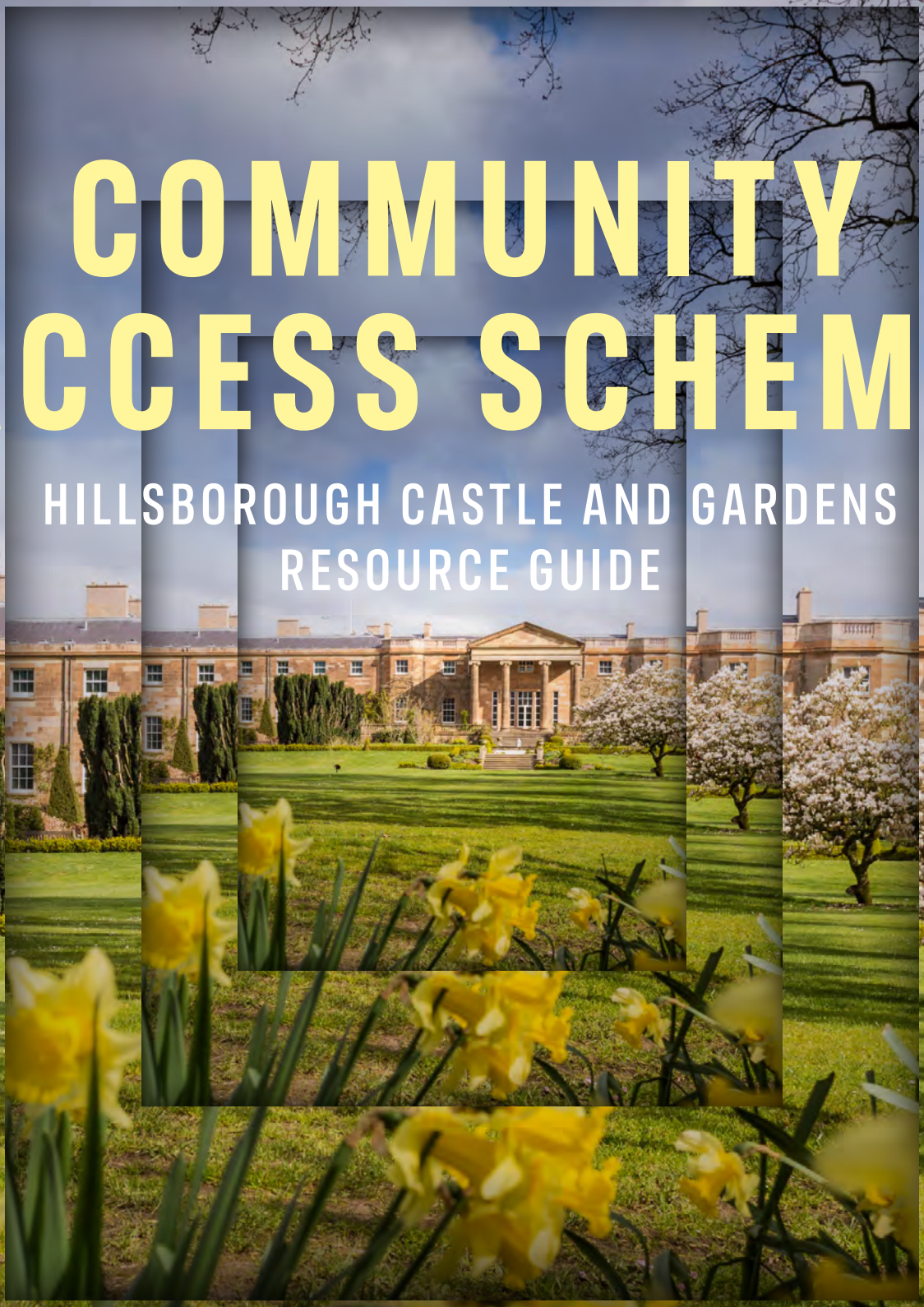
HISTORIC ROYAL PALACES

COMMUNITY ACCESS SCHEME

HILLSBOROUGH CASTLE AND GARDENS RESOURCE GUIDE



SPACE TO STIR AND BE STIRRED

TOWER OF LONDON · HAMPTON COURT PALACE · BANQUETING HOUSE
KENSINGTON PALACE · KEW PALACE · HILLSBOROUGH CASTLE AND GARDENS

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INTRODUCTION

This resource guide aims to help CAS leaders feel confident about independently visiting Hillsborough Castle and Gardens with their group and engaging with the history and stories of the site. It contains practical information about Hillsborough Castle and Gardens and information on how our Community Access Scheme works.

