

Saffron Walden Museum Access Policy 2013

1. Mission Statement, Key Purpose and Aims of Forward Plan 2013-18

- 1.1. To give people inspiration and a sense of place in Uttlesford district / north-west Essex, through exploration of our wide-ranging collections and the histories they represent.
- 1.2. To improve public use of and benefit from all the Museum's collections, whether on display, in store or on-line, in order to contribute to the Museum's long-term sustainability and development through increased use, income and public support.
- 1.3. The plan to improve the Museum will fall into two stages:

Stage I New Off-site Store to be built in Saffron Walden

The Council and Museum Society will provide a new purpose-built store at Shire Hill, Saffron Walden, to replace the current off-site store at the Council's Newport depot

This will free up the Museum buildings sufficiently and prepare collections for:

Stage 2 Museum to be extended (at east end) to improve facilities and displays

The Heritage Lottery Fund have indicated that they are willing to discuss an application for Stage 2 and preliminary discussions have already taken place with English Heritage whose consent will be required for building work and groundworks.

- 1.4. This two-stage plan will be the framework for realising six key aims:
 1. Improve and rationalise the storage of collections in off-site storage and in the Museum, through the construction of a new off-site store and a revised collections policy [Stage I]
 2. Improve management, accessibility and display of collections by developing the collections database [Stage II]
 3. Extend and reorganise the Museum building to improve its displays and facilities for visitors, staff and volunteers, researchers and visiting groups (school and other) [Stage II]
 4. Improve interpretation and use of the Museum and castle site [Stage II]
 5. Maximise community involvement through appropriate opportunities to contribute to the Museum Service [Stage II]
 6. Develop a marketing policy for the Museum and site as a local amenity and heritage destination to local and wider audiences, to increase use, income and community well-being [Stage II]

2. Our definition of access

- 2.1. Saffron Walden Museum recognises that there are many barriers to access at all levels of the museum service. However we believe that all people have a fundamental right to engage with, use and enjoy the service.
- 2.2. We define access as something that is made possible when physical, cultural, social, financial, intellectual, psychological and emotional barriers are removed or reduced.

3. Our commitment to accessibility

- 3.1. Saffron Walden Museum aims to provide the widest possible access to its museum, collections and services to enable all our visitors, potential visitors, volunteers and staff, from all sections of the community, to enjoy use of the museum. We will provide access to services in the wider community and within museums we will aim to provide independent use wherever possible.
- 3.2. Our policy has been written in line with Uttlesford District Council's Comprehensive Equality Policy and its commitment to a Single Equality Duty. Saffron Walden Museum has a public sector equality duty under the Equality Act 2010. The Act brought together existing equality laws and made them stronger. It also strengthened existing duties and places new duties on public bodies.
- 3.3. Uttlesford District Council Equalities statement:
The Equality of Opportunity Statement says: e.g. "It is a fundamental principle of our policies that all people are equally valued regardless of their gender, age, disabilities, race, ethnic origin, language, religion or sexual orientation".
- 3.4. Our policy aims to contribute to Uttlesford District Council's Equality Objectives:
 - a. To develop an improved level of understanding of Uttlesford's community and its needs through data gathering, research and community mapping
 - Specific Action. Create an Equalities monitoring system that ensures equalities is included in customer service questionnaires and service user surveys, building on the information accessed from the Census and engaging with our community to inform them as to why this information is required.
 - b. To continue to work to improve access to and take-up of Council Services by developing engagement across all the protected equality groups.
 - Specific Action. Continue to support and organise events and projects that promote and celebrate equalities such as the Tenant Forum, Citizens Panel, Disability Forum, Ageing Well Forum, International Day for Older People, LGBT History month, Disability History Month, Community Partnership work around Age, Community Safety, Domestic Violence, Hate Crime

- 3.5 Our policy is to build accessibility into everything we do to develop and improve the service. Our commitment is long term and our policy is to make continuous improvements as our resources permit. The Equality objectives set out by the District Council to understand our community and then provide better access to services has also formed part of our approach in developing our access policy.
- 3.6. Our commitment to accessibility extends to our staff, volunteers and work placements as well as visitors.
- 3.7. We are committed to on-going training in access/inclusion issues for staff and volunteers.
- 3.8. To eliminate barriers and ensure equality of access we will consider the following forms of accessibility:
- Physical – to enable people with physical disabilities to reach and appreciate every part of the museum service. To take into account the needs of the elderly and of people caring for young people.
 - Sensory – to enable visitors with impaired vision or hearing to enjoy the museum’s buildings and collections
 - Intellectual – We recognise that people have different learning styles and we will provide interpretation in a range of learning styles. We also aim to ensure people with learning difficulties can engage with and enjoy the museums and the collections.
 - Cultural – to consider the needs of people for whom English is not a first language, or whose knowledge of English history and culture may be limited.
 - Attitudinal / Emotional – to ensure the museum environment and museum staff are welcoming to visitors from all sections of the community. We will also aim to ensure people of Essex feel the museum is of significance to them.
 - Financial – when reviewing our admission charges we will take into account that ability to pay can be a barrier to access.

