

THE ORCHARD THEATRE – ACCESS POLICY

The Orchard Theatre is committed to enabling all our patrons to participate in our events equally and with dignity and respect.

In order to further this commitment, The Orchard Theatre has adopted the Access Policy set out in this document. For the purposes of this policy, “disability” is to be understood in the broadest sense of the word and covers all disabilities coming within the scope of the Disability and Equality Act 2010.

KEY AIMS

The key aims of this policy are to ensure that:

1. All our patrons are able to access and enjoy live entertainment, music, dance, drama;
2. Disabled patrons are not treated less favourably for a reason relating to their disability than others to whom that reason does not apply;
3. All reasonable steps are taken to prevent any of the physical features of the Theatre (or indeed our practices, policies and procedures) from making it unreasonably difficult for disabled patrons to make use of our services;
4. All reasonable steps are taken to provide auxiliary aids and services to enable and assist disabled patrons in making use of our services;
5. Disabled patrons therefore feel as valued and experience the same high levels of satisfaction with our services as our other patrons.

REALISING OUR AIMS

Set out below are some of the ways in which we have sought to realise our key aims.

Staff

The Front of House Manager has overall responsibility for looking after our disabled patrons’ interests and should be your first point of contact if you have any queries regarding this policy.

At each performance at the Theatre, we also aim to provide attendants who have been specifically trained in disability awareness and who will be available to assist disabled patrons in accessing our services.

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In addition, all our members of staff are provided with regular basic training in disability awareness and etiquette, are aware of this policy and are able to assist patrons with queries regarding disabled access to the Theatre.

Those who need additional assistance

Our policy allows customers who require assistance a complimentary ticket so that they can bring a companion with them at no additional cost. The assistant must be able to help the disabled person access the theatre and its facilities, remaining with them to ensure their wellbeing and comfort. All tickets are subject to availability at the time of booking.

Full details are available from the Ticket Office upon request or via the Front of House Manager at zkitto@orchardtheatre.co.uk

Access to the Theatre

Parking

The theatre has six on-site parking bays for the priority use of patrons who require assistance and hold a blue badge when attending a performance. A free car park entry code and permit (to be displayed on the dashboard of the vehicle) is sent out to such patrons who request the facility at the time of booking, with the tickets for the performance. If any of these spaces are still available on the day of the performance, they will be offered to blue badge-holders on a first come, first served basis (whether by telephone or in person).

In addition to the on-site bays, there are five public disabled parking spaces in Suffolk Road to the right of the clock-tower and further spaces are available in the town centre and on the lower level of the Orchards Shopping Centre Car Park.

Please note that, due to health and safety reasons, our staff are unable to assist disabled patrons in and out of their transport or mobility equipment.

Inside the Theatre

There is wheelchair/level access to the stalls, lower bar area and disabled toilets, via a ramp to the right of the main entrance. Our staff at the lower bar will gladly assist those patrons who have difficulty directly accessing our Ticket Office. All of our stairs have handrails except those within the auditorium. Most of the seating within the auditorium is of the traditional raked amphitheatre style with steps to each row. There are 65 steps to the Upper Circle seating and customers with mobility difficulties may wish to avoid this area.

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Wheelchair users are accommodated in six licensed spaces, three each side of the front stalls, adjacent to ramped emergency exits. Additional seating is provided next to these spaces for a companion.

As the use of motorised mobility scooters in the busy public areas of the theatre may pose a hazard, disabled customers who are unable to access the Theatre by other means must inform the Ticket Office at the time of booking or (where tickets have not been pre-booked) immediately upon arrival. Our staff will then be able to provide those customers with information regarding the safe use of their scooter in the theatre and the safe storage for during a performance. Customers who do not need to enter the auditorium on their mobility scooter are able to park them outside of the auditorium in our foyer space.

The Orchard Theatre reserves the right to refuse admission to any customer, where it is believed by the Duty Manager that, at such time, admission would contravene the conditions of the licence and/or pose a higher than acceptable risk to public safety.

Patrons who require particular seating arrangements in order to accommodate difficulties they may have in attending performances should contact the Ticket Office.

Patrons and their carers/companions are welcome to visit the Theatre prior to attending a performance in order to familiarise themselves with the Theatre's layout. These visits can be arranged by contacting the Duty Manager on 01322 220099 or by email zkitto@orchardtheatre.co.uk

The Ticket Office is briefed on the style of performances in case either a patron or their assistant requires further information as to its suitability for that patron prior to deciding whether to book. Information is offered in good faith. However please be aware that the creative elements of a live performance may not have been finalised at the time of booking and may even be changed during the performance day, but please discuss personal requirements on the day with the Duty Manager.

Warning notices advising of the use of strobe lighting effects and pyrotechnic explosives are displayed in the entrance foyer on the day of the performances concerned and can also be discussed in advance at zkitto@orchardtheatre.co.uk or with the Duty Manager on the day of the performance.

Further assistance for those with impaired hearing

Hearing-aid systems

The Theatre has installed two systems to help those with impaired hearing:

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- 1 Firstly, the Theatre is equipped with an Infra-Red audio enhancement system. Both infrared headphone receivers and necklace style induction loop transceivers (which work in tandem with an existing hearing aid set to “T”) are available and can be pre-ordered when the initial booking is made and then collected from the Ticket Office before the performance commences. No fee is charged for the use of these receivers although a £5 refundable deposit is required.
- 2 Secondly, the Theatre is equipped with an induction loop system which can be used by those with hearing aids. In order to use the system, a patron should set their hearing aid to the 'T' position once inside the auditorium. The system works best if the patron is seated in the centre of the auditorium and so patrons who wish to use this service should inform the Ticket Office at the time of booking so that a suitable seat can be found.

For loud music concerts these systems may not be suitable. The Ticket Office is able to provide advice as to whether these systems may be suitable in respect of any particular show.

These systems are regularly checked to ensure that they are operating correctly. However, in the unlikely event that you experience any difficulty, please report the matter to a member of staff.

Signed performances

The theatre also arranges signed interpreted performances of selected shows. Details of these shows may be obtained upon request from the Ticket Office and are included within the seasonal brochure and on the theatre’s website.

Further assistance for those whose sight is impaired

A complimentary seat space can be made available for the use of guide/assistance dogs. Please advise the Ticket Office at the time of booking, so that suitable arrangements can be made

The seasonal brochure as well as of those programmes that are produced in-house, are available with advance notice in large print.

Your comments

We regularly review this policy as well as the facilities we provide to disabled patrons, in order to ensure that all our disabled patrons feel welcome at the Theatre.

We greatly appreciate any suggestions you may have about how we could improve your access to and enjoyment of, the Theatre and its facilities.

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Comment cards are obtainable from our staff upon request and are also available in large print. Alternatively comments can be made via Email to zkitto@orchardtheatre.co.uk

Front of House Manager, The Orchard Theatre, Home Gardens, Dartford DA1 1ED.