



# Accessibility Guide

## Making Bat Events Accessible to Disabled People

This 'How to' guide is an introduction to making bat events more accessible to disabled people. If you are considering running a bat walk this guide will provide you with some important hints and tips on how to best plan, advertise and deliver your event. This 'How to Guide' will focus mainly on issues surrounding mobility and physical impairments, although this information will also be helpful when working with other groups of disabled people. If you need further information please contact one of the local or national organisations dedicated to providing access for disabled people.

### 1. Introduction to disability

As many as one in eight people will be disabled. This includes many older people and others who will have a range of access requirements. Disabled people include those who have learning difficulties, visually impaired people, wheelchair-users and D/deaf people. Some disabled people may be obvious to you but there will be many whose impairments and access requirements are not apparent. It is important to include everyone and not to make assumptions about who is disabled and what individuals might like.

By taking the needs of disabled people into account in your planning, you will create an event that is generally more accessible. For example, a wheelchair-accessible walk will also be suitable for anyone with a pushchair or for people whose balance is particularly bad in poor lighting.



### 2. Choosing a location for a bat walk

The primary consideration for choosing a bat walk location will be the likelihood of finding bats, however for most events that still encompasses a choice of sites or of routes to follow around the site. Often a city park or urban greenspace may be the

most suitable venue to allow access for all, but other countryside sites should be considered too.

Encouraging disabled people to attend is the first difficulty. Transport is often a huge barrier for disabled people, so a bat walk that can be reached by public transport will be more likely to be accessible for disabled people. Offering the possibility of shared transport can also increase participation and parking with sufficient space to get a wheelchair from the car can be important.

The venue should be chosen to have no constructed barriers, for example stiles, which could prevent access to wheelchair and scooter users and buggies; if there are gates, these need to be wide enough to allow easy access. You should also consider the nature of any catches on the gates. Can the gate be opened from either side? Does the catch open easily?



The nature of the path is also important; the best surfaces are good quality, firm paths with well defined edges. Loose gravel and paths with pot holes/rough sections should be avoided. The route chosen should avoid steps and paths taken should be as level as possible both along the length of their direction and in cross section. Both linear and cross slopes can result in manual

wheelchair users using considerable energy climbing gradients or trying to keep a straight course. For those with smart phones there is an app of a spirit level which can be used to measure gradients of paths, otherwise taking a spirit level and something flat to rest it on such as a notebook can be useful kit to take when planning a walk route. If the path crosses wooden plank bridges or boardwalks, the gaps between the boards should not be wide enough to trap a walking stick and ideally the planks should be at 90° to the direction of travel.

Choosing a route with regular seats allows people to rest during the walk. Seats which have back and arm rests are best as these provide more support for someone sitting down and while getting to their feet. However, even simple perches may be of value for people with mobility difficulties. Benches which have a space under them allow someone to get their feet under them before trying to stand up. Where possible you should plan to pause your walk to check for bats at locations that afford seating opportunities.

Letting attendees know of any toilets on site or nearby, along with their level of accessibility can also be important. For evening events you will need to make sure if and when the toilets will close.

The route should be checked out before hand: this will allow hazards to be indentified and removed, for example over-hanging or encroaching vegetation could be trimmed back before the event. It is also useful to have an alternative route in mind in case you need to shorten the walk for any reason.

By planning the walk in this way you will have the information you need to manage the risk and can slot this into the risk assessment for the event.

### 3. Advertising the event

If your publicity is not accessible then many potential participants are never going to find out about your event. Ideally your publicity should follow clear print guidelines and you should try to ensure that it is available in accessible formats. So if you are producing a leaflet you should include this statement on the front cover or somewhere it can be clearly seen.

- This leaflet is available in accessible formats; large print, braille, audio and straightforward English.
- To request these please contact us, on 0845 1300 228 or via email [enquires@bats.org.uk](mailto:enquires@bats.org.uk)
- You might also want to produce a pictorial version for people with learning disabilities.



What do I need to provide? You have to consider how you find out if someone has access requirements. Here is a positive suggestion as to what you might put on information about your bat walk:

***‘We will try to meet the access requirements of any disabled person who wishes to attend this event. Please contact us before the day to let us know what you would like.’***

If you have more space, it is helpful to give some examples of access requirements, and you might also like to add a plea for people to give you as much notice as possible:

***‘Do you need wheelchair access? Do you wear a hearing aid? Would you like a BSL interpreter? We will try to meet the access requirements of any disabled person who wishes to attend this event. Please contact us before the day to let us know what you would like. Please let us know what you would like as early as possible.’***

Or you can be more proactive:

***‘This bat walk will take place on level paths and will be wheelchair (and pushchair) accessible. We will be happy to provide information in large print or in braille and we can book a BSL interpreter. We can provide sighted guides or personal assistants. If you have any access requirements please let us know before the day and we will do our best to meet them.’***

The style is up to you. The important thing is that you have given the message that you can be flexible and will try to make the bat walk accessible to disabled people by asking them what they would like provided.