4 Access assessment and action plan

Access Audits will be regularly undertaken (at least once every 5 years) and an access report will be produced with the assistance of Uttlesford District Council’s Access Officer. An access action plan has been prepared that sets out the work required to improve access by removing barriers identified by the audit and customer feedback. This is implemented and monitored by the Access Working Group.

5 Buildings

- 5.1 We aim to provide equal access to our buildings and facilities for all visitors.
- 5.2. The Museum has a number of buildings which are used for collections, education and display: Museum building (Museum Street, Saffron Walden), School Room and Conservation Lab (Museum Street, Saffron Walden), Museum Workshop (Museum Street, Saffron Walden), Museum Stores (Newport and Ashdon). Buildings/use of some buildings will change in 2014 to make use of the new off-site store which has better access (see Forward Plan Stage 1)
- 5.3. The Museum is committed to providing full access to all areas of its buildings, and facilities. There are some limitations due to staff constraints, the physical constraints of listed buildings, especially in office areas and store areas. Nevertheless we are constantly working towards improving the facilities available to visitors with disabilities and will actively try to make our collections accessible even when our buildings are not. Forward Plan, Stage 2, will extend and improve the Museum building, including the re-display of galleries.
- 5.4. Information for potential visitors explaining our opening times, services and access to the collections is available on leaflets, by telephone, via e-mail, social media and on our website.

6 Access to Collections

- 6.1.1 Our collections staff are committed to increasing public access to the collections and information and to increasing knowledge and understanding of Uttlesford District's cultural heritage.
- 6.2 We will provide varied means of access to the collections, including displays, handling sessions, publications and events and activities.
- 6.3 To increase access to the collections not on display we offer study space, web-based resources and access to staff. (see Forward Plan Key Aim 2, cited in point 1.4.)
- 6.4 We will provide levels of information and interpretation to suit a range of audiences and abilities. We will ensure that the presentation and labelling of displays respects a diversity of background.
- 6.5 Stored collections are available to view by appointment with the collection team. The research facility at our off-site store has limited access for wheelchair users but alternative arrangements can be provided for access to most objects in the collection. Forward Plan, Stage 1 will involve a new fully accessible store.
- 6.6 Collections are continually being updated and developed to better reflect the diversity of the local area.

7. Access to Learning

- 7.1. Saffron Walden Museum will provide learning opportunities for different audiences and levels of ability, in accordance with our Learning Policy, and will tailor our programme to the needs of specific groups (see Forward Plan, Key Aim 3, cited in point 1.4., see also appendix 1).
- 7.2. We will provide education programmes for all our temporary and permanent displays to interpret the collections for people from a range of backgrounds and abilities.
- 7.3. We will identify and develop partnerships with a range of educational and community organisations to ensure that our activities continue to cater for the widest possible audiences.
- 7.4. The Museum will provide a range of suitable handling materials drawn from the collections for different audiences and levels of ability.
- 7.5. The Museum will maintain and develop outreach options for those who are unable to visit the Museum, particularly the Loan and Memory box schemes for audiences in schools, care homes and hospitals.
- 7.6. The Museum is committed to maintaining a Community Engagement Strategy to develop its links to new and existing audiences, especially through partnership with other community and educational organisations.
- 7.7. The Museum will provide some activities free of charge so that all parts of the community can enjoy its services.

8. Access to visitor services

- 8.1 All staff members and volunteers are involved in implementing this access policy, assisting and welcoming our customers.
- 8.2 Our front of house volunteers will assist and welcome all visitors. They will be available at the Welcome Desk to help visitors to understand and enjoy the collections and to pass on more difficult enquiries to the appropriate member of staff.
- 8.3 All users of the Museum will be treated with equal respect within an inclusive atmosphere and welcomed according to their individual needs.
- 8.4 We will consider the comfort of our visitors by providing, where possible, accessible toilets, baby changing facilities, access for pushchairs, seating in galleries and on-site wheelchairs.
- 8.5 We aim to provide appropriate signage and navigator tools to suit a range of audiences, including a range of sensory formats and languages.

- 8.6 We provide visitor facilities to meet our customers' needs at the Museum including a shop and a picnic area and quiet space.
- 8.7 The Museum is committed to providing a safe environment for all. It has procedures for the safe evacuation of all users and staff in an emergency. There is a policy and procedure for Safeguarding Child Protection and Vulnerable Adults.
- 8.8 The Museum is committed to providing volunteer opportunities and seeks to recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds. The recruitment and management of volunteers is guided by our Volunteer Policy.

