

**Great Western Society Ltd
Didcot Railway Centre
Access Policy, version 14**

The context

Vision

Our vision is for Didcot Railway Centre to be recognised for the international importance of its collection and the value of bringing to life the golden age of steam as a dynamic Living Museum.

Mission

Our mission is to fulfil our potential as a heritage venue at the centre of its community. Accessible to all, striving to engage and inspire the widest possible audiences in the history and heritage of the Great Western Railway – the pioneering transport infrastructure that laid the foundations for contemporary transport innovation.

Values

Authentic | Welcoming | Engaging | Innovative | Great Quality | Sustainable.

1. Introduction

Didcot Railway Centre warmly welcomes all visitors including those with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. The purpose of this policy is to set out our commitment to maximising access and to identify the ways in which we achieve this across the organisation. We recognise that access is a complex matter that must be addressed through the actions of the organisation as a whole, and that access provision benefits people generally, not just those with specific needs.

Our staff will do everything they can to ensure visits are both comfortable and enjoyable by minimising or removing barriers that can prevent people from engaging with our collections, website, social media channels, programmes, staff and volunteers. The Centre is a working museum and therefore it is not always possible to make all areas, locomotives and carriages as accessible as we would like but we will do everything that we can, within the limitations of our site and other resources, to offer the widest, richest, most engaging access for all our users.

The new entrance Ramp has removed the major physical barrier to access. In 2023, an Access Audit¹ identified a number of other barriers and made recommendations for improvements. We commissioned AccessAble², to produce the VisitEngland approved Accessibility Guide for our website.

¹ Didcot Railway Centre, Access Audit Report, November 2023, Sonia Rasbery & Co

² <https://visitengland.youraccessibilityguide.co.uk/>,
<https://www.accessable.co.uk/england/access-guides/didcot-railway-centre>

2. Definition of terms

When we refer to access, we mean the opportunity to engage with Didcot Railway Centre, our collections, content and expertise. The key barriers to access are:

- Attitudinal – some people may have a lack of interest in, or awareness of, the Centre and our collections, our programmes and services.
- Intellectual – some people may find the Centre too specialist in its approach to subjects and how they are presented.
- Personal - some people may have learning needs which affect their ability to engage with the museum,
- Language –
- Cultural – some people may feel that the Centre is not relevant to them and does not reflect their cultural or social heritage, or their interests.
- Economic – some people may not be able to afford to visit the centre or take part in our programmes.
- Geographic – some people will live too far away to visit.
- Physical/sensory – people with physical disabilities, limited mobility, or hearing or visual impairments may not be able to access the Centre, our website, social media channels or programmes.
- Technological – some people may not have access to the internet at home or use a mobile phone.

3. Responsibilities

The GWS Board and the Chief Executive are responsible for ensuring that the GWS meets its obligations under the Equality Act (2010) by doing everything reasonably possible to make Didcot Railway Centre accessible to the widest range of people.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that staff and volunteers receive appropriate disability awareness training and that the work of their colleagues takes into account the need to maximise access by addressing the barriers outlined above.

All staff and volunteers involved in developing, delivering or maintaining displays, activities, resources and other services for our users are responsible for making them as accessible as possible.

We will endeavour to staff the Enquiry Office when we are open to provide a point of contact for visitors.

4. The Policy

We are committed to maximising access by:

Physical access

- ensuring paths that provide access around the Centre are in good repair and are safe to use
- ensuring that we inform visitors that we have an accessible toilet and wheelchairs available

- ensuring that as much as possible of the Centre, including our buildings, exhibitions (including individual exhibits), learning spaces, Refreshment Room, Shop and Toilets are accessible to wheelchair users and those with mobility needs
- providing traditional wheelchairs for visitors
- providing seating around the Centre for rest breaks.

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 and to provide training to staff who interact with Centre users
- welcoming all assistance dogs
- following RNIB and Action on Hearing Loss good practice guidelines and ensuring our staff are trained on these
- ensuring that displays and exhibitions use a range of multisensory exhibits for example to touch, smell, listen to and incorporate tactile images where appropriate
- ensuring video-based exhibits have subtitles if they use the spoken word and that, budget allowing, key audio-visual exhibits include BSL and subtitles
- offering on request tours and events that are specifically designed for people with sensory impairments
- providing large print materials for visually impaired visitors where appropriate
- ensuring our website meets the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) AA standard.

Intellectual access

- providing guided tours for booked parties of visitors. Parties are welcome but are advised to check with the Centre beforehand
- ensuring that the text used in displays, exhibitions, educational resources, publications, website and social media channels is carefully tailored to the needs of their intended audiences
- providing effective signage and maps as set out in our Signage Policy and Schedule
- ensuring that the content and delivery of our learning programmes are tailored to the learning needs of their audiences
- following guidelines provided by Mencap
- reviewing the need for tailored programmes for special schools, and sessions for people on the autistic spectrum or with dementia.

Attitudinal access

- ensuring that our promotional activities present the museum as a welcoming, non-threatening, inclusive destination
- ensuring that visitors, volunteers and staff are made to feel welcome on arrival and are put at their ease

- creating environments in which people can feel comfortable, valued and able to learn at their own pace and level.

Cultural access

- making the Centre and its programmes as relevant as possible to the local community.

Economic access

- offering a flexible range of prices and ticket types. where possible (while ensuring the Centre's financial sustainability)
- while visitors with disabilities pay the normal admission charge, their carer is admitted free of charge.
- offering concessions where possible, e.g. for people in receipt of benefits, students and senior citizens
- providing outreach programmes to primary and secondary schools that find it difficult to meet the cost of visiting the museum.

Geographic Access

- providing a rich online experience
- providing object loans to other museums
- producing displays in public spaces and at local, national and community events

5. Related policies and procedures

This policy is supported by the following:

- Equality Policy (version 8, May 2023).
- Accessibility Guide, website only (2024).
- Access Audit recommendations (November 2023).

This policy is fully supported by Didcot Railway Centre's Chief Executive and staff, the GWS Board. senior management, was discussed by the Senior Management Team on 27 March 2025 and approved by the GWS Board on 12 April 2025. The policy will be monitored and reviewed every two years.

Ann Middleton
Version 14
May 2025