



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 which is also tarmac with 44 spaces, some of which have a good clearance to one side of the bay.

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. Please be alert to delivery vehicles if using this route.

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 contain designated spaces for drivers with limited mobility, although these are not regulation size as they are narrower than DDA compliant bays. 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, but should be aware that this single track road may cause delays of up to 20 minutes during delivery times to our site.

Access from this lower car park to the visitor centre is over flat tarmac. There is a 6cm lip at the entrance to the visitor centre - a portable ramp is available to aid entry. 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.

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 which leads onto a tarmac footpath.

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. Our admissions team will be happy to explain the easiest access routes on request. The footpath along the River Wear is level with access to Lagoon View hide. The path down to Lagoon View hide is not suitable for manual wheelchairs but can be accessed by mobility scooters on the lowest speed setting – this path is not DDA compliant. Please ask a member of the admissions team for further advice.

Lagoon View hide is spacious with room to turn mobility scooters around inside. There are views onto River Wear through large dropped windows.

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 recycled 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 or mobility scooters continue beyond the bridge. The steep section is clearly visible from the bridge as the path rises towards Top Meadow.

A foxproof gate must be passed through at North Wood, which may prove difficult for larger wheelchairs and pushchairs.

Borrowing a wheelchair or mobility scooter

The centre has a manual wheelchair available to hire during your visit. The centre also has a number of electric scooters also available to hire. Please book in advance on 0191 416 5454. 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 picture window as you enter the building. 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

Fully trained, on duty assistance dogs (trained by member organisations of ADUK) are welcome on site. The admissions team can provide a bowl of water. Unfortunately we can't allow any other dogs or pets of any kind on site as our wildlife may become distressed. Assistance dogs must be kept on their lead, under control and their harnesses must state "working or assistance dog".

Please ensure any dog waste is removed. If any of our birds/animals behaviour is affected by the presence of your dog, we respectfully ask that you understand that we may have to ask you to move away from the area. Please do not leave your dog in your car whilst visiting.

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.

Our popular guide book 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 at wheelchair user height.

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 is a composting toilet available between the otter exhibit and river viewpoint in the grounds - this is accessible but has no running water provision.

Eating in Waterside Café

Waterside Café is in the visitor centre. Hot and cold drinks are available throughout the day from 10am until 5pm (summer) and until 4pm (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.

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