9. Access to communication

- 9.1 We will promote the museum's collections, activities and events using accessible means of communication (see Forward Plan, Key Aims, 3,4,5 and 6, cited in point 1.4).
- 9.2 We provide a range of ways that people can communicate with us.
- 9.3 The needs of visitors are taken into account when preparing and presenting collections information and interpretation in the galleries and online.
- 9.4 The Museum will ensure that all information and communications (including leaflets, labels and website) follow good practice and the Museum's guidelines for text and style.
- 9.5 The Museum aims to keep the public informed of its collections, temporary displays and events through appropriate publicity including social media.
- 9.6 We will provide levels of information and interpretation to suit a range of audiences and abilities.
- 9.7 Information on displays will be provided in a range of formats, for example labels, large print, film, interactives and audio, as resources allow.
- 9.8 The Museum aims to present labels, displays, online and marketing materials that respect a diversity of backgrounds. Images and/or descriptions of the Museum will reflect the diversity of the community.
- 9.9 The Museum website is currently being redeveloped with accessibility features, including user defined text size and colours, in mind. Once the site is complete we will carry out an access review as with our previous website.
- 9.10 The Museum already provides publicity material on request for a range of languages. Over the coming 12 months we will be developing our large print publicity and materials to cater with other access needs.
- 9.11. We will evaluate all our services and projects to ensure they meet the provision of this policy and we will consult users and non-users on all new developments.

10. Staff and training

- 10.1 Uttlesford District Council is an equal opportunities employer. All people will receive equal opportunities in recruitment, employment and training. The Museum is committed to increasing the diversity of its workforce.
- 10.2 As part of a staff induction process, new staff will receive disability awareness training, including addressing the needs of visitors with specific requirements, appropriate use of language and assisting those with disabilities during the evacuation procedure.
- 10.3 Staff will receive training in areas of awareness and equality legislation appropriate to their roles and needs. This will be identified during induction and the annual appraisal process.

11. Reviewing the policy

- 11.1 Information on access will be available in a range of formats including our website, social media, printed material and Front of House volunteers and staff in the Museum's Welcome area.
- 11.2 We will review the access policy regularly to ensure it is in line with national guidelines and standards.
- 11.3 We will regularly consult and evaluate the Museum's services with users and use this information to ensure our services meet their needs.
- 11.4 We will consult with non-users to identify barriers to participation.
- 11.5 We will designate a member of staff to represent and champion disability issues. This member of staff will be responsible for monitoring the Access Policy.
- 11.6 We will prepare an Action Plan, approved by the Curator and senior staff, setting out the work which will be undertaken by staff to improve access and facilities across Saffron Walden Museum's operations. Staff will take responsibility for implementing the Access Policy. Developments in access resulting from the Action Plan will be taken into account when presenting Annual Reports and management plans.
- 11.7 The Museum team will take responsibility for implementing the Action Plan, in consultation with Uttlesford District Council and Saffron Walden Museum Society.

Sources and references

Equality Act 2010 Code of Practice, D of EE, 1999

DCMS Access Policy, Feb 2000

Disability Resource Directory, MGC

Perspectives on Access, MGC

Museums and Galleries Disability Association

This policy will give rise to a Five Year Access Action Plan for Saffron Walden Museum that will outline specific needs and projects, as resources allow.

Approved by Museum Management Working Group on

Date created: 7 August 2013

Review date:

Appendix 1

Programme of events, exhibition, activities and services 2013, which demonstrate proof of our policy.

- On-going analysis of visitors, ages, gender, ethnicity, feedback on exhibition through visitor survey (see 3.1).
- Temporary exhibitions: Castle and Community (covering the origins and history of Castle Street, Saffron Walden – community focused); Witch Hunt (addressing the issues behind the 1845-47 East Anglia Witch Trial – East Anglian focus); Butterflies (celebration of British Butterflies – nature, UK focus); 1950s (exploration of life and events in 1950s Britain (local and national focus); Re-imagining Egypt (a contemporary art and archaeology exhibition exploring the full range of Egypt's history with the help of an Egyptian artists and school children from the local community – international focus).
- Events for Adults: Saffron dyeing workshops, geology workshops, pop-up restaurant, talks and book signings
- Events for families: family holiday activities every half term, Easter, Christmas and summer, connected to our temporary exhibitions. Examples include: Kid's detective nights, craft sessions, Museum by torch light, museum trails etc. Craft activities are generally FREE for children (carers pay entry fee: £1.50 or 75p concessions), special events many incur a charge.
- Partnerships with local groups: SureStart (through our FREE Museum Minis activities for pre-school children and their carers), Carver Barracks Youth Club (subsidised learning sessions by the Learning Officer), Stanley Wilson Lodge (museum visits and the loan of FREE reminiscences boxes for residents of the care home).
- Schools: We work with a variety of schools from different social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds that travel to the Museum from London, Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Norfolk, Suffolk and Bedfordshire.
- Researchers: We provide access to our collections for independent researchers from all over the world.