

DORSET NATURAL HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

ACCESS POLICY

Name of Museum: Dorset Museum

Name of Governing Body: Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society

Policy approved by the Board of DNHAS: 28th July 2022

Policy review date: July 2025

1. Introduction

Dorset Museum is committed to maximising access to its buildings, collections and activities for all, regardless of ability, age, gender, cultural or social background, sexual orientation, faith, or location. We recognise that dismantling barriers to access and offering a welcoming and inclusive environment is fundamental in broadening the Museum's audiences and users further.

We recognise there are sometimes limitations to what we can offer when restrained by historic buildings, finances available and external factors not in our control. We also understand that access is a complex issue with no one size fits all solution. As an independent museum and registered charity, we rely on visitor admissions for a large proportion of our income. We recognise that as a result there are limitations to dismantling economic barriers, but are committed to working to mitigate these challenges wherever possible.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to outline how Dorset Museum provides access to its buildings, exhibitions, collections and activities for our audiences and users, and how we mitigate barriers that impede this access.

3. Definition of terms

Dorset Museum recognises that there are a number of key barriers to access:

Physical and environmental access: The physical layout of the building may impede wheelchair users or those with limited mobility from accessing our exhibitions, collections and activities.

Sensory access: People with vision and hearing impairments or who are not neuro typical may not be able to fully access the Museum.

Intellectual: Different learning styles are often not reflected in exhibition interpretation, or it caters for a specialist audience. Those with learning disabilities are often not catered for. Accessing collections can be difficult if the processes to do this are not open, simple and clear.

Economic: People may not be able to access the Museum because they cannot afford our admission fee, or other associated costs such as travel.

Cultural: Some people may feel that the museum is not relevant to them and does not reflect their cultural or social heritage, or their interests.

Attitudinal/emotional: If the Museum does not present a welcoming and inclusive environment, some may be put off visiting or using the Museum.

Geographic: Some people will not be able to access the Museum due to their location.

4. Responsibilities

The Director and the Board of Trustees are responsible for ensuring that the Museum meets its obligations under the Equality Act (2010) by doing everything reasonably possible to make the museum accessible to the widest range of people.

Heads of department are responsible for ensuring that the work of their colleagues takes into account the need to maximise access by addressing the barriers outlined above.

Every member of staff involved in developing, delivering or maintaining spaces, activities, resources and other services for our users is responsible for making them as accessible as possible.

5. Policy

The Museum is committed to maximising access to the widest possible audience through the following means:

Physical and environmental access

- Providing effective wayfinding through signage, museum maps, our Museum guidebook, and the knowledge and guidance of our trained Welcome team and volunteer gallery stewards
- Ensuring that all public spaces at the Museum comply with current legislation for access and equality, uphold the statutory requirements of the Equalities Act 2010, and follow relevant professional standards for inclusive design
- Providing step-free access throughout the building, with lift access to all public spaces
- Providing fire refuge points and evacuation chairs on all floors, with appointed fire wardens trained in their use
- Providing and maintaining a Changing Places toilet on the Museum's ground floor, with the commitment that this can be used without payment of an admission fee
- Providing accessible toilets on each floor of the Museum
- Providing accessible baby-change facilities
- Ensuring there is a range of accessible seating available across the Museum
- Providing access to a manual wheelchair to visitors
- Providing space for storing buggys and mobility vehicles

Sensory access

- Providing and maintaining fixed induction loops in key spaces across the Museum.
- Providing subtitles and where possible BSL interpretation on film displays in the permanent galleries
- Providing resources for blind and partially sighted visitors, including a braille and large print guide to the Museum
- Allowing assistance animals into the Museum building and galleries
- Providing opportunities for tactile experiences in the galleries and through special events
- Recognising the needs of and challenges faced by neurodivergent visitors to the Museum, and providing a range of resources, spaces and activities to support their visit
- Providing quiet spaces in the Museum to enable visitors to take a break during their visit
- Providing regular accessible events including relaxed/quiet openings for families and adults, British sign language tours and touch tours, and well-being activities

