

Visit Worcestershire Accessible Tourism Programme 2.0

Accessible Tourism Programme – Guidance Pack

The Accessibility Programme is being delivered by Visit Worcestershire in partnership with Access & Inclusion UK. Access & Inclusion UK provide professional access consultancy, training, auditing and inclusive design services throughout the UK. Led by Jane Cooper, they support businesses to understand their existing levels of access and inclusion and work in partnership with them to create places and destinations which deliver excellent experiences for visitors with accessibility requirements.

The Programme has been developed to help support our local tourism businesses, with a focus on accommodation businesses, to understand the benefits of accessible tourism to visitors, their business, and the destination. The programme is also designed to support business improvement by making small changes which will enhance the visitor experience and customer service for all guests. The programme is aligned with the Visit Worcestershire Destination Management Plan and key messages to enhance our offering with all national and international visitors.

What is Accessible Tourism?

The importance of access for all is crucial in today's environment, particularly when it comes to the tourism and hospitality sector. VisitBritain latest data indicates accessible tourism, or The Purple Pound as it is referred to, is worth £14.6 billion in England alone, with 1 in 4 visitors likely to have accessibility requirements. With VisitEngland's ambition to be the most accessible destination in the world, and with around 16% of the world's population (according to the WHO) having some form of disability or accessibility need it is vital to play a part in supporting that vision – ensuring a Worcestershire welcome is open to all.

People often under-estimate how many people have accessibility requirements; this is due to people not realising how broad disability is and that a lot of health conditions and impairments cannot be seen.

There are currently 16.1 million disabled people in the UK alone (around 24% of the total population) Disability also impacts on the lives and travel choices of disabled people's family members and friends, so getting your offering right for this market segment is key.

Not everyone with accessibility requirements meets the definition of a disabled person and many will not see themselves as disabled, so it is important as a tourism business to be aware of what you can do to cater for all and fully appreciate the spending power

and influence of these visitors. Typical examples might include people living with dementia, older visitors, autistic visitors and even families with young children.

Making tourism accessible doesn't need to be difficult, costly or daunting and is not unfamiliar to tourism businesses. It is often about building on the things you and you're your team are already good at, like providing a warm welcome for customers, delivering a great service and offering amazing and memorable experiences for everyone – tying in beautifully alongside one of Visit Worcestershire's key delivery pillars to ensure a warm Worcestershire welcome is open to all.

Supporting the visitor economy:

Visit Worcestershire have a clear vision of supporting the visitor economy to thrive for the benefit of those visiting, living and working here, with the Destination Management Plan defining 3 clear objectives to help achieve this:

- Objective one: Developing the Worcestershire Experience with increased product & a focus on business support which puts our key themes of sustainability and access for all at the heart of what we do. Creating the right environment for sector growth.
- Objective two: Raising awareness about what is special and distinctive about tourism in Worcestershire encouraging visits from our target markets and attracting higher value staying visitors.
- Objective three: Ensuring our infrastructure is ready for growth and investment while delivering an outstanding welcome across all visitor touch points which will create a positive impression and result in positive advocacy for the County.

To achieve our objectives, we must look at ways of growing and supporting the tourism offer in the county and meeting the changing needs of the visitor. One such way is through developing the venues and products we offer and making them more accessible for everyone to ensure visitors have a positive experience whilst here.

Case Study Examples:

The VisitEngland Accessible and Inclusive Tourism toolkit for businesses is full of practical guidance and case studies from tourism venues who have achieved significant business improvements through increased accessibility. These include:

- Broadgate Farm Cottages in East Yorkshire, which has quadrupled its number of guests with accessibility requirements over recent years.
- Croft Bungalow in Derbyshire, which has made more than 60 improvements based on guest feedback, including moving a light switch, adding extra grab rails and buying small items of equipment like 'Parkinson's-friendly' cutlery to improve the visitor experience.

- Birmingham Hippodrome which offers pre-visit materials such as easy-read guides, visual stories and videos, so audience members know what the building looks like, what facilities are available and have information about different shows. They also offer training to front-facing teams so they can provide the very best support to audience members.
- North Hayne Farm Cottages in North Devon, who have experienced a 15 to 20% increase in visitors with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other non-visible impairments since making changes to their marketing and accessibility.
- Cottage In The Dales in the Yorkshire Dales, whose many awards won and high returning guest occupancy have led them to conclude that “accessibility is the best business decision we’ve ever made.”

Whilst this is an example of a large business making significant investment, it is a good example of accessibility to showcase:

- Hotel Brooklyn in Manchester, whose investment in accessibility facilities delivered additional revenue of £217,000 in 2022, the hotel’s first full trading year.

What does the Programme entail?

This programme will commence in October 2025 running for approximately one year.

