



ACCESS POLICY

Name of museum: Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum (SJB), Accredited Museum 767.

Name of governing body: Lichfield City Council (LCC), as sole trustee of the Dr Johnson Birthplace Trust, Charity No. 500046.

Introduction

This Access Policy outlines how the Samuel Johnson Birthplace Museum (SJB) aims to make its collections, building, programmes, exhibitions, and services accessible to as wide an audience as possible. The museum is committed to welcoming all members of society, and engaging all visitors, staff, and volunteers regardless of age, sex, gender, wealth, social status, sexuality, ability, or background.

SJB is committed in our service objectives to: “safeguard the future and development of the museum and its collection to enable access by all” and “to help to create a socially inclusive and caring community which embraces all its residents.”

The purpose of the Access Policy is to identify:

1. The Museum’s statement of purpose
2. Applicable ethics, standards and legislations followed in relation to access
3. Barriers to access
4. The needs of users and non-users
5. How we provide access
6. Responsibility for access
7. Specific access responsibilities

1. Museum’s statement of purpose

The covenant under which the building was acquired in 1900 remains our fundamental mission: “... to remain in perpetuity as a memorial to the life, work and personality of Samuel Johnson, his Lichfield connections and his friends and contemporaries.” The Birthplace Trust, established in 1974, expanded this to refer to the care of the building and provision of a public service: “...to preserve the Birthplace as a place for historic interest and to maintain the same as a public museum and for public exhibitions.”

2. Applicable ethics, standards, and legislations

SJB will be guided by all relevant legislation and best practise guidelines, including but not limited to:

- Lichfield City Council’s Equal Opportunities Policy Statement
- Museum Association’s Code of Ethics
- Disability Discrimination Act, 2005

- Equality Act, 2010
- Data Protection, Act 2018, and the General Data Protection Regulation 2018
- Freedom of Information Act, 2000

3. Barriers to access

We recognise that it is essential to address the barriers which may prevent people accessing and engaging with our physical and digital spaces. We aim to reduce and where possible remove the following potential barriers:

Physical

SJBM is a Grade I listed building with many stairs. The museum is spread over five floors and the entrance is accessed via five steps. Due to the building's listed status, there is no lift and alterations to existing (or installation of additional) doorways and handrails is not permitted under existing regulations. There are no exterior lifts or ramps to provide an accessible entrance into the building due to local regulations beyond the control of SJBM and Lichfield City Council.

We are committed to welcoming all and improving access to the museum despite the limitations of our building with the following aims:

- we will make reasonable adaptations within the constraints of our Grade I listing to provide the best possible access.
- we will ensure our building is easy to find and move around, and that information to help plan a visit is readily available and accessible to all.
- we will increase digital access to our collections and the information available about our collections.
- we will ensure that a hearing loop and large print guides are available.
- we will work towards developing our interpretation to meet a wider variety of needs, including British Sign Language, Braille, and audio descriptions.
- assistance dogs are welcome in the museum and bookshop.
- we will ensure that access to the collections and associated information on upper floors of the museum is made available to visitors on the ground floor.
- we will design and develop our interpretation to facilitate the best possible access to our collections.
- we will communicate our available facilities at the museum and off site via our website and printed information.

Sensory

- we will integrate a wide range of sensory experiences into our programmes, interpretation, and services.

Intellectual

- we will offer a variety of experiences and multi-layered interpretation to cater for different learning styles, needs, and ages.
- we will create easy to read content for signage, interpretation, and online information, using simple language to ensure clarity and ease of understanding for everyone.

Cultural

- we will welcome all visitors, staff, and volunteers regardless of age, sex, gender, wealth, social status, sexuality, ability, or background.
- we will diversify the museum space by sharing our untold stories and reshaping how we interpret our collections with a shift towards an inclusive, global, and people-centred approach.

Attitudinal

- we will create safe spaces where individuals from differing backgrounds can share experiences and build connections.
- we will consult with our users and non-users to guide our developments.
- we will offer a variety of events and activities with wide appeal.

Language

- we will provide information in languages other than English.

Economic

- we will remain a museum that provides free access.
- we will reduce financial barriers to access while maintaining the financial sustainability of SJBM.

Geographical

- we will increase digital access to our collections and related information.
- we will facilitate outreach sessions and talks where staffing and resources allow.
- we will provide a loans box service for schools.

