

# Accessibility and Inclusion: Enabling growth of the Suffolk Visitor Economy



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## Executive Summary

# Accessibility and Inclusion: Enabling growth of the Suffolk Visitor Economy

One in five people in the UK have an impairment<sup>1</sup> that may affect where they choose to stay or visit. As such, there is a compelling business case for making tourism destinations, venues and experiences inclusive.

Suffolk Growth Partnership launched this review as an important part of Suffolk's strategic development programme for the visitor economy. Our proposition underpinning this report is that in addressing the challenges and opportunities of an accessible and inclusive visitor economy we will be contributing to our key ambition of growth, and priorities of collaboration, development of great places and experiences, upskilling the workforce, promoting sustainability, and raising the profile of Suffolk's visitor economy.

Accessibility and inclusion are essential characteristics of a vibrant visitor economy and within this review we have gathered research, good policy and practice, and expert opinion to demonstrate not only the importance of good accessibility to residents and visitors for wellbeing, but also a strong economic case for a focus on improvement and development of this visitor market.

The overarching message to all stakeholders is that better accessibility across the visitor economy will benefit everyone.

**The latest research analysis estimates the value of Suffolk's accessible tourism (the Purple Pound) at £303 million per year, or 20% of the total visitor economy spend.**

Our research also presents a case for significant space to grow the Purple Pound market further and the review sets out the opportunities for the sector by bringing together current activity, sector advice and resources to support improved accessibility and inclusion.

<sup>1</sup> [Family Resource Survey](#), 2018/19 Department for Work & Pensions

Some key strategic and operational opportunities areas have been identified within the review including;

### **Customer service**

Focusing on meeting the individual needs and requirements of those with disabilities and health impairments will improve customer service and the visitor experience for everyone. Developing inclusive service training programmes that meet business needs was highlighted in the research.

### **Information & Promotion**

Currently there is not a strong, established local or Suffolk- wide presence relating to accessibility information and promotion. There is a key role for local authorities and DMOs to play in business engagement and addressing the issue of disparate and fragmented consumer information regarding accessibility and inclusion.

### **Physical Facilities**

Suffolk's top visitor attractions are striving to make themselves as accessible and inclusive as possible with infrastructure improvements and wheelchairs or mobility scooters available to help visitors get around sites. There are also good examples of adjustments for those with sensory impairments. While there are some accessible accommodation options promoted, signposted on national or local platforms, few are part of the National Accessible Scheme (NAS).

### **Public Realm**

In driving Suffolk further forward as an exemplar accessible destination we need to build on the good practice and developments planned across our towns and high streets adding "access" value to regenerative and public realm improvements to ensure welcoming and accessible streetscapes. Building visitor economy accessibility into the master planning process is essential. Supporting navigation in town centres is also an important issue for visitors with additional needs and is an area that needs further coordination and profile across Suffolk's visitor economy.

### **Transport**

Consideration needs to be given as to how accessible Suffolk's attractions and destinations are and what travel planning information and integrated transport can support the whole customer journey for somebody with a physical, learning, sensory disability or impairment.

### **Technology**

Technology can lower barriers that people with disabilities encounter in their daily lives, and in their experience of a visit. It can allow them to participate and enjoy the benefits of the digital society, with the same access to information as everyone else. The potential for technology and innovation to support accessible tourism growth is an important area for the sector to advance. Adopting opportunities for tech-tourism will also help to promote a more inclusive society that benefits all.



## Data and evaluation

The visitor economy needs to be more systematic in capturing data relating to accessibility. This will contribute towards building a body of relevant data that can help to inform priorities and drive improvements.

## So how does Suffolk become an exemplar visitor destination for accessibility and inclusion?

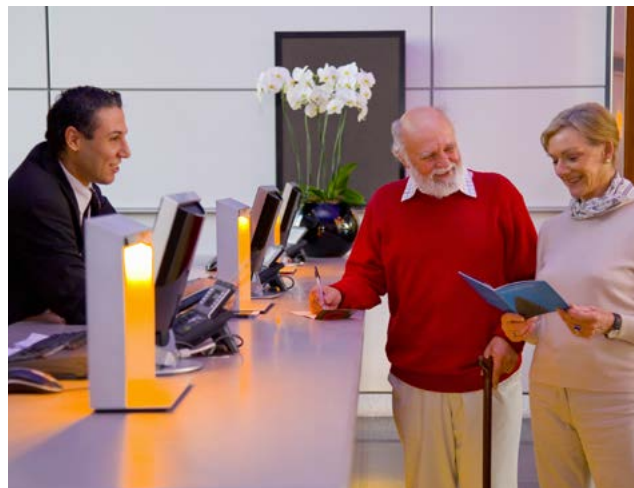
By removing potential barriers which many visitors face, businesses and destinations can reach their full potential.

**Key to success will be working collaboratively as a sector and taking tangible actions that support accessible tourism. Initially this will need to be strategically led and supported in a focused way in order to drive change and create impact for visitors and businesses.**

We do have to recognise that these are challenging times for visitor economy businesses and in developing and incentivising investment for accessible tourism we have to demonstrate the potential returns and benefits. There are however lots of small steps that all areas of the sector can make to enable growth of the “purple pound”. Accessible tourism doesn’t have to be just a “big bang” of development and as our report reveals there is wealth of good practice to build on in Suffolk.

The opportunities for Suffolk’s visitor economy are summarised in a range of strategic recommendations that will now be translated into an action plan by Suffolk Growth with our partners.

By focusing on developing a more inclusive and accessible approach to the visitor economy, Suffolk will be better able to compete with other destinations that are already embracing the accessible tourism market such as Brighton, Derbyshire, Lincoln, Northumberland and the Peak District.



Credit: VisitBritain/Pawel Libera

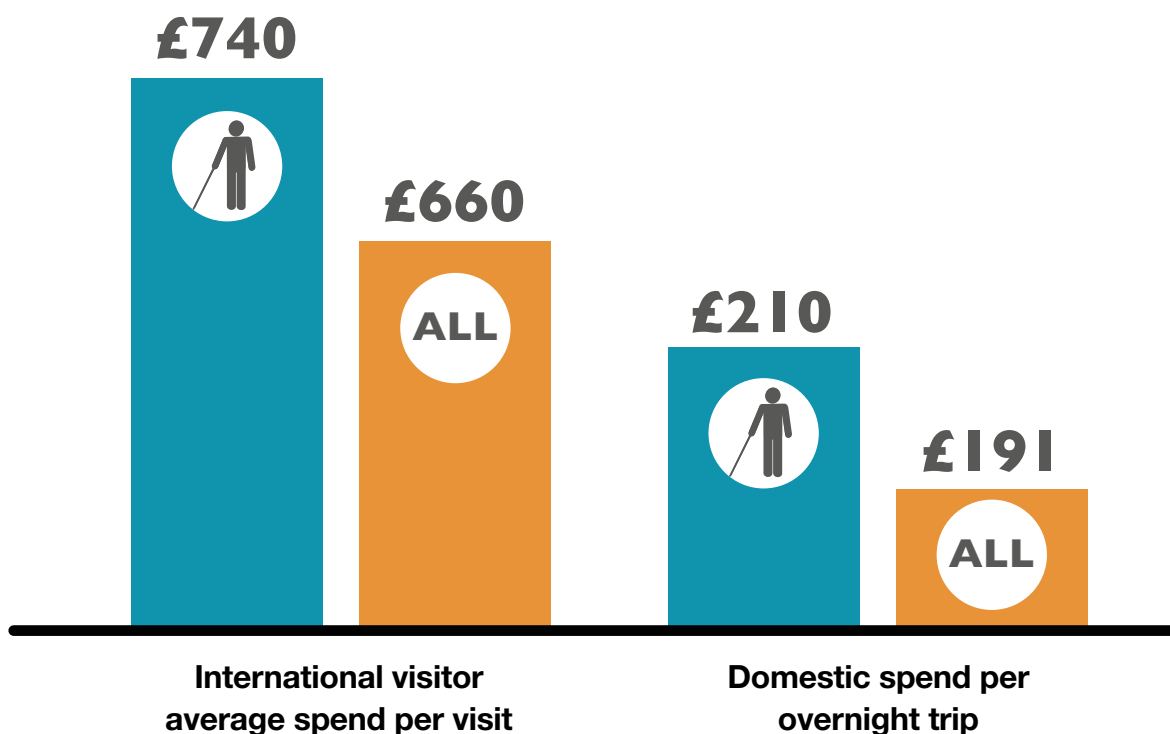
# Introduction

One in five people in the UK have an impairment<sup>1</sup> that may affect where they choose to stay or visit. As such, there is a compelling business case for making tourism destinations, venues and experiences inclusive.

People with disabilities, health conditions and impairments and their travelling companions spend around £15.3 billion<sup>2</sup> on trips in England each year, and given our ageing population domestically, the value of the 'purple pound' (the spending power of disabled people) is set to grow. The purple pound value is made up of:

- Inbound visitor spending by this group was £0.5 billion
- Domestic overnight visitor spending by this group was £3.2 billion
- Day visitor spending by this group was £11.6 billion

Since 2010<sup>3</sup>, inbound visits from those with a health condition or impairment have grown significantly: up 16% in volume and up 42% in value. Growth in visitors requiring a wheelchair saw the biggest rise - up 136% since 2010. Furthermore, 48% of those with an impairment have taken a holiday in the last year and long domestic holidays (4+ nights) are the most common type of trip.



<sup>1</sup> [Family Resource Survey](#), 2018/19 Department for Work & Pensions

<sup>2</sup> [The value of the purple pound](#) – Visit England

<sup>3</sup> [Inbound visitors to the UK with a health condition or impairment](#)

<sup>4</sup> Great Britain Day Visitor Survey 2018 and International Passenger Survey 2018

In thinking about the value of this market, it is important to recognise that one person with access needs can influence the travel plans of a group of people, and that those with a health condition and their travelling group are more likely to take longer trips and are anecdotally very loyal to places that meet their requirements.

This is reflected in a higher average spend<sup>4</sup>.

- The average spend per inbound visit was £660 for all trips, compared to £740 for trips taken by those with an impairment and their travelling companions.
- The average spend per domestic overnight trip was £191 for all trips, compared to £210 for trips taken by those with an impairment and their travelling companions.

Although this data illustrates the significant spend by those with disabilities, health conditions and impairments, it has been recognised nationally that there are a number of opportunities to grow this figure further. Nearly half a million British adults cited 'lack of accessibility provision' as the reason they did not take a domestic trip in the last 12 months<sup>5</sup>. This represents a £116.7M opportunity across England if each person with an impairment took a domestic holiday.

Furthermore, research by We Are Purple<sup>6</sup> estimates how related sectors lose money each month by not being accessible. For example:

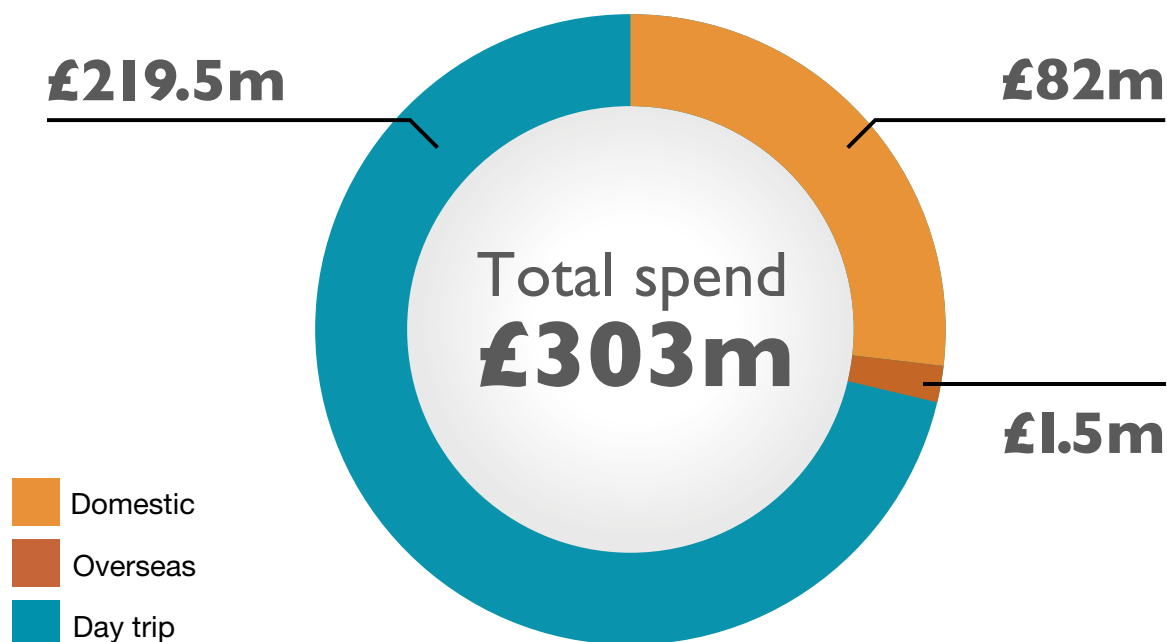
- High Street Shops – £267 million
- Restaurants/Pubs/Clubs – £163 million
- Transport Providers – £42 million

An analysis of the Purple Pound study at a local level projects the total expenditure generated by those with an impairment or those travelling within a group where a member had an impairment to be £303 million or 20% of the total direct expenditure by visitors to Suffolk, with domestic overnight visitor spending by this group estimated at £82 million, inbound visitor spending £1.5 million and day visitor spending £219.5 million. These estimates relate to 2019 data.

