

This access statement does not contain personal opinions as to our suitability for those with access needs, but aims to accurately describe the facilities and services that we offer all our guests/visitors.



HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Access Statement for the Houses of Parliament

Introduction

Situated in the centre of Westminster between the River Thames and Westminster Abbey, the Houses of Parliament is open to the public most days through the year except Sundays and Bank Holidays. People from around the world visit Parliament for a huge range of reasons including: meetings with MPs, watching debates or committee proceedings, attending events, or enjoying a tour.

The building and entrance you will arrive at will depend on the type of visit you are making but the most common entrances will be through:

- Portcullis House for committee meetings and Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben) tours.
- Cromwell Green Entrance for Houses of Parliament tours and most events in the House of Commons.
- Black Rod's Garden Entrance for many events in the House of Lords.

The area surrounding the Parliamentary Estate is flat with wide pavements. Portcullis House was built in 2001 and the areas most frequently visited are across two floors with eight lifts servicing both. The majority of the Palace of Westminster was constructed over 150 years ago, however all areas normally visited are serviced by lifts. Exceptions are St Stephen's Hall and the Elizabeth Tower.

Visitor Assistants and other members of staff are on hand throughout the Parliamentary Estate should you have any questions or require assistance.

If you wish to view our video access statement 'How to access the Houses of Parliament' please follow this link: www.parliament.uk/accessibility. It is available to watch with subtitles and BSL.

We look forward to welcoming you. If you have any queries or require any assistance please phone 020 7219 4114 or email visitparliament@parliament.uk.

Pre-Arrival

- The nearest **railway** stations are London Victoria (1.6 miles), Charing Cross (0.7 miles), and London Waterloo (0.7 miles).
- The nearest **London Underground** station is Westminster with step free access (0.2 miles).
- All London **taxis** and most minibuses are wheelchair accessible.
- All London **buses** have clearly marked priority seats and at least one designated wheelchair space. If you find the step tricky, you can ask the driver to make the bus kneel for you. There are priority seats near the front for those who have difficulty standing. Buses have a PA system and visual display to let you know the route, destination and next stop.
- The nearest **bus stops** are on Parliament Square, Whitehall and Abingdon Street (0.2 miles). 3, 11, 24, 53, 77A, 211, 435 and 507 stops nearby.
- **The Thames Riverboats** are accessible. The ramp is quite steep, so if you are using a manual wheelchair you may need to bring a companion to assist you.
- For more information about the accessibility of London transport please visit www.tfl.gov.uk/transport-accessibility/.
- Streets in the surrounding area are flat and paved. There are busy roads to cross in places but there are many pedestrian crossings.
- There are a number of London companies who you will be able to rent a wheelchair from if needed before you arrive.
- Chapter 2 (Getting Here) of our video also discusses what to expect on your journey to Parliament www.parliament.uk/visiting/accessibility.

Car Parking and Arrival

- We have no public parking available on site. If you choose to drive you can reserve a parking space in nearby Abingdon Car Park off Great College Street: charges are for up to 1 hour £6.50; up to 2 hours £13.00; up to 3 hours £19.50; up to 4 hours £26.00, full day £38.00. Reservations can be made in advance using the Q-Park online pre-booking facility. Alternatively, for blue badge holders, there are limited blue badge parking bays situated slightly further away on: Tothill Street, Little Smith Street, Dean Bradley Street, Smith Square, Matthew Parker Street, Great Peter Street. For details please check www.westminster.gov.uk.
- Taxis can drop you off outside all of our main public entrances, but coach drop off is limited to Millbank (alongside Victoria Tower) or Victoria Embankment (outside Portcullis House).

- The Houses of Parliament are in the congestion zone, so check to see if charges apply to your vehicle. Blue Badge holders can register with Transport for London for an exemption from the charge.
- Chapter 2 (Getting Here) of our video also discusses what to expect on your journey to Parliament www.parliament.uk/visiting/accessibility.

Main Entrance, Reception and Ticketing Area

- **Ticket Office:** The Ticket Office is located on the front of Portcullis House facing the river Thames. Access to the Ticket Office is via a very gentle slope and the floor is level inside. All four ticketing desks have low counters suitable for wheelchair users. There is glass between yourself and the cashier however a member of staff will be situated outside to assist you if required. We offer complimentary tickets for personal assistants for all of our tours.
- The ticket office is 0.2 miles from the main entrance to the Palace, so it may help people to order their tickets in advance through 020 7219 4114 or online at www.parliament.uk/visiting and ask for a ticket that can be printed at home or collected at the entrance.



