

Wallingford Castle Meadows Management Plan

Appendix 3

Accessibility information:

Disability Access report by RoamAbility Ltd

Findings from Equalities Impact Assessment

RoamAbility Ltd

Improving Outdoor Access

Wallingford Castle Meadows

This report was commissioned by South Oxfordshire District Council and the site managers the Northmoor Trust.

Background

It is not the purpose of this report to minutely detail the history of the site. The castle and grounds extended north from Wallingford Bridge. The castle, with three lines of moats, was extensively altered during the civil war before being demolished in 1652. The remains of these moats and mounds are main features of the site.

In mediaeval times, various properties were built around the outer moat, now fronting onto the High Street and Castle Street. Sometime after the destruction of the castle, Castle Lane was formed, running diagonally along the line of one of the moats and separating an area behind the High Street sufficient to build a large house and grounds in the 1830s. This was demolished in 1972 and its grounds now form Wallingford Castle Gardens, which are open for public use.

Wallingford Castle Meadows

This is the major part of the original castle grounds, and lies north of Castle Lane and between the A329 to the west and the River Thames to the east.

There are three distinct areas. The bulk of the original castle is immediately north of Castle Lane. Beyond this to the north are the Upper Meadows. To the east are two large flat meadows adjoining the River Thames with a stream along at their western boundary.

Existing Access

Although the Castle Meadows has a considerable frontage onto Castle Street, there is no vehicular access, save one for service vehicles off Castle Street. Cemetery Lane is used by visitors as an informal car park.

There are four pedestrian access points. Two are off the footpath, part known as Cemetery Lane, running along the northern boundary. There is another pedestrian access midway along the frontage to the towpath on the River Thames.

The fourth access point is through Castle Gardens and currently under going reconstruction. However, this is via a track with a 20% gradient where it climbs

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over Castle Lane, and so is only suitable for the able bodied and not for anyone with reduced or impaired mobility.

Ignoring the Castle Gardens access, the other three pedestrian accesses have identical timber kissing gates which are only just large enough to accommodate a standard wheelchair but too small for a large sized mobility scooter.

The Approach for visitors

There are several car parks available for visitors. In the summer months a large grasses car park is available on the eastern side of Wallingford bridge. Visitors then walk over Wallingford Bridge to get to the town centre.

It is just as they reach the High Street that visitors have to decide whether to visit Wallingford Castle Meadows, or to continue into the town centre. To reach the Castle Meadows it is necessary to turn north into Castle Lane for a short distance and then to dogleg through a short passage to reach the Thames path national trail.

The visitor then asked to walk up the towpath for 400 metres in order to reach the pedestrian access points on the river frontage. At the time of inspection, the tow path is in poor condition but it is understood that it is due to be reinstated as far as the northern end of King's Meadow.

Existing Internal Access

Grazing is used to the primary means of managing the Castle Meadows. There are no all-weather paths and the routes are defined by regular mowing of the grass. There is a mown perimeter route around the Upper Meadow and the castle remains, though there are several short sections which have combinations of crossfalls and gradients sufficient restrict access for the mobility impaired.

There are also various internal paths, but these are effectively impassable where they traverse the former ramparts. The two meadows adjoining the River Thames, the King's Meadow and the Queens Arbour, are flat and therefore the most assessable areas.

Existing Facilities

The Castle Meadows consist of the very limited remains of the original buildings and lots of grazing. There are no buildings, no visitor centre, no toilets, no seating nor any other facilities save for interpretation boards beside the four kissing gates.

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External Factors

Part of the site is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. This means that excavation or alterations of levels is effectively ruled out within the area of the original castle and moats. Outside this area it may be possible to make limited alterations to gradients and to improve parts. Paths must remain as mown grass, and even limited hardening may be unacceptable due the scheduling of the area. The other major factor affecting this site is its accessibility. The only potential route accessible to all visitors will be via the Thames National trail at the western end of Wallingford Bridge. It is then nearly 400 metres walk to the first access point on the tow path.

Management Approach

In my opinion, the best guidance for the management of this site is to be found in “By All Reasonable Means”, originally published by the Countryside Agency (now Natural England). Given the importance attached to preserving the existing environment and the very limited scope for creating any all-weather paths, coupled with the lack of parking and other facilities, it is recommended that Management Zone B would be the most appropriate for the Trust to adopt.

Although the remains of such a large castle should offer considerable tourist potential, the location of parking, the distance on foot and the lack of any on-site facilities all militate against generating large numbers of visitors. These factors are likely to affect some older visitors, though these are the very people with time available and most likely to take an interest in an historic site. So though the site almost adjoins Wallingford Town centre, it must be regarded as effectively being on the outskirts.

