



SIR JOHN  
SOANE'S  
MUSEUM  
LONDON

13 LINCOLN'S INN FIELDS  
LONDON WC2A 3BP

TELEPHONE: +44 (0)20 7405 2107

EMAIL: [admin@soane.org.uk](mailto:admin@soane.org.uk) [www.soane.org](http://www.soane.org)

REG CHARITY NO: 313609

## Sir John Soane's Museum Access Policy

The Museum is committed to providing the widest possible access to the home and collection of architect Sir John Soane at No. 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields, which has been a public museum since his death in 1837.

This policy has been developed with reference to the standards set out in PAS197:2009 Code for Cultural Collections Management and shows how our access provision links to our statement of purpose and meets ethical commitments and legal requirements. As a national museum we comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty and Equality Act 2010.

### 1. Access Audit

Prior to our recent major restoration project, *Opening up the Soane*, external advice was sought and a full physical Access Audit carried out by David Bonnett Associates: this led to building work, including the installation of lifts, in two phases which enabled wheelchair access to all public parts of the building in 2016. The most recent comprehensive internal Access Review was conducted in March 2018. The process of commissioning a new Access Audit began in May 2024.

### 2. Aims and objectives

Our accessibility aims are to:

- make physical access to the collection as easy as possible for all;
- enable everyone to enjoy and study the collection in as many ways as possible;
- ensure access for all to information about the work of the Museum;
- facilitate scholarship about the collection, the house and the life/work of Sir John Soane.

**Our three key access objectives are to:**

- Offer the widest and most appropriate forms of access to the Museum and its collections, its expertise, facilities and services, whilst respecting and preserving its

historic fabric and unique character and context as an icon amongst early museums and a 'total work of art'. In doing so, we will actively work to overcome geographical, physical, sensory, intellectual, cultural/language, emotional, social and financial barriers which may prevent this.

- Work in partnership with others to help tackle social inequality, discrimination and disadvantage by participatory engagement with communities, improving the quality of people's lives, contributing to social cohesion and acting as a catalyst for cultural and social change.
- Embrace and reflect the diversity in society, harnessing the potential of all stakeholders (staff, volunteers, existing /potential audiences and key partners) in the development of a truly inclusive Museum which inspires and promotes learning, creativity and participation.

Key related objectives are:

- Enhance and develop the potential of our collection;
- Invest in our staff.

The implementation of our Access Policy is fundamental to the fulfilment of the Museum's objectives.

### **3. Advice and training for staff**

The Museum has an in-house Inclusion Diversity Equality and Access Working Group (IDEA) with representatives from departments across the Museum, meeting quarterly and reporting to each meeting of the Trustees. The group advises colleagues on improving equality in all aspects of the Museum's services and ensuring we comply with all legal requirements.

Our objective is to ensure all members of staff have had external disability awareness training. A % of staff receive training each year.

### **4. Visitor and Research access**

The Museum is open free of charge all year round, Wednesday - Sunday and most bank holidays. In line with Soane's vision, expressed in the original Soane Museum Act of Parliament (1833), we strive to keep the Museum 'as nearly as circumstances will admit' the way that it was left when he died and to allow free access for students and the public to 'consult, inspect and benefit' from the collections. The collection is held on behalf of the nation for everyone regardless of education, income, residence or personal circumstances.

We are committed to free access for all. The total number of visitors in the Museum at any one time is restricted to 85 (due to its limited physical capacity) which ensures that all visitors can enjoy the Museum and that their safety can be guaranteed. Two areas of the Museum (the Drawing Office and the Private Apartments) are too small to permit free flow visiting so they are made accessible via regular free tours or by special arrangement, in very small groups. Areas only accessible on tours have been scanned and are available digitally, free to all across the world, via our *Explore Soane* platform on [www.soane.org](http://www.soane.org). By controlling numbers carefully we ensure that care of collections is balanced against access provision.