If you have any queries at any time regarding the Community Access Scheme, please contact:

Louise Smith
Community Partnerships Producer
louise.smith@hrp.org.uk
028 9268 1379

Lisa Murray
Community Partnerships Assistant Producer
lisa.murray@hrp.org.uk
028 9268 1337

HOW CAS WORKS

The Community Access Scheme provides free access to Hillsborough Castle and Gardens for local community groups and charities. By training up group leaders and encouraging self-led visits for groups, we aim to ensure community groups from all backgrounds can feel a sense of belonging here.

The Community Access Scheme consists of:
– Half-day onsite training for group leaders;
– Signing of a Service Level Agreement (SLA) which is renewed annually;
– Free group visits to our gardens all year round;
– Free return visit tickets for group members following their first visit;
– Staff support for planning visits;
– Access to our programme of facilitated creative workshops, tours, talks and activities.

Once you have completed your training and your group's SLA has been signed you will receive your personalised CAS Group Leader card. Please keep this safe as you will need it when bringing your group on site.

TYPES OF VISIT

Being a CAS member gives your group access to Hillsborough Castle and Gardens in a number of different ways. (Please note that group leaders must remain onsite for the duration of their group's visit.)

SELF-LED VISITS

The main one is via self-led visits. This allows a group leader, who has attended training with us, to bring up to 15 group members to enjoy the gardens. Visits must be pre-booked and tickets will be issued in advance via email. The ticket email should be brought to the admissions desk, along with your CAS group leader card, and your group will be allowed access to the gardens. The email does not need to be printed - as long as it can be viewed on your phone that is fine.

PRE-BOOKED VISITS

Facilitated visits are those where input or facilitation from our staff is required and could include your group taking a tour of the house or participating in an object handling session in the Clore Learning Centre. Facilitated visits are subject to the availability of rooms and staff and should be booked as far in advance as possible.





WORKSHOPS

We offer a seasonal programme of hands-on workshops, talks and activities to our CAS member groups. Participation in these is subject to availability and member groups will be kept up to date by email as opportunities arise.



FREE ENTRY CARD

The Community Access Scheme offers CAS group members the chance to make individual return visits to our beautiful gardens absolutely free of charge

Following your group's first visit, group leaders can request free entry cards for everyone who attended. These cards are limited to two per person and are for garden entry only. Other terms and conditions may apply – see cards for details. Please check our website for up-to-date opening hours.

CLORE LEARNING CENTRE

Our Clore Learning Centre provides facilities for learning and engagement activities with schools, families, and CAS groups. Rooms in the Clore are used for CAS training, workshops and, subject to availability, can be booked as a packed lunch eating area.

The Clore Learning Centre is situated at the upper end of the site nearer to Hillsborough Village. Buses can drop groups off here and make use of the dedicated coach parking at the lower main car park. There is limited accessible parking at the upper site and this should be pre-arranged with us in advance. The main parking area for visitors is located at the lower end of the site.

The Clore Learning Centre is a shared space also used for school groups, staff meetings, and events. Please be considerate of this when leaving the space.

GETTING HERE

OPENING TIMES

The gardens are open all year round whereas the castle is subject to seasonal opening hours. We suggest all groups planning a visit check up to date opening dates/times, and any planned closures, on our website in advance at **www.hrp.org.uk/Hillsborough-Castle**

Please contact us if you are unsure in any way about whether or not it is suitable/possible for your group to visit on a particular date.

