



2023

Life Science Centre - Access Review



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Life Access Review 2023

Background/Introduction

Life is a pioneering science village in the heart of Newcastle upon Tyne. It is home to researchers, clinicians, technologists and science engagement professionals who work side by side to help improve the health and well-being of people living in North East England.

At its heart is the award-winning Life Science Centre which provides a varied and exciting engagement programme for families, school children, adults, teenagers and pre-schoolers. Its aim is to inspire everyone to explore and enjoy science and to discover its relevance to their own lives. This has never been more relevant than it is today as we live in a world that's shaped increasingly by developments in science and technology.

Life is particularly proud of its efforts to make the centre more accessible, welcoming communities with sensory and other needs and has won several major awards in recognition of these efforts over the last few years. To build on these successes, Life has recently commissioned Tailored Leisure Co, to deliver an Access Review, which explores the centre from a regulatory and most importantly a disabled persons '*lived experience*'. *See below for more information on the intent, scope and anticipated project outcomes to drive inclusivity.

Tailored Leisure Company (TLC) are renowned across the region for their ethos and vision to overcome the barriers and social exclusion faced by disabled people, specifically when accessing fitness and leisure activities. TLC's vision is to focus on the individual's 'ability to participate' in accessible and inclusive environments. They believe everyone should be able to access health, fitness and leisure opportunities, to create positive social relationships in the community and engage in healthy lifestyle activities that enhance wellbeing.

TLC's award-winning formula has seen their Director/Founder (Tara Mackings) receive a BEM for her outstanding community work that she has delivered in the local community during covid and beyond the pandemic. The team has received an influx of award nominations and wins for groundbreaking work in fitness; wellbeing and driving accessibility of local businesses through their Community Access Reviews. Tailored Leisure are delighted to work alongside Life, to achieve their accessible aspirations and organisational goals.

Intent, Scope and Expected Outcomes

Statement of intent: The Life Science Centre is recognised as one of the most accessible science centres in the United Kingdom. In their community engagement strategy, they define accessibility in the following ways:

Accessibility is the practice of making information, activities, and/or environments we offer meaningful, and usable for as many people as possible. This can be defined in several ways:

- Physical – for individuals who use wheelchairs or have limited mobility
- Sensory – for individuals who are deaf, have impaired vision or other sensory needs such as autism
- Language – how accessible are exhibits and programming to those who speak English as an additional language or have difficulties reading

- Cultural – how relevant and diverse are exhibits and programming to those from different cultural backgrounds
- Financial – how accessible is the centre for different socio-economic groups

Diversity - Refers to the presence and participation of individuals from a range of backgrounds, including but not limited to race, ethnicity gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, ability, and age. Diversity can drive innovation and creativity by bringing together different perspectives, experiences and new ways of thinking to measure performance against in the future.

Equity - This means ensuring that Life's offer is accessible and relevant to everyone who wants to take part in our activities. We must also recognise that everyone comes with different experiences and knowledge and that some people may require additional support to access Life and STEM in the same way as others.

*During the Access Review process, TLC has very much considered and embedded the main intentions outlined above in their research methodology, report writing and action plans, to drive accessibility diversity and equity.

Scope of work and expected outcomes: Detailed below are the expected project outcomes that define the scope of work for this project. Alongside the outcomes, and within the remainder of the executive summary we have outlined progress, key findings and conclusions:

Outcome 1: Carry out a physical/sensory access assessment inside and outside the centre, including, Times Square Car Park; the access route leading to Life, the Life Labs (a dedicated suite of laboratories for use by schools) etc. * *Conducted Throughout October and December 2023*

Outcome 2: Create a baseline framework of key statutory requirements and best practice that we can measure progress against. **Refer to findings in 'Life detailed report v1*

Outcome 3: Complete a GAP analysis to identify areas for improvement, particularly any that are of a statutory nature. **Refer to findings 'Life detailed report v1' and 'Life Project Plan v2'.*

Project Delivery

To support TLC's organisational ethos regarding driving 'access for all' (which is very much aligned to Life's statement of intent and vision), we ensured local disabled communities and representatives with varying sensory and mobility disabilities visited Life and provided valuable feedback and insights from a 'lived experience perspective'. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used to collate data and feedback. Community Groups involved in the project included Useful Vision, Percy Hedley Foundation, SENDIASS Service, TLC service users, Vision and Hearing Support and pupils with complex needs from Villareal School.

