

Best Practice 30: Access to Historic Buildings and Landscapes: The English Heritage guidelines.

Scale: National

Stage of tourism development: Relevant to all stages

Main objective: Tourism quality management/Destination promotion (to promote access for all).

Categories of effects:

Effects on urban governance

- Effects on urban governance
- Cultural tourism strategy
- Sustainable partnerships
- Stakeholder participation
- Destination management

Effects on quality of life

- Social life, local values and traditions
- Urban economies

Heritage managers in England, notably English Heritage and the National Trust, are committed to removing barriers to access where possible, while reconciling increased access with conservation principles. All visitors regardless of age, gender, disability or background should feel welcomed when visiting historic sites and be able to enjoy these special places. Improvements have been prompted by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 & 2005. English Heritage Access Policy promotes high-quality design solutions that are sensitive to the special interests of historic buildings, sites and fabric. The diversity of historic places means that access improvements cannot be standard solutions: the Guides noted here help owners, planners, policy makers, designers and managers achieve a balance between improving access and the conservation of historic character and fabric. Recent estimates indicate that one person in five in the U.K. is classified as disabled: that is over 11.7 million people. About 8 million people have some form of hearing loss and over 2 million have some form of visual impairment. Older people may not consider themselves disabled but may have problems of reduced mobility, sight or hearing. Access improvements may also benefit families with young children. However, this is an enormously wide and varied constituency. Alterations to paving, steps, ramps, signage designed to suit one group can disadvantage another. Careful and creative thought is given to alternative needs. Access may also be improved significantly through low-key alterations and sustained management. Inclusive practices are not simply physical alterations: they rely on training and the support and involvement of staff and volunteers. Access Audits should identify barriers and then be considered alongside Conservation Management Plans to generate creative and reasonable solutions. It is not possible on sensitive historic sites to solve all problems for all people. But an inclusive approach recognises everyone as a potential visitor with a right to enjoy the experience of their visit.

Sources: Easy access to Historic Buildings, English Heritage July 2004; Easy Access to Historic Landscapes English Heritage & Heritage Lottery Fund October 2005.

Link:

<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/server/show/nav.1694>