

CHIGWELL PARISH COUNCIL

PROGRESS REPORT: VICTORY HALL FIRE ESCAPE PATHWAY REMEDIAL WORKS

Purpose of Report

To provide Members with an update on the completion of the Victory Hall Fire Escape Pathway Remedial Works Project and associated improvements undertaken at the site.

Background

Members will recall that remedial works were approved to address a longstanding health and safety issue concerning emergency egress arrangements at Victory Hall. The project sought to ensure that the facility complies with modern fire safety requirements whilst also improving accessibility, functionality and the overall appearance of the site.

I am pleased to report that the project has now been substantially completed and has been delivered within the approved budget allocation of £6,000.

Completion of Fire Escape Pathway

The new fire escape pathway has now been installed and is fully operational. The pathway provides a safe, unobstructed and clearly defined escape route for hall users in the event of an emergency.

Importantly, the design provides a semi-permanent, level-access escape route, improving accessibility for all users, including those with mobility impairments, whilst supporting the Council's wider commitment to accessibility and inclusion. The works have also been delivered in a manner which minimises disturbance to the surrounding environment and aligns with the principles contained within the Council's Biodiversity Policy.

The completion of the pathway now brings closure to a longstanding health and safety action and represents a significant improvement in the safety and resilience of the facility.

Occupancy Review and User Communication

Following completion of the works and a review of occupancy arrangements, the revised maximum occupancy levels approved by Full Council on 25 June 2026 have been formally communicated to all regular hall user groups.

The updated occupancy figures have also been incorporated into the Terms and Conditions of Hire, ensuring that existing and future hirers are fully aware of the permitted capacities and their responsibilities regarding fire safety and building management.

Site Improvements and External Community Space

As part of the wider improvement works, two of the three picnic benches previously situated within the Cemetery and no longer in regular use have been relocated to the side of Victory Hall.

This has created an attractive outdoor seating area for hall users, visitors and community groups. The additional seating enhances the amenity value of the site, provides a pleasant external social space and makes better use of Council-owned assets that would otherwise have remained underutilised.

Creation of External Storage Compound

During the project, officers identified an opportunity to improve storage arrangements at Victory Hall.

The Open Spaces Team has subsequently installed a fence and gate to create a secure external storage compound at the rear of the building. This area will be used for the storage of operational equipment including signage, barriers, traffic cones and other items currently occupying valuable internal space.

The creation of this storage area will:

- Improve the overall organisation of the facility.
- Reduce pressure on basement storage areas.
- Improve operational efficiency for Council staff.
- Enhance the functionality of the building for hirers and community users.

Emergency Lighting Installation

The final element of the project is the installation of external battery-backed emergency lighting.

A specialist contractor has been appointed, and installation is scheduled for 23 July 2026. Once completed, this will further strengthen the emergency escape arrangements by ensuring adequate illumination of the fire escape route during any power failure or emergency evacuation. Following completion of this work, all planned elements of the project will have been delivered.

Project Delivery

I would like to place on record my appreciation for the work undertaken by the Council's Open Spaces Team, who have successfully delivered significant elements of the project within demanding timescales and around existing hall bookings and hirer requirements.

Careful planning enabled works to be completed with minimal disruption to users and ensured that the project remained on programme throughout.

The team's commitment has ensured that the Council has:

- Delivered a compliant and accessible emergency escape route.
- Resolved a longstanding health and safety concern.
- Enhanced the appearance and functionality of Victory Hall.
- Created valuable outdoor community space.
- Delivered a secure external storage facility.
- Maintained service continuity throughout the project.
- Completed the works within the approved budget allocation.

Financial Position

I am pleased to report that all works associated with this project have been delivered within the approved budget of £6,000, representing a positive outcome for the Council and demonstrating effective project and financial management.

Conclusion

The Victory Hall Fire Escape Pathway Remedial Works Project has delivered a range of safety, accessibility and operational benefits which extend beyond the original project scope. The works have resolved a longstanding health and safety issue, improved accessibility, enhanced the external environment surrounding the hall and provided additional operational storage capacity for the Council.

Subject to the installation of the emergency lighting on 23 July 2026, the project can be considered successfully completed and represents an excellent example of the practical and cost-effective improvements that can be achieved through effective officer planning and the dedication of the Open Spaces Team.

Recommendation

Members are requested to:

1. Note the completion of the Victory Hall Fire Escape Pathway Remedial Works Project.
2. Note that all works have been delivered within the approved budget of £6,000.
3. Acknowledge the contribution of the Open Spaces Team in delivering the project on time, within budget and with minimal disruption to hall users.
4. Note that the installation of external battery-backed emergency lighting on 23 July 2026 will represent the final stage of the project.

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