

Access Policy and Plan 2022 – 2024



Head of Steam- Darlington Railway Museum



DARLINGTON
Borough Council

Head of Steam- Darlington Railway Museum Access Policy

This policy links to and guides the Museum Forward Plan.

The Museum is about to undergo a significant redevelopment project and this policy and plan covers the period up to reopening.

1. Statement of Purpose

Head of Steam - Darlington Railway Museum aims to delight all its visitors in the town that is the birthplace of the modern railway.

The museum's **mission** is to explain the significance of Darlington to railways, and for Darlington to be known for its railway heritage and its unique place in the birth of the modern railway.

The museum's **responsibility** is to preserve for future generations, and to make available for education and enjoyment, the unique historical collections it holds in trust.

The museum's **objective** is to make, in relation to the funding it receives, a worthwhile contribution to community development and economic prosperity in Darlington.

2. Aims

2.1. To encourage activity, interaction and enjoyment of the site.

2.2. To develop the museum to inspire learning and connect people with the past, present and future.

2.3. To care for the museum's collections and ensure they are accessible to the public.

2.4. For Darlington to be known for its railway heritage and as the birthplace of the modern railway.

2.5. To ensure the museum is operated successfully as a financially sustainable model.

3. Objectives

3.1. Develop an exciting events and exhibitions programme that appeals to a varied audience.

- 3.2. Engage with new groups and schools through partnership working, activities and new workshops.
- 3.3. Increase access to the collection through partnership working, outreach and digital media.
- 3.4. Promote the museum and Darlington's railway heritage in preparation for the redevelopment of the site and the bi-centenary.
- 3.5. Promote the facilities available to hire and increase retail income.

4. Access and Inclusion

4.1 Physical

The Museum recognises the need to ensure that the building and as many learning opportunities as possible are accessible under the terms of the Disability Discrimination Act, and is working hard to achieve this. Through market research and consultation with users and non - users the Museum will seek to update its information on the learning and physical needs of our target audiences. The Museum is committed to ensuring that our buildings and displays are as accessible to as many users as possible, and we would like them to be able to see our exhibits and information, to find their way round easily, to have places to rest, and to be able to access toilets and refreshments.

4.2 Intellectual

The Museum wants to engage with all our users and takes into account the different educational experiences, learning styles and ways of understanding of users of all ages. To help to achieve this, the Museum presents information and interpretation in a variety of text and graphic panels, as well as with museum objects, sound clips, audio visual displays, hands-on interactives and with staff.

4.3 Cultural

The Museum is committed to equality and diversity and adheres to Darlington Borough Council's Equalities Policy. The Museum recognises that users have differing cultural, ethnic, racial and gender backgrounds and have different religions or beliefs, nationalities, sexual orientations, gender identities, ages, and physical and mental abilities.

4.4 Social Inclusion

The Museum aims to engage with all sections of the community, particularly non users who may be from the following backgrounds: young people; isolated older people; people from ethnic minorities; people with disabilities; people from C2DE communities. The museum has an admission charge, which can be seen as a barrier to some groups, and the museum is actively seeking ways to overcome this. The Museum aims to develop creative learning programmes in partnership with organisations which already work with the above groups of people, and can bring their knowledge, expertise and existing relationships to bear.

4.4.1 Potential Barriers – Admission Charges

We are aware that having an admission charge to the museum constitutes a barrier to access.

Admission charges have remained the same since 2007 and are currently:

Adults: £4.95

Concession (over 60, Student): £3.75

Child (6 to 16): £3.00

Child aged 5 and under: Free

Members of partner and on-site organisations: Free on production on a membership card

We have annual passes for the museum for families (2 adults and up to 4 children) which were £15, and in our last year before redevelopment have been reduced to £10. Single person passes were £10 and are now £7.50. It is our intention to have free admission to the museum when we reopen, with some paid for elements, such as some temporary exhibitions.

We also provide many activities and groups either free of charge or are included in admission and annual passes. These include our Dementia Café, Ex-Railway workers coffee morning, Station Scamps (under fives), family activities in school holidays.

Carers / companions are free, and we have arranged discounted admission for families of looked after children in the regional MAX card scheme.

Learning activities for schools and outreach activities, such as talks, are free and we encourage groups to make a donation to the museum if they are able.

We are currently working with Children North East on a Poverty Proofing process. This involves training for staff as well as looking at how we work and what we provide.

5. Audiences

Existing audiences include: schools (mainly Key Stages 1 & 2), early years providers, tourists, family groups, visitors with special interests (eg railway / family historians), adult groups (eg: Women's Institute), older visitors on general visits, visitors who come for specific talks, home educated children and their families, child minders, people with dementia and their carers/care workers.

As well as seeking to increase the numbers of visitors within existing audiences, the Museum and will actively seek out and encourage (through the development of activities and resources) the following potential audiences: schools - particularly Key Stages 3 & 4 students in further and higher education, and adults with learning difficulties and / or physical disabilities.

5.1 Community Engagement

Our aim to engage our hyper-local community is central to our current engagement programme and our future site after redevelopment. We have already started to change our practices to be more inclusive of our neighbours, by changing our marketing strategy for the area and liaising with community leaders to access an audience that finds the museum hard to reach.

We hope to build relationships with our neighbours so they will feel confident in not only visiting the new site but also engaging with events, exhibitions, workshops and feeling a sense of ownership over the site. We are working towards democratisation and making the museum collections relevant and meaningful for users and non-users.

The surrounding wards of the museum, Northgate, North Road and Pierremont are one of our priority target audiences. They represent a diverse community, of ranging income levels, attainment rates and ages. Despite being our neighbours, annual visitor surveys show that they do not currently engage with the museum and collection. Local insight reports show that in Northgate Ward alone, 47% of children are living in relative low income families. The engagement with all of our community includes those with protected characteristics.

