

Leeds Castle, Kent

Information dated 2012, from www.accessinlondon.org
For a summary of the abbreviations used see under *Methodology*

Leeds Castle

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The castle dates back nearly 900 years, and the setting, in the middle of a lake, is breathtaking. It has been owned by monarchs, including Henry VIII, and by famous families including those of Sir Anthony St Leger, Lord Culpeper and Lord Fairfax. The last owner, Lady Ballie, left the castle to the nation. Since then, considerable efforts have been made to make the site accessible. A leaflet is available. Special events, such as wine festivals, concerts and a flower festival, are held from time to time.

The castle is well signed from junction 8 on the M20.

Large CP about 400m from the ticket office, with BB spaces at the far end in a tarmaced area (no height restriction). It's about 50m from the BB spaces to the ticket office, and if you want to use the loo, do so first, as it's before getting your ticket. It's around 1km via a winding path to the castle going past the Duckery which has an artificial lake. A minibus with lift access will take you near to the entrance if needed.

The bridge leading to the castle has 45m of quite vicious cobbles, to a circular 'courtyard' called the Inner Bailey. **The GF has been made accessible to chair users by using the main entrance, and there's a platform stair lift by the Heraldry room to bypass -6 steps.** Part of the route takes you against the flow of people doing a standard tour, so you may have to wait a little. Only two chair users are allowed in the castle at any one time.

The standard route through the castle involves about a dozen steps down to an outside path along the fortress wall, which leads you to the cellar. +2 into the cellar and then there's a staircase with uneven steps leading to the GF. From the GF, the upper floors are +2+28 (spiralled and with a floppy rope as a 'handrail'), then -2-15 'straight' steps to get down.

Other on-site attractions and facilities include several eating places, the Aviary and an area for a free flying bird show. Visiting these could take you a further 600m away from the Castle entrance. All are accessible. To see the **Dog Collar Museum**, which has a split level inside involving +3, a chair user would have to see half the exhibits from the courtyard side, and then go around to another entrance via the Culpeper garden.

Note that from this area it's important to follow the same route back through the archway and into the courtyard, as other paths lead to steps, and the signage is poor.

The grounds are partly sloped, and have a good number of seats. Past the castle entrance the Culpeper garden is ramped throughout; the **Aviary** is up a slope. The bird show takes place in a grassy area where people can sit. The **Maze** although not listed as being accessible to chair users, is step-free into the centre, but to get out step-free (bypassing the grotto with -15-7+13) you would have to retrace your steps to the entrance. The Fairfax restaurant toilets are not adapted.

The **Black Swan Ferry** on the lake can carry up to three chair users.

The **accessible toilets** were designed and installed some years ago (we think) to standards that have been superseded:

- opposite the ticket office and at the right hand end of the block, there are two **adapted toilets (D70 ST55)** both with a high level flush and an enormous bin (!);
- at the castle entrance behind the gift shop building, **wheelchair toilet (D75 ST75)** but again with an enormous bin, and, when we visited, no lock;
- just before the courtyard with the Fairfax Hall restaurant where there are three **wheelchair toilets (D75 ST75)**, one of which has BCF. You need to push the outer door to gain access to the yard area;
- near the Maze café right at the far end of the toilet block. **Wheelchair toilet (D90 ST90)** with BCF, but the washbasin was poorly placed at the far end.