In addition, TLC Auditors have attended Life to assess the centre against TLCs Access Review criteria, identifying potential barriers, making recommendations for improvement, to increase/embed accessibility and inclusion across services, exhibits and amenities.

In the first phase of the project, a number of reviews took place to a) manage the scale of the project, as there is so much to see and do at Life and b) to ensure there was a varied mix of feedback from different representatives of the disabled community.

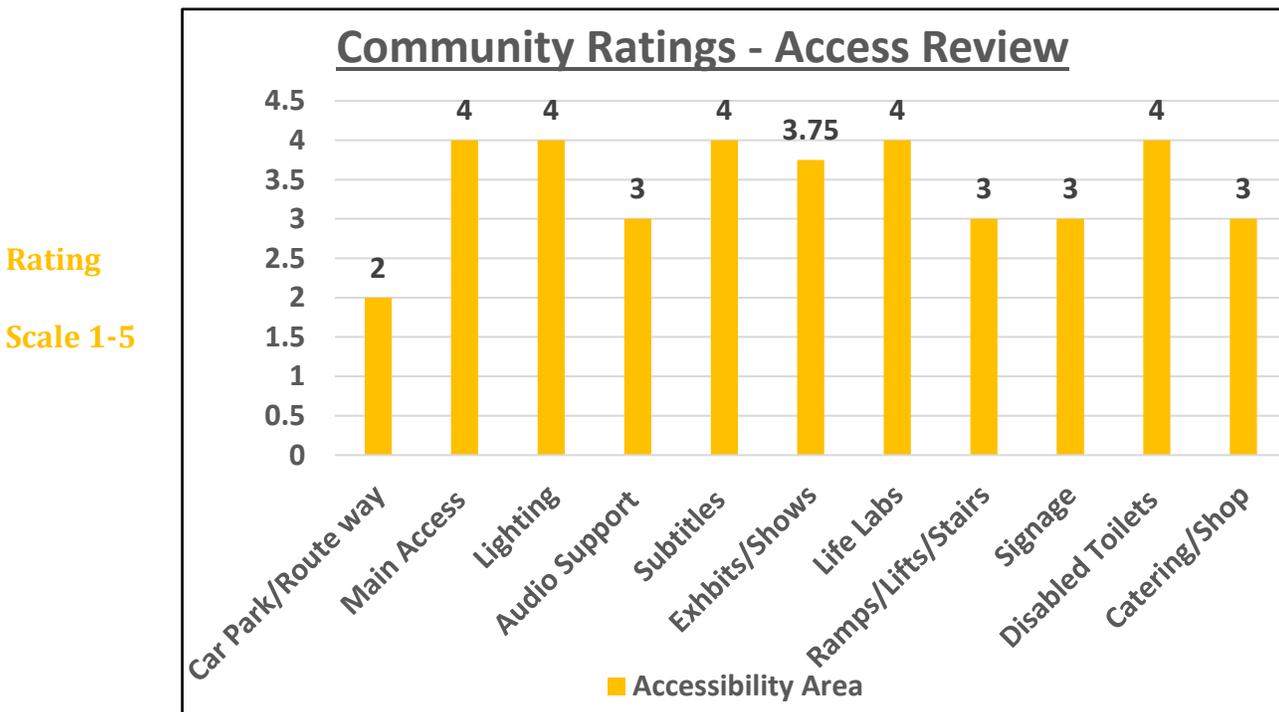
In phase two, findings were analysed by TLC Auditors to identify gaps, key themes and recommendations derived from the research process. Refer to the 'Life Detailed Report v1' and 'Life Project Plan v2', for a full break-down of feedback and actions. Within the detailed report narratives are provided with photos captured during the Access Review, to illustrate specific areas of strength/good practice and areas of focus to improve accessibility and inclusion. Note: TLC will be available in the New Year to work closely with Life to identify from Life's perspective, what are the priority work streams in relation to time, resources and budget constraints.

