

English Heritage Disability Access Policy

1. Introduction

English Heritage is committed to improving access to the historic environment, by helping other agencies and organisations to adopt creative and sensitive solutions in the adaptation and management of their properties, and by adopting best practice itself, in relation to the properties it manages, the services it provides, and the people it employs.

This policy statement sets out the principles that will guide our work with regards to disability access, and outlines the principal areas of responsibility.

2. Definitions

* Disability is defined as a loss or reduction of functional ability that results from a physical, cognitive or other impairment, and includes physical, intellectual, sensory and psychiatric disabilities.

* Access means physical access to buildings and monuments, intellectual access to ideas and information, and access to services, by a wide variety of means. In practice, the measures taken to improve access for people with disabilities, from an adoption of the principles of 'universal design' to the provision of temporary ramps at historic buildings to the introduction of tactile displays and hands-on exhibitions, will improve access for everyone, and help many people who do not consider themselves 'disabled' or whose disabilities are invisible.

3. Policy

English Heritage seeks to ensure that its programmes and activities are accessible to everyone, wherever practicable. It aims to provide easy, dignified access to its own estate whenever this can reasonably be done and encourages others who own or manage historic buildings, or other heritage properties, to adopt access plans that are consistent with the special architectural, historic or archaeological interest of the property concerned (*Easy Access to Historic Buildings*, English Heritage, July 2004)

4. Policy objectives

In pursuance of this policy, English Heritage will improve and enhance all forms of access to its properties and services, and will conform to the requirements of the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act (DDA), bearing in mind the constraints contained within pre-existing legislation relating to the protection of historic monuments, listed buildings and conservation areas. The DDA does not override existing conservation legislation, and physical alterations to the fabric of historic buildings, landscapes and monuments will continue to require statutory consent. But the Act does oblige us to think differently about the services we provide and the ways in which we provide them. This covers the management of our properties, including office buildings, the provision of advice and information on all our activities and initiatives, and the development of alternative means of communication, where these will provide an aid to access.

4.1 Access

English Heritage will explore all methods of providing and improving access to its properties for people with limited mobility, while respecting the historic integrity and quality of those buildings. Where physical access remain difficult or impossible, it will introduce alternative forms of interpretation in order to extend access as far as is practicable. Interpretative resources will also be used to meet the needs of visitors with cognitive and sensory impairments.

4.2 Services

English Heritage will develop and promote a range of services for people with disabilities, both individually and in groups, and will consult with access groups in initiating and managing these services. All new services and resources, including information services, education facilities, visitor receptions, meeting and lecture facilities, catering provision and retail outlets, will be designed to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities. Wherever possible, existing services will be upgraded to the same standards as part of planned maintenance and refurbishment regimes. The provision of services encompasses all English

Heritage grants programmes, and we will ensure that these are promoted and made available in a variety of appropriate formats.

4.3 Advice

In its role as statutory adviser to others, English Heritage will seek to reconcile access requirements with the protection of the special quality and interest of historic buildings in order to maximise or make possible their continued use. It will seek to promote examples of best practice, and to encourage the implementation of appropriate access initiatives in relation to its grant-aid programmes.

4.4 Training

Specialist training for staff and the appropriate allocation of resources are integral to the implementation of this policy.

4.5 Employment

All staff are employed on the basis they meet the agreed acceptable criteria for the post. English Heritage follows the basic policy that disablement is no bar to recruitment or advancement and wherever possible reasonable adjustments will be made both as part of the recruitment process and whilst in employment. If an individual becomes disabled whilst in post or a new recruit requires reasonable adjustments to be made before they can take up appointment then the "Providing Support for people with Special Requirements", will be followed.

4.6 Consultation

English Heritage is committed to the process of consultation with respect to disability access, site development plans and service improvement, and will seek to ensure that it involves access groups at key stages in project initiation and development. Where appropriate, English Heritage will also seek advice from specialist access consultants and the relevant agencies.

4.7 Review

English Heritage will regularly review its policies and guidelines relating to disability access, and amend both in relation to evolving best practice, the development of new techniques and potentially changing perspectives on the balance between access and preservation.

5. Policy implementation plan

The implementation of the Disability Access Policy will be outlined in English Heritage's Strategic Plan and will form an integral part of regional, divisional, departmental and, where relevant, individual forward plans.

Implementation requires the preparation of Access Plans for each property, including offices open to the public; these will be reviewed annually. The Access Plan should address the following key issues:

- * Market evaluation;
- * Physical access;
- * Interpretation and communication
- * Integration;
- * Public programmes;
- * Staff training;
- * Employment;
- * Resource requirements and timetables for action;
- * Review, monitoring and evaluation.

