

Access information for Washington Wetland Centre

Washington Wetland Centre offers an excellent day out for people regardless of their age and abilities.

The following information provides details of the facilities that we have and, in some cases, don't have.

We hope that this will allow all of our visitors to get the most from their visit. Please let us know if you experience any difficulties during your visit that are not covered by this information.

Getting to Washington Wetland Centre.

There are regular bus services to Waterview Park (a government building approximately 400m from the main entrance of Washington Wetland Centre). The walk from the bus stop is down a tarmac road and footpath.

The gradient from the bus stop is no more than 1:15. Buses travel to Waterview Park from Washington Town Centre, Sunderland, Newcastle, Gateshead, Durham and South Shields.

The centre is well signposted with brown tourist signs on the A19, A195, A1231 and A182.

Motorists arriving from the A1(M) will not see signs on the motorway but will pick up signs soon after leaving the A1(M) on the A195 or the A1231.

The main car park is tarmac and contains 57 parking bays plus 4 reserved for disabled drivers. There is also an overflow car park made up of a rougher dolomite surface.

Access from the car park is via a tarmac path. Parts of this path are steep and wheelchair users may prefer to access the centre via a short service road (marked 'Authorised vehicles only') which has a shallower gradient.

It is permitted to drop passengers off in the lower car park reached by the short service road. This is a small area used by delivery vehicles and does not contain designated spaces for drivers with a disability. Drivers are asked to return to the main or overflow car park after dropping off passengers with disabilities. Drivers may also return to this area to collect passengers at the end of the visit. Drivers with disabilities are permitted to park in this lower car park if necessary.

Access from this lower car park to the visitor centre is over flat tarmac. There is a small lip at the entrance to the visitor centre. The reception point/pay desk is immediately to your left upon entering the visitor centre. Further information is available at this point.

A cycle rack is available for use in the area immediately outside the front entrance. Washington Wetland Centre is passed by the C2C cycle route (Whitehaven to Sunderland).

Admission charges

Visitors with disabilities are charged the appropriate rate for their age and whether they are part of an organised group visit (12 people or more are eligible for discount).

Essential helpers are offered free admission when assisting a visitor with disabilities.

The Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust is a membership organisation with members receiving free admission to all nine Wetland Centres in the UK.

Full details are available on the website www.wwt.org.uk or from the admissions desk.

Getting around

The visitor centre is a single storey building with level access throughout - the only exception being a lower level viewing area just inside the front entrance. Access to the lower area is via three steps.

Washington Wetland Centre is located on a hillside site with footpaths leading down the site toward the River Wear.

The central circuit (approximately 880m) is on tarmac footpaths. The paths do slope with some steeper areas. Wheelchair users may find some of these areas challenging, although many wheelchair users complete the circuit without too much difficulty.

This circuit gives access to all of the captive birds. Many of these birds are located in an area known as Close Encounters. There is a short tarmac footpath leading into Close Encounters which leads to a wooden bridge over water. Beyond the bridge, visitors are encouraged to explore an area of grassland. This area can be slippery under foot (or wheel) and the ground is uneven. This area is not recommended for wheelchair users.

The longer route around the site incorporates our wild bird feeding station at Hawthorn Wood, Wader Lake (with views of nesting Grey Heron) and Spring Gill Wood.

Access to Hawthorn Wood is via a level tarmac footpath. The viewing hide is large enough for easy wheelchair access. Once past the Hawthorn Wood Hide the footpath descends steeply through the wood. Wheelchair users are advised not to continue along this route.

By returning to the main route it is easy to access Wader Lake. Shop staff will be happy to explain the easiest access routes on request. The footpath along the River Wear is level and gives easy access to the Reedbed Picnic Shelter (at the bottom of Hawthorn Wood) or along Wader Lake.

There are three wheelchair accessible hides along Wader Lake giving views of the birds on the Wader Scrape. This path leads, via access gates, to the Amphibian Pond. These gates are designed to maintain fox proof access through the perimeter fence and may prove difficult for larger wheelchairs and pushchairs. Once through these gates there is further flat access as far as the Dragonfly Ponds. The footpath along the River Wear is made of re-cycled road tarmac and is firm to move along (although not as smooth as new tarmac).

From the Dragonfly Ponds the footpath rises towards East Down and Old Oak Meadow before crossing Spring Gill via a wooden footbridge in Spring Gill Wood.

Some sections of footpath in Spring Gill are steep and it is not recommended that wheelchair users continue beyond the bridge. The steep section is clearly visible from the bridge as the path rises to the gates back through the perimeter fence. Once up this section of footpath the remainder of the route is on level ground.

Borrowing a wheelchair

The centre has a small number of manual wheelchairs available on free loan. The centre also has four electric scooters that are also available on free loan. Please ask at the shop if you would like to borrow either of these items. A short induction programme is given to each new user of the electric scooters.

Seating

Within the visitor centre seating can be found in the Waterside Café and the Discovery Centre. None of this seating is fixed.

Seating in the cafe and fixtures in the shop are positioned in order to allow full access to wheelchair users.

You will find over 50 seats/benches scattered throughout the grounds.

Public telephone

The shop telephone can be used on request for emergencies or to book taxis for people with disabilities.

Dogs

Assistance Dogs are welcomed. The information desk can provide a bowl of water. No other dogs are allowed access to the centre.

Induction loops

The centre does not have induction loops fitted at the present time.

Guided tours

Guided tours of the centre can be provided for groups. These must be booked in advance.

Leaflets, maps & guidebooks

The centre leaflet gives basic information about the centre and contains a basic map. Similar details are available on the website www.wwt.org.uk and are available in large print format.

The Walkabout Guide gives further information about the centre and can be purchased from the shop.

Fire alarms

The visitor centre is fitted with smoke alarms and break glass points. If the fire alarm should activate (continuous bell) you will be moved to a safe area by visitor centre staff.

Toilets and baby changing facilities

There are male and female toilets in the visitor centre. There is also an accessible toilet in the visitor centre. The accessible toilet contains a baby changing unit and a toddler seat.

There is a baby changing room in the visitor centre. This includes a toilet cubicle and a privacy corner. Electric sockets are available in the privacy corner for use with medical equipment.

There are no toilets within the grounds.

Eating in the Waterside Café

The Waterside Café is in the visitor centre. Hot and cold drinks are available throughout from 10am until 5pm (summer) and until 3pm (winter). Hot meals are available between 12noon and 2pm.

Seating is not fixed and is positioned in order to allow full access for wheelchair users.

Service is from a self-service counter. Visitors requiring assistance to carry trays of food and drink to a table should ask a member of staff.

There is always a vegetarian option for lunch, along with a vegetarian quiche, jacket potato or sandwich fillings, cakes and biscuits.

Staff are happy to assist by reading out menus and describing or locating products for those visitors with visually impairments.

Updated February 2008.