6. Safeguarding

This Policy links to our Safeguarding Policy covering staff, volunteers and people on work placements who will be in contact with children, young people and vulnerable adults.

7. Access Assessment

Access assessment carried out in November 2018, with follow up self-assessments to monitor progress in 2019, 2020 and 2021. The original assessment was carried out by staff from the Tees Valley Museums National Portfolio Organisation.

7.1 Access at Head of Steam

A number of measures have been put into place, some of which were highlighted in the Access Assessment carried out in 2018.

- Access statement online
- Accessibility Guide (Visit Britain) online
- The museum is Dementia Friendly
- The museum is Autism Friendly
- An access kit is available at reception. It includes magnifying sheets, easy to hold pens, signature guides etc.
- All labels and interpretation panels are in an accessible font.
- The building is accessible. The building is accessible via a ramp and is level throughout. It has accessible parking and toilet facilities.
- Visitor Visual Guide online
- Sensory and fidget toys available to borrow
- BSL interpretation of Star Objects online, on youtube and accessible via QR codes in the museum
- Large print guides on site

- Short general guides in other languages for tourists – French, Italian, Spanish, German, Mandarin Chinese and Japanese
- Family friendly measures – step stools and potty training seats, free access to spare nappies, age appropriate activities around the museum
- Contrasting toilet seats in accessible toilets and contrasting grab rail by urinal.
- The museum is breast feeding friendly
- Manual wheelchair and walker available, and seating around the museum

Regular activities:

- Under 5's group – every Friday morning
- Relaxed Opening – 1st Sunday of the month
- Dementia Café – 3rd Wednesday of the month
- Railway coffee morning – last Thursday of the month.

8. Access to Collections

This policy and plan links to the Collections Management Strategy and Learning and Engagement Policy and Plan.

8.1 The Ken Hoole Study Centre

The museum has a large archival collection which is available for the public, researchers, family historians and specialist interest groups through appointments in the Ken Hoole Study Centre. This is available in person and through enquiries to our Collections and Learning Assistant who is able to search for material and send printed or electronic copies. There are charges for reproducing materials and we have copyright arrangements in place.

8.2 Collections not on display

At present we have an object in focus display in the museum and online which features objects not usually on display. As part of the redevelopment plans we will be relocating our stores and wish to ensure they are appropriately displayed for people to tour.

8.3 Interpretation

We follow guidance from the RNIB, Tees Valley NPO and other bodies regarding our interpretation. This includes the physical appearance of the material in terms of size, colour and type of font, as well as considerations such as word count and reading age.

As well as printed materials we have audio visual materials, films and sound effects. We have recently had British Sign Language interpretation for some of our Star objects developed. This is available on our website, on our Youtube channel and via QR codes on display in the museum.

We also have front of house volunteers available to talk to, as well as our staff team.

8.4 Access to specialist knowledge and expertise

When creating interpretation for in-house temporary exhibitions we seek to work with those with relevant lived experiences, specialist knowledge and expertise, and where possible to co-curate.

9. Volunteers

This policy and plan links to our Volunteer Policy.

We have a team of volunteers who give their time to help support access to the building and our collections in a variety of ways.

We have front of house volunteers who come in weekly and are available in the museum to talk to visitors.

We have a team who work behind the scenes in collections on such projects as transcribing information from our North Eastern Railway Staff History Books into an excel document to allow much easier searches for information – when complete the documents are made available online, as with some of our catalogues and other information.

We have recently recruited a temporary member of staff to establish a digital volunteering programme. This will allow volunteers to assist with collections tasks without having to come into the building and allow more flexibility about when they volunteer.

We also have volunteers who help us on event days with tasks such as working with families in our activity room, or helping with visitor enquiries and flow. As well as our own team, we also work in partnership with Darlington Culture Volunteers who have, for example, helped with additional volunteers for room stewarding in a temporary exhibition and on busy event days such as Santa at the Station.

10. Staff training and Awareness

Staff receive mandatory training from Darlington Borough Council (who runs the museum) including First Aid and Equalities. Other training in more specialist areas is provided by the relevant organisation as and when required. Staff are able to self identify a training need.

Staff have received training in the following areas since 2019:

- Dementia Friends
- Autism Awareness
- Equalities
- Poverty Proofing

Our Learning and Access Officer has also had awareness training in the following areas:

- LGBTQIA+
- Unconscious bias
- Working meaningfully with young people
- Anti-racism

- Introduction to Makaton

Access Plan

Access work crosses all aspects of the aims and objectives of the museum’s Forward Plan.

Objective	Action	Task	Completion by	Lead Officer(s) /Resources
Increase access to collections and site	Get short guides translated to reflect two of the main languages spoken in our hyper local area. (2022)	Identify languages spoken in hyper local area	April 2022	Learning & Access Officer / Education budget
		Arrange for translations to be done	April 2022	
		Have copies of guide available in museum	May/ June 2022	
		Promote the range of languages we have guides for.	May/ June 2022	
	Update the easy read guide created just before the pandemic and before a large object move. (2022)	Edit Easy Read guide, remove references to Locomotion No 1.	May 2022	Learning & Access Officer Education budget
		Make copies available on website and at Reception.	May/June 2022	
		Promote the easy read guide.	May/ June 2022	
	Create Museum on the Move programme ready for closure period (2024)	Secure lease of a vehicle through DBC	October 2022	Manager Curator & Collections and Learning Assistant / Collections budget
		Consult with partners on possible workshop and touring programme	December 2022	
		Fit out vehicle and choose objects to be included	March 2023	
		Liaise with insurance team	December 2022	
		Consider access requirements	December 2022	

This policy and plan was written in March 2022 and is due for review in March 2023.