<sup>5</sup> [Accessibility - Non-Participation](#) Visit England - May 2018

<sup>6</sup> [The Purple Pound – loss of money for business per month](#)

## The value of the Purple Pound in Suffolk (2019)



Based on the findings of the Suffolk Growth's consumer survey<sup>7</sup> undertaken as part of this research, clear potential exists to grow the visitor market significantly further in Suffolk amongst those with a disability or long-term health condition by addressing accessibility barriers and the main reasons for not visiting.

Finally, in considering our organisational responses to this report we should recognise that accessibility and inclusion affects everyone at some point in our lives. Most recently we have seen the pandemic having a significant impact on those people with disabilities or health impairments, including access to services, and mental and physical well-being. More generally, Age UK have estimated that on average a person will spend 8 years disabled in their lifetime. Therefore while we are supporting the case for a more accessible visitor economy, we are also embracing activity that is supporting community health and well-being.

## Review Scope

This review was commissioned by Suffolk Growth Partnership and supports the accessibility and inclusion workstream within Suffolk's Visitor Economy Strategic Development Framework 2021-2025<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Suffolk Growth Accessibility and Inclusion business and inclusion surveys [Document library](#) | [Suffolk Growth](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Visitor Economy](#) | [Suffolk Growth](#)



**The aim of the review was to:**

- set out the opportunities for Suffolk's visitor economy in developing policy and practice for improved accessibility and inclusion
- investigate the economic case for sector investment in improvement and developing this market in Suffolk
- inform approaches to accessibility and inclusion, in the development of place and destinations
- inform how we promote accessible tourism and support the sector to maximise the potential of market growth in this area

## Methodology

The desk-based research reviewed relevant policy and also focused on assessing the current level of accessibility and inclusion within Suffolk's visitor economy. This has been considered in relation to the five pillars of accessible and inclusive tourism:

- Customer Service
- Information & Promotion
- Physical Facilities
- Public Realm
- Transport

In addition to reviewing the existing evidence base, new research was undertaken to investigate and establish the value of this market, a qualitative survey of accessibility practice in different business types across the county, and a consumer focus survey.

Throughout the process, good practice case study examples (appendix 3) and resources have been collated that signpost further sources of relevant information and guidance (appendix 4). A Suffolk Growth strategic workshop held in October 2022 generated further information to inform approaches to enable Suffolk to become an exemplar visitor destination for accessible tourism.

This review and recommendations will form the basis of a developing action plan, alongside a proposed set of metrics to measure growth in sector accessibility and inclusion.

# Policy Context

This section of the report focuses on the policy context in relation to accessibility Suffolk's visitor economy.

## National Policy Context

The Equality Act 2010 consolidated and strengthened all anti discrimination legislation, and as a result replaced the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. It is illegal to treat anyone who is disabled, is thought to be disabled or is associated with someone who is disabled less favourably than other customers, which means tourism businesses have to make reasonable adjustments.

In 2016, Britain scored just 25% on its accessibility credentials in the National Brands Index and as part of the Tourism Sector Deal<sup>9</sup> the government set out an aspiration to make the UK the most accessible destination in Europe by 2025 and to increase inbound visits by disabled people by 33%. This aspiration for improved sector inclusivity and accessibility remains as a cornerstone of the Government's current Tourism Recovery Plan<sup>10</sup>.

**Objective 5: A tourism industry that provides an inclusive and accessible offer that is open to all. The UK government wants the UK's tourism offer to be considered the most accessible of any in the world and to maximise the value of the 'purple pound'.**

Following VisitEngland's Unlocking the Purple Pound conference in 2015 the [Inclusive Tourism Action Group](#) was set up by a range of leading accessible tourism stakeholders who share the vision to provide world-class accessible tourism experiences that every person with accessibility requirements can enjoy.

The group undertakes a range of activities to increase engagement of tourism destinations and businesses in the provision of access for all and raise awareness of accessible tourism experiences amongst disabled people. The group has also produced a range of guidance on inclusive tourism that can be found in the resources section of this report (appendix 4).

VisitEngland also provides direction and support to businesses and destinations on harnessing the valuable and growing accessible tourism market with a dedicated section of guidance and resources on their [Business Advice Hub](#). The aim is to

<sup>9</sup> [Industrial Strategy – tourism sector deal](#)

<sup>10</sup> [The Tourism Recovery Plan](#) – June 2021

demonstrate that improving accessibility benefits all customers and does not always require major or expensive changes.

In response to the independent review<sup>11</sup> of Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) the Government agreed to address the overcrowded and fragmented DMO landscape, and will provide £4 million over the next three years to fund a new accreditation scheme<sup>12</sup>, developed and administered by VisitEngland, for the highest performing DMOs. DMOs will be renamed Local Visitor Economy Partnerships (LVEPs) and act as a one-stop shop for visitors to find all they need to know about a local area.

The accreditation scheme will run alongside the pilot of a tiering model in the North East of England. This pilot will give the North East Destination Development Partnership funding and the opportunities to focus on activities that ensure their destination remains responsive to challenges such as boosting skills, accessibility and levelling up.

**Whilst there is not yet clarity regarding the criteria for the scheme, there is a clear expectation for accredited LVEPs' to have a focus on accessibility. This presents an opportunity for Suffolk's DMO structure to build on the findings of this review and ensure full accreditation potential.**

## Regional and Local Context

The East of England Destination Plan<sup>13</sup> has also referenced accessibility. Acknowledging that by 2025 a quarter of the tourism market will have accessibility needs, Visit East of England has committed to developing bespoke online tourism toolkits for businesses that will include guidance on Inclusive and Accessible Tourism.

Suffolk's Visitor Economy Strategic Development Framework 2021-2025, has highlighted accessibility and inclusion as part of the Great places & Experiences priority, with the intention to encourage place and product development. This review and research undertaken is part of the ongoing workstream led by Suffolk Growth to progress the priority and influence key local stakeholders and business activity.

11 [Independent review of destination management organisations](#), August 2021, DCMS

12 [News release](#), July 2022, Government website

13 [Destination Development Plan 2022 by Visit East of England](#)

# The Pillars of an accessible and inclusive visitor economy

This report into the current level of accessibility and inclusion within Suffolk's Visitor Economy has been structured around reviewing the five pillars of accessible and inclusive tourism, which are interdependent, and progress will rely on taking actions to strengthen each pillar in order for there to be a manifest 'Welcome for Everyone'.





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# Customer Service

Improving customer service and meeting the requirements of an underserved market of people with disabilities, health conditions and impairments, has the multiplier effect of improving the visitor experience for everyone.

Being able to accommodate and provide services for wheelchair users is of key importance, as their accessibility needs are not discretionary. However, only 9% of disabled people are wheelchair users, so by limiting accessibility responses to this group, businesses are potentially missing out on being able to secure a share of the purple pound from the other 91% of visitors who may have less visible needs such as long-term illness, reduced vision, hearing loss or are neurodivergent.

**Developing awareness and training opportunities are therefore vital for businesses, managers and staff as it helps to grow understanding of the market, removes fear around what to do and say and gives confidence to serve all customers including those with hidden disabilities.**

## Training opportunities

The review sought to identify whether any skills training was being offered that focused on accessibility or disability awareness around the county.

World Host training is being provided through the ESF funded Visitor Economy Network Initiative (VENI) a regional partnership led by West Suffolk College. World Host training through VENI is available for small and medium tourism businesses at no charge or discounted rates. This opportunity is part of a programme to raise the level of customer service across the tourism and hospitality sector and ensure that visitors receive a friendly and professional welcome.

Whilst there is a clear focus on enhancing the skills across the visitor economy workforce and investing in the next generation of young people coming into the industry, the programme does not currently specifically address the topic of accessibility.

An online programme entitled WorldHost Principles of Customer Service set over four 90 minute webinars is instead offered, which includes the broad learning outcome of 'Identifying customer needs'.



To ensure a higher impact on the visitor economy it would be beneficial to offer the more focused option of WorldHost Inclusive Service<sup>14</sup>, which covers the following

- The impact of not providing accessible services
- Key words and phrases
- Putting yourself in someone else's place
- Visible and invisible disability
- Common disabilities
- Disability etiquette
- Re-framing disability

**By focusing on meeting the individual needs and requirements of those with disabilities and health impairments, this will improve customer service and the visitor experience for everyone.**

To be able to confidently serve all customers, staff need to undertake disability awareness training and familiarisation with the accessible facilities, services and equipment available within their business. There are two national training programmes: Welcome to Excellence ([Welcoming All Customers](#)) and World Host (Inclusive Service). There are other online and classroom-style courses specifically for those working in the tourism industry, and a selection of known training courses and providers are listed on the [VisitEngland website](#) including some free online courses through Tourism for All, Purple and CPL Learning, which are a great way for smaller businesses to embark on an accessibility journey.

Other bodies also offer training to help grow businesses knowledge and boost their confidence in supporting people with specific disabilities such as The Alzheimers Society, which has a [Dementia Friends initiative](#) and resources including free online videos; RNIB offers a selection of virtual eLearning courses through their online portal including [Visual Awareness training](#); the Royal Association for Deaf People offers [Deaf Awareness Training](#).

<sup>14</sup> Example of [WorldHost Inclusive Service](#)

## Survey feedback on training

Drawing on the findings of the telephone research undertaken on behalf of Suffolk Growth during September 2022, which engaged a representative sample of the various types of Suffolk businesses, it is encouraging to note that over half of respondents (52%) reported that they had given their staff training specific to welcoming guests with accessibility needs. Of these, more than three quarters (76%) had given disability or equality training, a quarter had given 'Welcoming all Customers' and a similar number 'BSL sign language'. Among the responses for 'other' were autism & dementia awareness, mobility scooter use and 'in house' courses.

Across the businesses 23% identified the need to look at a specific inclusive training area to develop in future.

## Survey feedback on employment

**A diverse workforce is good for business; a study by Disability:IN, the leading non-profit resource for business disability inclusion worldwide, has shown, that companies that championed people with disabilities actually outperformed others – driving profitability with revenues 28 percent higher, net income 200 percent higher, and profit margins 30 percent higher.**

The study also refers that hiring a diverse workforce can also give businesses fresh insights into developing and marketing products and services that meet the needs and preferences of consumers with disabilities.

As part of the survey of Suffolk businesses, respondents were asked 'Do you have any employees or placements within your business that have a known disability or impairment? Only one fifth responded in the affirmative, accounting for an average of 12% of the workforce. This suggests that the tourism and hospitality sector does not currently reflect the level of disability in society, whereby 20% of the population is disabled or has an impairment.

The Disability Confident<sup>15</sup> employer scheme is creating a movement of change, encouraging employers to think differently about disability and take action to improve how they recruit, retain and develop disabled people. It was developed by employers and disabled people's representatives to make it rigorous but easily accessible, particularly for smaller businesses. Through the workstream associated with the findings of this review, there is an opportunity to encourage businesses to sign up

<sup>15</sup> [Disability Confident Employer Scheme](#)

to the scheme, which supports employers to make the most of the talents disabled people can bring to the workplace.

Furthermore, the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) has created a [Business Without Barriers hub](#) that features inspiring interviews with successful disabled entrepreneurs and personal accounts from employers who are helping to break down barriers to employment. FSB also provide free advice and guidance on topics such as the Access to Work scheme, which can provide support for an individual with a disability or long term physical or mental health condition to help them start or stay in work and resources to help make the workplace more inclusive and accessible. Key findings<sup>16</sup> from the FSB member survey and interviews with business owners across the UK include:

- 25% of small business owners are disabled or have a health condition.
- 51% of small business owners have employed a disabled person or someone with a health condition in the last 3 years.

## Summary

**Focusing on meeting the individual needs and requirements of those with disabilities and health impairments will improve customer service and the visitor experience for everyone. While the current focus on sector skills through the VENI programme aspires to embrace the importance of great customer services, consideration should be given to the development and take up of Inclusive Service training as part of the sector skills programme, as it does not currently specifically address the topic of accessibility.**

**There is an opportunity for all sector partners to collaborate and to raise the profile of resources and schemes that might help to bolster employment representation within the sector so that it more equitably reflects the level of disability in society.**

<sup>16</sup> [Business without Barriers: Supporting disabled people and those with health conditions in the workforce](#), April 2022, Federation of Small Businesses

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# Information & Promotion



## **Consideration needs to be given to every aspect of the customer “journey” and whether a trip to Suffolk (be it a day trip, a weekend or a holiday) is accessible and inclusive to the “purple pound” market.**

Most visitors with additional needs will try to find disabled access information before they travel. This, for many people, starts with researching the marketing portals for an area and drilling down to individual websites to check the accessibility and establish whether the venue, attraction or accommodation is suitable. So for people with visual impairments colour and font can be an initial barrier to access information. Others will need to be able to navigate the website using speech recognition software or by using a screen reader.

There are therefore definite and obvious commercial benefits to making websites accessible. Central Digital and Data Office guidance<sup>17</sup> says that Council websites should be as accessible as possible and provide guidance for website audit and publishing Accessibility statements.

Improving visitor confidence through the provision of reliable information was cited as a key priority, by 92% of respondents to Euan’s Guide annual access survey<sup>18</sup> stating that they try to find disabled access information before any trip or visit. Therefore, information about a destination or facility needs to be accurate and up to date. If elements of a visit may pose difficulties for someone with physical or sensory or learning needs, then a potential customer needs to be made aware of this in advance. A key frustration is arriving at a destination and discovering that part of the service or experience is inaccessible or unsuitable as an attraction.

Having an accreditation or audit from a recognised body that verifies the information can help to give the assurance necessary for securing business.

