

Access Policy Framework

Introduction

Southend Museums Service is committed to providing the greatest possible access to the museums' collections, whilst balancing this with finite resources and our duty to preserve and maintain the collections for study and enjoyment by future generations.

As part of this commitment, we seek to make our buildings and collections accessible, by removing as many physical, intellectual or cultural barriers to access as practicable, within the limits of budgetary and planning considerations.

We endeavour to develop a programme of activities and events that are designed to involve, educate and inform groups from a wide range of backgrounds and all sectors of the community and engage them with the human and natural history of Southend as evidenced by the Museums buildings and collections.

World-Wide and 24/7 Access

We are aware that not everyone is able to physically visit the Museum, due to physical disability or for geographical reasons. We seek therefore to make our collections increasingly available on a 24 hour worldwide basis through the use of information technology.

This is carried out both through ongoing developing of our own website, and by the appropriate dissemination of material through other websites and internet portals.

Challenging Other Barriers to Access

Although many of our buildings are ancient and Listed, making necessary changes more problematic than might be found in other settings, it is central to our Policy to continue to enhance access to the buildings and collections for those with a physical or sensory disability.

We recognise that there can be intellectual barriers to access to our collections and events, and to overcome this, our displays are designed with regard to informing visitors with differing learning styles, prior knowledge, and/or abilities.

We further recognise that cultural or social barriers to accessing the Museum and its collections may exist. To challenge and overcome these barriers we will continue to undertake initiatives to reach different sectors of the community, and engage them with the Museum and its collections.

It is our policy to remove social barriers to access by ensuring that entry at low cost or no charge is offered for the Museums and special events, and where charges have to be made, they are kept as affordable as appropriate.

Visitor Care

All users of the Museums Service will be treated with equal respect within an inclusive atmosphere and welcomed according to their individual needs.

Access Statement

Visiting the Museums

Pre-Arrival

Information for potential visitors explaining our opening times, services and access to the collections is available in leaflets, by telephone, via e-mail or on our websites.

General

The Museum Service currently consists of buildings that are old and were not designed with their current purpose in mind. Access is therefore not ideal, but is subject to an ongoing programme of improvements where resources allow.

All Museum buildings have accessible entrances, although the age of the buildings means that certain areas within each of the buildings are not currently accessible. Dedicated and accessible car parking to enhance access is an integral part of the design and plan for the new Museum which will replace both the Central Museum and Beecroft Art Gallery.

Central Museum and Planetarium

Arrival and Car Parking

There is a public pay-and-display car park available close to the Central Museum, situated beside the Central Library.

Four disabled car parking spaces are available in a special car park situated behind the Central Museum the serves both the Museum and the Library. Access is via the rear of the Library.

Public transport links are good, with a bus stop immediately outside the museum and Southend Victoria Railway Station only 100m from the front door.

The town's cycle path network is connected, with cycle racks 20m from the front door.

Access to Building

Entry: The Central Museum has wheelchair access via double doors to the side of the Museum. There is a shallow but easily negotiable ramp, with handrail, to this. The first floor is currently only accessible by a stairway.

The minimum width of access to wheelchair accessible areas is 110cm.

Wheelchair Accessible Areas

- Human History Displays
- Natural History Displays
- Room Settings
- Discovery Centre
- Temporary Exhibition Area
- Shop

Currently Wheelchair Inaccessible Areas

- Toilets¹
- Planetarium
- Schoolroom²

Notes:

- 1) Accessible toilets are provided in the Library immediately adjacent to the Museum.
- 2) Where education sessions in the schoolroom require wheelchair access, they are instead held in the Discovery Centre on the ground floor.

Beecroft Art Gallery

Arrival and Car Parking

There is a public pay-and-display car park available beside the Cliffs Pavilion, about 150m from the Beecroft Gallery. There is also closer, but limited, on-road parking.

Bus routes pass along Station Road and there is a stop immediately outside the Gallery. The nearest rail station is Westcliff, on the Fenchurch Street line, about 500m west of the Gallery.

Building Access

Entry: The Beecroft Gallery has wheelchair access via doors to the side of the building. There is a shallow but easily negotiable ramp, with handrails, to this. The doorway from this ramp to access the gallery has a minimum width of 77cm.

The first and second floors are currently only accessible by a narrow stairway.

Wheelchair Accessible Areas

- Gallery 1 (91cm access)
- Gallery 2 (90cm access)
- Gallery 3 (84cm access)

Currently Wheelchair Inaccessible Areas

- Toilets
- Gallery 4
- Gallery 5
- Gallery 6

Collections Access

Internet access to collections

- The oil paintings in the collection are expected to be viewable on-line on the Public Catalogue Foundation website within two years (from 2010).
- All of the European Old Master paintings pre-1900 are already online at the VADS website: www.vad.ac.uk

Publications

- A brief illustrated catalogue of the highlights of the Beecroft Art Gallery's collections is available to purchase.
- The Public Catalogue Foundation for Essex has published all the oil paintings in the collection.

Southchurch Hall

Arrival and Car Parking

There is on-road parking available for Southchurch Hall in Park Lane.

Wheelchair using visitors should access the park via Southchurch Hall Close and use the footbridge to enter the grounds.

Bus routes pass along Woodgrange Drive to the south and Southchurch Road about 500m north of the park.

The nearest rail station is Southend east, on the Fenchurch Street line, about 200m to the north of the park.

Building Access

Entry: Southchurch Hall has wheelchair access via the large north door. porch entrance (111cm access)

Wheelchair Accessible Areas

- All ground floor of ancient building:
 - Great Hall (Accessed via porch above 111cm access)
 - Kitchen (103cm access)
 - Parlour Room (95cm access)
 - South Parlour (This room is normally for display viewing only. However, when accessible during special events the access is 79cm)

Currently Wheelchair Inaccessible Areas

- Restricted access to shop & exhibition room (step)
- 1st Floor Bedroom (Victorian Setting)
- Toilets¹

Notes:

1) Accessible toilet facilities, recently (2010) refurbished, are available in the park. The route from the Hall to these toilets, avoiding steps, is quite lengthy, about 300m.

Prittlewell Priory

Prittlewell Priory is currently closed for extensive renovation and reinterpretation, which includes greatly enhanced access. Wheelchair accessible toilets will be included and all except one room will be wheelchair accessible. Full details will be published here on completion.

Museum stores

A new storage facility in Central Southend, although not open to the public, provides researchers with wheelchair-accessible facilities.

Mike Culley
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