Fully funded by Visit Worcestershire, the programme includes:

- One 1.5 hour initial online business engagement workshop led by Jane Cooper from Access and Inclusion. Available to all Worcestershire Tourism businesses, the workshop will provide:
 - Top line training for business leaders on accessibility tourism and awareness, outlining the benefits and opportunities it yields.
 - An understanding of the new VisitEngland Kick-Start Programme and available Business Toolkit which will be available to utilise.
 - An understanding of the Visit Worcestershire Accessible Programme and what is required from you and what will be delivered.
- Following a completed Expression of Interest Form, professional accessibility support and guidance will then become available to a maximum of 20 businesses. Which will include:
 - 1 day face to face ‘Accessibility Champion’ training for 1 or 2 members of the qualifying supported businesses.

- Following the training businesses will be equipped to undertake self-audits of their current accessibility in order to develop an accessibility improvement plan.
- An individual consultant site visit of each business alongside the designated Accessibility Champion to ensure the key challenges, opportunities and priorities have been identified and help finalise the accessibility improvement plan.
- Follow on support after programme completion to review progress made.

After the training & site visits have taken place, each business will have access to the following resources:

- An Accessibility guide walkthrough video to help the businesses on creating an online accessibility guide to support visit planning.
- A digital handbook detailing top tips for greeting visitors with different accessibility needs and guidance on the small, specific actions which people in different job roles can take to make a big difference to guests (reception, kitchen staff, cleaners, restaurant staff etc)
- Additional training support to the 20 businesses, including a training video on providing assistance for disabled people which will be made available for all staff at each business.
- Additional ad-hoc guidance post accessibility support to participating businesses

Completion of the introduction webinar and the face-to-face training day is a necessary requirement of the programme. You must therefore be available for the following dates:

- Tuesday 14th October 2025 11-12.30pm (Introduction webinar)
- Wednesday 25th February 2026 10-4pm (Face to face training session)

Once the above programme is successfully completed financial support of up to £1,000 from Visit Worcestershire will be made available for each of the 20 businesses.

What can the financial support be used for?

The Accessibility Tourism Programme financial support is designed to act as 'seed funding' to help fund adjustments needed to improve your accessibility, based on what has been identified in the improvement plan. No match funding is required, but you do need to successfully complete all of the training before you are eligible. Examples of what the money can be used for include:

- Equipment necessary to ensure tangible adjustments within the business to provide greater accessibility. A list of example products can also be found on the Visit Worcestershire website, but examples include; Tour guide hearing

loops, portable ramps, plastic friendly wheelchair matting or improved signage and interpretation

- Creation of a Detailed Access guide from AccessAble
- Further consultancy support or advice if needed
- Marketing and or website development

All costs must be related to the accessibility improvement plan and grants will be paid after purchases have been made and evidenced.

What are the Eligibility Criteria to join the programme?

To be eligible for the Accessibility Tourism Programme 2.0, your business must meet the following criteria:

- Your business must be based within Worcestershire.
- Your business must meet SME Status (please refer to this page of the Government website for the definition of an SME).
- Businesses must be classified and defined within the Tourism and Hospitality sector.
- The business must have been trading for a minimum of 6 months before the start date of the programme.
- You must be able to participate in the whole Accessibility Programme, including workshops, webinars and in person visits. You must also be committed to completing the self-audits of the business.
- Understand your legal obligations and be seeking to conform to them. “The Equality Act 2010 applies to all businesses and legally requires businesses to make reasonable adjustments to the way you deliver your service and to the physical features of your premises to make it easier for disabled guests to use them. A disability may not always be apparent, so it is important not to make assumption”. Full details can be found here: [Equality Law: Accessibility Regulations UK | VisitBritain.org](#)

To be eligible to receive the financial support from Visit Worcestershire to help implement the accessible adjustments following the audit, the additional criteria must be met:

- An accessibility improvement plan must be created and agreed with the programme lead Jane Cooper. Items to be purchase must be detailed within the improvement plan. If you are accepted for the grant support and it becomes apparent the accessibility improvement plan will not be followed, for reasons within your control, Visit Worcestershire reserve the right to cancel the agreement and not reimburse the business for any spent expenditure.

- All sections of the Accessible Tourism Programme must have been completed. Missing one or more sections will make your business ineligible to receive the grant support funding.

How will Visit Worcestershire decide who to support?

Visit Worcestershire only has funding to support 20 businesses with this pilot programme.

The Visit Worcestershire team will assess Expressions of Interests alongside Access & Inclusion, reviewing them against our priority themes and delivery pillars outlined in our Destination Management Plan, eligibility criteria and the knowledge and research conducted by Access & Inclusion.

If you are not successful at this stage, the team will advise of other support, and signpost where relevant to partners or alternative Visit Worcestershire support.

How do I apply?

If you are interested in the programme, please fill out the Expression of Interest form and send to:

- Kerry Comber, Tourism Project Manager – kcomber@worcestershire.gov.uk

If you have any questions about anything at all, please do not hesitate to get in touch with us.