Manx National Heritage
Eiraght Ashoonagh Vannin

Access Guide for the Old House of Keys

Manx National Heritage recognises that historic properties can present difficulties for people with disabilities. We have prepared an access guide for the Old House of Keys to help you plan your visit. This access guide 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 to all our visitors.

Introduction

Situated in Castletown, the Old House of Keys was once the centre of 19th century political life on the Isle of Man. The fascinating building has been restored to its former appearance of 1866 – a milestone in Manx history when the old self-elected House of Keys took its first step along the road to modern democracy by passing the House of Keys Election Bill and becoming a popularly elected body. During your visit you will see how democracy developed in the Island, sometimes years ahead of England, and the effect that political decisions have had and continue to have on the Manx nation.

You will meet the costumed Secretary of this historic building before taking a seat in the finely restored debating chamber where you will enjoy an active debate on setting the laws of the island. Should motor racing be allowed on open roads? Should women get the vote? You decide!

The Old House of Keys is usually open seasonally (from Easter – October). It has an admission fee and various concessions are available. Our annual pass for Island residents and holiday passes can be purchased online prior to visiting. It is our policy that carers accompanying a disabled visitor are admitted free of charge to all our sites. Please see our website for up-to-date information (www.manxnationalheritage.im).

Visitors using wheelchairs are able to access the Old House of Keys debating chamber, via a temporary ramp which staff will put in place.

There are no public toilets on site.

We look forward to welcoming you. If you have any queries or require assistance please speak to the entrance team on arrival.

Alternatively to discuss your requirements prior to visiting please email enquiries@mnh.im.

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1 Getting to the Old House of Keys

The Old House of Keys is located in Castletown in the South of the Island. It is the 19th century home of Manx parliament – the House of Keys.

The Old House of Keys, Castletown

Map showing Old House of Keys location

By car:

The Old House of Keys is next to a free-of-charge car park. There are no dedicated disabled bays in the car park.

Visitors should note that Castletown operates a parking disc zone, which means free parking for an allotted time. Disabled badge holders can park in the disc zone for double the allotted time, a parking disc must be displayed. Parking discs can be collected from any IOM Post Office (there is one in Castletown town centre), the Isle of Man Airport and the Welcome Centre at the Sea Terminal in Douglas. Please check the information signs when you park.

There are double yellow lines in a number of places around Castle Rushen, please note that on the Isle of Man disabled badge holders are not permitted to park on these lines.

There is a drop off point immediately in front of the Old House of Keys.

On foot:

The Old House of Keys is a 2 minute walk from Castletown Market Square and is on level ground. There are pedestrian pavements leading to the main entrance and there are dropped curbs.

Please note that Castletown is the ancient capital of the Isle of Man and is thus historic in nature. Many of the streets and pavements are uneven. The pavements of Castletown are narrow in places and paved with textured slabs. In addition the slabs can become slippery when wet.

By bus:

There is a bus stop in the main square. Journey time from Douglas takes approximately 25 minutes. The route to the Old House of Keys is wheelchair and buggy accessible, but assistance may be required due to the uneven pavements.

By coach:

Coach visitors can be dropped off in the Market Square. There is a coach park on Farrant's Way (to the rear of the Market Square).

2 Entrance Area

Access to the Old House of Keys is through a single door, 100cm wide. There is a slight step (5cm depth) leading to a larger stone step. There is no handrail. The step is not edge-marked.

We have two temporary wooden ramps which can be placed at the large step to aid access for visitors using wheelchairs.

Main entrance – showing moveable wooden ramps and slight step

Main entrance – detailing temporary ramp

The lighting level is good in the Old House of Keys.

There is no entrance counter at the Old House of Keys.

Cloak Room Facilities

There are cloak room facilities at the Old House of Keys and bag/coats can be brought into the debating chamber.

3 Access for Disabled Visitors

The Old House of Keys offers a warm welcome to all.

Visitors with specific needs are welcome to contact Manx National Heritage in advance of their visit and descriptive guided tours can be arranged. To discuss your requirements please email enquiries@mnh.im.

Assistance dogs are welcome and a water bowl is available at reception, please ask.

