



## SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM

Uttlesford District Council &  
Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd



# ACCESS POLICY 2020-2025

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Saffron Walden Museum is operated by Uttlesford District Council under a joint management agreement between Uttlesford District Council & Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd (charity 1123209).

**Date on which this policy was approved by Museum Management Working Group for recommendation to Cabinet:**

30 October 2019

**Date on which this policy was approved by Cabinet of Uttlesford District Council:**

November 2019

**Policy review procedure:**

The Access policy will be published and reviewed from time to time, at least once every five years.

**Date at which this policy is due for review:**

October 2024

## 1 Introduction

We believe that everyone has the right to access Saffron Walden Museum, whether they are a visitor, remote user, volunteer or member of staff and regardless of ability, age, gender, cultural or social background, sexual orientation, faith, language, location or wealth. It is important that our Museum and store are welcoming and inclusive to all.

We are committed to removing barriers that prevent people from accessing our sites, collections, events and services so that we can share our collections and histories of North West Essex as widely as possible. The Museum strives, within the limitations of the sites and other resources, to offer the widest, richest, most engaging access for all users. Saffron Walden Museum recognises that access is a complex issue that must be addressed through the actions of the organisation as a whole. At the heart of our Access Policy is our belief that everyone benefits when barriers to access are removed.

## 2 Scope

This policy covers provision at Saffron Walden Museum and the Museum Store at Shirehill, Saffron Walden as well as our website, social media and other online activities, and our outreach programme at other venues.

## 3 Responsibilities

The Curator and Museum team and Uttlesford District Council are responsible for ensuring that the museum service meets its obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty and the Equality Act (2010) and the Museums Association's *Code of Ethics* by doing everything reasonably possible to make the Museum accessible to the widest range of people. Managers are responsible for ensuring that the work of their staff and volunteers takes into account the need to maximise access by addressing the barriers outlined in this policy.

Everyone involved in developing, delivering or maintaining spaces, activities, resources and other services for our users at Saffron Walden Museum are responsible for making them as accessible as possible. This includes contractors employed by Saffron Walden Museum (e.g. designers, artists, session leaders) and volunteers.

## 4

# Identifying potential barriers to access

**When we refer to access we mean the opportunity to engage with our buildings, collections, content and expertise. There are a number of key barriers to access:**

- 4.1** Attitudinal – e.g. some people may have a lack of interest in, or awareness of, the Museum and the subjects and issues it deals with, or our programmes and services.
- 4.2** Intellectual – e.g. some people may find the museum too specialist in its approach to subjects and how they are presented; some may have learning disabilities which affect their ability to engage with the Museum; and some may not be able to read or speak English.
- 4.3** Economic – e.g. some people may not be able to afford to visit the Museum or take part in our programme.
- 4.4** Geographic – e.g. some people will live too far away to visit the Museum, or have difficulty travelling to the museum.
- 4.5** Physical/sensory – e.g. people with physical disabilities, limited mobility, or hearing or visual impairments may not be able to access the Museum, our website, social media channels or programmes.
- 4.6** Technological – e.g. some people may not have access to the internet at home or use a mobile phone.

## 5

# Physical access

**The Museum seeks to**

- 5.1** Uphold the statutory requirements of the Equality Act (2010) by taking reasonable steps to ensure that policies, practices and procedures do not discriminate against disabled people; by provide auxiliary aids and services which enable disabled people to use the Museum; and by removing, altering or circumventing physical barriers within our buildings. The Feasibility Study & Options Appraisal to be undertaken in 2020 (National Heritage Lottery Fund project) and subsequent development plans for the Museum will be an opportunity to address issues and design new facilities and displays for improved accessibility.
- 5.2** Work with Council colleagues and other organisations to review and improve signage and access to the Museum and Castle site, especially following the opening of the recently-conserved Castle keep to the public (2019-20).

- 5.3** Provide dedicated disabled parking space on the Museum forecourt, near the entrance, and a manual wheelchair for visitors who require one (e.g. if they need to transfer from a large mobility scooter).
- 5.4** Ensure that all our galleries, exhibitions and learning activities are accessible for wheelchair users.
- 5.5** Ensure that if any service user cannot access a specific display or exhibit, we will provide an alternative way to access the information wherever possible (e.g. through images or written interpretation).
- 5.6** Provide an accessible toilet and baby-changing facilities.
- 5.7** Provide seating with armrests throughout the Museum building.
- 5.8** Maintain opening hours throughout the year (Tuesday – Sunday and Bank Holidays) to maximise visiting opportunities for people to visit regardless of their working pattern. The Museum will review these periodically, in the light of the planned Audience Development Study (2019-20) and public consultations for future developments, and respond to requests for evening events (e.g. booked group visit) subject to staff resources available.
- 5.9** Maintain affordable prices for admission tickets (currently £2.50 adults, £1.25 concessions, free for under 18s), with Annual Season Ticket offers (currently £8 and £4) and free admission for carers accompanying disabled visitors. The Museum offers free access to all for the annual nationwide Heritage Weekend in September and occasionally participates in other special promotional free / reduced admission events at the Council's discretion (e.g. Big Essex Weekend), to encourage visits by all regardless of income.
- 5.10** Provide appropriate aids for visitors with sensory impairments, within limitations of resources and the historic nature of the Museum building, e.g. provision of a hearing loop at the Welcome Desk and in the Special Exhibitions Gallery and Great Hall.
- 5.11** Provide and improve internal signage and information to enable all visitors to explore the Museum and locate facilities easily.
- 5.12** Provide a basic guide (leaflet) to the Museum in a range of languages for visitors from overseas (around 13-14% of Museum visitors). We will use information from visitor surveys, Audience Development Study (2019-20), front-of-house volunteers and Council sources to review the range of languages to match our actual and potential visitor communities, including any ethnic community groups identified in the north-west Essex area (traditionally an area with very little ethnic diversity in the population).