Key findings and themes

Headline findings and Community Ratings: See below for a summary of ratings, relating to different areas that were explored by various local disabled community groups. Visitors were asked to rate these key areas (in relation to accessibility and inclusion) on a scale of 1 - 5:

1 = Area of focus/improvement

5 = An area of strength/good practice



Community and TLC feedback: In addition to the ratings outlined above, Community groups and TLC Auditors were asked to provide written feedback on areas of focus and strength. Outlined on the following pages are high-level findings and themes, we identified during this research activity:

Areas of Strength	Areas of Focus
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Space - At Life there is a lot of space in most areas for wheelchair users to move around, without restrictions ➤ The environment - is colorful, welcoming and friendly ➤ Staff - are supportive, approachable and helpful, there is a willingness and positive attitude to support accessibility and inclusion ➤ A sensory bag - includes a variety of interesting toys and ear defenders, to support different disabilities ➤ A changing place is provided for disabled people who need additional equipment to access the toilet (this is a great asset to the building!) * You may consider advertising this to outside general public ➤ Disabled Toilets –are provided throughout different areas of the centre ➤ Exhibits -There are a variety of exhibits/activities, to engage with that cater for different disabilities. Exhibits are fun, interesting, visual, tactile, and kinesthetic ➤ Wash Facilities - Some sink designs were accessible – the Life Labs 2&3 illustrates good practice for this amenity ➤ Life Lab – A great educational facility - Sensory items are available in the life lab area; such as fish tank; cloud lighting; sensory toys; adaptable/kinesthetic equipment; there is also an automatic adjustable science bench in Life Lab 3, which should be considered for other areas at Life ➤ Lifts, ramps and stairs – There is a variety of these features to support accessibility at Life, to get around the centre 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Car park – requires the most adaptations to drive accessibility. Doors are a major barrier for independent wheelchair users ➤ Signage/Literature - by increasing and improving signage currently available, you can immensely improve the accessibility of Life and the Car Park Area, to support navigation; evacuation; engagement and reduce barriers/risks; be mindful of lighting and glare ➤ Exhibits/Activities – offer adjustable tables/seating, to cater for different wheelchair sizes and people with mobility needs; Consider buttons instead of dials for dexterity needs; More Audio/Subtitles/BSL required in places; Provide smaller scale exhibits on adjustable benches to drive inclusivity; Consider implementing a quiet and sensory room for neurodiverse visitors; lower counters in the catering and gift shop areas would benefit wheelchair users ➤ Disabled Toilets; Wash facilities – Automatic doors, soap dispensers and taps would make toilets more accessible; cords on both sides of the toilet, is ideal for emergencies ➤ Lifts/Ramps/Stairs – have highly contrasted handrails/nosing on stairs; ensure areas are well lit; the new lift will reduce issues with longer ramps ➤ Life Lab – adjustable tables in all labs are suggested; lab 1, is most accessible, for toilet requirements and to reduce potential risks with stairs and lift ➤ Floor surfaces – carpeted areas are difficult for manual wheelchair users to push on/be mindful of glare on polished floors ➤ In dark areas – Provide a clear lit/tactile pathway for people to navigate successfully ➤ Dedicated quiet room/area – consider a dedicated area that is fit for purpose and advertise it

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Shows – There is a variety of seating options and accessible features within shows. * The science theatre demonstrates best practice for wheelchair seating (located at the front of the stage) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sensory Room – a dedicated sensory room would be a great asset to Life for people who are neurodiverse ➤ Evac chair - Ensure all community and frontline staff are aware of the evacuation chair process and the evacuation points in Life -i.e. where to position a wheelchair user who cannot be transferred to an evac chair in the event of a fire * Advertise these locations on a Wheelchair Accessible Map or inform relevant visitors at reception
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Results and Conclusions

Headline findings and key priorities: See below for emerging themes and recommended priority areas that have been identified during triangulation of research/data. These headline findings require important reasonable adjustments to enhance accessibility at Life:

CAR PARK – This facility is a key priority that requires essential adjustments to ensure accessibility and safety for independent wheelchair users

SIGNAGE – Signage is one of the main improvement areas, collated from the various community groups that participated in the Access Review

ADJUSTABLE TABLES/BENCHES – By implementing adjustable tables/benches into your exhibit/catering areas you can support inclusivity

RAMPS/STAIRS
Adjustments such as signage, highly contrasted handrails and lighting are important to support accessibility

LIFTS: When the new lift is installed, this will significantly reduce the issues identified with the non DDA compliant ramp - for wheelchair users

AUDIO FACILITIES:
Consider implementing more assistive hearing technology in key areas throughout Life i.e. in shows and experiment zone

Tailored Leisure Co and the various Community Groups who have visited Life, gave Life (excluding the Car Park and Access Route) an official rating of 3.5 Butterflies for accessibility and inclusion. This rating can easily increase to a 4 and above after the implementation of actions recommended.

TLC would like to take this opportunity to thank Life for this exciting and wonderful experience! We have been blown away by the enthusiasm and dedication of the Life Team to deliver an accessible, inclusive experience to people with disabilities and will look forward to working with you in the 2024.