Recommendations

Improving accessibility

The main access route into Castle Meadows for the mobility impaired should be via the Thames National Trail. It is therefore vital that there is clear signage at both ends of the High Street and into Castle Lane.

The footpath to the river is not entirely obvious. But this is the point where a visitor has to choose between the town centre and Castle Meadows. A strong ornamental sign post is needed, possibly coupled with an information board.

In addition to signage, the route of the footpath needs to be easily seen, especially the section between Castle Lane and the riverbank. Special railings and surface treatment may be worth considering.

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It is also recommended that the entrance should be set back to allow mobility vehicles, etc., to stop and manoeuvre clear of the tow path.

Secondary Access points

It is recommended that the access gate at the northern end of Kings Meadow is moved to connect directly onto the tow path. There is no advantage in the present exit onto the footpath in the adjoining field, especially given the barriers created by the kissing gates and surface condition of the field.

Access via Castle Gardens

This route involves a gradient of 20%. This is not just inaccessible, but a potential hazard with its grassy surface if visitors do not appreciate just how steep it is. There is also no handrail or support. Though strictly speaking this is the responsibility of the managers of Castle Gardens, it would be very frustrating to negotiate the kissing gate over Castle Lane and then discover that the steep gradient. It is recommended that there are suitable warning signs on the Castle Meadow side.

Access Gates

All three pedestrian entrances should be accessible for all visitors. It is also appreciated that cattle are used to manage the grassland and with a location so close to the town centre, there may be a wish to err on the side of caution.

There is no doubt that kissing gates provide greater security against a gate being left open, either accidentally or deliberately. However, mobility vehicles can be to 1600mm in length, which may be too much to prevent animals getting in. One solution is to use a bypass kissing gate, where the kissing gate can be opened further through the use of a RADAR key, and available from Centrewire Ltd.

Any internal gates should if possible be double swing and self-closing. If there is particular concern, two gates could be used provided there is a gap of at least 3 metres between gates.

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Internal Access within Castle Meadows

At the time of inspection the route across Kings Meadow was blocked by floods. As the principal access, it is important that the surface should not become muddy during wet weather, especially if there are cattle in the field.

The secondary route from King's Meadow into Upper Meadow needs a new gate and the path needs re-grading to achieve a consistent gradient. The route from new gate over Castle Lane should be realigned by the fence to minimise crossfall on the way to the perimeter path.

The Perimeter Path

The perimeter route around Castle Meadows and Upper Meadow is about 1.25 kms in length. With some slight realignment and re-grading, it will be possible for this route to meet the requirements for Zone B. The steepest gradient will be about 10% but only over relatively short distances. Providing this is maintained by regular mowing, it will provide a high degree of accessibility. .

There are some opportunities to slightly realign parts of paths across the Inner Bailey, again through mowing and rolling.

Seating

For many elderly and less active people, the opportunity to rest for a few minutes greatly increases their range. When the distance to get into the Castle Meadow is taken into account, it is recommended that some form of seating is provided. Firstly at the main entrance, looking towards the castle mound. Then at about 400m apart along the perimeter path around the Upper Meadow and the Inner Bailey. If there is a prejudice against formal wooden or metal benches, then logs and even rails to lean against can be a reasonable substitute.

Signage

Given the open nature of the site and the information boards, it is felt that relatively few internal signposts are needed. The priority is to direct visitors between the pedestrian access points. Simple finger posts are recommended as adequate.

It is understood that signage from the town centre is to be installed in summer 2008. It is obvious that good signing in the town centre is vitally important to attracting visitors. However, this cannot be done in isolation but needs to be integrated within the overall scheme for the town centre. Visitors will particularly

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need to be reassured over the relationship of Castle Meadows to the facilities in the town centre, especially the distance to toilets and refreshments.

Signage should make it clear that access from Castle Gardens to Castle Meadows is restricted by the 20% gradient so that the mobility impaired avoid an abortive journey via Castle Gardens.

The Appendix

When appropriate, some recommendations above have been more fully detailed in the attached Appendix, together with photographs.

Summary

If the recommendations are for improvements are carried out, access for the disabled will have been achieved following the recommendations of “By All Reasonable Means” for Zone B. Given the limitations inherent with a Scheduled Ancient Monument and the existing landscape, the Northmoor Trust will have achieved all that will be a reasonably possible. It will mean that site of great historic interest will now enjoy a high degree of accessibility.