TRAVEL

Car

Free on-site car parking is available at our main car park located off the A1. The car park post code for satnav is BT26 6TY. Follow the brown tourist signs on the A1 south to the sign-posted car park entrance. There is plentiful accessible and coach parking here also. Please note this car park is at the opposite end of the site to the castle itself and it is not possible to access this car park via the entrance on Main Street in Hillsborough Village.

If you are coming to an activity in the Clore Learning Centre, or for a castle tour, and will be arriving at the top gate via Hillsborough Main Street please speak to us in advance about the availability of suitable onsite parking.

Public Transport

Hillsborough Castle can be reached by public transport. Up to date public transport information can be obtained from **www.translink.co.uk** which also has a journey planner feature. There are regular bus services from central Belfast and Lisburn Bus Station. The nearest bus stop is 'Hillsborough War Memorial' which is a few minutes' walk from the castle gates in the village. If arriving by public transport please speak to us to pre-arrange access for your group via our top gate from Hillsborough Main Street.

Coach Parking
Parking is available for coaches and minibuses in our main car park accessible off the A1. Depending on the nature of your visit buses may drop groups off at the upper entrance, behind Hillsborough Court House. However, buses will then have to leave and if requiring parking, park at the main coach park at the lower site (as above). It may be possible for minibuses to remain parked at the upper end of the site depending on other onsite activity.

Accessible Parking
Groups coming for a pre-arranged visit to the Clore or for a castle tour who require accessible parking at the upper site must arrange parking in advance. Limited parking for those with mobility difficulties (e.g. blue badge holders) may be available on the forecourt near the Clore Learning Centre. If your group requires this facility please contact us before your visit.

UNFORESEEN CLOSURES

As Hillsborough Castle is a working royal and political residence, we are on occasion, required to close at short notice. Should this occur, we will let you know as soon as possible. In the event of your visit being cancelled, we will endeavour to arrange a suitable alternative date where possible.

At times, areas of the garden may be closed for maintenance, event set-up or for health and safety reasons. Should this occur, and in the event that it will have a major impact on your visit, we'll inform you as soon as possible if we are aware of your visit. **Otherwise, please check the website for the most up to date events information. We advise you check the website when planning your visit and a day or two beforehand in case anything has changed at short notice.**

Should any areas be closed, staff and signage will be on hand to advise and assist on the day.



ESSENTIAL INFO

TOILETS

Groups may use the toilets in the Clore Learning Centre if you have booked a facilitated session. If you are on a self-guided, gardens-only visit, then toilets are located behind the greenhouse in the gardens and near the main car park in the Pineapple Yard. Accessible toilets are situated in all of these spaces. Our Changing Places toilet is located in the Pineapple Yard at the main admissions area.

EATING & DRINKING

Please do not eat or drink in the house or any of the historic buildings. You are welcome to enjoy a packed lunch in the gardens or make use of a pre-booked lunch space in the Clore Learning Centre (subject to availability and requiring pre-booking.) A café is also located adjacent to the main car park and admissions desk with plenty of indoor and outdoor seating. Our Stableyard Café at the top of the site is open during the summer months when the castle is open to the public.

OBJECTS IN THE HOUSE

There are no ropes or barriers in the house, as we strongly feel that this detracts from the visitor experience and has a negative impact on the stories we wish to tell and the atmosphere we want all our visitors to enjoy. With this in mind, please remember that you cannot touch any objects, or sit on any furniture in any of the rooms, unless a member of staff explicitly invites you to. Seats can be made available during tours for visitors with mobility difficulties – please speak to your guide before the tour.

SECURE AREAS

As well as being a heritage site, Hillsborough Castle is also a working building used by government and the royal family. As a result, certain areas in the house and grounds will remain off limits to visitors. We ask that you stay on the visitor route and respect any directional signage regarding access. Please also follow any instructions given by the Warden and Security teams and any other members of HRP staff.

SMOKING

Smoking is not permitted in any area on-site at Hillsborough Castle and Gardens. We do not want a repeat of the devastating 1934 fire!

PHOTOGRAPHY & FILMING

Visitors are welcome to take photographs anywhere in the grounds. Photography is not generally allowed within the castle itself.