There is considerable overlap between these areas, and the implementation plan must define and make clear key roles and responsibilities to avoid the duplication of effort or the danger that important access issues are overlooked. It is essential that all members of staff accept and understand their own role in improving access, and that overall responsibility for policy development, implementation and monitoring rests with a nominated member of the senior management team. In addition, it is recommended that a

Commissioner assume special responsibility for monitoring our achievements and progress in relation to disability access.

6. Disability strategic action plan

6.1 Market evaluation

Goal To evaluate the unmet needs of people with disabilities within English Heritage's new and current target markets.

Strategy Establish regular consultation with groups representing customers with disabilities, and collaborate with them in evaluating our properties and services; undertake targeted market research in relation to key properties, development projects and communities

Action by Regional Directors

Conservation Management

Central and regional marketing teams

Major Projects Project Directors

Interpretation Team

6.2 Physical access

Goal To preserve the historic integrity of our properties whilst establishing best practice in terms of access, whether through design solutions which encompass physical alteration or by providing alternative means of access.

To provide reasonable access to all office buildings throughout the estate.

Strategy Identify where and how improvements to physical access can be made and agree an implementation programme; provide alternative forms of access where physical adaptations are not possible; incorporate both into development and maintenance programmes.

Action by Regional Directors

Regional Project Development Managers

Major Projects Project Directors

Office and Building Services; all office / building managers

6.3 Interpretation and communication

Goal To effectively communicate information at properties and offices to people with disabilities.

To provide information in alternative formats and / or by alternative means.

To provide and promote appropriate forms of interpretation, adapted programmes and specialist services for people with disabilities.

Strategy The research, development and targeted promotion of various methods of interpretation and communication within the context of each property, office, and service.

Action by Regional Directors

Central and regional marketing teams

Interpretation Team

Communications Team

6.4 Integration

Goal To develop opportunities to integrate people with disabilities into English Heritage services and activities, whether as a member of staff or a visitor / customer.

Strategy Review existing English Heritage policies and plans in relation to the requirements of the DDA, to ensure that no obstacles to access and / or employment remain in place; actively work with existing members of staff and advisory bodies to ensure that best practice is adopted and followed as an employer and as a service provider.

Action by Human Resources

Regional Directors

Central and regional marketing teams

6.5 Public programming and special activities

Goal To provide appropriate educational and recreational activities and programmes for people with disabilities.

Strategy Prepare new or adapt existing programmes in collaboration with access groups and specialist providers; promote these programmes and activities to target groups and audiences.

Action by Central and regional marketing teams

Special events team

Education team

Site and area managers

6.6 Staff training

Goal To provide disability awareness training for all members of staff, together with specialist training for those who provide key public services;

Strategy Allocate resources (training and staff cover costs) within all training budgets, based on a comprehensive assessment of needs and commitments.

Action by Human Resources

Senior management

6.7 Employment

Goal: To remove all obstacles to employment and career development within English Heritage for people with disabilities.

Strategy A revised Equality and Diversity policy is being launched during 2001 which incorporates sections on providing support for individuals with special needs. A mandatory training session for all staff will be cascaded throughout the organisation. Staff will be made aware of their responsibilities in respect of individuals with disabilities and clear guidelines will be available on how to deal with individual situations.

Human Resources are responsible for advising on the policy, monitoring individual cases, and providing feedback to all parties involved and facilitating cases where problems arise. There is a complaints process for those who feel they have suffered any form of discrimination, harassment or victimisation.

Action by Human Resources

All line managers with responsibility for recruitment

6.8 Resource requirements

Goal To provide adequate resources for physical adaptations, new interpretation and staff training, in order to ensure that (a) English Heritage complies with the requirements of the DDA and (b) sets exemplary standards in providing physical and intellectual access to the historic environment; to agree timetables for implementation at divisional, departmental and site level;

Strategy Incorporate access improvements into all site maintenance and development budgets and set aside a central research and development budget, held by a designated department, to ensure the best practice is established and followed.

Action by Commission

Chief Executive's Group

Regional Directors

6.9 Review and evaluation

Goal To regularly evaluate improvements to access and to act upon the results of such evaluation;

Strategy Establish review and reporting procedures through an Annual Forum and presentation to Commission;

Formal review of key improvements or innovations in relation to physical access and interpretation by a disability access consultant.

Action by Commission

Nominated member of the senior management team

Project manager or sponsor

This policy was established in September 2001

With acknowledgement to Disability policy and strategic plan, Sheridan Burke, Historic Houses Trust, NSW, 1997