## **Accessible Destinations**

Between 2014-2016, VisitEngland worked with destination organisations in Birmingham, Brighton, Derbyshire, Lincoln, Margate, Nottingham, Northumberland and the Peak District to [develop accessible itineraries in coastal, countryside and city destinations](#).

Additionally VisitEngland is supporting the [North York Moors](#) as a pilot destination for an accessibility project to develop and promote a high quality accessible tourism itinerary, bookable in Germany and the Netherlands. VisitEngland will be seeking to build on the success and learnings of the pilot project, rolling out to more destinations a process it has refined to develop accessible tourism itineraries.

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/make-your-website-or-app-accessible-and-publish-an-accessibility-statement#make-a-plan-to-fix-any-accessibility-problems-you-find>

<sup>18</sup> [Euans Guide Access Survey 2021](#)

Potential opportunities to work with Visit England and access funding for accessibility campaigns is likely to be linked to the new LVEP accreditation programme.

Increasingly destinations around the country are bringing together accessible visitor information in one place to make life easier for disabled people and their travelling companions. For example, in Derbyshire through [Accessible Derbyshire](#) potential visitors can find support, guidance and a full range of itineraries and opportunities. This has been achieved by working collaboratively with Visit Peak District, the Peak National Park Authority, Derbyshire County Council and District Councils.

VisitEngland are currently developing an Accessible Tourism Toolkit for destination managers that will include guidance on how to develop and promote accessible tourism itineraries. It is recommended that dedicated time is ring fenced to review and take action around this resource.

**By focusing on bringing together and developing inclusive and accessible information, itineraries and news about the visitor economy offer, Suffolk will be better able to compete with other destinations that are already embracing the accessible tourism market.**

## Access Able

AccessAble was established to take the stress and anxiety out of planning for those with disabilities and additional access needs and was used by 3.4 million people during 2021. The detailed access guides tell users all about a venue's access using [33 accessibility symbols](#) that have been designed in consultation with disabled people and represent important information that at a glance allows all would be visitors to assess whether a location is accessible for them.

In Suffolk there are 45 Libraries listed, 18 museums and 14 arts venues, 18 leisure centres, 29 railway stations, 43 restaurants and 8 parks/nature reserves. However, there are currently only 9 accommodation providers listed. [This presence](#) forms part of a Suffolk County Council contract with AccessAble that currently incorporates maintenance and updates to existing access guides for libraries, arts and museum venues. There is potential to explore widening access guidance further across visitor economy services, however this would be at an additional cost.

[Glasgow](#) is an example of a destination that has worked with AccessAble in a focused way on an Access Guide that pulls together the visitor offer to detail what's available for disabled visitors and residents from wheelchair accessible hotels and restaurants



to disability savvy museums and attractions.

AccessAble offer a number of different support services in terms of guides; options range from Summary Access Guides, Destination Guides to creating itineraries from individual listings in a place or wider area e.g. focussed on accessible family attractions, outdoor activities, places to visit, eating and drinking, and lead promotional activity for destinations.

Suffolk DMO's are establishing how to develop their links to current Accessible Suffolk listings. The Suffolk Coast DMO has linked the relevant AccessAble Suffolk pages with their town guides. They will also be adding links to AccessAble entries on relevant members listing pages. A specific filter will be added to allow for monitoring and measuring website visitor traffic.

The potential to develop access and destination guides is clearly a significant step in growing the Purple Pound in Suffolk. Developing the Suffolk review presence on AccessAble is a potential route and would send a strong positive message to people with disabilities, health conditions and impairments demonstrating commitment to welcoming visitors with access needs.

## The role of DMOs

Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) have a key role to play in providing good access information and can also help local businesses, and the destination as a whole, to maximise market opportunities and improve the quality of the visitor experience for everyone.

VisitEngland reviewed a range of DMO consumer websites and gathered examples of best practice to create a complete example of an 'Access for All' section<sup>19</sup>. Ideally, this should be no more than 3 clicks into the site and should include sections on:

- travel planning with information on trains, coaches, accessible taxis, Blue Badge parking and shopmobility locations;
- environment and geography, noting uneven or steep terrain and maps with drop curbs and crossing points to assist those with additional needs to get around;
- accessible accommodation, attractions and restaurants, highlighting those with Access statements and accreditation;
- details of assistance available during a stay and other useful information such as location of accessible toilets, Changing Places Toilets (CPT), equipment hire and repairs

<sup>19</sup> [Winning more visitors](#), VisitEngland

As part of this work the following Destination Management Organisation sites across Suffolk were reviewed:

## Visit Suffolk

There is currently no dedicated section on Accessibility. The '[Accessibility](#)' link takes users to a page that is dedicated to accessibility assistance for various browsers, rather than detailing useful information on the components identified by Visit England.

Using 'accessible' as a search term returned 16 results, many of which proved irrelevant and were largely linked to proximity i.e. 'the beach is easily accessible' or 'accessible from the A12'.

Listed organisation access guides are limited. For example, Heath View Holidays enjoys a single line entry despite being the type of accommodation that those with limited mobility may be searching for.

## All About Ipswich

There is currently no dedicated section on Accessibility. Using 'accessible' as a search term returned 10 results, many of which proved irrelevant and were largely linked to proximity i.e. 'easily accessible by foot, car or sail'.

Listed organisation access guides are limited. For example, Orwell View Barns is included in the accommodation, but no mention is made of the fact that it is suitable for older and less mobile guests and part-time wheelchair users.

## The Suffolk Coast

There is currently no dedicated section on Accessibility. However, using 'accessible' as a search term returned 38 results many of relevance such as the Marina Theatre highlighted as having a wheelchair accessible café and bar, so too the Red Rose Chain venue, The Avenues, which is fully accessible, and The Red House in Aldeburgh where there is level access across the site and accessible toilets and Blue Badge parking available.

The entry for East Point Pavilion includes an informative access statement. Indeed Lowestoft is singled out in an article for the new south beach boardwalk, offering greater accessibility for people with disabilities and parents with pushchairs, plus the Changing Places Toilets.

Beach Street Felixstowe is described as a landscaped space that is wheelchair and buggy accessible with disabled toilet facilities.

Mollett's Farm, the top property listed on Euan's Guide in Suffolk, is featured under accommodation along with Haw Wood Farm, Five Acre Barn and Mill Hill Farm that have various adaptations to allow for enhanced accessibility.

Links have been created on the website from the town guides to existing entries on AccessAble.

## Bury St Edmunds & Beyond

There is currently no dedicated section on Accessibility. Bury is majoring on being a dog friendly town and the DMO has invested time in pulling together an entire section on Dog Friendly activities and venues. Using 'accessible' as a search term returned 11 results, some of which proved irrelevant.

Listed organisation access guides are limited. For example, Wigwam Holidays is detailed as being wheelchair accessible accommodation and in terms of places to visit Thelnetham Windmill is described as having the ground floor accessible and accessible toilets.

The St Edmund's Weekend Spectacular in November is described as being 'fully accessible'.

## Discover Newmarket

There is currently no dedicated section on Accessibility and no option to search the website. Discover Newmarket are however proactively seeking to develop access guides with Access Able as resources become available.

Although not detailed or linked on the website Newmarket Racecourse has developed detailed access guides through Access Able.

## Desk-based review

The desk-based review of DMO websites suggests that the term 'accessible' is interpreted as relating to those in wheelchairs rather than encompassing a far wider demographic of potential visitors with sensory or learning needs, health conditions and age-related impairments, or indeed families with buggies.

**Looking ahead to the requirements for LVEP accreditation and the clear expectation for a focus on accessibility, there is an opportunity to review and re-present a higher profile and exciting offer of Suffolk as an accessible destination.**

As part of this work Suffolk DMOs should consider developing comprehensive 'Access for All' sections, to highlight their accessible business members and consider how to promote an improved offer of accessibility through the creation of guides and itineraries that encompass a wider definition of access.

Promoting Suffolk as a destination that is welcoming and accessible will need to be supplemented by campaigns that profile this proposition. This should include imagery and content that not only promotes accessible places and experiences, but also features people with disabilities. Visit East of England brings together DMOs and local authorities regularly to determine campaign programmes and it is recommended that accessibility information and promotion is reviewed and features much more prominently.

## Working with businesses

VisitBritain recommends that tourism businesses appoint an Accessibility Champion<sup>20</sup> who is inspired by inclusive tourism and the value and potential this has for the business. Accessibility Champions take responsibility for embedding accessibility throughout the business by assessing access provision and recommending improvements to services and facilities in order to offer an inclusive experience for all customers.

As part of the Suffolk Growth Tourism Business Telephone Survey participants were asked whether they had an appointed Access Champion. Encouragingly over two thirds responded that they had (67%) with 30% saying that they did not and 3% not knowing. Just under half of respondents (47%) also said that they have an accessibility statement or guide.

In relation to the various accessibility schemes, participation or membership across all schemes appears to be limited, reflecting low take up and awareness of Access Able, and the Visit England National Accessible Scheme.

It was estimated by respondents that just that 8% percent of their customers have a disability or impairment. This indicates that they are not currently attracting a representative share of the full market potential. This might be linked to the fact that only 55% of the sample businesses surveyed promote the provisions they have in place for these guests, despite the fact that significant adaptations have been made.

There are clear benefits to businesses in striving to adapt and accommodate this market and two thirds (67%) of respondents said they had achieved 'increased customer satisfaction', one third cited 'repeat business' (33%), and a quarter 'improved reputation' and 'increased turnover' (24% each).

<sup>20</sup> [Accessibility Champion Brief](#), VisitBritain

50% of businesses saw the disability or impairment market as one that could grow albeit only 5% saw this as significant growth. Barriers cited in developing this market included costs, listed buildings and also a perception that the area was not really suitable for disabled visitors.

The findings of this research provide a rationale to communicate the opportunity with greater clarity and seek to engage the business community in a strategy that puts Suffolk on the map as an accessible and inclusive visitor destination.

Alongside this, a further recommendation is to encourage participating in [Purple Tuesday](#) events and campaigns. This is a global initiative that aims to inspire the leadership and staff of organisations of all sectors and sizes to promote awareness, develop understanding, and implement solutions for better accessibility in their customer environments. Participating organisations make [public commitments](#) each year to improve their accessibility and practice so that disabled customers have a better, more inclusive experience.

## Summary

**There are a range of platforms that potential visitors may use to explore whether a trip to Suffolk can accommodate their needs, ranging from destination portals and individual business websites to sites with a specific focus on providing access information such as AccessAble, the review site Euan's' Guide or the Tourism for All travel planner.**

**Currently there is not a strong, established local or Suffolk-wide presence relating to accessibility information and promotion. To help address this, the value and benefits of accessible tourism need to be clearly articulated to all stakeholders.**

**There is a key role for local authorities and DMOs to play in developing business engagement and addressing the issue of disparate and fragmented information regarding accessibility and inclusion.**

**Suffolk DMOs should consider developing comprehensive 'Access for All' sections, to highlight their accessible destinations and business members and promote an improved offer of accessibility through the creation of guides and itineraries that encompass a wider definition of access.**



3

# Physical facilities



# Accommodation

Suffolk's visitor economy is supported by a mixture of accommodation ranging from hotels, bed and breakfast and self-catering cottages to glamping, camping, caravan parks and moorings.

The status of access for all activity and provision across Suffolk's range of accommodation is predictably a mixture of good practice and under promoted services. The recent business survey results from Visit East of England demonstrate the potential for physical accommodation improvements along with the challenges for SMEs to overcome including building constraints (e.g. listed building restrictions) and the cost of implementing some of the necessary changes.

## Findings from businesses indicated that:

- 60% have disabled parking available at the property
- 56% have step-free access available to the property
- 16% of those who have a lift could accommodate a wheelchair user
- 49% have an accessible toilet in communal areas
- 37% have additional 'accessible for all' facilities at the property

This section of the review also focused on identifying what level of the accommodation stock is formally accredited or aligned to an accessibility scheme.

VisitEngland's National Accessible Scheme<sup>21</sup> (NAS) highlights accommodation providers who have improved their accessibility. This means recognising accommodation that has introduced facilities such as handrails, ramps, level-access showers, hearing loops and colour contrast.

As with visitor attractions and entertainment, a focus on accessibility has a wider benefit beyond those with disabilities and impairments, for example, enabling families with buggies to visit more easily.

There is no serviced accommodation nor holiday parks currently listed in Suffolk that are part of the NAS, and just 5 properties with some level of provision.

<sup>21</sup> [Accommodation in the National Accessible Scheme](#) – March 22

Business name	Suitable for older and less mobile guests	Suitable for part time wheelchair users	Suitable for assisted wheelchair users	Suitable for independent wheelchair users	Suitable for visually impaired guests	Suitable for guests with hearing loss
Gladwins Farm, Nayland	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Heath View Holidays, Ipswich	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Red House Farm, Haughley	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Wattisham Hall Holiday Cottages	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
YHA Blaxhall	No	Yes	No	No	No	No

Visit England have confirmed that the low participation numbers in Suffolk are reflected in most other areas of England and that a [review of NAS](#) is underway within the wider context of their work on accessible tourism.

The availability of accessible accommodation was also cross-referenced with [Euan's Guide](#), which is the disabled access review website where disabled people, their families, friends and carers can find and share the accessibility of venues. The website shares thousands of experiences and is the go-to tool for many disabled people. There are 9 entries for Suffolk on the website, whereas by comparison in Norfolk 23 are listed.

The top property listed on Euan's Guide in Suffolk is [Mollett's Farm](#), Saxmundham with one review in particular praising the owners proactive approach.