Above: approach to the Ticket Office

Above Right: entrance to the ticket office

Right: inside the ticket office



- **Visiting Portcullis House:** At Portcullis House there is access to the main entrance via a very gentle slope.
- The main public entrance at Portcullis House is a revolving door however alternative access is available if you speak to the security staff on arrival.
- Once inside Portcullis House there is a security search point before you continue into the building.



Pedestrian crossing between the ticket office and the visitor entrance

- **Visiting the Palace of Westminster:** At the visitor entrance (Cromwell Green on St. Margaret Street) there is a downward sloping ramp that takes you to our security search point. There are handrails on both sides of the ramp and large motorized wheelchairs can access this.
- At the bottom of the ramp is a security search point before you continue into the rest of the building. You will need to pass through airport style security to enter Parliament, you and your bags will be subject to a search, security staff are courteous, flexible and have had disability awareness training.
- Please avoid bringing too many bags or bulky items as we have no storage facilities on site.
- The main entrance to Westminster Hall has two large heavy wooden doors but staff will be on hand to assist you if required.
- Chapter 3 (Getting In) of our video also discusses entrances into Parliament and security arrangements. www.parliament.uk/visiting/accessibility.



Top of the ramp heading from the Visitor Entrance to the security search point



Continuation of the ramp from the Visitor Entrance to the security search point



Ramp heading out of the security search point, and the doors into Westminster Hall



Black Rod's Garden Entrance, used for many House of Lords Events

Attraction (displays, exhibits)

- After leaving security you will come into Westminster Hall
- **Taking a Tour:** There are Guided Tours, Audio Guided Tours, BSL screen based tours, and we will book a BSL interpreter upon request with a minimum of two weeks' notice from you if you are attending a guided tour. We deliver Tactile Tours for blind and partially sighted visitors, which run occasionally throughout the year. All guided tours cover quite a distance with limited opportunity to sit down. There are only three designated seating points on guided tours. We have 10 wheelchairs available to loan, which you can book in advance. However, you will need to bring a companion to push you, as we can't provide a member of staff to do this.

- Whilst on an audio tour there is seating available in just under half of the rooms on the tour route.
- There are steps at the start and at the end of the tour, but a Visitor Assistant will escort you on a step-free route. All other parts of the tour route are wheelchair-accessible, except for St Stephen's Hall which has steps at either end but can be viewed from Central Lobby.
- There are very few interpretation boards across the palace and staff are on hand to explain more or provide assistance if required.



There are 37 steps at the end of Westminster Hall, however, a Visitor Assistant will be happy to escort you along a step free route if you require it



St Stephen's Hall (Above Left) has steps at both ends, however, can be viewed from the top of the steps (Above Right)

- **Watching a debate in the public gallery or attending an event:** The first room you come to will be Westminster Hall. There are thirty-seven steps which lead from Westminster Hall up to the principal floor to give access to Central Lobby, and the House of Lords and House of Commons Chambers. If you require step-free access or to climb fewer steps a Visitor Assistant will escort you on a longer route round to a lift. If you are going to the House of Commons public gallery the lift to use is 150 by 105 centimeters. If you are visiting for a tour, attending a committee, visiting a dining room, or attending a meeting or function in the Palace of Westminster the lift you will most likely use is 152cm x 120 cm.
 - The public galleries for the House of Commons and House of Lords Chambers are fitted with an induction loop system which improve audibility for visitors using a hearing aid.
 - The public gallery of the House of Commons has spaces for wheelchairs and assistance dogs.
 - If you are visiting the House of Lords gallery and aren't able to use the stairs, you will be able to view the proceedings from the back of the main Chamber instead.
 - All committee and dining rooms have step-free access.
 - For those attending committee meetings of either House an infra-red loop system is employed. Visitors attending committee meetings in the main Palace of Westminster can pick up a neck loop from the pulpit area outside of Committee Room 10. If you are attending a Lords Committee you can also obtain a neck loop from the House of Lords Attendant's Office adjacent to Committee Room 1. Visitors attending a committee meeting in Portcullis House can obtain a neck loop from the pulpit outside the Boothroyd Room. Westminster Hall has an Induction Loop that is used for (large) events, *but not every day*. mobile induction loops are available to borrow when attending a guided tour.
 - There is very rarely any **background music or noise** however the most common thing you may hear if visiting on a sitting day is our division bell. This bell tells MPs that they are required to vote, you will not have to take any action.
 - **Floor surfaces** you will traverse whilst visiting Parliament include patterned tiles, stone, and patterned carpet.
 - All rooms are well lit using a wide variety of **lighting** including lamps and spotlights. A few of the corridors you may visit are slightly darker, but are still lit throughout.
 - If you wish to go on a tour of **Big Ben**, please be aware that it involves a steep flight of 334 steps. You must be able to undertake such a strenuous climb.
 - Chapter 4 (Getting Around) and Chapter 5 (Taking a Tour) of our video also discusses assistance available to visitors once inside the Houses of Parliament including step-free routes, wheelchair loan, hearing loops, and facilities for assistance dogs.
- www.parliament.uk/visiting/accessibility.