Visitors who use Wheelchairs or have Limited Mobility

The Old House of Keys is accessible to visitors using wheelchairs via a moveable ramp.

The chairs in the debating chamber can be moved to accommodate wheelchairs.

Level Changes (The Old House of Keys)

Ground Floor

The Old House of Keys consists of a debating chamber on the ground floor. It is accessible to visitors using wheelchair. The floor surfaces are wooden and carpet.

The Old House of Keys is a 45 – 60 minute interactive performance, where visitors are able to debate historic laws. Visitors are generally seated for the debate.

The Old House of Keys Debating Chamber

Visitors who are Blind, Partially Blind or have Sight Loss

The Old House of Keys is a 45-60 minute interactive debate in the historic debating chamber. It utilises film and sound technology, and is coordinated by a costumed interpreter ('the Secretary'). Our Secretary will be happy to answer any questions you may have and can offer descriptive assistance.

Assistance dogs are welcome and a water bowl is available, please ask.

Visitors with specific needs are welcome to contact Manx National Heritage in advance of their visit and descriptive guided tours can be arranged. To discuss your requirements please email enquiries@mnh.im.

Visitors who are Deaf or have Hearing Loss

The Old House of Keys is a 45-60 minute interactive debate in the historic debating chamber. It utilises film and sound technology, and is coordinated by a costumed interpreter ('the Secretary').

The debate questions are available in written form.

The Old House of Keys has an induction loop for our hearing impaired visitors. The hearing induction loop requires your hearing aid to be set to T.

The films are not subtitled.

Assistance dogs are welcome and a water bowl is available, please ask.

Visitors who have Learning or Sensory Difficulties

The Old House of Keys is an interactive experience, with a costumed member of staff playing the role of the Secretary of the House of Keys. The paintings in the room come to life (through technology) and interact with each other, the secretary and the visitors. There is also a mannequin playing the role of Speaker of the House of Keys, which also talks to visitors.

This can all seem a bit strange to some visitors, so we can arrange for a tour of the Old House of Keys prior to a 'sitting' taking place to familiarise visitors who might find the experience daunting.

The House of Keys 'sitting' is great fun and visitors are encouraged to join in with the debates. It works best if you are in a small group, so that you can debate with your family and friends.

We can also offer private 'sittings' for pre-booked groups. To discuss your requirements please email enquiries@mnh.im.

4 Young Children

The Old House of Keys is a 45-60 minute interactive debate in the historic debating chamber. It utilises film and sound technology, and is coordinated by a costumed interpreter ('the Secretary').

The Old House of Keys is not generally recommended for very young children as it involves sitting in the debating chamber for the duration of the session. However, the experience is fun and the film and sound technology used is engaging – so older children can certainly enjoy the experience. Our Secretary also helps engage different audiences with the debate.

We leave it up to you to decide whether the sitting would suit your children, and you are welcome to have a familiarisation visit prior to taking part in the debate.

Please note the Old House of Keys can still be explored without taking part in the debate.

The Old House of Keys debating chamber

5 Toilets

There are no public toilets at the Old House of Keys. The nearest accessible public toilet is at the Castletown Civic Centre (5-10 minute walk). It is operated by a radar key, which can be borrowed from the Civic Centre staff.

There is also a male and female accessible toilet at Castle Rushen, which can be used by MNH visitors.

There is also an accessible toilet at the Costa coffee shop outside the main entrance of Castle Rushen.

6 Future Plans

The Old House of Keys team receive customer service and equality awareness training, and are always happy to help. We work with a range of partners across the Island to ensure our sites and collections are accessible, engaging and inspiring to a broad range of users. We are always seeking to improve our services for visitors and appreciate your feedback.

Manx National Heritage is committed to improving access to heritage assets for everybody; and is working to embed an inclusive 'access for all' philosophy across the organisation and in everything we do.

If you would like to discuss access and inclusion in more detail please contact Access & Inclusion Champions Katie King on 01624 648023, Katie.king@mnh.im, or Suzie Walker on 01624 648091, Suzanne.walker@mnh.im.

Contact Information

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Opening hours:	*Please see our website for up-to-date opening hours*