Historic Royal Palaces is a safeguarding-aware organisation and takes its responsibility to protect children and vulnerable people seriously. We ask therefore that visitors refrain from filming or photographing other visitors. If you have concerns about photography of your group, please speak to a member of staff.

ACCESSIBILITY

ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Please let us know as soon as possible if any members of your group have special educational needs and/or health and mobility difficulties that may impact their visit to Hillsborough Castle and Gardens. We are here to help!

While the gardens are spacious and generally peaceful we appreciate that visiting a new place can be overwhelming for some of our guests. On our website you will find many images of the places and sights you might see during your time here. If you need any further guidance or support, or would like a Visual Story personalised for your visit, please get in touch with us in advance of your visit.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESS

The State Rooms in the house are accessible for wheelchair users. Please note that mobility scooters are not permitted inside the castle. Please be advised that due to the natural terrain in the gardens, some of the paths are unsuitable for wheelchair users and those with restricted mobility. There are step free routes available throughout. Visitors should bring their own wheelchairs.

PEOPLE MOVER

During the castle's regular public opening hours we have a wheelchair-accessible people mover vehicle available which can bring visitors from the main admissions area at the lower end of the site up to the castle and vice versa. Please speak to a member of staff on arrival who would be happy to arrange this for you.

TOILETS

Fully accessible toilets are located in the house, gardens toilet block near the greenhouse and in the Pineapple Yard near the main car park.





HEALTH AND SAFETY

RISK ASSESSMENTS

We carry out risk assessments on all of our activities and we have assessed the risks associated with visiting Hillsborough Castle as very low but please remember the site is open to public and consider this when planning your visit. We ask all visiting groups to carry out their own risk assessment in relation to their visit.

EQUIPMENT

Any equipment supplied by Historic Royal Palaces has been risk assessed and is deemed to represent a very low risk of an accident occurring. Individuals are responsible for any equipment which they bring into Hillsborough Castle and Gardens. At the beginning of any session, a member of staff from Hillsborough Castle and Gardens may issue instructions. It is important that the group leader and all accompanying adults listen to and follow these instructions.

CLOTHING

Please make sure that your group is suitably dressed for the day's activities. Please make sure that your group is wearing suitable footwear, especially when visiting the gardens, and is equipped with wet weather clothes and/or protection from the sun.

INSURANCE

Historic Royal Palaces has Public Liability insurance. Details can be provided on request.

ACCIDENTS/FIRST AID

If there is an accident, or near accident, during your visit, please find the nearest member of staff who will be able to help you. First aid is always available and a record will be made of any accident that occurs.

SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & VULNERABLE ADULTS

Our aim is to help everyone explore the stories of how monarchs and people have shaped society, in some of the greatest palaces ever built. This welcome to everyone includes children, young people and vulnerable adults. We want their experience of engaging with our palaces and their stories to be meaningful, enjoyable and safe. Our full safeguarding policies and procedures are available under **https://www.hrp.org.uk/about-us/policies/safeguarding-policies-and-procedures/**

If a safeguarding incident occurs while you are on-site please report this immediately to a member of staff who will be able to assist you.

SECURITY INFORMATION & PROCEDURES

The safety and security of Historic Royal Palaces' staff and visitors is always of the utmost importance. As with many public venues Hillsborough Castle and Gardens uses a range of security measures to help minimise the possibility of terrorist or other criminal activity taking place, and these measures also include procedures to deal with incidents should they actually happen.

Our security team receive regular briefings from the police and security services and are in regular contact with a number of agencies who are able to provide advice and guidance about how we can enhance our security. All our staff are regularly briefed on security matters.

BAGS

Historic Royal Palaces reserves the right to conduct bag searches as a 'condition of entry' to all its sites. Small cross-body bags are recommended. Please note large or bulky backpacks will not be allowed in the State Rooms during tours.

IN CASE OF EVACUATION

In the unlikely event that an incident should occur, it may be necessary to close, or evacuate, part or all of a site. If this occurs, you may be directed by staff to leave by certain routes, or prevented from leaving via certain routes, or from leaving the site entirely, if it is considered to be in your best interests. Please respond to the directions given by our members of staff.



