

Home of Charles Darwin – Down House, Kent

Hazard Information for Education Visits

It is the responsibility of teachers and group leaders to complete a risk assessment prior to the site visit. The following information is intended as an aid and does not replace the group leader's own risk assessment. We recommend coming to the site on a free planning visit, to help you with your risk assessment. Please note: where possible, English Heritage staff at the site will be happy to assist you with your queries, but cannot check or sign any section of your risk assessment.

Environmental conditions at historic sites may change rapidly and you will need to remain alert at all times during your visit. Most accidents are the result of slips and trips so please make sure you wear appropriate footwear and dress sensibly for the site and weather. Please be aware that the site may close at short notice due to adverse weather. Where applicable, stonework and trees at our sites are inspected regularly; however, extreme weather conditions can sometimes affect stonework and trees so as well as following any staff instructions and being mindful of temporary barriers and signage, please remain vigilant at all times. On-going conservation work may pose a temporary hazard; a member of staff will advise you of any works when you visit. Dogs on leashes may be present on site.

All learners who are 16 years or younger must be supervised by a responsible adult at all times whilst on site.

Moving vehicles may pose a hazard upon arrival and while on the site.

- Please be aware of moving vehicles in the car park. There is only one coach parking bay, this must be booked in advance directly with the site. Cars will be in the same car park as coaches and use the same route as pedestrians.
- There are no pavements leading to the site from the nearby village. If public transport is being used to travel to the site, walking along the road will be necessary. There is a likelihood of fast moving cars using the road, walking along this route is not advised for school groups. There is an alternative route via a public footpath through fields which takes around 15 minutes to walk. Please contact the site directly for instructions on how to access this footpath.

There are uneven surfaces which may change in level throughout the house and gardens.

- Some areas have loose gravel surfaces and there may be potholes and various trip hazards around the site; please use paved pathways and designated walkways wherever possible.

There are conservation interventions within the house.

- There are low lighting levels throughout the house to help conserve the fabric, objects and paintings.
- Although many exhibits are housed in glass-fronted cabinets, visitors must observe 'Do Not Touch' signs, especially on free-standing exhibits.
- The glass in windows and display cabinets is not safety glass.
- Several areas are roped off to the general public for the safety of the collection. Please ensure that you do not cross the rope barriers, or pull on the rope which will sound the alarm system.

Staircase treads may be worn and uneven in the house.

- Some stairs are narrow, please take care and use the handrail.

The house can become busy and congested.

- Follow the suggested flow through the house to limit congestion.
- The downstairs rooms are limited in size and some cannot accommodate more than 5 people at a time.

Trees onsite may pose a hazard.

- There are low overhanging tree branches in the garden and estate.
- Climbing on the trees is not permitted for the safety of visitors and for the conservation of the trees.
- There are mature trees on site that may drop branches in rare circumstances; care should be taken when passing under or near large trees.

There are various hazards within the restored garden and estate, including wildlife and allergy risks.

- The gardens have been restored to how they were in Darwin's time; it is very important that visitors keep to the designated paths while walking around the grounds.
- In wet weather the paths can become muddy and slippery.
- Please do not pick the flowers or any other plants and close all gates.
- Hazard to those with allergies. The garden attracts many bees and insects. There is an observation beehive in the laboratory from April – September.
- There may be deer and other wildlife in and around the Sand Walk. Please do not approach wild animals.

Livestock may pose a hazard within the estate.

- Sheep graze on the estate and must not be disturbed. All animals may bite and/or kick.
- There may be a risk of zoonotic infection; visitors should ensure hands are washed after contact with animals.