

Belsay Hall, Castle and Gardens, Northumberland

Hazard Information for Education Visits

It is the responsibility of teachers and group leaders to complete a risk assessment prior to the site visit. The following information is intended as an aid and does not replace the group leader's own risk assessment. We recommend coming to the site on a free planning visit, to help you with your risk assessment. Please note: where possible, English Heritage staff at the site will be happy to assist you with your queries, but cannot check or sign any section of your risk assessment.

Environmental conditions at historic sites may change rapidly and you will need to remain alert at all times during your visit. Most accidents are the result of slips and trips so please make sure you wear appropriate footwear and dress sensibly for the site and weather. Please be aware that the site may close at short notice due to adverse weather. Where applicable, stonework and trees at our sites are inspected regularly; however, extreme weather conditions can sometimes affect stonework and trees so as well as following any staff instructions and being mindful of temporary barriers and signage, please remain vigilant at all times. On-going conservation work may pose a temporary hazard; a member of staff will advise you of any works when you visit. Dogs on leashes may be present on site.

All learners who are 16 years or younger must be supervised by a responsible adult at all times whilst on site.

Moving vehicles may pose a hazard upon arrival and while on the site.

- Coach parking is permitted in the main car park.
- Visitor traffic will be present in the car park.
- The gardens team may use vehicles and other moving equipment throughout the grounds and gardens.
- An access road runs across the route between the formal and quarry gardens, which may have occasional site traffic.

The historic nature of the hall and stable block presents many potential hazards.

- The floor surfaces are often uneven, and there are old, steep steps and staircases throughout.
- There is low masonry around the site, particularly the Ha-Ha wall.
- Climbing on the walls is not permitted and poses a significant hazard.
- There is low level lighting in the basement of the hall, which is accessed by steep steps.
- A metal balustrade runs around the edge of the first-floor hallway overlooking the pillared hall. Please do not climb on the railings.

The gardens throughout the site pose many potential hazards.

- Paths are mainly gravelled and can hold surface water after rainfall.
- The south terrace of the Hall has unfenced, sudden and concealed drops, which are signposted.
- The quarry gardens have exposed rock faces and delicate plants embedded. Climbing is not permitted on any of the rock faces.
- The east quarry garden has a pond with deep water. The pond is not fenced off.
- Many plants are potentially harmful, including some with poisonous berries, seeds and spores; others have spikes, thorns and hairs that can irritate the skin. Yew, rhododendron and laburnum are among many of the frequently seen toxic trees and shrubs.
- Many species of fungi are encouraged to grow. These should be left undisturbed to prevent poisonous spores coming into contact with skin.
- There are mature trees on site that may drop branches in rare circumstances; care should be taken when passing under or near large trees.

The historic nature of the castle presents many potential hazards.

- The floor surfaces are uneven; the upper-level floors are accessed by a steep spiral staircase which is narrow. Some steps are worn.
- There is low-level lighting in some of the internal rooms.
- The castle roof has decked wooden flooring which may be slippery in wet conditions.
- The roof turrets have low-level doorways.
- The southern side of the castle has unfenced, sudden and concealed drops. These are signposted.
- The animated interpretation in the ground floor of the castle is on a timed loop and contains loud noises.

The playground by the castle may pose a hazard.

- The playground behind the Coach House tearoom at the castle contains apparatus for children.
- It is the responsibility of teachers and group leaders to supervise their groups when using the playground.
- Surfaces may become slippery in wet weather.
- The structures are made of wood and metal.

Belsay Castle, Hall and Gardens are home to a wide variety of wildlife.

- There are animals and birds on site, and their droppings can present a zoonotic hazard. Visitors should wash their hands prior to eating.

Asbestos has been identified on the site. This is common with older buildings and some historic artefacts and is being managed and monitored by English Heritage.

- These areas and objects are clearly marked with red 'a' stickers.
- No activities that may disturb the asbestos are permitted; please raise any concerns or accidental damage with the Site Manager immediately.

The English Heritage / Taskmaster Education bookable Tasking Backpack may cause potential hazards for groups using it.

- Leaders should choose a large, safe, flat place to do the tasks, taking advice from site staff where necessary.
- Leaders should supervise students / groups whilst doing the tasks – there are some small resources, and some that could cause injury if handled incorrectly.
- Leaders should make site staff aware if any resources are broken.
- Participants should wash their hands after completing the tasks and before eating.