Left: Visitor welcome desk with induction loop

Below Left: Mobile receiver with headphones

Below Right: Mobile receiver with induction loop



Wheelchairs available to borrow in Westminster Hall, and our screen based BSL version of our Audio Tour



(Above Left) Assistance dogs are welcome in all Parliamentary buildings, and (Above Right) we offer touch tours for blind and visually impaired visitors, please enquire about availability

Public Toilets

- Public toilets are located next to Westminster Hall with one accessible toilet. There are four steps to access these toilets or visitors can use a lift.
- Around the Palace of Westminster there are further accessible toilets including one Changing Places approved facility, <http://changingplaces.uktoiletmap.org/toilet/view/308> which is open to all. It's in the Lower Waiting Hall, just off Central Lobby. The room has a large turning circle. It is 3 metres square. There's a hoist, height adjustable, adult sized changing bench and the toilet is 48 centimetres high.
- In Portcullis House there are two accessible toilets on the first floor which you can get to via one of eight lifts. The dimensions are 214 by 150 centimetres, with the toilet 44 centimetres high.
- Chapter 6 (Refreshments and Toilet Facilities) of the accessibility video also discusses this. www.parliament.uk/visiting/accessibility.



The public toilets are accessible via four steps or the lift shown above



Left: Accessible toilets near the shop and café

Centre Left: Off Central Lobby we also have a Changing Places approved facility

Centre Right: It has a touch pad to open, close and lock the door

Bottom Left: A view of the Changing Places approved facility

Bottom Right: Hoist, Changing Table and Baby Changing



The link below gives additional information on what a Changing Places toilet is:

http://www.changing-places.org/the_campaign/what_are_changing_places_toilets.aspx

Café

- A cafeteria for visitors (Jubilee Café) is available in the Palace of Westminster just off Westminster Hall. The Jubilee café can be reached via four steps or via a lift. A level access alternative door is also available. Once inside the Jubilee café the floor is level throughout. Tables and chairs are well spaced apart and can be moved. The chairs are upright and do not have arm rests. Visitors order and collect their food from a counter, but staff are happy to assist you at your table if you require it.
- The nearest toilet and accessible toilet facilities to the Jubilee Café are 10 meters away with level access.
- Chapter 6 (Refreshments and Toilet Facilities) of the accessibility video also discusses this. www.parliament.uk/visiting/accessibility.