There is an opportunity for more of Suffolk's accommodation and attractions to feature the Euan's Guide website. Businesses could be encouraged to list themselves on the site, which will both help disabled people find great places to visit and stay and also help enhance the profile of Suffolk as a welcoming accessible and inclusive destination.

Tourism for All is an independent, national charity that features a [travel planner](#) allowing visitors to tailor a holiday specifically to their requirements, whether they need wheelchair access, certain lighting, or sensory rooms. It also links travel, accommodation, attractions, events and more to help create the accessible holiday.

Cross-referencing the accommodation available in Suffolk with the NAS list revealed 3 additional properties with some level of suitability for guests.

- Orwell View Barns in Shotley on the outskirts of Ipswich can offer accommodation suitable for older and less mobile guests and part-time wheelchair users.
- Wylene on the outskirts of Bury St Edmunds can offer accommodation suitable for older and less mobile guests, part-time wheelchair users, and guests with hearing loss.
- Swilland Mill can offer accommodation suitable for guests with hearing loss.

Tourism for All is therefore a further national initiative that supports any activities that relate to accessible tourism and welcomes partners that share their values and want to help make accessible tourism better. Tourism for All is open to DMOs, tourism businesses and service providers, promoting partners through their website and social media channels. Members are also entitled to display the 'TFA Partner' logo on their own website and other media.

## Summary

**Access for all in terms of Suffolk's accommodation has examples of good practice, alongside the potential for wider development. The need to extend the awareness of returns on investment and better promote accessible services, using the range of local and national platforms is clear.**

**Accessibility has a wider benefit beyond those with disabilities and impairments, and accessible design can be an attractive universal offer. The potential is to encourage design beyond the requirements of regulations and to create attractive universal facilities, moving away from traditional "clinical" presentations.**

**The potential to develop the range and quality of accessible accommodation across Suffolk can be enhanced through promoting local good practice, and evidencing returns on accessibility investment, drawing upon the guidance and developing toolkits provided through VisitEngland.**

# Attractions

Visit England state that simply providing an Accessibility Guide can help businesses be more inclusive for people with a wide range of visible and hidden impairments.

Suffolk's visitor economy has a wide range of natural, cultural and heritage attractions and many have made adaptations to ensure that they may be enjoyed all. This section highlights some of the good practice emerging from the review with further local and national examples included in appendix 3.

The National Trust have focused on improving accessibility information for their sites and include comprehensive Access statements for their properties, which are vital for those with disabilities, as these describe the whole site in detail, enabling would be visitors to establish whether the attraction is viable for their visiting needs.

At **Flatford and Bridge Cottage** the National Trust has worked hard to maintain the original essence, while also making it as accessible as possible. Many of the routes are on level, tarmacked ground and there is an accessible toilet near the Constable Exhibition. There are 5 designated disabled access spaces in the car park and a transfer vehicle takes visitors between the car park and Bridge Cottage. There is a manual wheelchair and also a Trampler scooter available for loan. Braille guides and hearing induction loop facilities are available. Assistance dogs are also welcome. Their Access statement describes the whole site in detail for planning a visit. Flatford is considered to be one of the best accessible days out in Suffolk.



**Ickworth House** and Gardens has been made fully accessible with lifts and scooter and wheelchair hire available as part of the National Trust accessibility review. Again, there is a clear Access Statement available. Working in partnership with VocalEyes, an accessible audio-described tour of the ground floor rooms of Ickworth House has been produced for blind and partially sighted visitors giving detailed and evocative descriptions of the architecture, interiors, and some key items in the collection along with historical information.



**Sutton Hoo** has two manual wheelchairs available for use inside and four powered mobility vehicles and two all-terrain wheelchairs that allow easier access across the outdoor areas of the site. There is also an accessible platform on level one of the viewing tower, accessed via a ramp, ensuring everyone can enjoy a perspective of this important Anglo-Saxon archaeological site. Essential companions for disabled visitors are entitled to free entry. Again the National Trust Access statement is a really helpful piece of detailed information that describes all of the landscape in detail, so that a visit can be planned in advance.

Most of the **Africa Alive!** park is accessible by wheelchair and the viewing areas are designed with wheelchair users in mind. Free disabled parking is available. There is a free wheelchair loan scheme and mobility scooter hire facility. A portable hearing loop is available, as is an A3 photocopy of literature. Free ear defenders are also available to guests. Free entry for guests who are caring for someone who is registered disabled. Information is collated on the website under [Visitors with access requirements](#).

**West Stow Anglo-Saxon Village and Country Park** museum, visitor centre and café are wheelchair accessible via ramps and gravel paths, the village is also wheelchair accessible. The majority of the paths and trails in the park are wheelchair friendly, although assistance is recommended on part of the route. A large print transcript of the introductory DVD and a large print version of the village map are available, induction loops are installed in the visitor centre and café and assistance dogs are welcome throughout the site [Accessibility at West Stow](#).



The exhibits, café, bottom and first levels of **Framlingham Castle** are all accessible by wheelchair and via a lift. There are accessible toilets, disabled parking and a guided virtual tour with hearing loop is available on the ground floor in the exhibition. Information on accessibility is available on the [website](#) of this English Heritage property.



Credit: National Trust

Over 75% of the audio tour points and two video rooms at **Landguard Point** are located on the ground floor, which is fully wheelchair accessible, although there is no lift to the first floor. They have accessible toilets on site, two designated disabled parking spaces and assistance dogs are welcomed. [Information on accessibility](#) at the fort.

The **Food Museum** has an [Access Statement](#) and offers manned buggies to provide transport around the large site. The disabled parking has an easy access path leading to the facilities, there are wheelchair accessible doors and a lift allows access to upper floor. They have a mixture of audio and visual interactives, making exhibitions accessible for the visually or audibly impaired. There are 3 accessible toilets, a hearing loop system is available. Assistance dogs are welcome. All staff receive regular training that includes disability awareness training.



Credit: Food Museum

**Theatre Royal, Bury** offers an authentic 19th century theatre-going experience and despite being a Grade I listed building is also well equipped to cater for accessibility needs with an induction loop in every seat, ramp access, 4 wheelchair adapted boxes and spaces for guide dogs. The [Access information](#) also highlights adapted performances with audio description, captioning, BSL sign interpretations and 'relaxed' performances with less intense music and lighting designed to be dementia and autism-friendly. A complimentary companion ticket is also available for anyone not able to attend the theatre on their own.

**The New Wolsey Theatre** also offers an extensive access guide, facilities and services set out clearly for visitors on the [access pages of the The New Wolsey Theatre website](#) along with the story of restarting the theatre as a place that everyone can access without permission or concession as part of the Creative Case.

**Woodbridge Tide Mill** is a Grade I listed building over three floors, which presents some challenges in being able to provide equitable access. However, they have introduced Sensory Backpacks for individuals with sensory processing disorders such as Autism. They can also offer 'Quiet Visits' for families with a neurodivergent parent or child and mindful that some visitors can be sensitive to both light and sound, have developed [an outline of each floor](#) of the Tide Mill indicating sources of light and sound.

Some nature trails and hides at **RSPB Minsmere** have been adapted for wheelchairs and pushchairs. In addition to 8 Blue badge spaces, a mobility scooter and manual wheelchair are available to borrow. There are hearing loops at key points in the visitor centre. The walls and the doors have high colour contrast and display information is in large print. A complimentary ticket policy is in place for personal assistants. All staff have disability awareness training and they have created [this film](#) which offers personal testimony about the site and highlights the role of staff in providing a positive and enjoyable experience.



The organisers of **First Light Festival** on Lowestofts' South Beach are conscious that the natural environment and Victorian infrastructure may mean it is not easy to navigate for everyone. In 2022 they located accessible toilets in key areas of the festival site, made available large print or audio versions of the programme, offered a complimentary Personal Assistant ticket for each paid-for ticket. There were also a number of British Sign Language interpreted events and performances across the Festival weekend and highlights from the programme were live streamed with captioning. Their [Access Statement](#) included information electric and manual wheelchairs and scooters hire, plus descriptions of various areas of the site to inform getting around. Assistance dogs were welcomed.



Credit: East Suffolk Council

## Summary

**Suffolk's top visitor attractions are striving to make themselves as accessible and inclusive as possible. In terms of infrastructure ramps, accessible toilets and designated parking have been widely introduced, along with wheelchair loan and mobility scooter hire to help visitors get around the site.**

**There are also good examples of working to support those with sensory impairments through the introduction of audio described tours and braille guides along with a range of hearing loops, audio and visual interactives, large print transcripts and adjustments such as special 'quiet' or 'relaxed' visiting times and performances. Furthermore, several attractions actively promote free entry for carers and welcome assistance dogs.**



4

# Public Realm



**Across the county, local authorities working with partners develop improvement plans for infrastructure and regeneration schemes across our key towns, and all will be delivering improvements to accessibility in line with regulations and guidance.**

Town fund programmes for example in Lowestoft and Ipswich present the opportunity to improve accessibility as part of local regeneration investment. As part of our ambition to become an exemplar destination we need to maintain and encourage good practice and further emphasis to integrate initiatives that enable residents and visitors with impaired mobility or sensory impairments to interact with their local towns to ensure welcoming and accessible streetscapes.

## Examples of development and regeneration of destinations

It goes without saying that development plans led by local authorities will be DDA compliant and subject to an Equality Impact Assessment. However, this section has identified aspects of how local authority public realm regeneration plans will support an accessible visitor economy and highlights where they are going the extra mile to embrace accessibility as part of the visitor economy.

Lowestoft Board Walk has greatly improved accessibility to the south beach for both wheelchair users and pushchair users. The provision has resulted from work and consultation conducted by the Lowestoft Disability Forum, who have campaigned for improved access and this type of provision.

A number of relevant developments merit highlighting in Felixstowe. An [Accessibility Guide](#) was created in 2020 to highlight how accessible the town is as a resort including information on toilet facilities, car parking and accessible attractions. A new £1.5million café opened in Felixstowe in May 2022 in the town's seafront area. The Kitchen @ Felixstowe is a fully accessible facility that has recently been shortlisted for an [LABC Award](#) for best non-residential new build.

As part of continued wider redevelopment of Felixstowe there are plans to create a beach village close to the promenade that will incorporate 5 accessible pods for hire to people, and includes an electric wheelchair



Credit: East Suffolk Council



charging point plus a Changing Places facility in a new build toilet block. A feasibility study on the Martello Tower is also underway with the intention to make this far more accessible as part of the visitor destination vision. Furthermore, wi-fi was recently launched across the town centre and seafront area of the resort supporting consumer information and enabling better data regarding visitors to the town.

Ipswich Borough Council has appointed an access consultant to assist in matters associated with the detailed design of redevelopments in Arras Square, which is located between the Buttermarket Centre and St Stephen's Church in Ipswich town centre. The Church is currently being redeveloped as a town centre live music and cultural venue.

Plans are also in place for the Ipswich landmark R&W Paul silo to be redeveloped to include leisure uses that will offer people spectacular views across the Waterfront. Currently research and analysis is being undertaken around accessibility.

To help ensure that celebratory events are accessible, Blue Badge Holders are able to drive through Ipswich town centre on four evenings in the run up to Christmas to enjoy the lights.

## Streetscapes

Streetscapes in terms of all the shared space that you walk, wheel, push, drive or cycle in, are subject to significant changes that impact accessibility including: widened pavements, low traffic zones, street furniture, bollards and the introduction of e-scooters.

Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, which aim to increase space for safe active travel are an example of the potential for variable impact and can be controversial in terms of the impact on less mobile people.

Indeed, Euan's Guide Access Survey<sup>22</sup> highlighted the concerns regarding changes to the physical environment as a result of lockdown measures. These have been widespread, with pavements being used for outside dining and parking spaces being recommissioned to increase capacity of stores and restaurants. All these changes have occurred for obvious reasons, but they have had a huge impact on how those with impaired mobility or visual impairments interact with their local towns and cities.

## Changing Places Toilets

Nationally it is estimated that over 250,000 severely disabled people do not have access to public toilet facilities that meet their needs. Changing Places Toilets (CPTs), unlike standard accessible toilets, have an adult changing bench and hoist facilities as well as extra space for carers. There are around 1,300 registered CPTs in England

<sup>22</sup> [Euan's Guide Access Survey](#), UK wide 2021

but demand for provision is outstripping supply and the number needs to increase to improve access for severely disabled people and their carers.

New building regulations guidance came into force in January 2021 to make Changing Places a requirement in all new public buildings, including zoos and theme parks with a capacity of over 2000 people. Later that year the government invited unitary and district local authorities to submit expressions of interest for funding from the £30 million Changing Places Fund to increase the provision of Changing Places Toilets in public buildings.

#### **This will result in 9 new CPTs within Suffolk**

- **Babergh District Council secured £90,000 for 2 CPTs to be located at Flatford Mill and Belle Vue Park, Sudbury**
- **East Suffolk Council secured £110,000 for 3 CPTs; facilities are now located at the East Point Pavilion on Lowestoft Seafront, Waveney Valley Leisure Centre in Bungay and Leiston Leisure centre. In addition, ESC submitted a bid for Elmhurst Park in Woodbridge partnering with the Town Council and with the Broads Authority for Lowestoft Railway Station.**
- **Ipswich Borough Council secured £146,000 for 2 CPTs to be located in Christchurch Park and Orwell Country Park.**
- **Mid Suffolk District Council secured £100,000 for 2 CPTs to be located at The Food Museum Stowmarket, and Stradbroke Leisure Centre**

These facilities will not only benefit residents, but also make the host towns more appealing as a visiting proposition for those that need CPTs and their families. Given that people planning a day out or short break will factor the availability of a CPT into their decision as to where to visit using the Changing Places website or app<sup>23</sup>, the economic benefit of a destination or facility installing or housing a CPT facility could be considerable.