A BRIEF HISTORY

The village of Hillsborough has had royal connections since the mid-seventeenth century when King Charles II granted the charter to create a borough here and thus also send two members of parliament.

The present house dates from the late 18th century and was built as a family home for the Hill family. It remained as such until the turn of the 20th century when the family first rented it out, and later sold it completely in the 1920s.

It was bought by the British government following the partition of Ireland to be the official royal residence in Northern Ireland. Governors were then appointed to represent the Monarch and the house became known as Government House. It remained as the official residence of the Governor of Northern Ireland for over fifty years.

When that role was abolished in the 1970s, Hillsborough became the home of the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and in 2014 Historic Royal Palaces took over the running of the house and gardens.

However, it is still the official residence in Northern Ireland of both the Secretary of State and also His Majesty the King, so we are very much a working, living household.

WHAT TO SEE AT HILLSBOROUGH CASTLE AND GARDENS

As part of your training you will have received a copy of our visitor guidebook giving you detailed information on the castle, the gardens and some of our most famous faces. This will help you guide your groups around points of interest on their visits.

(Please be aware that your group can only access the house on a guided tour as part of a pre-arranged session. You cannot access the house on a self-guided visit.)

Official residence of the royal family in Northern Ireland, pivotal venue in the Northern Ireland peace process, Government House, and Georgian family home; Hillsborough Castle has a rich and interesting history. There is lots to explore in the house, grounds and wider village.

Hillsborough Castle is a large and diverse landscape covering almost 100 acres, with formal gardens, woodland areas, a walled garden and lake.

The historic gardens, which were developed from the 1760s onwards, offer a wide range of habitats and feature many spectacular specimen trees and rare plants.



You might want to explore some of the following highlights:

The South Terrace:

This area of the garden is one of the more recent additions and was designed to commemorate Queen Elizabeth II's Diamond Jubilee in 2012. The garden follows a traditional symmetrical design, with pathways linked by clipped border hedges.

Granville Garden:

This beautiful rose garden was created during the late 1940s by Lady Rose Bowes-Lyon, aunt to Queen Elizabeth II, who was then living at Hillsborough Castle with her husband, Lord Granville, who was Governor of Northern Ireland.

Yew Tree Walk:
This path, leading to Lady Alice's pond, was originally the old road to Moira which passed right under the windows of Hillsborough Castle and into the Square. The road was moved during the 1830s and the buildings along its route relocated. It is named after the paired Irish Yew trees which line each side of the path. When the path was created the stipulation was that it had to be wide enough for two ladies in crinoline dresses to walk side by side!

Lady Alice's Temple and Pond:
Lady Alice's Temple overlooks the pond and offers stunning views up Yew Tree walk and towards the house. The temple was a wedding gift to Lady Alice Hill, by her brother Arthur, the 5th Marquess of Downshire, in 1867. Former Secretary of State Mo Mowlam greatly enjoyed the gardens here and often retired to the temple with a book as a respite from politics.

Quaker Burial Ground:
Historically the Quaker Meeting House was located along the old road to Moira. When the road was relocated so was the Meeting House which remains in the village today. The burial ground became enclosed within the castle's grounds. A ceremony is held at the burial ground by local members of the Quaker community every year.

The Ice House:
Built in the 1770s the ice house was the forerunner to modern refrigeration. Ice was harvested from the nearby stream during the winter and packed between layers of straw in a deep pit. It could then be used all year round to enable food to be stored for longer and allow the cooks to create luxurious iced desserts.

Walled Garden:
The beautifully restored 18th century Walled Garden covers an area of 4 acres. Historically, it would have produced fruit, vegetables and cut flowers for the running of the house. Why not visit and see what seasonal produce is being grown? Or pay a visit to the shell house at the top of the Walled Garden?

Stable yard:
Originally the stable yard for the castle, housing horses and coaches, during the time the Governors were in residence it housed a range of cars. Today it is home to the Clore Learning Centre.

Other areas you may wish to visit include the unique Moss Walk, the lake with its range of waterfowl and the historic Pineapple Yard.



