

## **Dr Johnson's House Access Policy and Plan**

Completed By: Celine Luppo McDaid

Date: 20th April 2016

Date of next review: 30th April 2017

To be reviewed internally on an annual basis, or when changes to existing conditions necessitate. External audits to be commissioned every 10 years or less, or when changes to existing conditions necessitate.

### **1. Statement of purpose**

The aims of Dr Johnson's House are:

- 1) To preserve for the use and benefit of the public, Dr Johnson's House
- 2) To enhance learning and scholarship

### **2. Definition of access**

We define access as something that is made possible when physical, sensory, cultural, social, economic, geographical, digital, intellectual, psychological and emotional barriers are removed, reduced, or overcome. Dr Johnson's House aims to preserve the building and collections for the use of all members of the public and therefore works towards removing these barriers wherever possible, while balancing this with the long-term preservation of the building and collections for use by future generations.

### **3. Our aims**

Dr Johnson's House Trust is committed to providing the widest possible access to the building and collections and to incorporate considerations of accessibility into all future plans for development. We pledge to improve access for all visitors, staff and volunteers as our resources permit and include specific improvements in our Forward Plan. Dr Johnson's House Trust takes regular advice from relevant people and bodies to ensure our current arrangements and future plans are appropriate and accessible.

Dr Johnson's House commits to conducting an external access audit every ten years, or as changes to the existing conditions necessitate, and will identify prioritised areas for improvement in the Forward Plan. Where an area does not fall within in-house expertise, we seek further advice and training.

This document also outlines an Action Plan for specific action to be taken. The individuals responsible for realising these aims and a schedule for the implementation of specific actions are recorded in the Forward Plan.

### **4. Introduction**

Dr Johnson's House is committed to welcoming all members of society, regardless of sex, age, social status, ethnic origin, sexuality or ability. This Access Policy sets out our criteria for providing access to the Historic House Museum and its collections. It aims to promote the understanding and enjoyment of the House and its collections through a broad range of means, as sources allow, and to act considerately and responsibly at all times.

## 5. Background

We commit to exploring possibilities to increase our services in all areas of access. We commit to prioritising the recommendations of the most recent external Access Audit (May 2016).

## 6. Barriers to access

The House acknowledges there are number of key barriers to access:

- **Attitudinal** – e.g. some people may have a lack of interest in, or awareness of, the Museum and the subjects and issues it deals with, or our programmes and services
- **Intellectual** – e.g. some people may find the Museum too specialist in its approach to subjects and how they are presented; some may have learning disabilities which affect their ability to engage with the Museum; and some may not be able to read or speak English
- **Cultural** – e.g. some people may feel that the Museum is not relevant to them and does not reflect their cultural or social heritage, or their interests
- **Economic** – e.g. some people may not be able to afford to visit the Museum or take part in our programmes
- **Geographic** – e.g. some people will live too far away to visit the Museum
- **Physical/sensory** – e.g. people with physical disabilities, limited mobility, or hearing or visual impairments may not be able to access the Museum, our website or programmes
- **Technological** – e.g. some people may not have access to the internet at home or use a mobile phone

## 7. Removing barriers to access

### *a) Physical, Geographical and Sensory Access:*

The nature of the building presents barriers to those with limited mobility or ability to travel.

We therefore commit to overcoming these barriers by:

- Continuing to take advice on increasing wheelchair access, and prioritising physical access as an area for consideration during the planning stages of the Basement Project to improve visitor facilities
- Installing and maintaining handrails on all staircases, seating in all rooms, and providing a ground level toilet with an extra rail to ease use
- Providing those visitors unable to travel or those unable to use the stairs with a DVD which provides information on the House/museum. It can be posted to anyone unable to access the site (international formats available). English subtitles were added to the DVD recently
- We will continue to monitor international demand of our DVD and consider providing additional languages
- Making information on physical access available on our website, printed marketing materials and in correspondence for group bookings, events ticket sales and private hire of the House
- Ensuring the layout of the House, signage, labels and interpretation are designed to make viewing the site, its collections and accessing information as straightforward as possible
- Endeavouring to keep up-to-date with best practice and any changes to relevant legislation and to implement the requirements of the legislation

- Providing interpretation to allow those with visual and hearing impairments to access the collections by providing a Handling Collection and access to curatorial time and interpretation. In addition, offering written interpretation in a large print format (in line with RNIB guidelines) and free use of our audio-visual guide for visitors with visual and hearing impairments
- Continuing to expand our Handling Collection to allow for access to this provision without the need of staff supervision
- Providing outreach sessions and talks which can be booked by groups unable to visit the site (where budgets/resources permit)
- Offering concessionary entry fees to those with a disability and providing free entry to carers to encourage visits

b) *Intellectual, psychological and emotional access:*

Dr Johnson's House Trust understands that our visitors come from a variety of educational backgrounds and age ranges, and may have specific learning needs. Visitors will also have a variety of learning styles. We therefore commit to mitigating this/overcoming these barriers by:

- Providing interpretation in a variety of formats: visual, auditory and kinaesthetic. This is achieved through written, visual, oral, audio materials and the use of our Handling Collection
- Taking intellectual access into account when creating new interpretation and when considering the needs of non-users in a bid to reduce or remove barriers wherever possible.
- Ensuring special consideration is given to emotional barriers in the research and planning stages of new interpretation, displays and exhibitions, particular in the discussion of culturally sensitive issues, such as race and religion

c) *Cultural and social access:*

Many of our visitors face cultural barriers, including not speaking English or having little knowledge of the cultural and historic context of Dr Johnson's House. They may be unaccustomed to visiting museums and historic houses. We therefore commit to overcoming these barriers by:

- Providing written interpretation in over ten languages, offered free to visitors (after usual entry fee). In 2013 and 2014, the audio-visual guide was translated into Japanese and Mandarin to encourage overseas visitors. Demand for other languages will continue to be monitored and additional languages are to be considered for translation, as and when funding allows and need arises
- Providing where staffing allows, tours and workshops conducted in Italian and Spanish
- Providing where staffing allows, workshops designed especially for ESOL students
- Ensuring interpretation and information is layered, to allow visitors a choice to access the level of information they wish
- Training staff and volunteers to be friendly and welcoming to all. Dr Johnson's House is committed to equal opportunities and ensures our workforce welcome all sections of the community and that our exhibits provide an enjoyable learning experience for all

d) *Economic access:*

Dr Johnson's House is open to the public 6 days per week and the entry charge is kept as low as possible to limit any financial barrier while still providing income to maintain the House. As an independent, charitable trust Dr Johnson's House must charge this small fee (currently £6 or less) to maintain long-term sustainability in addition to fundraising campaigns. The admission fee is intentionally lower than other similar organisations in the vicinity, in the hope of reducing economic barriers. We therefore commit to overcoming these barriers by:

- Offering discounted entry for a range of people, including students, the over-60s and registered unemployed persons. (Visitors with disabilities are offered free or concessionary entrance rates and a free carer's ticket.)
- Holding free curator's talks and tours, advertised widely in advance, in order to attract those less able to afford the entry fee
- Working in conjunction with other organisations and city- or nation-wide events to offer free access to the House, such as Open House weekend or English Tourism Week

*e) Digital access*

The website has been designed to be accessible to all, including those utilising other technologies to view content. The website is designed and controlled by House staff, and is therefore flexible and can be changed to overcome any barriers identified. We therefore commit to mitigating this/overcoming these barriers by:

- Monitoring and keeping up-to-date with best practice regarding the presentation of digital content, including font type and size, etc, and evaluating our website in relation to these standards, making amendments where possible
- Continuing to explore the possibilities available within our resources to convert the website into a mobile-friendly suitable format as the proportion of visitors to our website and social media accounts is approaching 50%
- Continuing to maintain and develop our social media accounts to enable us to engage in a meaningful and often personal manner with visitors from across London, as well as nationally and internationally who are unable to visit in person
- Continuing to monitor and have an awareness of best practice in social media and seek training for staff where appropriate
- Committing to developing our digital catalogue of our library collection (hosted by Heritage Cirqa and accessed via our website) and to continue to raise awareness of the collection and service by encouraging and assisting research requests

## **8. Access to collections**

The House's collection consists of over 1,000 books, an archive containing 18th-century manuscripts and an organisational archive of over 100 years of House operations, a broad collection of prints, several oil paintings, and a small collection of ceramics and ephemera. Most of our collection (approx. 80%) is on display and the library and archive are available upon appointment. In order to foster interest in and provide access to the collection, we therefore commit to overcoming these barriers by:

- Offering outreach talks and free curators tours, where a handling collection can be taken off-site
- Providing open days where entry is free for all, with curatorial talks and/ or tours throughout

## **9. Staff Training**

All staff and volunteers are introduced to disability awareness during their induction. They are made familiar with our Access Policy, what we offer, and where to find further information and our facilities. People with disabilities receive equal opportunities in recruitment, employment and training. We therefore commit to overcoming these barriers by:

- As part of staff and volunteer induction process, new staff and volunteers receive disability awareness training including addressing the needs of visitors with specific requirements and appropriate use of language
- Staff keep up-to-date date with any changes in regulations and best practice, making arrangements for any necessary amendments to the House and/ or its facilities as appropriate. These updates are circulated and any relevant changes are identified. Volunteers are kept informed through regular meetings and by written information, especially for those unable to attend. Additional training is arranged as appropriate.

**Ratified by the Trustees**

**Date:** 13th July 2016

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

Lord Harmsworth, Chair of Trustees