There are already a number of existing CPTs located in supermarkets and leisure centres, plus others dotted around Suffolk at a country park, library and shopping mall. However, a co-ordinated, structured approach to their location and installation in significant visitor economy locations, in all major towns and along key visitor routes in Suffolk would be beneficial.

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.changingplacesmap.org> allows users to search for the nearest facility or by town/postcode before they travel.

A further round of the Changing Places Fund has been promoted however across Suffolk local authorities only East Suffolk Council has been invited to submit an expression of interest based on the government's assessment on the CPT index of need.

## Welcoming town centres

According to the Alzheimer's Society over 850,000 people are living with dementia in the UK, this will increase to over 1 million by 2025. The older people become the more likely they are to develop dementia and tourism businesses are becoming more dependent on older consumers. The number of domestic holidays taken by the over 55 age group continues to increase, with a 43% uplift between 2006 and 2018. People with dementia may prefer to visit 'out of season', as places are likely to be less busy and staff may be able to give them more time and attention. This has clear benefits for tourism helping to extend the peak visitor season. [Alzheimer's Society's website](#) provides dementia-friendly signs that make it easier for people living with dementia to navigate spaces that can be purchased or downloaded for free.

The Dementia Friendly Communities programme<sup>24</sup> aims to create communities that make daily living and activities easier and more accessible to people living with dementia. Suffolk is striving to be as dementia-friendly as possible by encouraging businesses and organisations to welcome and provide for those with dementia.

Ipswich, Newmarket, Bury St Edmunds, Debenham, Hadleigh and Stowmarket are exceptional examples of dementia friendly communities with flourishing initiatives such as memory cafés and dementia-friendly eateries, dementia-friendly entertainment, exercise and other activities and businesses that have signed up to providing a safe and accessible shopping experience for those with mobility limitations and dementia.

**As part of a drive to build the brand of Suffolk as a welcoming, inclusive and accessible destination, there is an opportunity to bring these local initiatives to the fore in the overall approach to promoting the county.**

When visiting a new destination it is important for those with additional needs to be able to plan their route around; important elements are likely to be the locations of dropped kerbs within the area and locations of Blue Badge parking spaces. Visit Brighton has created an [Accessible City Centre Walking Map](#), which details locations of dropped kerbs within the city centre area and also a [Blue Badge Parking Bay Map](#), which indicates streets in the city that have Blue Badge parking spaces.

## Summary

**In driving Suffolk further as an exemplar accessible destination we need to build on the good practice and developments planned across our towns and high streets adding value to place-making and public realm improvements to ensure welcoming and accessible streetscapes.**

**We need to recognise the physical restraints of Suffolk's historic market towns and space for new infrastructure but integrating thinking around accessibility for the visitor economy into local authority master planning is essential.**

**We know that appropriate toilet provision, such as CPTs, are an important aspect of planning an accessible visit, and building on CPT provision as part of local strategic master planning is encouraged.**

**Supporting navigation in town centres is a key area for visitors with additional needs and is an area that could benefit from greater profile across Suffolk's visitor economy.**

**Suffolk has already developed a number of dementia friendly towns and community schemes, which can be positively developed and promoted, noting opportunities for the sector's engagement through Dementia Action Week.**



A close-up, low-angle shot of a person in a wheelchair on a ramp. The person's hand is on the handrail, and their legs are visible in dark clothing. The wheelchair is a light-colored metal frame with a large rear wheel and a smaller front wheel. The ramp has a textured surface and an orange safety line. The background shows a white door and a wall.

**5**

# Transport



The Government's Inclusive Transport Strategy<sup>25</sup> states an ambition that disabled people have the same access to transport as everyone else, and be able to travel confidently, easily and without extra cost.

The Government has recently joined with disability charity Scope to develop a new Disabled Persons Passenger Charter<sup>26</sup> for bus, coach, taxi, private hire vehicle and rail. The charter seeks to improve journeys for disabled people by helping ensure they can travel easily and more confidently. It brings together a host of information for disabled passengers travelling across England and advice for passengers on what to do when things do not go as expected. The charter follows the unveiling of the Government's National Disability Strategy with a range of initiatives to improve journeys for disabled people including:

- an accessibility audit of all rail stations
- clearer audible and visual announcements on buses
- introducing legislation for taxis and private hire vehicles

There are a number of potentially relevant aims in the Suffolk Local Transport Plan 2011-2031<sup>27</sup> such as improving the physical accessibility of the transport system, improving information about travel options, improving access to services for those without access to cars. However, the extent to which this will benefit disabled people is undeveloped at this stage and will need to be reflected within the new LTP process.

Suffolk's Bus Service Improvement Plan<sup>28</sup> (BSIP) does not specifically focus on accessible transport needs but does focus on passenger numbers, reliability, and satisfaction. Included in the BSIP are proposals to integrate contactless services and bus rail ticketing, as well as increasing demand responsive transport services across Suffolk building on the e bus Katch service. Funding for development is challenging but where appropriate could be considered and aligned to accessible tourism opportunities.

<sup>25</sup> [The Inclusive Transport Strategy: achieving equal access for disabled people](#) July 2018

<sup>26</sup> [Disabled Persons Passenger Charter](#), January 2022

<sup>27</sup> [Suffolk Local Transport Plan 2011-2031](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Suffolk+Bus+Service+Improvement+Plan.pdf \(suffolkonboard.com\)](#)

# Trains and Stations

The Office of Rail and Road commissioned the Research Institute for Disabled Consumers (RiDC) to carry out a mystery shopping audit by disabled passengers on their experience of travelling from staffed and unstaffed accessible stations<sup>29</sup>. The audits highlighted the need for passengers to feel confident that they will be able to request assistance on arrival at an unstaffed station such as via a HelpPoint.

RiDC also conducted an accessibility review of train operating companies' websites<sup>30</sup> and highlighted this feedback from a panel member with cognitive impairments on the Greater Anglia site.

**'So professional and the homepage was so easy to navigate, not overcrowded and both clear and concise headings in correct colours and size, which made it so much easier as a disabled passenger.'**

Greater Anglia trains have also improved a great deal in recent years in terms of physical accessibility, designed with expert advice from disability professionals, including people with disabilities. Each train has an accessible toilet next to the spacious accessible seating area. New trains have lower floor heights for level or near-level boarding at all stations and are equipped with an extendable step which will automatically deploy when the doors open to help reduce or eliminate the gap between the train and the platform edge.

Free car parking is available to Blue Badge holders at all Greater Anglia car parks. Portable boarding ramps are available at all staffed stations and at unstaffed stations, assistance and a ramp can be provided by [pre-booking](#). Ticket vending machines have a special assistance option which links to the call centre in Norwich. They also provide free-of-charge assistance with luggage within their stations and to and from the train for disabled customers when the service has been pre-booked.

In terms of information and assistance Greater Anglia commissioned a team of trainers to deliver awareness sessions to ensure its 2,500 strong workforce was able to help improve the journeys of people with accessibility needs ahead of new rules that came in in 2021 requiring all train operators to undertake such training.

Recent rail infrastructure improvements include Needham Market station, which received an upgrade to improve access to the Ipswich-bound platform 2 after a long campaign locally. And at Bury St Edmunds, a new accessible entrance links the newly-built car park with the station concourse.

29 [Accessible Travel Policy Implementation](#) - Review of unbooked assistance and Help Points, July 22 Office of Rail and Road

30 [Accessibility review of train operating companies' websites](#) - Summary report by the Research Institute for Disabled Consumers, July 22, Office of Rail and Road

The [East Suffolk Lines Community Rail Partnership](#) is an example of how by bringing together representatives of the local transport authority, local planning authorities, train operating company, infrastructure operator and a wide range of local community groups can help to drive through improvements in terms of accessible travel and all stations now have step-free access to all platforms.



From Wickham Market visitors can use Katch, an on-demand shared taxi-bus service connecting the rail station to the popular visitor destinations of Framlingham, and Snape. However, there is no information on the website regarding accessibility.

The whole customer journey would also involve consideration as to how somebody with a physical, learning, sensory disability or impairment would be able to get from a station to their destination by bus or taxi.

## Walking and Cycling

Disabled people are twice as likely as non-disabled people to be physically inactive and tend to be more reliant for day-to-day travel on driving or being driven.

However, Suffolk is renowned for its relatively flat terrain, quiet country roads and prides itself on offering cycling for all abilities. Cycling tourism is growing as a visitor experience and Suffolk has an opportunity to develop this market, and to impact positively on developing accessible cycling tourism for all.

Inaccessible cycle infrastructure is the biggest difficulty faced by disabled cyclists. Routes that are suitable for handcycles, recumbents and trikes, which are typically longer and wider than standard two-wheeled bicycles, can get overlooked or may not have been considered if the infrastructure is older. For example this might create barriers such as gates onto bridleways that aren't wide enough, cycle parking where the stands are too close together, or older cycle paths that simply aren't wide enough for non-standard bikes. The new [LTN-1/20 design standards](#) take into account accessibility and will be required in developing schemes within Local Cycling and Walking Improvement Plans.



Credit: CyclingUK

**Wheels for Wellbeing is a national charity that supports disabled people to access and enjoy cycling. As part of its [Infrastructure for All](#) campaign, it has highlighted the most significant barriers to cycling for disabled cyclists, including inaccessible cycling infrastructure and inadequate facilities to secure adapted cycles.**

**It recommends that authorities looking to install or upgrade cycling infrastructure follow [CD195 guidance](#) on designing for cycle traffic from Highways England, or the [London Cycling Design Standards](#) inclusive cycle concept.**

Sustrans has published a dedicated map of the National Cycle Network and cycle tracks in Suffolk, which features 5 day rides highlighting, alongside the routes, local history and places of interest to visit.



Given that Sustrans<sup>31</sup> has estimated that £1.64 billion was spent in local businesses by leisure and tourist users on the National Cycle Network alone, to maximise the potential associated with disabled cyclists, local authorities looking to install or upgrade cycling infrastructure should make provision for inclusive cycling, along with adequate facilities to secure adapted cycles.

Wayfinding also needs to be fully accessible. This is not an issue for new wayfinding provision, but some of the older signage is not up to standards in terms of being visible enough or readable enough (from a reasonable distance) for those with visual impairments. For example, some of the markers for the national cycle routes are really very small, and any cyclist with less than perfect vision could easily miss them these.

**The ‘Quiet Lanes Suffolk’<sup>32</sup> project identifies and designates suitable single-track roads where visitors and locals can enjoy the natural surroundings and safely use them for activities such as cycling, horse-riding, jogging and walking.**

**The signage used is a good example of clear signage - it’s large, bold and uses images.**

Users of mobility vehicles have the same rights of access that walkers do. Man-made structures along walking routes should not be a barrier to access for those in mobility vehicles. New structures should allow convenient access to mobility vehicle riders as standard, and should comply with British Standard BS5709: 2018 Gaps Gates and Stiles, which places the emphasis on Least Restrictive Access. When it is impossible



31 [About the National Cycle Network](#)

32 Quiet Lanes Suffolk - [www.quietlanessuffolk.co.uk](http://www.quietlanessuffolk.co.uk)

to avoid man-made structures, which are a barrier to mobility vehicles, wherever feasible a nearby alternative should be provided. For example, a slope adjacent to steps or a signed short diversion.

The [Disabled Ramblers](#) lists two suitable routes in Suffolk; a 9.3km ramble for people on mobility scooters in Brandon Country Park plus a 13.3km ramble from Southwold to Walberswick Marsh with accessible toilets at the starting point car park near the [Alfred Corry Lifeboat Museum](#), which also now has improved access with a stair lift enabling those with mobility impairments to see the exhibition area and a view into the interior of the boat.

**Discover Suffolk<sup>33</sup> has developed 18 Easy Access Trails which aim to help everyone get close to nature in Suffolk's countryside. An [information sheet](#) has been compiled for each of the locations providing an overview of the facilities at the site and description of the trail. Many have accessible toilet facilities, some have Blue Badge parking areas and couple of the locations also have electric mobility buggies that can be booked in advance and braille maps. Furthermore, the Mobile App has audio guides for all the walks featured.**

It is worth noting that the initiative was delivered with support from the Access Group for Suffolk who helped to design the guide and tested each trail.

Whilst the information for the Easy Access Trails uses symbols to indicate its suitability for a range of visitor needs, they may not convey the level of detail that is required by some visitors and has been adopted by AccessAble.

The 2022 Suffolk Walking Festival generated £117,490 in economic benefit and just under half of the participants visited solely for the event, travelling on average 21 miles<sup>34</sup>. As part of the evaluation of this annual programme, data is collected on ethnicity, but not on disability or health conditions, so it is not possible to establish the level of participation of this group in the Walking Festival nor draw on any feedback of their experience.

**As part of the evaluation of all major events and activity programmes, it is recommended that data be collected from participants to establish whether they have any disability or health conditions and also invite their feedback on the experience. This will help to establish a baseline and drive improvements in terms of provision for future.**

<sup>33</sup> Discover Suffolk - [www.discoversuffolk.org.uk](http://www.discoversuffolk.org.uk)

<sup>34</sup> [Suffolk Walking Festival - Over 70 walks. 14th – 29th May 2022](#)

## Summary

**Consideration needs to be given as to how accessible Suffolk is as a destination and what travel planning information supports the whole customer journey for somebody with a physical, learning, sensory disability or impairment.**

**In terms of public transport strategic links with the BSIP partnership and integrated visitor services with Greater Anglia and their accessible service plans will be important.**

**Suffolk should seek to maximise the potential associated with inclusive cycling and tourism and upgrade cycling infrastructure where resources allow.**

**Wayfinding also needs to be fully accessible and a focus on replacing older signage to appropriate standards is important alongside the potential for accessible digital information support.**

# Summary of recommendations

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## **This report marks the beginning a collaborative journey towards improved accessibility and inclusion that will enable further growth of the Suffolk visitor economy.**

The Purple Pound value in Suffolk is estimated to be worth £303 million per year to our local economy, and with a significant potential latent value to grow, this serves to illustrate that accessible and inclusive tourism is not a niche market.