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28th February 2008

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Response to recommendations of Disabled Access Report prepared by RoamAbility Ltd

Recommendation	Response	Action	Date	Cost
Extend refuges on all 4 kissing gates to 1600mm	This change is essential on southern lower meadows gate and on Cemetery Lane gate;	Undertake works	Summer 2008	£800
Re-grade approach to cemetery lane gate	Agreed, volunteer labour	Undertake works	Summer 2008	None – use volunteers
Re-grade area in front of Cemetery Lane interpretation board	Agreed - Feasible outside of SAM; volunteer labour	Undertake works	Summer 2008	None – use volunteers
Move northern Kings Meadow gate to connect directly with towpath – to allow for disabled access.	Anyone approaching from Cemetery Lane or town centre would have to pass other two gates before arriving here – this is only the primary entrance for people coming from Benson however, the towpath is often not easily passable for disabled users – There is an alternative gate some 100m further on	No action required as there is a reasonable alternative.	N/A	N/A
Set back the southern Kings Meadow gate further into the meadow	Might be possible same time as extending refuge? Significant amount of re-fencing necessary; contractor job		Autumn 08	£250
Remove the right angled kink in the fence adjacent to the southern pedestrian gate	Scheduled into work programme	Green gym to remove wire, add new post and remove kink	Scheduled for 13 th May 2008	None, use volunteer labour, existing wire and post
Resurface/harden the area immediately in front of the southern pedestrian gate/field gate	This area is subject to flooding from Nov – April and underwater for much of that time – The area has already had many tonnes of aggregate put on it and the mud is only on the surface as a result of deposition during flooding	No work required.	N/A	N/A
Re-grade top section of path leading up to the	Agreed - feasible – outside of SAM; possible with volunteer	Undertake works	Winter 08/09	None – use volunteers

northern pedestrian gate from Kings Meadow	labour			
Re-grade steep bank in upper meadow next to northern pedestrian gate	Agreed - feasible outside of SAM; possible with volunteer labour	Undertake works	Winter 08/09	None – use volunteers
Change route of path from Castle Gardens gate to perimeter path	Agreed and works now complete	Complete	Complete	
Re grade areas of new route from castle gardens gate to perimeter path	This area is within the scheduled monument and there are alternative routes	No work required	N/A	N/A
Re-route the path slightly further north as it runs from the northern pedestrian gate back towards the cemetery	Agreed - mowing contract to be amended.	Undertake works	April 2009	No additional cost
Re-route the path east of the water trough	Agreed - mowing contract to be amended.	Undertake works	April 2009	No additional cost
Fill in the ramparts south of the vehicle entrance	This area is within the scheduled monument and would not be acceptable - there are alternative routes	No action	N/A	N/A
Notify visitors of the steep gradient of the ramparts south of the vehicle entrance	Agreed - Will be written into leaflet/website or temporary notices on site; existing boards to be updated as replaced.	Amend text on updated leaflet	Summer 2008	No additional cost
Re route the perimeter path closer to the boundary fence as it swings from south south west to south east	Agreed - mowing contract to be amended.	Undertake works	April 2009	No additional cost
Re route the perimeter path where it curves east into the inner bailey	Agreed - mowing contract to be amended.	Undertake works	April 2009	No additional cost
Create viewing points over the pond	Minimal scrub clearance of box hedging could produce “windows” over pond; barbed wire fencing/metal railings may still be a barrier; possible	Undertake works	Winter 2008/09	None – use volunteers

	with volunteer labour			
Provide seating at the main entrance and at 400m intervals around the perimeter path	This is contrary to current policy on the site and would need to be discussed with the Meadows Advisory Group. Provision of 'log seats' is the least intrusive option	To be considered	TBC	TBC
Install clear signage at both ends to the high street and in castle lane	This project was already underway		Summer 2008	£1,500
Install finger posts on site directing visitors to the access points	This is contrary to current policy on the site and would need to be discussed with the Meadows Advisory Group. Maps on interpretation boards and leaflet sufficient are considered sufficient.	No action	N/A	N/A
Install signs at Castle Gardens entrance informing of the 20% gradient into castle meadows	Not our responsibility, but necessary – need to work with town council	Negotiate with Wallingford T.C	Ongoing	TBC
Install signs on the castle meadows entrance into castle gardens informing of the 20% gradient immediately after the entrance	Agreed – amend existing engraved sign on gate	Undertake works	Summer 2008	£15 approx
Remove Castle street car parking symbol from leaflet map	Agreed - Easily achievable as leaflet in draft stages – liaise with Linda Francis	Undertake works	April/May 2008	No additional cost
Indicate accessible public toilets on leaflet map	Agreed - Easily achievable as leaflet in draft stages – liaise with Linda Francis	Undertake works	April/May 2008	No additional cost
Indicate the distance and duration of the self guided trail on the map	Easily achievable however, walk supposed to be a series of points of interest; not necessary to do in order. Therefore this information will be made available on the web site.	Undertake works	April/May 2008	No additional cost
Provide downloadable map and text of the self guided trail on the SODC website	Agreed – this was already planned.	Undertake works	When leaflet completed summer 2008	No additional cost