Intellectual access

- Providing detailed accessibility information on the Museum's website
- Ensuring that the Museum is open seven days a week, throughout the calendar year
- Providing a range of special exhibitions, which appeal to a wide variety of interests, learning styles and audiences
- Ensuring that interpretation developed for exhibitions is tailored to the needs of different audiences, follows best practice guidelines and adheres to the Museum's internal style guide
- Providing a range of different interpretation methods in exhibitions (where budget allows), including text panels, braille captions and guides, touch objects, audio and film, and interactive exhibits
- Providing opportunities for taking a tour of the Museum as part of a regular visit
- Providing a range of formal learning workshops for schools which take into account different abilities and learning styles
- Ensuring that the Museum Library is supervised and open to visitors to the Museum for research and study, six days a week from 10.30-3.30.
- Providing regular opportunities for general visitors to see collections in storage, through Collections Discovery Centre tours
- Providing an enquiry service relating to our collections, managed by the Museum's collections team, with a maximum target response time of 28 days
- Providing regular opportunities for researchers to access the collections in the Collections Discovery Centre by appointment – there may be limitations on access in some cases due to where material is physically held, its condition or if the content is sensitive
- Providing opportunities to access the Museum's collection database at the Museum and exploring opportunities for future online access
- Providing a range of informal learning experiences for adults and families, including talks, object handling and creative workshops.

Economic access

- Recognising that the admission fee can be a barrier and mitigating this by developing a range of offers and activities that enable access to the Museum and its collections
- Providing free admission to companions accompanying disabled visitors
- Providing a range of ticket offers, including an annual pass and family tickets.
- Offering a number of free openings throughout the year including monthly 'After Hours' events and special events celebrated annually, working with community partners
- Providing access to all exhibitions in the Museum's Community Space, and to the Museum's café and shop without the need for an entry ticket
- Developing a programme of outreach activities during each year, for example at community events, schools and to care homes
- Ensure that the Museum offers good value for money, with changing exhibitions and lots to see during a visit
- Providing several spaces for hire across the Museum at competitive prices for businesses and local communities, and a charitable rate for NGOs.

Cultural

- Emphasising aspects of Dorset's story which have wider resonance, to appeal to visitors not from the local area or from a range of cultural backgrounds

- Carrying out the work to understand how historic and societal structures have shaped the collection; why certain stories are represented, and others are excluded
- Ensuring that under-served communities in Dorset are represented in our exhibitions, collections and activities
- Offering opportunities for consultation with under-served audiences to inform the Museum's programme of activities
- Explore possibilities for offering non-English language interpretation for visitors in the future

Attitudinal/emotional

- Providing a welcoming, inclusive and non-threatening environment for visitors throughout their visit, including in our pre-visit information available on our website and in marketing literature
- Training our staff and volunteers to ensure that they are able to welcome and communicate with visitors with a wide range of needs and disabilities
- Providing opportunities for open feedback across the Museum, including the provision of visitor annual surveys through Audience Finder, which are assessed on a regular basis.
- Ensuring that we consult with disabled people as part of ongoing developments at the Museum

Geographic access

- Ensuring a rich and varied online experience for those who cannot access the Museum physically, including increasing the amount of information on our website relating to our collections
- Providing loans to regional, national and international museums of our collections
- Developing exhibitions that can be toured to partners in the UK and beyond
- Working to provide opportunities for rural communities in the county who cannot easily reach the Museum by public transport to access the Museum and its collections
- Working with our partners in Wessex Museums to share and collaborate on collections projects, increasing engagement with our collections across the Wessex region
- Creating an online archive of films of talks and events held at the Museum
- Providing an on-line shop offering a range of key merchandise

6. Related policies, legislation and guidance

Equality Act 2010: The Equality Act bans unfair treatment and helps achieve equal opportunities in the workplace and in wider society. The Act replaced previous anti-discrimination laws and covers nine protected characteristics which cannot be used as a reason to treat people unfairly – age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity/paternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The Act prohibits unfair treatment when providing goods, facilities and services, when holding public functions, in the management of premises, and in education.

Wessex Museums Equality, Diversity and Inclusion framework:

<https://www.wessexmuseums.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/WMT-EDI-Framework-visual.pdf>

Dorset Museum Access Standards, 2016

Dorset Museum Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan, 2018-2022