To fully capitalise on this opportunity to grow the accessible visitor economy in Suffolk, action will need to be taken across all elements of the customer journey, with consideration given to each part of the tourism value chain by providing relevant accurate information, high quality person-centred service, improving the infrastructure and facilities and having an accessible public realm, including travel to and whilst moving around the destination.

This will require a strategic public private partnership approach within the sector including key organisations Suffolk Growth, Local Authorities, Visit East of England, Suffolk Destination Management Organisations and the Business Improvement Districts and individual businesses.

Recommendations to take this approach forward are set out below.

## **Strategic engagement**

- 1** Suffolk Visitor Economy Strategic Group (SVESG) are recommended as strategic sponsors for the development of action planning from this report, advocacy for the accessibility and inclusion programme, and monitoring and review of progress.
- 2** SVESG will champion the strategic connectiveness of the programme, working to embed visitor economy accessibility and inclusion within local authority plans for place-making, transport, digital services, skills and community development.
- 3** Suffolk's visitor economy accessibility and inclusion programme should be developed through sector wide engagement, led by SVESG and key stakeholders, promoting the value of the Purple Pound to Suffolk, and the key messages and opportunities to enable growth of domestic overnight and day visitor markets.
- 4** SVESG will engage nationally with Visit England and locally with Visit East of England, local authorities, and Suffolk International trade advisors to develop plans for inspiring the growth of international visitors with accessible needs to Suffolk.

- 5** SVESG will develop ongoing strategic advisory links and engagement for the sector with disability forums and user-led groups in developing the visitor economy accessibility and inclusion programme and encourage partnership links with [Tourism for All](#) to both demonstrate commitment and draw on support available.

## Developing information and promotion

- 6** SVESG with key stakeholders will develop a communications plan to present consistent messages for cascade through networks to visitor economy businesses in Suffolk regarding the value and benefits of accessible tourism.

- 7** For businesses there is an opportunity to raise awareness and profile of resources and schemes that will help to support good practice and develop the accessible and inclusive visitor economy in Suffolk. For example, this will include encouraging businesses to

- sign up to the Disability Confident Scheme, which supports employers to make the most of the talents disabled people can bring to the workplace.
- list themselves with Euan's Guide and Access Able, which will both help disabled people find great places to visit and stay and help enhance the profile of Suffolk as a welcoming accessible and inclusive destination
- utilise VisitEngland support, guidance and toolkits, including development of accessibility guides.
- explore with local innovation hubs the potential for technology and innovation to support digital inclusion and accessible tourism.

- 8** Local authorities are asked to

- consider within their commissioning of visitor economy campaigns and marketing services with Visit East of England (Visit Suffolk) the prioritisation of accessibility and inclusion information and the development of an Accessible Visit Suffolk information hub.
- work with DMO partners to enable greater development of accessible guides and itineraries within Suffolk's visitor economy including working with Access Able.

- 9** Suffolk DMOs are asked to

- consider developing comprehensive 'Access for All' website sections, to highlight their accessible destinations and business members and consider how to promote an improved offer of accessibility through the creation of guides.

- review the VisitEngland Accessible Tourism Toolkit (currently under review) and take action to develop and promote accessible tourism itineraries. This will help ensure they are strongly positioned to secure Visit England LVEP accreditation potential under the new scheme.

**10**

Suffolk has already developed a number of dementia friendly towns and community schemes. There is an opportunity for all sector partners to develop this connection as part of the accessible visitor economy and for the sector's engagement for example through Dementia Action Week.

## Customer service skills and training

**11**

The Visit East of England skills group should embed an accessibility and inclusion skills workstream within planned development for an East of England Visitor Economy Skills Academy.

**12**

The VENI partnership including Suffolk Colleges and training providers should review current accessibility and inclusive service training for the sector and the potential for development of programmes within VENI or VENI legacy schemes. By focusing on meeting the individual needs and requirements of those with disabilities and health impairments, this will improve customer service and the visitor experience for everyone.

## Public Realm and transport

**13**

Local authorities with local partners should consider the commissioning of destination accessibility audit programmes for specific towns or areas that focuses on the experiences of disabled people from arrival through to departure.

**14**

Local authorities and DMOs should review and simplify information supporting accessible navigation in town centres. This is a key area for visitors with additional needs and is an area that could benefit from greater profile across Suffolk's visitor economy.

**15**

Local authorities reviewing wayfinding and accessibility should include a focus on replacing older signage to appropriate standards alongside the potential for accessible digital information support.

**16**

Suffolk's local authorities should consider a co-ordinated overview and structured approach to the location and installation of CPTs in significant visitor destinations or locations, including major towns and along key visitor routes in Suffolk.

- 17** Suffolk Growth will liaise with Transport East regarding the importance of accessible transport serving the visitor economy and work with Suffolk Highways and Transport teams to develop support of visitor economy accessibility and inclusion within the development of the LTP and in terms of the Bus Services Improvement Plan and integrated services with the rail network.
- 18** Suffolk should seek to maximise the potential associated with inclusive cycling tourism, upgrading cycling infrastructure for inclusive cycling, where resources allow. Local authorities currently looking to install or upgrade cycling infrastructure should make provision for inclusive cycling, along with adequate facilities to secure adapted cycles in order to maximise the potential for leisure and tourism.

## Research and evaluation

- 19** To drive improvements in terms of future provision, Suffolk Growth will work with the sector to develop research and evaluation of the impacts of the Suffolk visitor economy accessibility and inclusion programme and develop with partners frameworks for local data collection. This will include feedback from consumers with disability or health conditions and explore any barriers to access.



# Appendix 1: Baseline Data for Accessibility and Inclusion

This section provides a summary of the available data for accessibility and inclusion drawing on national, regional and local evidence of relevance to Suffolk's visitor economy.

## Disabled people's access to products and services

Drawing on indicators from the Opinions and Lifestyle Survey<sup>35</sup> on disabled people's experiences of accessing products and services in person in Great Britain, physical access was reported as a barrier by 12.5% of disabled adults who said they found it difficult to move around buildings.

Physical design of spaces can undermine disabled people's access in different ways including both access to buildings, and accessibility of facilities and layouts once inside. Barriers in relation to physical design were particularly reported by those who are neurodiverse, or with impairments affecting mobility and stamina, breathing or fatigue.

During follow up in-depth interviews<sup>36</sup>, some participants also explained that they need to do additional planning to be able to access activities, products, and services in person.

Not having enough places to rest when accessing services was also an issue with 15.3% of disabled adults reporting this in the survey. Interviews with disabled adults shed more light on why rest spaces were important for alleviating tiredness and overstimulation.

Accessing toilets was a further barrier, with more disabled adults reporting difficulties in the survey (13.1%) than non-disabled adults (2.2%). Toilets were mentioned by many disabled people, with the lack of available or sufficient toilets for customer use particularly affecting those with bladder or bowel issues.

Interviews revealed the practical and emotional issues faced by disabled people in having to go through 'gatekeepers' to gain access to toilets, which undermined independence and created an unwanted sense of being treated differently.

35 [Disabled people's access to products and services](#), ONS February to March 2022

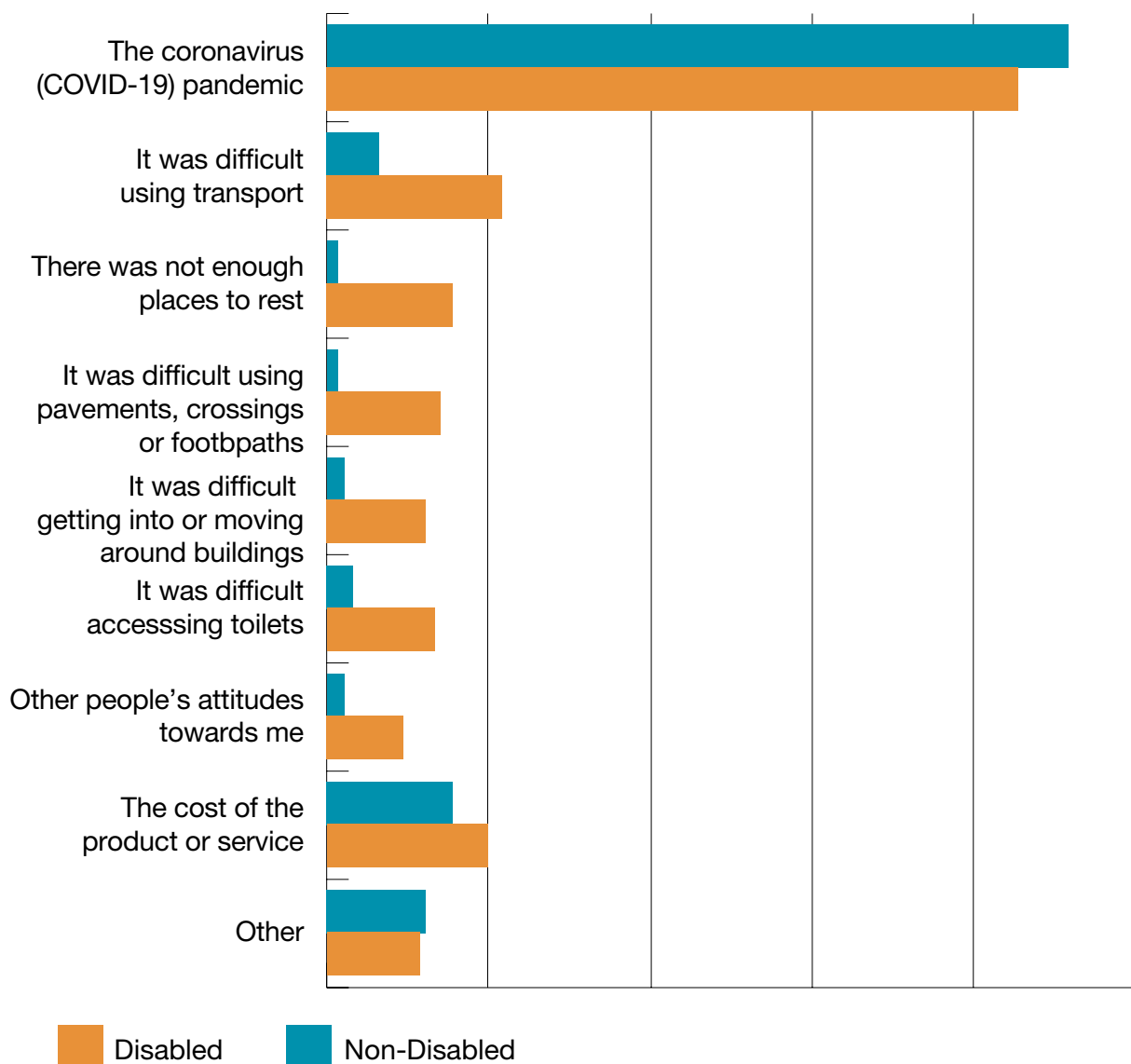
36 [Disabled people's experiences with activities, goods and services](#), ONS February to March 2022



Participants also highlighted the importance of website accessibility, providing examples of where websites had and had not met their needs. Some participants with learning, understanding or concentration impairments also highlighted a priority for accessible and digestible information such as easy read and video formats. Others described difficulties with functional aspects of websites such as a lack of screen-reader accessibility, or colour blind settings.

Difficulty using transport was the barrier with the largest difference between disabled (22.9%) and non-disabled people (6.1%).

**Percentage of disabled and non-disabled adults aged 16 years and over who experienced different types of barriers to accessing products and services in the last 12 months, Great Britain, 16 February to 27 March 2022.**



## Euan's Guide Access Survey

The Euan's Guide Access Survey<sup>37</sup> is the longest running survey of its kind in the UK. Each year they ask disabled people what's good and not so good about disabled access at the places they visit.

In 2021 over 2400 disabled people, families, friends and carers shared their opinions on disabled access. The findings are set against a backdrop of emerging from the pandemic and 59% of those disabled people surveyed believe that Covid has made disabled access worse.

Information remains key and 92% of respondents stated that they try to find disabled access information before visiting somewhere new, with 56% avoiding visiting a venue if it has not shared disabled access information.

73% of respondents reported that they have found information on a venue's website to be misleading, confusing or inaccurate and this was echoed by 73% of respondents who had experienced a disappointing trip or had to change plans due to poor accessibility.

Accessible parking and accessible toilets remain a top priority for disabled visitors with 81% and 80% of respondents respectively reporting that they would help improve confidence when visiting new places.

Alongside finding relevant access information, another top influencing factor was feeling welcomed by staff, or feeling the venue cares about accessibility (67%) This highlights the importance of providing relevant training.