4. Identifying the needs of users and non-users

SJBM is committed to working with users and non-users to understand their needs and barriers to viewing, utilising, referencing, and engaging with our collections, and to work together to minimise or remove those barriers wherever possible. We aim to do this by:

- ongoing evaluation of our exhibitions, services, and programs.
- acting on advice and action points from the 2020 Access Audit and 2018 Consultant Report, to increase access to the building as far as possible, and virtual access to everything beyond.
- working with external consultants to conduct site audits focused on access for individuals with physical health and mental health needs.
- identifying and conducting market research with non-user groups including focus groups, questionnaires, and interviews.
- carrying out an effective survey to be completed by visitors.
- offering various opportunities for visitors to provide feedback on their experience and assessing those responses.
- collaborating with external organisations and community groups to learn best practices, engage marginalised audiences, and reach communities that currently face barriers to engaging with us and accessing our services.

5. How we provide access

SJBM is committed to making its collections, programs, services and activities as accessible as possible. By addressing potential barriers to access during the development of programmes, projects, and collections displays, we ensure that equitable access remains a core focus of our ongoing work.

We provide access and the delivery of our policy in multiple ways, including but not limited to:

Premises

- SJBM is open every day throughout the year, except Christmas Day, Boxing Day, New Year's Day, and in special circumstances (i.e. to allow for essential maintenance, and instances where it is not considered safe to open).

- SJBM is committed to ensuring access to the building and facilities. However, there are some limitations due to staffing and resources, and the physical constraints of listed buildings, particularly in office and storage areas.
- SJBM is free to visit. Group visits, school visits, and ticketed events are priced fairly while maintaining the financial sustainability of SJBM.
- SJBM facilitates group, school/education, and research visits, as well as providing an outreach service and schools loans boxes.
- Information for visitors regarding our opening times, services, and access to the collections can be found on our website, social media, in leaflets, and through phone and email inquiries.
- Ensuring that access requirements and improvements are considered during the project planning phases of site transformation and development.

Curatorial and collections

- Ensuring access is prioritised throughout the exhibition development and installation process.
- Creating engaging, layered, multi-sensory permanent displays.
- Changing the collections on display via temporary exhibitions.
- Producing easy-to-read information about our collections, written in clear and straightforward language.
- Responding to public enquiries; providing information about our collections in-person, and via telephone and email.
- Digital access via the collections online database and online exhibitions.
- Enabling access to collections not on display by providing research facilities, and online resources.
- Stored collections can be viewed by appointment.
- Carefully balancing access with the necessary care and management of the collections. In certain instances, access to specific objects may be restricted due to their fragility, hazardous nature, security concerns, or sensitivity.

Learning and programming

- Delivering an annual programme of events, talks, tours, and activities that provide knowledge and learning to a wide range of audiences, interests, and abilities.
- SJBM will continue to enhance and broaden its educational offerings, encouraging schools and young people to engage with the collections across all Key Stages.
- Continue to seek opportunities to engage and collaborate with higher education institutions and offer student placements.
- Have free on-site activities available to ensure that all members of the community can access our services.

6. Responsibility for access

Every SJBM staff member is responsible for creating, implementing, and maintaining both physical and digital spaces that prioritise accessibility, actively work to remove barriers to audience engagement, and ensure the safety and longevity of the collection for future generations.

All staff members and volunteers at SJBM have a responsibility to ensure that our services are provided in line with this Access Policy. Each staff member and volunteer will:

- eliminate and deem unacceptable all forms of direct and indirect discrimination against individuals on any grounds.
- engage in relevant training to uphold a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion.

- recognise barriers to access and identify opportunities for inclusion within their area of work.
- understand and be skilled in the specific access responsibilities associated with their role.

7. Specific access responsibilities

Governing body (Lichfield City Council)

- Evaluate and approve the Access Policy at least once every five years.

Senior Management (Museums and Heritage Officer)

- Holds overall responsibility for access policies and plans, maintaining the physical and intellectual integrity of the collection, and balancing the care and management of the collection with providing access.
- Makes a clear commitment to developing access in our forward planning and future developments
- Seek funding opportunities for access development.

Date on which this policy was approved by governing body: 10 March 2025.

Policy review procedure: The Access Policy will be reviewed at least once every five years.

Date at which this policy is due for review: March 2030.