

Getting started with...

Accessibility

How to create a more
accessible visitor experience





We want every visitor to our sites to have an amazing day out with us, to connect with nature and to be inspired to protect it. To do this, we need to make sure that our sites and the activities that we offer are as inclusive and accessible as possible.

Making our sites accessible is not only the right thing to do, it also makes good business sense. Around 20% of day visitors to UK tourist attractions are people with an impairment and their travelling companions*. That's a fifth of visitors!

The total expenditure each year by these visitors is estimated to be £15.3 billion*. This is known as the 'purple pound'.

Our sites already provide great accessible days out, but there are always ways we can improve! Read on to find out how you can improve accessibility at your site and promote your accessible offer to potential visitors.

*<https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/value-purple-pound>

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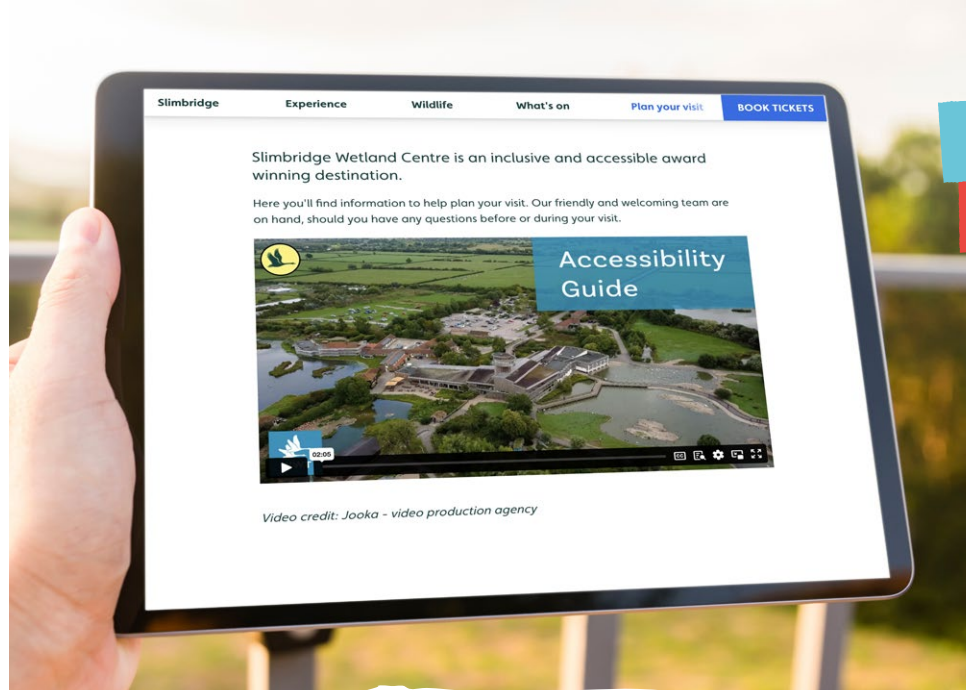
Pre-visit

Accessibility starts before people have even set foot on your site. Try to provide as much information as you can about your offer on your website pages and social media channels.

The need for more information has been identified by disabled people in the UK as the second biggest barrier to accessing nature and the outdoors**.

Here are some simple steps that you can take to improve the information that you provide to visitors before they arrive, helping them to plan their day out with confidence.

**Outdoor Accessibility Guidance published by Paths for All and the Sensory Trust, 2023
<https://www.pathsforall.org.uk/mediaLibrary/other/english/outdoor-accessibility-guidance-2023.pdf>



STEP 1

Accessibility Guides

Make sure that you have an up-to-date Accessibility Guide available to download from your website. Remember that this should be called an Accessibility Guide NOT an Access Statement.

[Visit Britain](#) provide easy-to-follow guidance on how to create Accessibility Guides, along with some useful examples.

WWT Slimbridge created a new [Accessibility Guide](#) in 2022 which you can use as a template.

Make sure you regularly review and update your Accessibility Guide.



STEP 2

Provide the facts and let visitors decide

Every individual has different needs and abilities. It's important to provide as much information as possible so that people can make their own decisions about whether something is suitable for them. For example, instead of saying that a path isn't accessible, describe the features of the path such as the surface, width, gradient and presence of steps.

If you can, include photos so that people can make up their own minds. And try to avoid using the phrase 'fully accessible' as this is very subjective.



STEP 3

Think more widely than physical access

It's easy to think about accessibility in terms of paths, steps and seating, but not everyone with a disability has a physical impairment.

Information about the sensory environment, such as how noisy an area might be or details of the lighting levels, may be useful for some visitors, including those with neurodivergent or neurodegenerative conditions (such as autism, learning difficulties and dementia). And information on sensory highlights around the site, or alternative formats for visitor materials, may be relevant to a whole range of people, not just those with hearing or sight loss.

