

St Albans Museums Access Policy

Access Statement

We believe that everyone has the right to access St Albans Museums, whether they are a visitor, researcher, volunteer or member of staff. It is important to us that our sites are welcoming and inclusive.

We are committed to removing barriers that prevent people from accessing our sites, collections, events and services so that we can share the history of St Albans as widely as possible.

We will always seek to make appropriate and reasonable adjustments to improve access, within the limits of our sites and resources. We believe that when barriers to access are removed, this benefits everyone.

1. Introduction

St Albans Museums is committed to maximising access for everyone, regardless of ability, age, gender, cultural or social background, sexual orientation, faith, language, location or wealth, by minimising or removing barriers that can prevent people from engaging with our buildings, collections, website, social media channels, programmes and staff.

We do everything that we can, within the limitations of our buildings and other resources, to offer the widest, richest, most engaging access for all our users. St Albans Museums 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 in the social model of disability and the understanding that everyone benefits when barriers to access are removed.

2. Scope

This policy covers provision at St Albans Museum + Gallery, Verulamium Museum, the Hypocaust (Roman mosaic), the Clock Tower and Sopwell Ruins, as well as our website, other online activities, and in other venues where we deliver outreach programmes. This policy relates to access by our users and does not cover access in relation to staff, volunteers, freelancers or contractors.

3. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out St Albans Museums' commitment to maximising access and to identify the ways in which we achieve this across the museums service. More information about St Albans City and District Council's approach towards equalities & diversity, including their Inclusion Strategy can be found online here: www.stalbans.gov.uk/council-and-democracy/equalities-diversity/

4. Definition of terms

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:

- 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
- 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
- Cultural – e.g. some people may feel that the museum is not relevant to them and does not reflect their cultural or social heritage, or their interests
- Economic – e.g. some people may not be able to afford to visit the museum or take part in our programme
- Geographic – e.g. some people will live too far away to visit the museum
- 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
- Technological – e.g. some people may not have access to the internet at home or use a mobile phone.

5. Responsibilities

The museum management team and St Albans District Council are responsible for ensuring that the museums service meets its obligations under the Equality Act (2010) by doing everything reasonably possible to make the museum accessible to the widest range of people.

Line managers are responsible for ensuring that the work of their staff takes into account the need to maximise access by addressing the barriers outlined above.

Everyone involved in developing, delivering or maintaining spaces, activities, resources and other services for our users at St Albans Museums are responsible for making them as accessible as possible. This includes not only museum staff, but also contractors employed by St Albans Museums (e.g. designers, artists, session leaders) and volunteers.

6. Policy

The museum is committed to maximising access by, for example:

Physical access

- upholding 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
- ensuring that if any aspect of an exhibition is not accessible via lift access, we will provide an alternative way to access the information whenever possible

- signposting the nearest parking spaces for blue badge holders
- ensuring that all our galleries, exhibitions (including individual exhibits), learning spaces (including interactive whiteboards and computers), cafés, cloakrooms, toilets and information desks are accessible to wheelchair users
- providing a manual wheelchair
- providing seating throughout our buildings

Sensory access

- providing front-of-house staff who have the awareness and skills to successfully communicate with and provide a quality service to people with visual or hearing impairments
- following RNIB and Action on Hearing Loss good practice guidelines
- looking to incorporate multisensory exhibits (e.g. to touch, smell, listen to), Braille and tactile images into exhibitions and galleries where appropriate
- ensuring that video-based exhibits have subtitles if they use the spoken word.
- offering to work with groups to create tailored tours or activities for people with sensory impairments
- ensuring that our website meets the WCAG AA standards (www.w3.org/WAI/intro/wcag)

Intellectual access

- following guidelines provided by Mencap
- ensuring that the text used in our galleries, exhibitions, educational resources, publications, website and social media channels is carefully tailored to the needs of their intended audiences, in line with the museum's style guide
- providing effective wayfinding signage
- ensuring that the content and delivery of our learning programmes are tailored to the learning needs of their audiences
- providing tailored session options for special schools and SEN units in schools and colleges

Attitudinal access

- ensuring that our promotional activities present the museum as a welcoming, non-threatening, inclusive destination for people who are not regular museum visitors.
- ensuring that visitors are made to feel welcome on arrival and are put at their ease. This could include providing an explanation of what to expect inside the museum, answering visitor questions and providing guidance and reassurance about navigation, how to move around the museum and where to find key exhibits and points of interest.
- creating environments in which people can feel comfortable, valued and able to learn at their own pace and level

Cultural access

- making the museum and its programmes as relevant as possible to our culturally and socially diverse society

Economic access

- ensuring that our museum opening hours are convenient for the widest possible range of visitors
- offering a flexible range of prices and ticket types where possible (while ensuring the museum's financial sustainability) where entry charges apply to our museums or special exhibitions.
- offering concessions where possible, e.g. for registered carers, students and senior citizens
- providing outreach programmes to schools that find it difficult to meet the cost of travel to visit the museum, and offering online resources to support and supplement this.

Geographic access

- providing a rich online experience of our various sites, exhibitions and collections for those unable to travel to St Albans Museums in person
- providing object loans to other museums nationally and internationally
- producing touring exhibitions and displays in public spaces

7. Related policies, legislation and guidance

The Equality Act (2010) 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.

Information from a number of organisations has informed this document, including:

- St Albans Museums Access Advisory Group
- Oaklands College: www.oaklands.ac.uk
- The National Autistic Society: www.autism.org.uk
- The Museum of London www.museumoflondon.org.uk/museum-london
- Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB): www.rnib.org.uk
- Action on Hearing Loss (formerly RNID): www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk
- Mencap: www.mencap.org.uk
- Web Accessibility Initiative: www.w3.org/WAI/
- The Museums Association: www.museumsassociation.org/policy/guidelines
- The Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF): www.hlf.org.uk/apply/how-apply/guidance-applying

8. Queries

Enquiries about this policy should be directed to the Audience Development Manager.

Date approved: June 2018.

Policy review date: June 2019