

Dorchester Abbey Museum

Access Policy

2025 - 2030

Name of governing body:

Dorchester Abbey PCC

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body:

12/05/2025

Date at which this policy is due for review:

12/05/2030

The Access Policy for Dorchester Abbey Museum is based on our belief that all people and social groups have a fundamental right to access the Museum and its collections and resources. 'Access' is here understood in broad terms to be the opportunity to engage with and enjoy the museum's collections, exhibitions, activities and resources.

This Access Policy is set within the overarching framework of Dorchester Abbey Parochial Church Council's Parish Disability Inclusion Policy (draft 18/02/24).

Dorchester Abbey Museum's access policy is closely linked to our Museum purpose (Dorchester Abbey Museum's Governing Document), shown in the appendix, p5 below.

Our access policy is underpinned by two main principles:

1. The principle that we have a duty to provide equality of access to the Museum so that, as far as possible, disabled and disadvantaged groups and individuals are able to enjoy Dorchester Abbey Museum's collections and resources in the same way as the public at large. (Equality Act, 2010)

As the statutory guidance on this Act notes, equality of access *'is not a minimalist policy of simply ensuring that some access is available to disabled people; it is, so far as is reasonably practicable, to approximate the access enjoyed by disabled people to that enjoyed by the rest of the public'* (Equality Act, Statutory Code of Practice, p 90, section 7.4).

2. The principle of the social model of disability, that we should seek to remove, or at least reduce, barriers to access by all. As the Arts Council (2019a) points out, *'The Arts Council uses the social model of disability... based on the principle that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference. It puts the emphasis on what needs to be done to identify and remove barriers [by] arts and cultural organisations'* (Arts Council, 2019a, p 3).

Based on these core principles, Dorchester Abbey Museum's access policy is committed to:

- a) access for everyone – recognising all people and sectors of the community have a fundamental right to engage with, use and enjoy the collections and services the Museum provides;
- b) making reasonable adjustments to enable and support access, as far as possible, for all those who wish to engage with the Museum;
- c) providing a welcoming and inclusive environment for all our visitors and the local community.

We recognise that there are many barriers to access, especially in our listed, historic building, which we do not own or maintain. We are committed to making all aspects of our activities as fully accessible as our premises and resources allow, including access to buildings, collections, events, exhibitions, learning, and to our volunteers as well as visitors. This entails working to remove and reduce constraints to accessibility by individuals and groups.

Dorchester Abbey Museum is committed to increasing public access to our collections and information associated with those collections, to increase knowledge and understanding of the items held by the Museum and of Dorchester's rich historical and cultural heritage.

We will provide welcoming staff and learning opportunities for different audiences, different levels of ability and tailor our programmes to meet the needs of specific groups.

We will promote all our activities and collections using accessible means of communication.

The Arts Council (2019b, p 62) identifies seven main forms of access that we need to consider: physical, intellectual, sensory, social, geographical, cultural and financial factors. We outline briefly below our policy to reduce (or where possible to eliminate) barriers, and support equality of access with respect to each of these seven forms of access. Finally, we include a further, and increasingly important, aspect of access – technological access, in the form of digital engagement with our collections, resources and information.

- **Physical:** enabling people with physical disabilities, the elderly and those caring for small children, to reach our building and collections, as far as possible. This is particularly challenging in our premises - a listed historic building, not owned or maintained by the Museum, with uneven floor and steep entry steps (see Dorchester Abbey Museum Access Plan)
- **Intellectual:** we acknowledge that people have different learning styles and we will endeavour to respond by adopting clear interpretive guidance
- **Sensory:** to start to build in to our displays and activities a wider range of different sensory experiences
- **Social:** to ensure that all visitors feel welcomed and valued, seeing the museum as a place that is accessible to all.
- **Geographical:** to work to provide a rich online experience of our collections and resources and to develop our outreach work for those unable to travel to Dorchester Abbey Museum.
- **Cultural:** we acknowledge and recognise cultural differences and seek to represent varied cultural experiences and issues through our programmes and exhibitions

- **Financial:** we aim to minimise financial barriers by providing free entry to the Museum and minimal charges for activities.
- **Technological/virtual:** we are committed to the development of the Museum online:
 - through increasing the digital accessibility of artefacts from our collections, resources and information to the public at large and to researchers,
 - by developing our website, and
 - by increasing our use of social media for information, communication and publicity (see Dorchester Abbey Museum Access Plan)

Legal requirements and ethical commitments

Dorchester Abbey Museum will adhere to all national and international statutes of law, including specifically in relation to access, the Equality Act 2010, Freedom of Information Act 2000, Data Protection Act 1998 and the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

As noted in our Governing Document (p 5), *'staff are morally accountable in adhering to the Museums Association's Code of Ethics, as a code of conduct.'* We will follow national standards, ethical codes and best practice guidelines, including this Code of Ethics, Historic England's (2015) guidance on access to historic buildings, and guidance on good practice from the Centre for Accessible Environments.

Additional points relating to Accreditation Guidance (2019) p 62

This access policy has been informed by our users and their perceived needs, as expressed in our visitor surveys and visitor feedback comments. These comments are noted in a visitors' book which is frequently used, and also expressed verbally to museum staff.

Access awareness will be included in our annual volunteer training sessions. The Access Policy will be included in our *Policy Folder*, available to all volunteers at the museum reception desk, as well as on our museum website for users and potential users.

The policy will feed into and inform our future forward plans.

Given our visitor profile in a small rural English village, there has not been a demand for provision of information in other languages to meet the needs of local communities, but we will of course be pleased to provide this as requested.

Our access assessment is ongoing, and will feed into the future version of our access plan.

The strategies we employ to maintain and improve access are set out in the Dorchester Abbey Museum Access Plan.

References

Arts Council, England, et al (2018) *Accreditation Standard, Nov 2018*, Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom, London, Arts Council.

Arts Council, England (2019a) *Building Access: a good practice guide for arts and cultural organisations*, London, Arts Council.

Arts Council, England (2019b) *Accreditation Guidance for Accreditation Standard 2018*, London, Arts Council.

Centre for Accessible Environments <http://cae.org.uk/resources/publications/>

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2011) *Equality Act, 2010, Statutory Code of Practice*, Norwich, The Stationery Office.

Historic England (2015) *Easy Access to Historic Buildings*, London, Historic England.

Museums Association (n.d.) *Code of Ethics*. [Code of Ethics for Museums - Museums Association](#)

Grateful acknowledgements and thanks are also due to Leeds Art Galleries and Museums and St Albans Museums for adapted material.

Appendix: Dorchester Abbey Museum purpose

The overall purpose of the Museum is:

‘to be a guide to the past and present of the village of Dorchester-on-Thames and its environs’.

This statement has guided the development of the Museum over many years and remains unchanged. The museum is an educational resource for Dorchester-on-Thames, displaying its history and introducing visitors to its ancient landscape, to the Abbey and to its environment today.

The more specific purposes of the museum are:

- a) to collect, care for, interpret and make accessible for public benefit, historic collections relating to Dorchester-on-Thames
- b) to hold and develop our collections and to provide and extend access to them, both physically and online
- c) to care for and conserve our collections, and document them to ACE Accreditation basic national standard, thus keeping them safe for future generations
- d) to engage with and develop our audiences, including young people and schools, and improve their experiences
- e) to manage the museum and its activities effectively, efficiently and with future resilience in mind

(Dorchester Abbey Museum Governing Document, 2025)

