

Dalby Forest Visitors Centre – External Stairs



Design and Access Statement

December 2017

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Introduction

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared by AEW Architects on behalf of the Forestry Commission to support a Full planning application required for a new external staircase and replacement of a section of timber parapet with a glass balustrade at the Dalby Forest Visitor Centre.

These works form part of the overall refresh works previously undertaken at the Visitor Centre.

Location

Dalby Forest offers over 8,000 acres of woodlands to explore and enjoy, including play areas for children (at Sneverdale and Adderstone), barbeques for the family and plenty of waymarked trails, cycling and walking, for all abilities. The Visitor Centre is positioned close to Low Dalby village, 1.5 miles from the Thornton Dale entrance into Dalby Forest.

Dalby Forest is situated on the southern slopes of the North York Moors National Park. The southern part of the forest is divided by a number of valleys creating a 'Rigg and Dale' landscape whilst to the north the forest sits on the upland plateau.

Dalby Forest Visitor Centre

The Dalby Forest Visitor Centre is an eco-friendly visitor centre and is one of the Forestry Commission's first visitor centres with sustainability as its main focus. Prior to the refresh works facilities within the centre include an information desk, Forestry Commission shop, hands-on interactive exhibition area, meeting room, external and internal toilets, Treetops Restaurant and an external first floor terrace.

The Visitor Centre sells maps and booklets about the various walks and cycle trails within the forest and is also the new home of the Dalby Astronomical Centre where events are held throughout the year.

The Visitor Centre is wheelchair friendly.

In addition to the Visitor Centre Dalby Forest is also home to the Courtyard Complex which includes craft workshop units, offices for rent by private organisations, a permanent home for the cycle hire centre, cycle wash facilities and new improved toilet facilities.

The Visitor Centre and Courtyard Complex are designed to improve and develop the forest as a 'Regional Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Economic Activity'. It was expected that tourism activity would be developed in a way that builds upon, enhances and maintains the distinct character of the forest, which contribute to the special qualities of the National Park and creates real benefit to the local community in terms of economic regeneration, quality of life and an enhanced environment.

Planning Overview

There are three planning application of relevance to this application since they relate to the development of the existing Dalby Forest Visitor Centre, the construction of a new visitor centre on the site and the addition of solar PV panels to the southern elevation of the existing visitor centre.

NYM/2003/0709/C1: conversion and extension of existing complex to provide community hall, craft workshops and offices, biking centre and associated facilities and parking
Approved with conditions on 22 12 2003

NYM/2003/0800/C1: construction of a new visitor centre
Approved with conditions on 06 05 2010

NYM/2010/0460/FL: installation of solar pv panels on southern elevation of Dalby Visitor Centre together with solar pv panels on south east facing roofslope of units 3/4/5 the Courtyard and solar pv panels on south west facing roofslope of Community Resource building and installation of 11 square metres of heritage solar slates on cafe building
Approved with Conditions on 07 10 2010

NYM/2013/0825/FL: Installation of new window and door openings, steps, posts and handrails and balustrade
Approved with conditions on 24.01.14

The planning policy of relevance to this application is *policy DP3 - Design of the North York Moors Core Strategy and Development Policies* (November 2008) which requires development to enhance the distinctive character of the National Park by utilising a high standard of design detailing whether traditional or contemporary that reflect the local vernacular and take into account the access needs of all potential users.

The Proposal

In 2014 The Dalby Forest Visitor Centre underwent a refresh to improve the visitor facilities. During the refurbishment the restaurant was relocated from the first floor to the ground floor in order to increase the number of customers and allow access to the children's play area. This has been a very successful change resulting in the desired increase in restaurant use.

When the restaurant was located on the first-floor level visitors had access to an external roof terrace. Due to the restaurant's relocation to the ground floor this first floor external terrace has now become an underused area. The proposal included in this planning application is relink the restaurant and external spaces with the roof terrace by installing an external staircase which will allow visitors to gain access to the roof terrace directly without having to travel up through the building internally.

The design of the staircase has been carefully considered. The west facing balustrade will be constructed of a galvanized frame clad in larch timber to match the existing building's cladding while the east facing balustrade will feature galvanized posts with toughened glass panels and a tactile timber handrail. The width of the first stair flight is deliberately splayed, elevating the design above that of a purely functional access stair.

Along with the proposed external staircase it is planned to remove part of the timber clad parapet on the northern side of the building. This parapet will be replaced with a glass balustrade which, it is hoped, will encourage visitors to ascend the staircase and will afford views of the surrounding area.

The materials proposed will feature galvanized metal stairs including the treads, risers and balustrade support posts. The first-floor terrace will feature a glass balustrade supported by galvanized metal posts. Larch cladding will feature on the west facing stair balustrade.