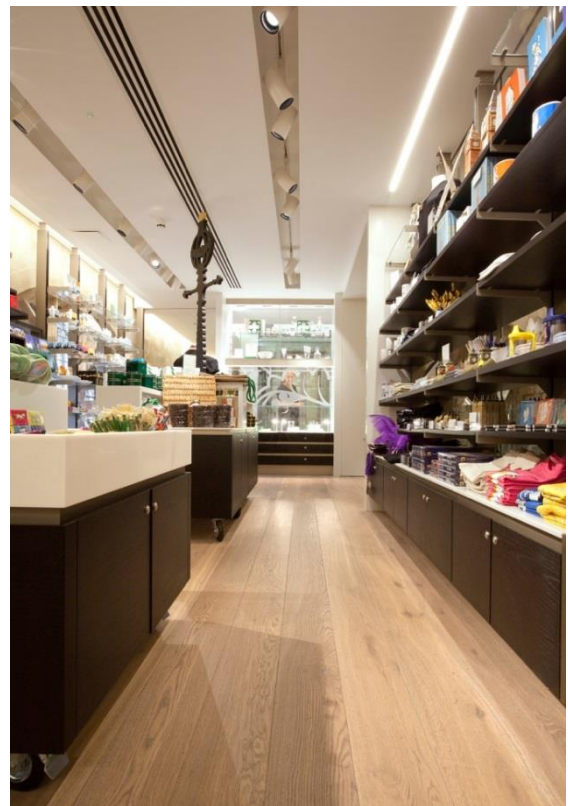


The Jubilee Café, with low counter, adjustable chip and pin device, and moveable furniture



Shops

- There are two main shops available to our visitors. Both shops have a range of souvenirs, gifts and books etc.
- The Houses of Parliament Shop is situated on the corner of Bridge Street and Parliament Street and has level access throughout the store. The shop is small but there is space for wheelchair users or pushchairs.
- The Jubilee Shop is situated in the Palace of Westminster just off Westminster Hall. The Jubilee Shop can be reached via four steps or via a lift. A level access alternative door is also available. Once inside the Jubilee Shop the floor is level throughout. The shop is small but there is space for wheelchair users or pushchairs.
- The nearest toilet and accessible toilet facilities to the Jubilee Shop is 5 metres away with level access.
- There is a low counter area.
- There are tall display racks and low tables accessible from a seated position.
- We have pin pads on the tills that can be moved to whatever height or distance from the counter that the customer requires.
- We have text relay numbers and a hearing loop at the counter.
- Shop staff are always on hand to assist any visitor.



The Jubilee Shop has a mixture of low displays and high shelves

Additional Information

- We aim to provide all Visitor Services staff with disability awareness and equality and diversity training. The Houses of Parliament run regular training sessions which we book our team members onto and we also ask all of our staff to complete a customised e-learning course on disability awareness. We provide training to our team to help them know how to assist visitors who are wheelchair users, visitors living with dementia, visitors with mental health problems and visitors with special educational needs.
- All Visitor Services and security staff are provided with fire evacuation training and know exactly how to assist and advise visitors in the case of an evacuation.
- We welcome assistance dogs to all parliamentary buildings, we have a designated run/toilet area, and we have water bowls in the reception areas.
- Our Signage across the site is currently being reviewed and we anticipate great improvements in coming months. At present many of the signs used across the parliamentary estate are black with white writing. Visitor Services often use white signs with black writing.
- We do not have any areas to power a mobility scooter or battery powered wheelchair.
- There are many hotels close to the Parliamentary estate including a few which are 0.5 miles away.

Future Plans

- To open opportunities for more people to visit Parliament, through engagement with external stakeholders and participation in Disabled Access Day.
- Your Feedback: Parliament welcomes all visitor comments regarding accessibility as we continue to improve the experience for future visitors. We act on feedback wherever possible.

Contact Information

Address (Including postcode): Visitor Services Houses of Parliament, Westminster, London SW1A 0AA

Telephone: 020 7219 4114

Text Relay: 18001 020 7219 4114

Email: visitparliament@parliament.uk

Website:	www.parliament.uk/visiting
Grid Reference:	TQ303 795
Hours Of Operation:	Closed on Sundays and Bank Holidays, Opening hours varied due to the Parliamentary Calendar. More information on our website
Local Carers:	Westminster Carers Network Beethoven Centre, Third Avenue, London, W10 4JL Telephone Number: 020 8960 3033
Local Equipment Hire:	There are a number of London companies who you will be able to rent a wheelchair from if needed before you arrive.
Local Accessible Taxi:	All of London's black taxis are fitted with space for a standard wheelchair, grab rails and an intermediate step. Most are also fitted with hearing induction loops and swivel seats for those with restricted mobility. Assistance dogs travel free of charge.
Local Public Transport:	The nearest railway stations are London Victoria (1.6 miles), Charing Cross (0.7 miles) and London Waterloo (0.7 miles). The nearest London Underground station is Westminster with step free access (0.2 miles). All London taxis and most minibus's are wheelchair accessible. All London buses have clearly marked priority seats and at least one designated wheelchair space. The nearest bus stops are on Parliament Square, Whitehall and Abingdon Street (0.2 miles). For more information about the accessibility of London transport please visit www.tfl.gov.uk/transport-accessibility/