You can also use the access symbols. Although without the additional friendly words many disabled people may assume that the bat walk will not actually be open to them. There are standard access symbols such as the blue wheelchair symbol, which denotes a particular level of accessibility. If used it is advisable to have a line beside it stating ‘to discuss access, please call...’. Alternatively outline the route and potential hazards (and still give the telephone number) thereby allowing people to decide for themselves if the walk is accessible to them.



Ensure your publicity says whether guide dogs and assistance dogs can be accommodated (all sites should allow assistance dogs).

#### 4. Running the event

Bat walks can provide something for everyone. Bats can be seen flying and foraging at dusk. A great way to see this is if there is a place where you can stop by water and watch the bats feeding over a lake or river. By using bat detectors it is possible to hear the hunting calls of bats, some bat detectors vibrate when a bat flies past and others have visual displays allowing the bat's



calls to be seen as well as heard. Bat detectors can easily be enhanced with ‘bump-ons’ (raised plastic bumps) to indicate the positions of dials, allowing this to be done by touch as well as sight. Having information in print or tactile objects to be passed around also allows you to communicate with a wider audience and shows a greater understanding and approach to customer care by having these resources available.

Keep the walk short, less than an hour and make sure the pace of the walk is suitable for all those attending, so people are not rushed or in danger of being left behind. Make sure that you wait for everyone to catch up before you explain features along the route and that you have enough opportunities for people to sit down.

Timing the event to coincide with local transport links will make the event accessible to a wider range of people. If this is not possible it may be appropriate to consider using taxis or hiring a minibus. Taxis and minibuses should have ramps to make them accessible, but if a minibus is for a group remember wheel chairs take up more space (some minibuses have removable seats and tracks to bolt wheel chairs into).



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An initial talk indoors where participants can sit down in good lighting and with good acoustics will improve access for many people. Sight lines for those in wheelchairs are lower so ensure that everyone is able to see you when talking or demonstrating using a detector.

Face the audience, have the light source in front of you rather than behind, stay relatively still and avoid covering your mouth with your hands. This will improve your communication with anyone who has a hearing loss and who may be relying on lip-reading. Note that some individuals may need to stand near to hear/see you speaking, especially in the field. Having some supplementary written material available may also help some deaf people follow what is happening outside when listening conditions are poor.



Using models to illustrate your initial talk will be of particular value to visually impaired people, D/deaf people and those with learning disabilities. Talking while people are looking at models, bat detectors or up in the sky excludes anyone who has a hearing loss so try and talk first and then let people look afterwards.

Props and pictures will make your talk more engaging and will improve access for people with learning difficulties who may find it difficult to follow your talk.

It will be helpful to have additional staff/volunteers who can act as sighted guides or personal assistants or who can offer assistance to anyone who is struggling. Basic disability equality training for staff and volunteers will enable these people to be more effective in their role.

Any print information should follow clear print guidelines:

[www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/accessibleinformation/text/Pages/clear\\_print.aspx](http://www.rnib.org.uk/professionals/accessibleinformation/text/Pages/clear_print.aspx)

Ideally, the minimum font size should be 14 with a sans serif font (e.g. Arial) in black on a white, cream or yellow background. This will provide a high contrast.

Sound recordings of bat echolocation calls can be much easier to understand than attempting to verbally describe them.

## 5. Offering help to disabled people

If you think someone needs assistance, ask them before you do anything. Never make assumptions about what help someone may need, as you do not know how much, or how little help, is required or wanted. The best question to ask is 'Can I help you?' or even 'How can I help you?'

If you are speaking to a wheelchair user, bend down to their level to speak to them but do not take hold of their chair without their permission.

## 6. Further Contacts / Organisations

### **Fieldfare Trust**

Volunteer House, 69 Crossgate, Cupar, Fife. KY15 5AS

Telephone: 01334 657708

Website: [www.fieldfare.org.uk](http://www.fieldfare.org.uk)

## **Disabled Ramblers**

[www.disabledramblers.co.uk](http://www.disabledramblers.co.uk)

## **Action for Blind People**

14-16 Verney Road, London. SE16 3DZ

Telephone: 020 7635 4800

Helpline: 0303 123 9999

Website: [www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk](http://www.actionforblindpeople.org.uk)

## **Action on Hearing Loss**

Head Office, 19-23 Featherstone Street, London. EC1Y 8SL

Telephone: 020 7296 8000

Information Line: 0808 808 0123

Website: [www.rnib.org.uk](http://www.rnib.org.uk)

## **Sense**

Head office, 101 Pentonville Road, London. N1 9LG

Tel: 0845 127 0060 / 020 7520 0999

Website: [www.sense.org.uk](http://www.sense.org.uk)

## **AddVenture in Learning**

c/o Isobell Phillips, 2 Holly Drive, Pen - y Ffordd. CH4 0NE

Telephone: 01244 544749

Website: [www.add-ventureinlearning.org.uk](http://www.add-ventureinlearning.org.uk)

### **See also**

- **E.1.e** - Improving Access to Bat Events - Film
- **D.2.c** - Open Country Case Study
- **B.1.c** - Example of bat walk poster
- **B.1.a** - A rough guide for bat walks
- **E.2.b** - How to use a bat detector - Video

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Credit photos: Bat Conservation Trust unless otherwise stated.