

**Access Policy**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page Number</b>
1. Purpose	2
2. Scope	2
3. Applicable Frameworks	2
4. Defining Access	3
5. Access Audit	3
6. Statement of Intent	3
7. Consultation and Audiences	4
8. Learning Programming	4
9. Civic Engagement	4
10. Premises	5
11. Collections	5
12. Interpretation	5
13. Welcome	6
14. Financial	6
15. Legislation, Standards and Ethics	6
16. Other Policies and Guidance	7
17. Review	

## 1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to set out The Bowes Museum's commitment to maximising access to our museum, and to identify the ways in which we achieve this across the organisation.

## 2. Scope

This Access Policy relates to all collections held by The Bowes Museum as well as our activities, facilities, content and programmes onsite, off-site and online.

It is published online at <https://thebowesmuseum.org.uk/visit/access-for-all/>

## 3. Applicable Frameworks

Arts Council England (ACE)

As a National Portfolio Organisation funded by ACE, The Bowes Museum adheres to four Investment Principles. Here, the most applicable is Inclusivity and Relevance. ACE guidance states organisations should:

*Give voice to talented creative practitioners who have too often been overlooked. It is now time to build on this work and address the persistent and widespread lack of diversity and inclusivity in cultural organisations' leadership, governance, workforce and audience. Build closer connections with their communities, particularly those that they are currently underserving. We want them to mean more to more people: to strengthen their relevance to the communities, partners and practitioners with whom they work.*

As an inclusive and community-centred museum, The Bowes Museum will work with partners to centre audience needs, raising aspirations and increasing skills and knowledge. Our Volunteers will be more representative of our communities. Our exhibitions & displays will unlock untold stories and surface new narratives. Our communities will feel that The Bowes Museum is relevant to them and their lives.

### Accreditation

The Accreditation Scheme is the UK industry standard for museums and galleries.

The Accreditation Scheme is run for museums and galleries of all sizes and types across the UK. It is managed as a UK Partnership between ACE, the Welsh Government, Museums Galleries Scotland and the Northern Ireland Museums Council.

An approved Access Policy is both good practice and a key requirement of the Museum Accreditation Scheme, under which The Bowes Museum has Full Accreditation status (Accredited No. 362). Museums participating in the Scheme must have an access policy or statement approved by the governing body. It covers how people can see, use, and reference the collection, gain access

to the museum buildings and site, and how the museum shares information about the collection with people.

#### **4. Defining Access**

When we refer to access, we mean the opportunity to engage with our buildings, collections, content and expertise.

We understand that different users have different needs and recognise that there are many potential barriers to access. They are:

- Attitudinal – some people may have a lack of interest in, or awareness of, the museum and the subjects and issues it deals with, or our programmes and services
- Intellectual – some people may find the museum too specialist in its approach to subjects and how they are presented. Some may have learning disabilities which affect their ability to engage with the museum. Some may not be able to read or speak English.
- Cultural – some people may feel that the museum is not relevant to them and does not reflect their cultural or social heritage, or their interests
- Financial – some people may not be able to afford to visit the museum or take part in our programmes
- Geographic – some people will live too far away to visit the museum
- Physical/sensory – people with physical disabilities, limited mobility, neurodiversity, or hearing or visual impairments may not be able to access the museum, our website, social media channels or programmes

#### **4. Access Audit**

Access Audits have been regularly undertaken at the Museum. The last access audit was completed August 2022.

Moving forward, an access action plan will be prepared after each audit, setting out the work required to improve access by removing barriers identified by the audit, customer feedback, and engagement with local support and advocacy groups. This will be implemented and monitored by the museum's Inclusivity and Relevance sub-committee.

#### **5. Statement of Intent**

We are committed to offering an inclusive service to all our users.

We have identified key areas of focus below:

- Attitudinal – we want everyone to feel like The Bowes Museum is for them, we will reflect that in our welcome and communications.
- Intellectual – we acknowledge that different people have different learning styles and abilities, and we will take this into account when interpreting our collection.
- Cultural – we will seek to reflect the cultural and social diversity of our audiences through our programmes.

- Physical – we will seek to enable people with physical disabilities, older adults and those with limited mobility, and those caring for others, to access and enjoy sites, services, collections and information.
- Sensory – we will seek to enable those with neurodiversity, limited sight or hearing to access information using alternative sensory experiences or media where possible.
- Geographic – we acknowledge that not everyone can visit The Bowes Museum physically. We will invest in digital opportunities to create interesting and engaging alternative experiences.
- Financial – wherever possible we will seek to minimise financial barriers to the use of the Museum and its collections. We acknowledge the economic climate of the country and the intolerable hardship that many people are forced into and will seek to balance this with the financial resilience needed to operate a public museum.

## **7. Consultation and audiences**

- The Museum is committed to understanding who its visitors and non-visitors are, so that we meet their needs and provide access to collections and services. Data collection and analysis is a key priority for the Museum.
- The Museum is committed to developing and diversifying its audiences through its Organisational Action Plan.
- We will regularly co-produce, consult and evaluate our services with communities and use this information to ensure our services meet their needs, as outlined in our Organisational Action Plan. The last ‘Wheel and Walkshop’ was conducted 20/06/23
- We will consult and co-produce with non-visitors/less-engaged visitors to identify barriers to participation.

## **8. Learning Programming**

- The Museum will provide learning programmes that are tailored to the needs and interests of our general visitor and targeted community audience as outlined in our Organisational Action Plan.
- Learning materials and interventions will be made available for different audiences and interests, as required and as resources allow.
- Daily Spotlight Tours highlight specific objects, collections and exhibitions and displays for the public. They are free past the point of entry.
- Collection staff deliver a tour every Thursday sharing expert knowledge and in-depth research about an area of the collection.
- Behind the Scenes tours exploring collection vaults and painting stores are delivered regularly to visitors, Members and Friends of The Bowes Museum.

