

# Involvement Sessions    Access for People

## Darwin Centre Phase 2 - Explore



DC2 showing the ramp

### Overview

Access for People were commissioned to design and deliver a series of focused involvement sessions exploring how the Natural History Museum (NHM) and its Darwin Centre Phase 2 exhibit (DC2) might engage with a diversity of disabled stakeholders to inform its ongoing development up until its launch in 2009.

### Preliminaries

At the start of this process, it was felt important to allow participants to engage with their experiences of visiting museums as disabled people as well as their connections with the NHM and its offer and in particular, the developing DC2 exhibit and what it may or may not mean to them.

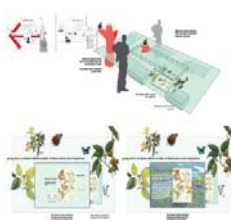
The methodology overall is one that over 4 sessions will guide an experienced and representative group of disabled people through a series of questions and exploratives, facilitating them to note, explore and challenge accessibility and usability of the proposed exhibit and to consider a wide range of time lined developments and facets of the DC2.

As a public body, it is hoped that NHM will be able to illustrate this process as exemplary methodology in meeting its responsibilities under the DDA and Disability Equality Duty to 'involve' disabled people, not just consult them and at the same time, build loyalty, mutual respect, new audiences, access and usability and promote disability equality.

### Museums - connection

People's individual and collective experiences of museums and their experiences of accessing exhibitions are very important. These experiences will not be unique to this sample of disabled people alone but will reflect the delight as well as the barriers that many museums are still, often unwittingly, putting up to participation and enjoyment.

#### A graphics panel



#### A participants response



#### 'Light touch'



*'I remember a visit to D Day Museum at Southsea. All of us were deaf. People wore headphones to hear the tapestry commentary. The exhibition space was pitch black to protect the embroidery and the panels were illuminated in time with the commentary. We couldn't use the headphones and we couldn't move on until the next panel was illuminated. So we were stuck in front of a panel for ages and couldn't really see each other to sign as it was dark. I'll never forget it. We were stuck in there for what seemed like year'.*

### Natural History Museum - connection

*'I remember coming here as a child and being Aspergic, I had a complete fascination with all the 1000s of specimens. They all disappeared in the late 70s and I was very disappointed. Eventually I came on to work here'.*

*'Too often, I've come and there are so many people. Crowds are an access issue, because they make it so difficult to see from where I'm sat and this is just as important as the features of a building or space'.*

*'The Natural History Museum has been a special place for me since I first visited it in the 1960s. The front entrance hall with big dinosaurs has ever been a place of excitement with its gorgeous architectural features'.*

*'The building (DC1) feels quite medical with all the specimens and cases on show and that's quite hard for me to come into this space, because my culture is one of hospitals and doctors probing me continually'.*

The group were very excited about DC2 and its potential for showing the real workings of the many scientists and researchers behind the scenes and throwing light in an interactive and engaging way on Darwin's theories, what they have meant and mean and how they are understood today. The opportunity to look 'behind the scenes' was particularly inviting.

### Thoughts about DC2 and the NHM



A picture of the cocoon    A participant's response    DC2 staff members' response

*'Working here has opened our eyes to the world of natural history and we feel a sense of privilege to be able to access the most amazing collection from our natural world. The paper clips on the kite show young people hanging on with all their enthusiasm' Louise Fitton - DC2 Interpretation.*

Our sample group

see appendix 1 - narratives

*'Being able to see something and feel something - a dinosaur footprint and putting your hand in that somehow, at the time made me feel absolutely connected'.*

The group comprised the following people and many of these people were able to represent a range of perspectives from others within the same impairment group:-

- A person with visual impairment
- A deaf person with sign as a first language SSE (Sign supported English) and BSL (British sign language)
- A person with a learning disability
- A person with dyslexia/ Aspergers
- A person with mental health history and associated and ME
- A person with chronic fatigue, and associated mobility impairment (wheelchair user)
- Persons with mobility impairments and chronic pain

### Involvement Design Methodology

Access for People's experience of designing consultation in this way, enables those we are involving in the developing exhibit to give the most appropriate and useful feedback for you, the client.

### Report Focus

The report focuses on usability and accessibility in relation to the developing exhibition. Any consideration of aesthetics is deliberated in the light of access and when an aesthetic response is documented, we will illustrate this clearly as requested - (aesthetic).

Access for people have qualified all comments made and why they were made and to what ends, but it has not always been possible to categorically define whether a response is down to a person's specific impairment or access requirement. We have done our utmost to give feedback that is informative and easy to respond to from an accessibility and usability perspective.

DC2 visual



Virtual Guide



'NHM and me'



## DC2 - Session 1

### Orienteering - virtual 'walk through' tour + GRAPHICS Panels

#### Virtual Tour

This was an extremely useful and informative presentation by DC2 Interpretation Developer as an introduction to the developing exhibit. It was delivered with a sense of space, narrative, accessibility and wonder.