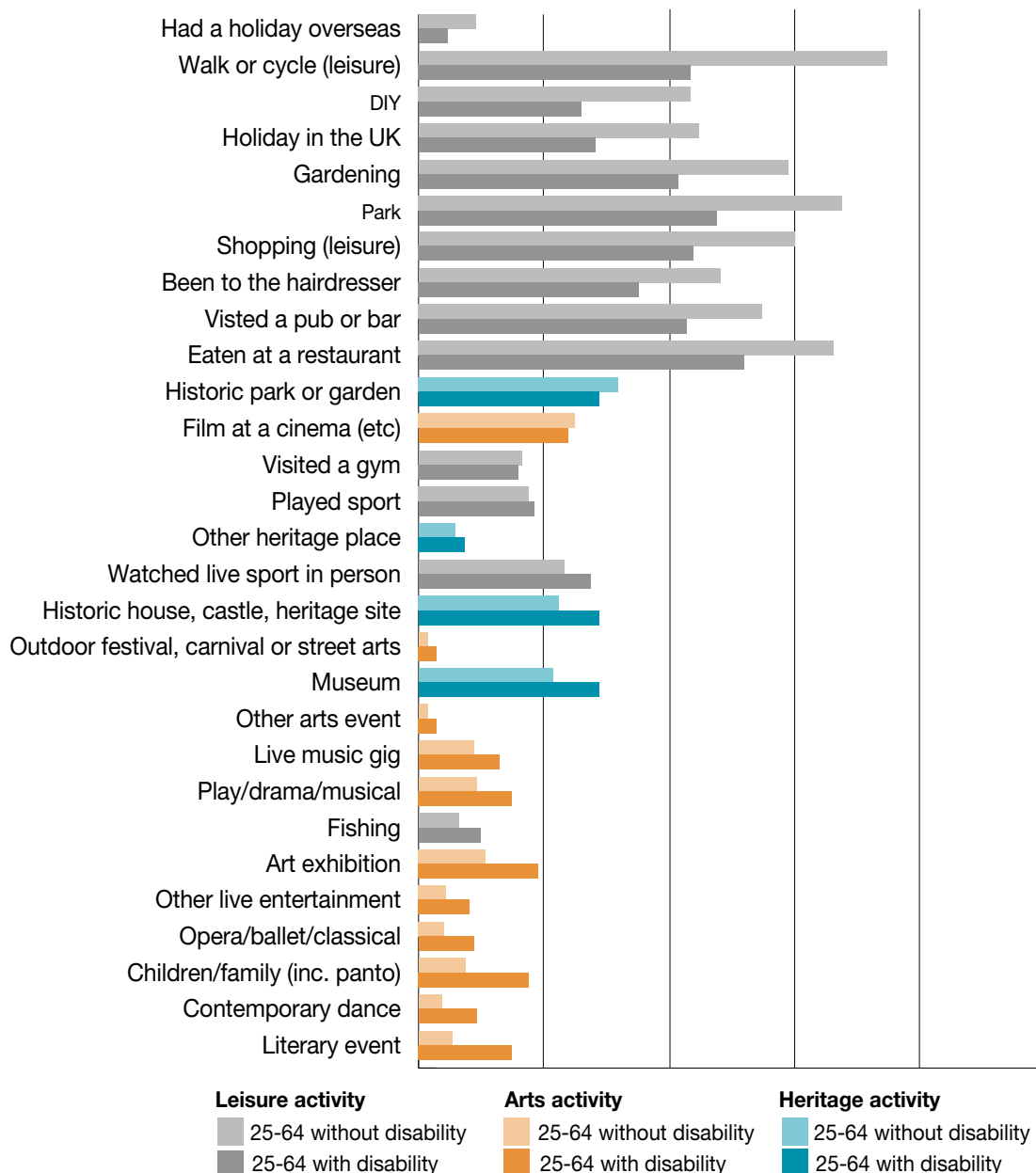
In terms of getting out and about again, there is a pervasive reluctance to participate in indoor activities post lockdown; with 57% less likely to attend entertainment venues like theatres and cinemas, 61% less likely to attend predominantly indoor or covered attractions, and 38% less likely to use overnight accommodation. However, on an encouraging note, 55% are more likely to go to outdoor areas such as beaches, parks and trails. A further positive is that 56% of people said they would be more likely than normal to visit restaurants, cafes and bars.

# Access Feedback from Cultural Participation Monitor

The tables below are drawn from the Audience Agency reports on the Cultural Participation Monitor, which is a nationwide longitudinal panel survey of changing views about participating in creative and cultural activities through the pandemic and beyond.

The graph below published in September 2021 shows the narrow differences between those with and without a disability, indicating the extent to which the respondent was likely to have engaged in a particular activity. The findings indicate the opportunity for destinations to build on the propensity amongst those with a disability to participate in cultural and heritage offerings.

**Disabled people were more likely to have attended arts and heritage, less likely to have done other leisure activities.**

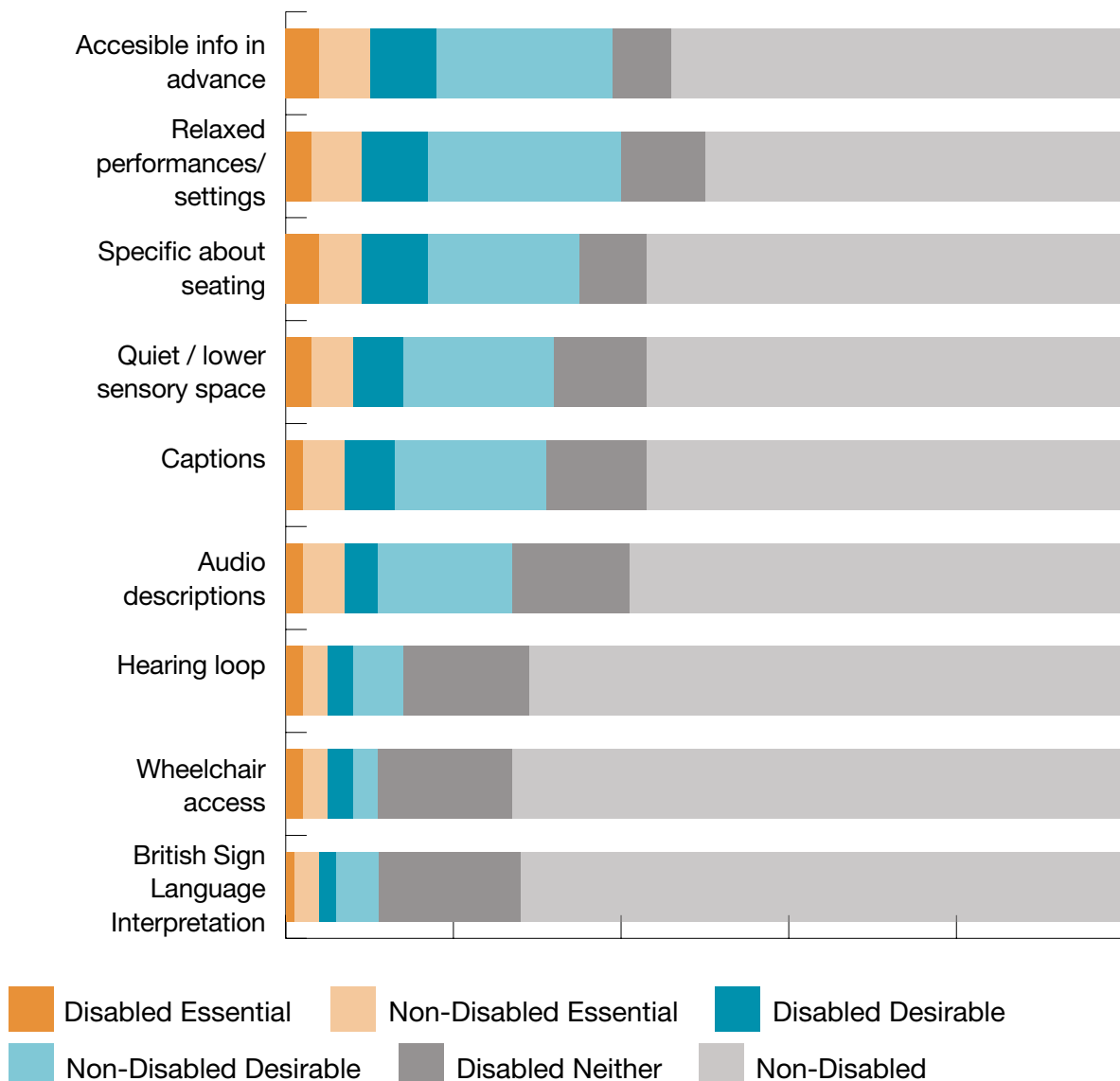


Furthermore, feedback from interrogation of access measures within cultural venues illustrates that there is widespread endorsement of the need or desirability of various access measures among disabled people.

Notably, however, their benefit also extends to substantial numbers of those who don't consider themselves disabled or affected by a long-term health condition. The following chart summarises the proportions of all respondents who consider each accessibility measure listed either essential (dark/light pink), desirable (dark/light blue) or neither (dark/light grey) for their attendance, with the intensity of colour differentiating between those who are disabled (darker) and non-disabled (lighter).

## Considerable Proportions of the Population Value Accessibility Measures

Figures show percentage of the whole population by category/rating



Thus, although these measures are most important for disabled people, their application is even broader, with most being at least ‘desired’ by more than a third of the population.

These findings are from Wave Six of the Monitor, with fieldwork taking place online from 14 March 2022 to 24 March 2022.

## Visit East of England Online Business Survey

The Visit East of England’s Tourism Business Survey<sup>38</sup> of August 2022 was designed to gauge what work is required to build back the region’s vital visitor economy. It also reported on accessibility and what measures are being taken to provide access for all.

The results are based on based on a sample of 267 responses to an online survey with businesses in the region, 42% (112) of which were from businesses located in Suffolk.

### Key findings:

- 57% have an Accessibility for All policy
- 60% have disabled parking available at the property
- 56% have step-free access available to the property
- 16% of those who have a lift could accommodate a wheelchair user
- 49% have an accessible toilet in communal areas
- 37% have additional ‘accessible for all’ facilities at the property
- 54% have accessible rooms available on the ground floor and there are an average of 2 accessible rooms available on the ground floor.

Building constraints (e.g. listed building restrictions) and the cost of implementing some of the necessary changes were given as the key reasons preventing businesses from becoming more accessible.

An earlier survey in January 2022 also cited that “implementing some of the accessibility measures would involve a financial outlay that businesses are not able to absorb, particularly when many are still recovering from the financial impact of the pandemic”.



## Qualitative Business Survey – Accessible Tourism

A telephone survey of 40 businesses within the visitor economy was undertaken by Destination Research on behalf of Suffolk Growth during August 2022. This engaged a representative sample of the various types of Suffolk businesses within the visitor economy covering aspects of training, staffing, promotion, financial implications as well as accessibility provision within the business and the surrounding local environment.

The business survey was designed to provide a review of accessibility within the visitor economy, measuring levels of accessible tourism – that is, tourism which is accessible for person with limited mobility but also for individuals with sensory disabilities, learning disabilities, chronic diseases or other health impairments.

Efforts were also made to ensure there was a geographic spread across the county with feedback from coastal, urban and rural businesses. As the graph below illustrates, retail and serviced accommodation were the largest two groups of respondents followed by leisure, restaurants and visitor attraction groups.

### Key findings:

It was estimated by respondents that they recognised 8% percent of visitors/customers to have a disability or impairment.

Respondents were asked about any adaptations they have made to improve accessibility. The majority of changes that have been made to date were cited as step free access (65%), grab rails in the bathroom (58%). ‘Other’ adaptations were reported by a further 58% - these included: large doors, grab rails (away from bathrooms), disabled toilets and staff with sign language skills.

Facilities for assistance dogs and emergency pull cords were next most popular (40% each). Less adjustments appear to have been made that would benefit those with age related impairments such as large print menus and hearing loops.

A little over half (53%) have noticed a benefit to their business as a result of the accessibility provision against (43%) who had not. (For example, this could be anything from providing disabled parking, ramped access and an accessible toilet in a communal area, down to providing a magnifying glass at reception or information in large print or providing armed chairs for people with mobility challenges and welcoming assistance dogs).

You can view the report here [Document library | Suffolk Growth](#)

# Consumer Focus – Accessibility Survey

Suffolk Growth commissioned a consumer focus survey using the Omnibus survey as a method during August 2022 drawing on a sample of 2000 responses.

The questions were designed to better understand the reasons why some people with health conditions and impairments are not taking holidays. The results compare general population, population without impairments and the population with a health condition or impairment.

In particular, the survey measured the number of British adults with an impairment that did not take a domestic trip to Suffolk in the last 12 months due to the lack of accessibility provision and the potential income that could be generated if each person with an impairment took a domestic holiday.

## Key findings:

The results indicated that 24% of respondents have a health impairment with the most common being a long term illness (55%), followed by a mental health condition (45%). Those indicating that they had a health conditions had an older profile, with more than two in five (44%) stating that they were aged 55 and over.

However, it is important to note the potential that this segment of the visitor market offers in terms of growth potential, as three in five (58%) of those with an impairment confirmed that they had taken a holiday in the last 12 months. Furthermore, UK holidays accounted for 46% of all holidays taken by respondents with an impairment, in comparison to just 15% who indicated that they had travelled abroad.

Potential exists to grow this market yet more, as 9% of those who did not take a trip in the last 12 months cited an accessibility concern as a reason they had not taken a domestic trip; this included lack of accommodation that suited their needs, lack of transport that suited their needs, concern about how they would be treated by staff, lack of accessibility information on places to stay and visit, lack of attractions suited to their needs.

You can view the report here [Document library | Suffolk Growth](#)

## Appendix 2: Performance Metrics for Measuring Growth & Performance

Drawing on the findings from the Tourism Business Telephone Survey as a baseline, the following draft metrics are proposed for measuring growth in terms of accessibility within the sector.