The Museum's Research Library is open by appointment Wednesday to Friday 10:00-13:00, 14:00-17:00. The Museum's collection is also available free via our collections online at [www.soane.org/collections](http://www.soane.org/collections) - users can contact the curatorial team with their questions or with additional information they would like to contribute using the [worksofart@soane.org.uk](mailto:worksofart@soane.org.uk) email address signposted on the site.

## **5. Physical, visual & auditory accessibility**

The Museum seeks to provide all visitors with access to the building, making alternative provision where required, within the constraints of a Grade One Listed Building and the unique mandate laid down in our original Act of Parliament. It ensures that current and future restoration/building projects provide appropriate physical access for all visitors. Expert advice is sought where required.

Some of the facilities we provide include:

- Level access to the entire Museum via a lift when using our in-house narrow wheelchairs. Visitors with wheelchairs larger than 41cm wide, 84cm deep and a height of 82cm are asked to transfer to our own specially manufactured wheelchairs. The Museum is narrow and difficult to manoeuvre in; we therefore require that a member of staff accompanies any visitor using a wheelchair throughout their visit. Access to key areas of the Museum is available for those using their own wider wheelchairs (who cannot transfer). Appropriate evacuation procedures are in place for visitors using wheelchairs.
- Subtitled film in the rear kitchen for those unable to access the restored Drawing Office (only accessible on tours and the only space not wheelchair accessible).
- Wheelchair accessible toilets with an Emergency Call system.
- Nappy changing facilities on site with an Emergency Call system.
- Chairs available for visitors to use in Museum spaces.
- There are four portable folding stools available for use on request.
- Hearing loops are available at the main entrance guidebook desk and in the shop. There is an integrated hearing loop system for No. 14 Lincoln's Inn Fields in the

basement, ground and first floors (education/Seminar Room/Research Library areas).

- A portable hearing loop system is also available for D/deaf, deafened and hard of hearing group events.
- Assistance dogs are welcomed and can either enter the Museum or be cared for in the front area (external) during their owner's visit. We have mats available to cover floor grilles so that Guide/Assistance dogs may cross them safely.
- While the low lighting levels in many parts of the Museum are part of its historic character, additional lighting in the form of torches can be provided on request.
- Breastfeeding is permitted in the Museum and access can be provided to a more private area on request.
- Cloakroom available for bags (not suitcases) and coats; lockers are also available.
- The Museum can provide alternative spaces in which disabled visitors may consult material from the Research Library by prior arrangement if they cannot access that space (all Library access is by appointment). The Art Room in the Basement of No. 14 can be used for accessible seminars and events as an alternative to the Seminar Room on the ground floor of No. 14.
- Blue Badge parking (Camden/Westminster) is available in Lincoln's Inn Fields.
- Geographical accessibility - for those unable to visit in person we provide a wide variety of content via [www.soane.org](http://www.soane.org) (see **Digital Accessibility** below)

## **5.1 Safety in the building**

The Museum provides uniformed staff trained in fire safety and in responding to emergencies, including first aid incidents.

The Museum's safety procedures take account of the needs of all visitors and enable all occupants of the building to be evacuated at the same time in an emergency. The Museum has strategies in place for the safe evacuation of disabled people in case of fire which include allowing a maximum of two wheelchair users in the building at any one time. Visual alarms to indicate to D/deaf, deafened or hard of hearing visitors that the fire alarm has been sounded have been installed in our Accessible Toilets.

## **5.2 Interpretative methods and signage**

The Museum aims to provide information in forms that are accessible to all visitors. We follow best practice guidance for interpretation including exhibition texts and interactives. Some of the resources we provide include:

- Large print version of the short guide;
- Large print copies of the labels and panels for temporary exhibitions;
- Easy read guides for visitors with learning difficulties (on request);

- Braille guide for visitors (on request);
- Front of house staff and volunteer visitor assistants to assist and welcome all visitors according to their needs;
- Appropriate signage and navigation tools to suit a range of audiences.