## Users, Collections and Interpretation

### The Museum seeks to

- 6.1** Work with groups and advisors to develop our activities and aids for people with sensory impairments and special needs, to continually update our Access Audit and inform our Access Policy and Plan (e.g. Support4Sight, Uttlesford Dementia Friends, with whom the Museum has been working 2018-19).
- 6.2** Display exhibits which reflect the range and diversity of the Museum's collections, and engage with the diversity of our users and their needs. This supports our core aim of inspiring people and providing a sense of place in Uttlesford district / north-west Essex, through exploration of our wide-ranging collections and the histories they represent.
- 6.3** Provide access to all collections and appropriate associated information, to meet the needs of all researchers and different cultures and communities. This includes direct physical access and provision of information in a suitable and accessible format to users who cannot visit, e.g. by email or letter. We seek to be sensitive to the nature of requests and to users, e.g. in providing full information on items in our world cultures collection to enquirers from first nation communities, or to local community groups in Uttlesford exploring their local heritage. Information given out will be subject to legal and ethical constraints, e.g. data protection legislation, or the need to protect sensitive archaeological and environmental site locations.
- 6.4** Access to study objects and specimens in the collections will be supervised at all times by a member of Museum staff, to assist the researcher, ensure the security of the collections, and provide guidance in handling where necessary. Wherever possible, items will be made available in a wheelchair-accessible research area (Museum Workroom, Shirehill store Research Room) unless the size, weight or other aspects of the objects or specimens make it necessary to view in store, accompanied by Museum staff.
- 6.5** Promote public awareness of the full extent of the collections through special features in the Museum (e.g. Object of the Month display), on-line (website blogs, social media) and through other remote means (e.g. talks by staff). Store tours for small groups, supervised by Museum staff, will be offered at Shirehill by appointment subject to staff availability. Museum development plans (2020-25) will seek to redress limitations placed on access to stores and collections by the nature of the building (narrow staircase access and cramped space currently make group tours behind-the-scenes in the Museum untenable for the safety of people and collections). Potential improvements for access, to be considered in development plans, include changes to stores or developing a 'virtual tour' (linked to the Documentation Plan and digitisation of collections).
- 6.6** Differentiate between commercial reproduction requests for images of the collection, and non-commercial / not-for-profit requests from local communities,

researchers, students and educational, academic or charitable organisations, for fees & charges and conditions. This is to foster knowledge and use of the collections through their wider study and publication, and maintain a balance between legitimate income generation and access for non-commercial users.

- 6.7** Incorporate multisensory exhibits (e.g. to touch, smell, listen to), and tactile objects into exhibitions and galleries where appropriate.
- 6.8** Ensure that video-based exhibits have subtitles if they use the spoken word, and/or printed copies of the script for reference.
- 6.9** Write text for use in our galleries, exhibitions, educational resources, publications, website and social media channels which is carefully tailored to the needs of their intended audiences, in line with the Museum's style guide.
- 6.10** Provide appropriate aids and options to enhance exploration of the Museum and collections by all, e.g. tactile toys and ear defenders in our "Explorer Backpacks" to assist young visitors in general, and especially those on the autism spectrum.
- 6.11** Offer outreach visits to schools, care homes and community groups who have difficulty in visiting the Museum.
- 6.12** Ensure that the content and delivery of our learning programmes and activities are tailored to the learning needs of their audiences.
- 6.13** Provide tailored session options for special schools and Special Educational Needs (SEN) units in schools and colleges.

## **7 Marketing and publicity**

### **The Museum will**

- 7.1** Ensure that our promotional activities present the Museum as a welcoming, non-threatening, inclusive and family-friendly destination.
- 7.2** Promote the Museum to a broad range of users through a variety of media, printed and on-line, for local and target audiences, within the restrictions of budget and staff resources. This will be reflected in the marketing strategy to be produced after the Audience Development Study 2019-20. Essential information on accessibility will be included on the Museum's website and programme leaflet, and wherever possible or practical to do so.

## 8

## Staffing and training

### The Museum will

- 8.1 Ensure that visitors are made to feel welcome on arrival and are put at their ease. Our Welcome Desk volunteers are trained to offer a guide of what to expect inside the Museum, answer visitor questions and provide guidance and reassurance about navigation, how to move around the Museum and where to find key exhibits and points of interest.
- 8.2 Staff and volunteers are Dementia Friends trained.
- 8.3 The Learning & Outreach Officer advises staff and volunteers on giving accessible access for those with Special Educational Needs and Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD).
- 8.4 Museum staffs attend appropriate training by SHARE and other providers on Museum accessibility for a range of users with different access needs.

## 9

## Partnerships and networking

### To extend access to collections further, the Museum will

- 9.1 Provide loans to other museums nationally and internationally, subject to our conditions of loan and to approval by the Board of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd (owners of the collections).
- 9.2 Provide loan boxes for schools and community groups, and maintain an education & handling collection specifically for this purpose and for taught sessions, to encourage interaction with collections while preserving the main Museum collections from undue risks (Collections Development Policy).
- 9.3 Actively develop partnerships in the community for exhibitions and the activities programme (e.g. co-curated Community Case, use of Museum & Castle grounds for wildlife surveys). In developing plans for the improvement of the Museum and re-display of the collections (2020-25) the Museum will consult and involve local communities through appropriate means such as co-curation projects, focus groups and workshops.

## 10

## Review

Policy review date: October 2024