WHAT TO SEE IN HILLSBOROUGH VILLAGE

The Court House

Wills Hill, first Marquess of Downshire designed and built the Court House. It was originally a Georgian market house, where linen was bought and sold, and was built before 1765. It was also the place where tenants would come to pay their rents.

From 1810, the building was extended and used as a Court House and continued to be used as a petty sessions court until 1986. The Court House is not currently open to the public on a regular basis but there are plans for development in the future.

Hillsborough Fort

The fort was completed by Peter Hill in approximately 1630 and was built on the site of an earlier Magennis stronghold. It was then rebuilt by Arthur Hill in 1650, after having been destroyed in the rebellion of 1641.

King Charles II made Arthur Hill a Hereditary Constable, which allowed him to have a private militia of 20 armed men. The current Lord Downshire remains Hereditary Constable of the Fort Warders (of which there is only 1 – the bugler!) and it remains one of only two legal private militia in the United Kingdom.

In the mid-18th century, Wills Hill restored the, by then, dilapidated fort and turned the grounds into a pleasure garden where many celebrations were held.

St. Malachy's Church

The church is a fine example of Gothic Revival architecture and was built by the 1st Marquess of Downshire between 1760 and 1774.

Inside the church porch, you will see several plaques commemorating the Hill family, many of whom are buried in the family vault underneath the church. Inside the church you can see the pulpit, which was designed by Wills Hill himself.

The organ is by Johann Snetzler, one of the most renowned organ builders of the 18th century. The organ cost Wills Hill the sum of £400 in 1772 which today would be approximately £35,000.

At the end of the drive leading away from the church back into the village the two small buildings on the right- and left-hand side were also built by Wills Hill. These were originally school houses, one for boys and one for girls.

Downshire Monuments

There is a statue to the 4th Marquess at the bottom of the drive leading away from St. Malachy's Church. Also known as the 'big Marquess', this statue was created by Samuel Lunn in 1868 and was erected in gratitude for the aid the Marquess gave to his tenants during the famine. He gave £20,000 for famine relief efforts, which is approximately £500,000 today. He also opened a hospital.

A short distance outside Hillsborough village is the Downshire Monument, erected to the 3rd Marquess.

Forest Park

There is a large lake and forest park nearby which can be accessed from the fort, or from the Dromore Road via Park Street. As well as offering opportunities for walking and bird watching, the site is also renowned as the location for the first flight in the British Isles. This flight, which took place at the end of 1909, was by Harry Ferguson who built and flew his own plane. There is a plaque commemorating this in the park.


Gas Works Meadow
Coronation Meadow
15
14
13
12
9
11
Carriage Drive
Vehicle only
Main entrance from A1
Pineapple Yard
Entrance/exit from the Car Park
Weston Pavilion
WHERE TO FIND
Hillsborough Castle Café
Shop
Information
Buggy Park and lockers
First Aid
Car Park
Toilets
Baby change
Changing Places toilet
Step-free route
Mobility Transport stop



1 Hillsborough Castle entrance
2 Granville Garden
3 Yew Tree Walk
4 Willow House
5 Friends Burial Ground
6 Lost Garden
7 Lady Alice's Temple
8 The Gardens' Summer House
9 Glen
10 Moss Walk
11 Walled Garden
12 Hydro House
13 Pinetum
14 The Ice House
15 Lake

Imaginary Menagerie trails

Please pick up an Imaginary Menagerie leaflet to discover our trail through the gardens

ACCESSIBILITY

Please ask a member of staff for more information or our Access Guide.

RECOMMENDED ROUTE TO CASTLE

The main route to the Castle entrance from the Walled Garden is step-free. All step-free routes are marked on the map in pink.

Other paths have uneven steps and slopes which may become slippery in wet weather, and are unsuitable for wheelchair users and those with restricted mobility.

MOBILITY TRANSPORT

When the castle is open we operate a transport service from the Walled Garden for those needing assistance. Stops are marked on the map.

YOUR SAFETY

Please take care around deep open water, steps and steep drops *(especially Lady Alice's Pond and the Lake.)*

Children must be supervised at all times