Visitor volume and value (segmented for disability and health impairment data)

Number of businesses with Accessibility Guides

Number of businesses with Access Champions

Number of businesses investing in Accessible Tourism Training

Number of employees or placements within tourism businesses that have a known disability/impairment

Number of visitor economy services audited by an independent group e.g. AccessAble

Number of businesses that have won awards from a local disability group or a national award such as VisitEngland's Inclusive Tourism Award or Blue Badge Access Award

Destination Management Plans highlight access and recognise the value of this market

Number of Changing Places Toilets in Suffolk

Public Transport passenger use

Level of involvement of local groups and user led organisations in developing access within key destinations and the public realm

Number of projects contributing to increased or improved accessibility

Level of inward investment leveraged for accessible tourism initiatives

Increase in visitor research at business and destination level to build local data with improved insights into visitor profile, accessibility requirements, satisfaction with services, length of stay & spend

# Appendix 3:

## Good practice case studies

The **National Trust** has made a commitment to action through the [For everyone, forever strategy to 2025](#) and has been working to improve accessibility to its places for a number of years to ensure that all visitors are able to enjoy their time visiting their properties and locations. The Trust has made improvements to the presentation and content of their accessibility information, as per the examples highlighted in the 'Attractions' section of this report to ensure visitors feel confident about the facilities available when choosing a property to visit. In addition to these improvements, the Trust allows a companion or carer to visit free of charge.

**Debenham** has become one of the UK's foremost rural **Dementia Friendly Communities** and aims to help families in the area who are having to cope with the impact of dementia on their lives. [The Debenham Project](#) includes a range of service and activities offered including:

- Fit Club - seated Exercise Therapy
- Cameo - sessions aimed at encouraging both social and intellectual activity, and giving carers, those with dementia, and other older people opportunities to meet and interact.
- Lunch Clubs - inclusive of all the elderly and their carers, but with a clear remit to support those with dementia, and an emphasis on maintaining social contact in the community.
- Information and Advice - access to extensive and accredited information, and a personal service to guide carers in making contact with support agencies.
- Medication and Pharmacy Support - a personal service providing help to carers in ensuring that those they care for reliably take their medicine.
- Carers' Club and Info Café - afternoon tea and an opportunity to talk through problems. An experienced volunteer dementia support advisor is there each month.

Beach access for people with disabilities has recently been considerably improved with a new boardwalk at **Lowestoft's South Beach**. The boardwalk provides year-round access on to the beach for people with disabilities, particularly wheelchair users, as well as people with pushchairs. Furthermore, there are two specially designed [beach wheelchairs](#) with large pneumatic wheels, which can be used to help people access the sandy beach and shoreline. There is also a Southwold beach wheelchair, which is owned by the town council. The plan is to create a dedicated email contact point for wheelchairs across both Lowestoft and Southwold.

The **Wolverstone Project** on the River Orwell and at Alton Water have a uniquely designed wheelchair-accessible Wheelyboat amongst their fleet, dedicated to providing mobility, learning and sensory impaired people of all ages with an opportunity to get out onto the water. This is the only location for a Wheelyboat in Suffolk, although 220 have been supplied to inshore waters, lochs, lakes, reservoirs, rivers and canals all over the UK. By comparison in Norfolk<sup>39</sup> there are 4 Wheelyboat locations for angling, nature watching and pleasure boating.



Credit: The Wolverstone project

**Battersea Arts Centre** launched themselves in February 2020 as the world's first [Relaxed Venue](#), which takes the principles that guide Relaxed Performances and applies them across all of an organisation's spaces and programmes, encompassing everything from clear, understandable advance information, to taking a relaxed approach to movement and noise coming from the audience.

The **White Horse Hotel** in Dorking made luxury a priority and created [accessible rooms full of attractive features](#) for all guests. The stunning renovation of this historic coaching inn provided the perfect opportunity to prove accessible hotel bedrooms can appeal to all and since then, the subsequent room bookings have shown that the investment has really paid off as they achieved extra revenue of £6900 over 12 months from their accessible rooms.

**Nottingham Racecourse** has a specific [Accessibility Guide](#) and [Sensory Guide](#) for people with invisible illnesses. It is useful for those with dementia, autism, ADHD, social anxiety and general anxiety disorder. There is a quiet room where people can go if they get upset or anxious and there is always a Dementia Friend present who will be understanding and sympathetic. They also promote an afternoon tea session to local dementia groups. This is held at a mid-week race meet for a reduced fee. It is great for the racecourse as it helps to bring in more people at a quieter time. Nottingham Racecourse is part of the [#GoRacingGreen](#) initiative, that racecourses are starting to

39 [Wheelyboat locations list and uses](#)



adopt, which is aimed at people who live with various conditions that make coming to the races difficult for them.

**Bristol City Council and Destination Bristol** asked AccessAble to audit 1,000 venues across Bristol including shops, restaurants, leisure centres, hotels, libraries, parks and cinemas. The audits, which were free of charge to businesses, covered everything from parking to toilets and are relevant to people with mobility and sensory impairments, learning difficulties and people on the autistic spectrum.

Local disabled people gave up their time to attend events, be trained as surveyors and gave suggestions on places to be included. This is the resulting [Accessible Bristol](#) online guide.

**Visit Buckinghamshire** have brought together a comprehensive range of accessible itineraries, guides and information in the [Accessibility Hub website](#).

**Devon County Council**, with support from **SUSTRANS** are now assessing all the routes through the county as part of the National Cycle Network, with the aim of removing gates and barriers and replacing them with a mixture of signs, painted markings and bollards. By doing this, there will be enough space for users of mobility scooters, wheelchairs, buggies and prams, among other mobility aids to pass through the network without issue. The older barriers, many of which are in need of replacement, will be looked at and assessed to determine if they are needed along the route.



# Appendix 4:

## Further Resources

In addition to the documents referenced throughout this review, the resources below provide useful guidance for all those interested in improving accessibility within the visitor economy.

*Accessible & Inclusive Marketing Toolkit for businesses*, VisitEngland

<https://www.visitbritain.org/business-advice/accessible-inclusive-marketing-toolkit>

*Easy does it - Simple, low-cost changes to improve your accessibility*, VisitEngland

[https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/business-hub/resources/easy\\_does\\_it\\_low\\_cost\\_changes\\_to\\_improve\\_your\\_accessibility.pdf](https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/business-hub/resources/easy_does_it_low_cost_changes_to_improve_your_accessibility.pdf)

*Dementia-Friendly Tourism, a practical guide for business*, VisitEngland

[https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/business-hub/resources/dementia\\_friendly\\_guide\\_for\\_tourism\\_businesses\\_0.pdf](https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/business-hub/resources/dementia_friendly_guide_for_tourism_businesses_0.pdf)

*Welcoming autistic people - A guide for tourism venues*, VisitEngland and The National Autistic Society

[https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/business-hub/resources/autism\\_guide\\_for\\_tourism\\_venues\\_2018.pdf](https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/business-hub/resources/autism_guide_for_tourism_venues_2018.pdf)

*Listen Up! Tips and advice to help you welcome customers with hearing loss*,

VisitEngland and Action on Hearing Loss <https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/business-hub/resources/listenup.pdf>

*Speak Up! A guide to marketing accessibility*, VisitEngland [https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/speak\\_up\\_visitengland\\_accessibility\\_guide\\_june\\_2017.pdf](https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/speak_up_visitengland_accessibility_guide_june_2017.pdf)

[https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/speak\\_up\\_visitengland\\_accessibility\\_guide\\_june\\_2017.pdf](https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/speak_up_visitengland_accessibility_guide_june_2017.pdf)

*An Open Welcome, Making pubs more accessible for customers*, British Beer and

Pub Association <http://beerandpub.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/BBPA-An-Open-Welcome-Making-your-pub-accessible-for-customers.pdf>

*A Guide to Inclusive Cycling*, Wheels for Wellbeing [https://wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/FC\\_WfW-Inclusive-Guide\\_FINAL\\_V03.pdf](https://wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/FC_WfW-Inclusive-Guide_FINAL_V03.pdf)

[https://wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/FC\\_WfW-Inclusive-Guide\\_FINAL\\_V03.pdf](https://wheelsforwellbeing.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/FC_WfW-Inclusive-Guide_FINAL_V03.pdf)

VisitEngland's Inclusive Tourism Action Group have compiled a range of short guidance notes with top tips.

- [Top 10 tips on inclusive tourism](#)
- [Top 10 tips on inclusive hotels](#)
- [Top 10 tips on inclusive visitor attractions](#)

*Easy Access to Historic Landscapes and Easy Access to Historic Buildings* guides by Historic England to help property owners and managers provide easier access for all their visitors. <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/easy-access-historic-landscapes/> and <https://historicengland.org.uk/images-books/publications/easy-access-to-historic-buildings/>

*A sense of freedom: the experiences of disabled people in the natural environment* published by Natural England <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/37007>

*By All Reasonable Means Least restrictive access to the outdoors* produced by Sensory Trust on behalf of Natural England <https://www.sensorytrust.org.uk/uploads/documents/ByAllReasonableMeansEnglandAug2020.pdf>

*Destinations for All – a guide to creating accessible destinations*, Visit England [https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/dmo\\_guide\\_final.pdf](https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/dmo_guide_final.pdf)

*Winning More Visitors* - a guide for destination managers on providing Access Information on destination websites [https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/England-documents/winning\\_more\\_visitors.pdf](https://www.visitbritain.org/sites/default/files/vb-corporate/Documents-Library/documents/England-documents/winning_more_visitors.pdf)

**The Heritage Access 2022** report published by Vocal Eyes and partners includes guidance for venue staff on creating and presenting access information online. There is also a Heritage Access 2022 **benchmark tool** aimed at supporting the heritage industry identify best practice across different regions.

Accessible Towns Initiative - Access Able explains an holistic approach to support towns on their accessibility journey to not only support economic recovery but to be more inclusive. [Accessible Towns Initiative - Accept the Challenge \(click to play\)](#)

Purple Tuesday - <https://purpletuesday.co/Get-Involved/Overview>

# Appendix 5:

## Acknowledgements

**This report was researched and developed by Heidi Bellamy on behalf of Suffolk Growth and co-written with Richard Hunt, Strategic Lead for the Visitor Economy.**

Thanks go to the following contributors who have shared information that has helped to shape this report:

Name	Position	Organisation
Karen Chapman	Partnership Manager	Suffolk Growth
Lianne Smith	Project Officer	Suffolk Growth
Ross Calladine	Government-appointed Disability and Access Ambassador	Visit England
Sergi Jarques	Director	Destination Research Ltd
Matt Jones	Economic Development Manager & SCC Access champion	Suffolk County Council
David Falk	Green Access Manager	Suffolk County Council
Chris Pyburn	Head of Digital and Communication	Suffolk County Council
Beccy Coombs	Economic Development Project Manager	Ipswich Borough Council
Katherine Davies	Sustainable Travel Officer	Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils
Zoey Banthorpe	Arts and Culture Lead	Babergh and Mid Suffolk Councils
Bonita-Bluebell Khan	Communications and Engagement Officer	Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils
Darren Newman	Economic Regeneration Manager	East Suffolk Council
Jenny Edgerley	Development Officer (Felixstowe)	East Suffolk Council
Jonathan Miles	Principal Growth Officer	West Suffolk Council
Valerie Watson-Brown	Co-ordinator	VENI partnership
Annie Willey	Brand Manager	The Suffolk Coast

Tracey Harding	Manager	Discover Newmarket
Candy Richards	Development Manager	Federation of Small Businesses
Graham Peers	Economic Development Officer,	South Norfolk Council
Ben Heather	Rights of Way & Access Team	Suffolk County Council
Sasha Ayers	Director	Molletts Farm
Russell Clement	General Manager - Suffolk & Essex	National Trust
Sarah Jay	Projects Coordinator	Suffolk New College
Steve Wiles	Councillor	East Suffolk Council
Helen Cutting	Brand Manager	Visit Suffolk /Visit East of England
Elizabeth Dubbeld	Planning Policy Officer	Ipswich Borough Council
Neil Cockshaw	Regeneration Manager	East Suffolk Council
Jasmin Machen	Planning Officer	East Suffolk Council
Michelle Gordon	Corporate Manager	Babergh & Mid Suffolk District Councils
Jo Chapman	Place based programme lead	East Suffolk Council
Lindsay Want	Consultant	Xtrahead Marketing
Richard Best	Collaboration & Connecting manager	East Suffolk Council
Kate Cain	Manager	Felixstowe BID
Paul Horne	Transport Strategy Manager	Suffolk County Council
Jess Palmer	Manager	Saxmundham Town Council
Sarah Friswell	Visitor Experience Manager	Bury St Edmunds Cathedral
Jen Healy	Consultant	Jen Healy Innovations
Suzanne Kemp	Safety Manager	Center Parc Elveden Forest
Lesley McEwan	Head of Development	AccessAble
Anna McGowan	Green Access Assistant,Rights of Way Team	Suffolk County Council
Jandr� Smuts	Zoological Society East Anglia	ZSEA Ltd
James Skipper	Natural Heritage Officer	Dedham Vale&Coast & Heaths AONBs
Dr Amanda Hodgkinson	Associate Professor English & Creative Writing, Associate Dean for Research & Knowledge Exchange	University of Suffolk



# Suffolk Growth

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Suffolk Growth works with all of Suffolk's local authorities and a range of stakeholders to align and promote countywide economic growth and inclusivity, driving positive change through shared activity, delivery, and engagement.

Suffolk Growth is hosted by East Suffolk Council on behalf of all Suffolk councils.

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