance Considerations

Victory Hall provides approximately 131 sqm of usable floor space.

Indicative capacities (subject to Fire Risk Assessment):

- Standing: approximately 200 persons
- Seated (chairs only): approximately 120 persons
- Seated at tables: approximately 80 persons

A Fire Risk Assessment is scheduled for 18 May 2026, which will inform final occupancy limits.

Given the regular presence of wheelchair users, improving the fire escape pathway is critical to meeting:

- fire safety legislation.
- equality and accessibility duties and
- the Council's duty of care.

Reducing effective operational capacity below 200 persons will also avoid higher-risk compliance thresholds and associated administrative burdens.

Financial Summary (Excl. VAT)

- Eco Pathway £4,853.44
- Lighting, Fencing and Signage £750
- **Total recommended investment £5585.44**

Risk of Not Proceeding

Failure to act would:

- leave an identified Health & Safety action unresolved.
- expose the Council to ongoing legal and reputational risk.
- undermine accessibility obligations and
- conflict with fire safety best practice.

Recommendation

That Full Council:

1. Approves the installation of an Eco 40 permeable gravel fire escape pathway at Victory Hall.
2. Approves associated expenditure for lighting, fencing, and signage; and
3. Notes that this decision resolves a longstanding Health & Safety Action and significantly improves disability and fire safety compliance.

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