It is an essential part of Soane's legacy that the Museum is presented as he left it and its historic interiors do not have interpretation panels or labels. However, expert staff are on hand to answer visitor questions and a wide range of guides, both short and more comprehensive, are available. In addition, visitors may use their phones to access the Bloomberg App which provides them with an easy to navigate guide.

## **6. Digital accessibility**

The Museum reviews digital access regularly. Audience requirements are determined through research, testing, and feedback.

We provide digital access to our collection and resources in the following ways:

- Through our website - designed to meet the latest access standards to make it easy for our audiences to get the information they need.
- Our collection is available to search online with information and images. Regular social media posts provide additional information about works of art, conservation, public programmes, *Artist at Soane* [our artists in residence programme], the award of the annual Soane Medal etc.
- We promote our activities and events using accessible means of communication. We keep the general public, including a wide range of audience groups, informed of permanent and temporary displays and events through appropriate publicity.
- We provide a range of ways for people to communicate with us, including various forms of social media.
- We have created a platform called *Explore Soane* which provides access to 3D scans of the Model Room (in Soane's Private Apartments on the second floor) and four key architectural models, our iconic Picture Room (with visitors able to digitally open the moveable planes) and the newly restored Drawing Office. Visitors can either manipulate the 3D images themselves to move around the spaces or choose to take a guided/themed tour. The interpretation enables visitors to click through to access other related material in our collections. Our online visitors can also interrogate and download hi-res 3D images of the Egyptian sarcophagus of King Seti I.
- We host versions of all our exhibitions on our website. Each of our physical exhibitions is accompanied by an online version, facilitating access for those who may not be able to visit the Museum in person and providing a range of additional, rich content for visitors who wish to engage more deeply with the themes of the

exhibition. Where appropriate, online exhibitions also deliver specific content to specific audience groups, for example children or architectural students.

- Stand-alone online exhibitions provide opportunities to engage with the themes of exhibitions and the collections and to view objects which are not physically on display as well as providing opportunities to mark significant anniversaries and national occasions.
- All new videos on our social media channels are fully subtitled.
- Films available on the website are subtitled.

## **7. Intellectual accessibility**

The Museum delivers a wide range of learning programmes and opportunities for different audiences, designed to suit different levels of knowledge, backgrounds, interests, and learning styles.

The Museum continues to consult people with disabilities, specialist organisations, and other museums and galleries on the best and most practical ways of improving intellectual access.

## **8. Economic & social accessibility and well-being**

We identify and develop partnerships with a range of educational and community organisations to ensure that our activities continue to cater for the widest possible audiences including offer bursary places for most paid learning activities.

We are signing up to the Kids in Museums Manifesto (April 2024), and will use it as a benchmark for ensuring that our offer is as family friendly as possible.

Some of the groups we have worked with:

SEND schools and groups;

ESOL schools and groups;

Older groups;

Vulnerable adults and young people for example those with early onset of dementia, care leavers, refugees and mental health service users.

Some of the services we provide include:

- Free audio described tours for blind and partially sighted visitors;
- British Sign Language (BSL) interpreted talks and tours;
- Braille version of the short guide;
- Daily guided tours (free and paid for) which accommodate people who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids; weekly tours of the Drawing Office;

- Opportunities for visits to our conservation studio to see conservation in action;
- Educational programmes and visits tailored to specific groups and audiences;
- Museum family trails and temporary exhibition activities for younger children;
- Sensory toys available for all educational sessions;
- Staff availability on request to lead a child or young person with sensory needs to a quiet space;
- We run two architecture clubs for children and young people and a Youth Panel, who contribute ideas and co-curate events at the Museum (most recently a Soane Late on the Grand Tour);
- Virtual tours and talks for specific groups and audiences where travel and mobility may be limited;
- Telephone tours/talks where travel, mobility and digital access may be limited;
- The Soane Study Group: a forum for new / on-going research in architectural history and Soane-related topics, which meets quarterly and is open to all;
- Our expert curatorial staff regularly publish their research in peer reviewed journals and the Museum has a publications programme producing exhibition catalogues and books.
- At present we do not offer printed museum guides in other languages but we do have the Bloomberg App guide available for mobile phone users. Staff who speak various languages wear badges to signal this to visitors and make themselves available.