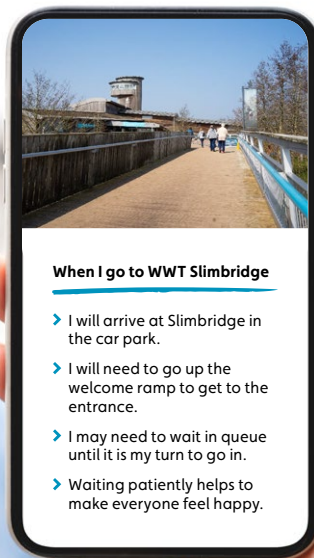
STEP 4

Provide additional pre-visit resources

As well as detailing your access offer and providing a downloadable Accessibility Guide, could you provide other pre-visit resources on your website?

A **social story** can help set the scene for visitors who may not know what to expect from their visit, and an **access map** can detail accessibility features around the site.

Get in touch with the Experience and Engagement team if you'd like advice and help to develop these types of resources.





STEP 5

How can people get in touch?

Make sure you provide more than one way for people to get in touch with you to find out more. Include a telephone number and an email address in your communications.

Is there someone in your team who could be your accessibility champion, and a point of contact for access enquiries?





Onsite

STEP 1

Seating

Not all accessibility improvements need to cost a lot of money – small changes can make a big difference to visitors with additional needs.

Add more seating! For people with a physical impairment or who suffer with fatigue, long paths without seating can be very daunting. Ideally you should be able to see the next rest point from the previous one. And remember that seating doesn't have to be a formal bench – it could be a perch point or something else that's in keeping with the spirit of your site.

Talk to the Experience and Engagement team for advice on seating locations, styles and suppliers.



STEP 2

Distances

Do you provide information on distances between different areas of your site? This is particularly important where there are long paths or seasonal walkways.

Make sure that you use waymarking, maps or signage to tell visitors how long the route is so that they can make their own decision as to whether it's suitable for them.



STEP 3

Regularly check accessibility features

Do you have fixed hearing loops installed at your site? Are they working, and would you know how to use them if asked?

Make sure any accessibility feature such as a hearing loop is regularly checked, that staff know how to use it and that it's clearly signposted for visitors.



STEP 4

Alternative formats

You should be able to provide information to visitors in alternative formats if requested. For large print this should be a correctly formatted document which complies with **clear and large print standards**. It shouldn't just be a photocopied enlargement. Talk to the Experience and Engagement team for more advice.



STEP 5

Sensory resources

An easy and low cost way to enhance your accessible offer is to provide sensory loan items that visitors can borrow to use around your site.

You could create kits which provide sensory resources related to areas of your site, including items to touch, look at, smell or listen to. Or you could create a kit which supports an individual during their visit, including ear defenders (to reduce noise and sensory overload), fidget toys, colour overlays (used for easier reading), and large print guides.

If you're already trialling these types of resources at your site make sure you're evaluating their use and asking visitors for feedback.



“

At WWT we believe that nature is for everyone. We create inclusive and accessible experiences not just through physical access to our sites, but through the warmth of the welcome from our staff and volunteers.

”



Promoting your offer

STEP 1

Focus on accessibility on your social channels

Making your site as accessible as possible is the first step, the next step is to shout about it!

Regularly promote your site's accessibility through your social media channels, building accessibility into posts about various aspects of your site. You could also tie in with various national days and awareness weeks.



STEP 2

Inclusive content

Make sure photos and videos are inclusive, showing a range of visitors with different needs and from different backgrounds. If you're arranging a photoshoot and don't have the budget for professional models, could you reach out to your followers to see if they would like to take part? Ask the central visitor marketing team for advice on how to do this.



STEP 3

Listings

There are a growing number of websites focusing on accessible days out.

[Euan's Guide](#) is a free resource that encourages businesses to create listings and customers to leave disabled access reviews.

[Tourism For All](#) and [Great Days Out](#) allow users to search for accessible days out by location, and offer various advertising packages for businesses for around £100–£500 per year.

STEP 4

Enter your site for local awards

Entering your site into the accessibility category of local tourism awards is a great way to increase awareness of your site's accessibility credentials, and you never know, you might win!

Visit England's Awards for Excellence have an Accessible and Inclusive Tourism category, you can apply for this via your local destination organisation. There may also be other regional award schemes you can apply for.

You'll usually get useful feedback from the judging process, highlighting areas you can improve for the future.

STEP 5

Local networks and influencers

Reach out to local disability influencers, groups and networks. Let them know about your accessible offer, or ask them if they'd be willing to help improve your offer by reviewing your site or providing suggestions.

If you ask people with additional needs to help with reviews, audits or photoshoots, you should recompense them for their help and expertise. For example, you could provide free entry and refreshments on the day of their visit, or a free return visit for them or their group.



Contact us

Contact the Experience and Engagement team for advice and support to make your site more accessible and provide an amazing day out for every visitor, every time.



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