## **9. Civic Engagement**

- The Museum is committed to actively engaging with diverse local communities; especially through partnership and co-production with other community, cultural and educational organisations. Our Organisational Action Plan outlines target audiences.
- Large-scale free entry days are delivered twice a year to introduce the Museum and its collection to non-visitors who might face a pay barrier.

- The Museum will make artist-led opportunities available in spaces and places beyond the Museum's bricks for those unable to visit in partnership with other community, cultural and educational organisations.
- The Museum is committed to providing volunteer opportunities and seeks to recruit volunteers from diverse backgrounds. The recruitment and management of volunteers is guided by our Volunteer Policy.

## **10. Premises**

- The Museum operates a Grade I listed building with Grade II listed parkland of 22 acres.
- While there are some limitations due to the physical constraints of listed buildings, especially in building entrances, office areas and store areas, we will continually seek opportunities to improve accessibility throughout investment in our site and buildings, building on work started through the MEND-funded Journey to Accessibility Project.
- Information for potential visitors explaining our opening times, services and access to the collections is available on our website, social media, leaflets, and by telephone and e-mail.
- We will provide information about access provision on our website <https://thebowesmuseum.org.uk/visit/access-for-all/>

## **11. Collections**

- The Museum is committed to increasing public access to the collections and information, and to increasing knowledge and understanding of the collection and site.
- In 2023/24, The Bowes Museum increased the number of collection objects accessible to the public by 2%. The Museum will continue to grow this figure.
- We will provide varied means of access to the collections including permanent displays, temporary exhibitions, loans, object handling, tours, events and activities.
- Daily Silver Swan performances and Alter Piece opening introduce key artworks to our visitors and are free past the point of entry.
- Virtual tours are available for our temporary exhibitions offering those who cannot visit a digital experience.
- Collection enquires are answered regularly by collection staff via email.
- To increase access to collections not on display we offer research facilities, doctoral research opportunities in partnership with The National Gallery, web-based information and access to staff.
- Stored collections are available to view by appointment with the collection team.
- Collection information is regularly updated as per our Documentation Policy.
- Access to collections is balanced with care for collections including appropriate storage, monitoring, regular checks and display rotation where required.

## **12. Interpretation**

- The needs, interests and co-produced feedback of visitors are considered when preparing and presenting collections information and interpretation in the galleries, exhibitions, offsite and online.
- This information has informed the Museum's Interpretation Framework.

- The Museum will ensure that all information and communications (including leaflets, labels, blog, social media and website) follow good practice and the Museum's Interpretation Framework.
- The Museum aims to keep the public informed of its collections, temporary displays and events through appropriate publicity including social media and will provide levels of information and interpretation to suit a range of audiences and abilities.
- Information and interpretation will be provided in a range of formats, for example labels, large print, film, subtitles, interactives and audio, as resources allow.
- The Museum aims to present labels, displays, online and marketing materials that respect a diversity of backgrounds. Images and/or descriptions of the Museum will reflect the diversity of the community.
- Other than English, 5 main languages are used by Durham residents. English is the main language used across all Durham's communities, spoken by 98.5% of residents, and will continue to be the primary language used in the delivery of our services.

### **13. Welcome**

- All staff members are involved in implementing this policy, assisting and welcoming our visitors. *Welcome* is one of our organisational values.
- All users of the Museum will be treated with equal respect within an inclusive atmosphere and welcomed according to their individual needs.
- The Museum will provide baby changing facilities, access and parking for pushchairs and seating for the comfort and ease of visitors.
- The Museum will provide navigational signage and Welcome Team staff to support welcome, care and experience.
- We provide visitor facilities to meet our customers' needs at the Museum including a shop and café.
- The Museum is committed to providing a safe environment for all. It has procedures for the safe evacuation of all users and staff in an emergency.
- There are policies and procedures for the Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Adults at Risk.

### **14. Financial**

- The Bowes Museum is a paid-for venue. It has a Membership offer with preferential rate for local communities and audiences.
- The majority of daily events and activities are free past the point of entry.
- Large-scale free entry days are delivered twice a year to introduce the Museum and its collection to non-visitors who might face a pay barrier.
- Volunteers should not be deterred from offering their services because they feel they cannot afford to volunteer. The Museum's Volunteer Policy sets out the circumstances in which travelling expenses can be offered.

### **15. Legislation, Standards and Ethics**

The Bowes Museum will adhere to legislation and ethical guidelines relating to access, including:

- Equality Act 2010
- Disability Discrimination Act 2005 (replaced by the Equality Act 2010)
- Public Records Acts 1958
- Freedom of Information Act 2000
- Data Protection Act 1998
- Copyright Acts
- Code of Ethics for Museums (Museums Association)
- ICOM Code of Ethics for Museums (International Council of Museums)
- Accreditation Scheme for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom (Arts Council)
- Ethical Guidelines 4 – Access (Museums Association)

## **16. Other Policies and Guidelines**

This policy should be read with reference to the following Museum documents:

- Organisational Action Plan
- Safeguarding Policy for Children, Young People and Adults at Risk
- Volunteer Policy
- Interpretation Framework
- Equality and Diversity Policy and Action Plan
- Programming and Collections through Learning, Audiences and Access Framework (inclusive of Access Plan)

17. Review

**Date approved: June 2024**

**Review date: June 2025**