Our Research Library and Archive are available by appointment, Wednesday to Friday 10:00-13:00, 14:00-17:00 providing access to Soane's collection of 30,000 drawings and more than 7,000 books, which are also available via collections online, and to his archive of personal and business correspondence.

## **9. Temporary Exhibitions and Public Programmes**

Our temporary exhibitions fulfil the vision of the Museum as an active 'Academy' by embracing both historic and contemporary inquiry and debate about architecture, art and design to appeal to a broad digital audience and a targeted physical audience.

Expanding upon themes suggested by our collections, temporary exhibitions and other initiatives, our Public Programme of events is central to the Museum's strategic aims of attracting new and repeat audiences and increasing diversity and inclusion.

Exhibitions and Public Programmes facilitate access by:

- Ensuring exhibitions are always free;
- Ensuring Public Programme events are competitively priced with some free events;

- Targeting specific, under-represented groups (including under 40s, racially and ethnically diverse, lower socio-economic groups, LGBTQI+);
- Providing BSL tours of temporary exhibitions;
- Ensuring all exhibitions are designed so as to facilitate wheelchair access;
- Providing online and off-site content for those who cannot visit in person;
- Showcasing the Museum's world-leading scholarship and providing new perspectives on its collections;
- Programming exhibitions/events providing access to objects not usually on display;
- Working collaboratively with external curators, contemporary artists, community groups and Museum volunteers to deliver exhibitions, displays and events which appeal to our community in the widest possible sense;
- Providing guidelines for exhibition interpretation which outline ways to make this accessible to audiences from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities, as well as ensuring that graphic design is undertaken with accessibility in mind.
- Ensuring exhibition interpretation includes audio material accessible via the Bloomberg app, as well as expanded labels and additional information accessible via QR code, and additional printed leaflets and maps (including large-print versions of all the interpretation) where necessary, to facilitate engagement by the widest possible range of visitors.

## **10. Employment and training**

### **10.1 Equality, Diversity, Inclusion and Protected characteristics.**

The Museum is committed to the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion and will not discriminate between candidates, employees or volunteers on the basis of any of the nine protected characteristics (race, sex, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion or belief). The Museum actively promotes tolerance and respect within its workforce. The Museum aims to ensure that all members of staff have the opportunity to achieve their full potential.

### **10.2 Selection procedures and employment policies**

Employment decisions are made on the basis of fair and objective criteria and taken without reference to irrelevant or discriminatory criteria. The Museum's selection procedures are reviewed from time to time to ensure that they are appropriate and avoid any unlawful discrimination.

The requirements of job applicants and existing members of staff who have or have had a disability are reviewed to ensure that whatever reasonable adjustments can be made, are made to enable them to enter into or to remain in employment with the Museum.



Promotion opportunities, benefits and facilities are not unreasonably limited and every reasonable effort is always made to ensure that disabled staff can participate fully in the workplace.

The Museum operates hybrid and flexible working policies. In addition, working patterns are reviewed on request, to offer additional flexible working subject to the operational needs of the Museum. Where necessary and practicable, special provision is made for training for staff returning to work following a break for personal/health reasons.

#### **11. Policy availability**

A copy of this policy is available to the public via our website and on request from our contact points at the Museum entrance.

#### **12. Review**

- Date on which this policy was approved by the Board of Trustees: 13 May 2024
- Date on which this policy is due for review: by 13 May 2029
- Policy Owner: Head of Visitor Experience and Operations

**END/**