Provide photos of each section of the access to the site, starting from the car park, accompanied by brief information on gates, surfaces, gradients and cross falls on the SODC website	Agreed	Undertake works	Winter 2008/09	No additional cost
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Equality Impact Assessment – Action Plan

Equality Objectives

Please indicate the overall equality objectives for your service

EO1	Ensure the council provides appropriate access to the countryside for all sections of the community where possible (particularly the elderly and disabled)
EO2	Ensure we seek regular feedback from customers to better understand their needs and analyse data according to equality group
E03	Increased awareness by the countryside team, of issues affecting our customers (particularly for people with disabilities and cultural awareness)
E04	Increased awareness of the service and what the sites offer for people with limited mobility and disabled users
EO5	Encourage participation as volunteers / users of sites regardless of race, disability, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age.

Your EIA action plan

ETHNICITY

Action number	Action	Outcome	Performance measure	Service / corporate action?	Completion date (quarter/year)
1	Include equal opps. monitoring questions on our customer surveys	A better understanding of how BME groups use and view the site/service	Results of survey used to establish usage and satisfaction among bme users	Service	Q1 2009-10
2	Continue to use citizens panel	More info on usage/satisfaction with service/sites	Results of survey used to establish usage and satisfaction among bme users	Service/corporate	Q2 2009-10
3	Consult religious	To enable more BME	ongoing	service	ongoing

Action number	Action	Outcome	Performance measure	Service / corporate action?	Completion date (quarter/year)
	calendar when organising events	groups to attend our events			
4	Ensure marketing includes welcoming imagery and text (including a statement welcoming participants from all sections of the community regardless of ethnicity, religion or belief, disability, gender, sexual orientation or age)	Increased participation at sites/events	-	service	Done
5	Advertise in Embrace magazine for bme volunteers	Promotes opportunities for bme residents to become volunteers	Article placed in magazine	service	Q3 2009/10

DISABILITY AND AGE -

Action number	Action	Outcome	Performance measure	Service / corporate action?	Completion date (quarter/year)
1	Include equal opps. monitoring questions on our customer surveys	A better understanding of how people with disabilities use and view the site/service	Results of survey used to establish usage and satisfaction among disabled users	Service	Q1 2009-10
2	Continue to use citizens panel	More info on usage/satisfaction with service/sites	Results of survey used to establish usage and satisfaction among	Service/corporate	Q2 2009-10

Action number	Action	Outcome	Performance measure	Service / corporate action?	Completion date (quarter/year)
			disabled users		
3	Update web with access information	Disabled people or those with limited mobility can be aware of the level of site access before visiting.	-	Service	Q4 2008-09
4	General Access improvements to WCM – gates, paths and seating	To enable more disabled and elderly users to enjoy and access the site	-	Service	Part complete, remainder by Q1 2009/10
5	Review of signage, interpretation and leaflets	To make people more aware of the site, what it has to offer and where local facilities are	-	Service	Complete
6	Ensure marketing includes welcoming imagery and text	Increased participation at sites/events	-		Done
7	Training for staff – Staff to attend next available training session	Increased awareness of issues	Attending training	Service/corporate	As training become available -

GENDER

Action number	Action	Outcome	Performance measure	Service / corporate action?	Completion date (quarter/year)
1	Include equal opps. monitoring questions on our customer surveys	A better understanding of how men and women use and view the site/service	Results of survey used to establish usage and satisfaction among men and women	Service	Q1 2009-10
2	Continue to use citizens	More info on	Results of survey used to	Service/corporate	Q2 2009-10

Action number	Action	Outcome	Performance measure	Service / corporate action?	Completion date (quarter/year)
	panel	usage/satisfaction with service/sites	establish usage and satisfaction among men and women		
3	General Access improvements to WCM – gates, paths	To enable more people to enjoy and access the site	-	Service	Part complete, remainder by Q1 2009/10
4	Ensure marketing includes welcoming imagery and text	Increased participation at sites/events	-		Done

RELIGION OR BELIEF

Action number	Action	Outcome	Performance measure	Service / corporate action?	Completion date (quarter/year)
1	Consult religious calendar when organising events	To enable more BME groups to attend our events	ongoing	service	ongoing
2	Consult with our Ethnicity panel to establish if there are any cultural reasons why people from different ethnic / religious back grounds would not participate in this service.	Increased awareness of cultural issues		Service/corporate	

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Action number	Action	Outcome	Performance measure	Service / corporate action?	Completion date (quarter/year)
	No actions				