It had the additional effect of allowing a range of issues and questions and experiences to gently emerge re: accessing exhibitions and in the case of DC2, the proposed levels, layers, observation, interaction opportunities and information points.

By virtue of the different ways of communicating and accessing within the group, it was difficult for everyone to grasp at first (via audio description or through sign language interpreters).

Of note was the fact, that the exhibit was not as enormous as first imagined from the pictures and the presentation.

To add, people were pleased to hear that the exhibit is not envisioned as a 'jam packed' experience - visitor flow would be controlled throughout, the one way system which was reassuring for those with issues with crowds, claustrophobia, different spatial and visibility access needs.

It was also made clear that there would be different points and means to access information and interpretation (to be discussed in future sessions).

It was felt that a tour around the actual space as soon as was feasible would bring a deeper sense of the exhibit to the group.

Comments expressed included:-

'Two dimensional BSL on film does not really have the quality necessary for a 3D language; the best tours for deaf people are those led by deaf people experienced in the exhibit or Sign Language interpreted tours' (deaf participant).

'The presentation made me question how close I could get to see inside the cocoon to get a sense of the scientists at work'. (visually impaired participant).

'There is a real issue for some people, well myself, if I cannot get out. If I have to follow a certain route I can feel hemmed in, so it's good to hear that there will be points where I can opt out.' (adult with learning difficulty).



## Graphics Style and Layout

A series of sample panels were shared with the group to explore the proposed graphics style, layout and content in development.

### usability/accessibility

1. Ragged right margins helpful - easier to read (dyslexia, visual impairment)
2. Text size about right, with the exception of the smallest caption size which some of our stakeholder group found virtually impossible to read (dyslexia, visual impairment)
3. Black text against a white background offers a high level of visual contrast (visual impairment) Recommendation: a cream background might reduce glare and 'floating' words effect that many people with dyslexia experience
4. The DC1 captions, whilst not within the sample, proved a useful comparator. Participants much preferred captions mounted on case fronts to those placed on shelves inside the cases which were more difficult to read - with the proviso that a solid background is provided so you cannot see exhibits/shadows behind them. (learning disability, visual impairment, dyslexia)

### accessibility/usability concerns

1. Glossary positioning/spacing - insufficient space between each glossary reference, and between the glossary and body text (dyslexia, visual impairment, chronic fatigue)
2. Glossary colour coding - grey provides insufficient contrast against white background, although red stands out well (visual impairment, learning disability)  
  
Recommendation: avoid colour combinations of reds and greens as they may be indistinguishable by those with colour blindness (10% of male adult population, 0.1% of adult females)
3. Lack of spacing between title and body text, and between paragraphs meant that the words were for most people quite difficult to read (dyslexia, learning disability)
4. Lack of spacing between sentences (aesthetic)  
Recommendation: 2 gaps after full stop easier to read.

5. Indent to indicate paragraphs - everyone without exception wanted more space between paragraphs and no indent. (aesthetic, visual impairment)
6. There were questions around the style of the large scale screen (aesthetic) but in terms of accessibility and processing information there were several additional design features that were felt to be particularly inaccessible (all)
  - a. layout of full-scale screen was hard to decipher and orienteer
  - b. the use of red and grey blocks of text were not adequately referenced as to render them meaningful unless colour coded elsewhere
  - c. the grey was impossible to decipher alongside a black font
  - d. images were neither clear nor hierarchical - to assist understanding, or appropriately labelled
  - e. overlapping of images could make things additionally difficult to understand (visual impairment)
7. The varying scale of text between the various caption panels was confusing.

Recommendation: it was felt that a consistent size should be used

8. There were questions around the design of the text and its variant behaviour at different sizes. An unwieldy graphic font that behaves differently to the eye at different sizes is difficult to process. This is also true of text within websites (dyslexia, visual impairment)

## Content

### usability/accessibility/connection

1. Illustrations are helpful in providing clues to the text, and are a hook to attract attention, however it was felt important that the illustrations support the text e.g. If you refer to a stag beetle and a ladybird, sitting alongside each other, there is a need to see the reference. In some instances the connection was not obvious (learning disability)
2. References to popular culture e.g. Star Wars: Darth Vader reference in one caption - contemporary, unexpected (i.e. humorous, non-academic) and a useful, accessible connection to describe something ( learning disability)

3. Glossary at the point of delivery i.e. within the text panels and not elsewhere was helpful (learning disability, visual impairment, dyslexia)
4. Some people felt that they had received the right amount of information, others felt there was not enough - many felt you would be compelled by the text panels to find out more, which is a good thing.

### accessibility/usability concerns

1. Text is quite wordy - easy read version requested for adults with learning disability and second language speakers, possibly with icons for key objects or trails. (learning disability)
2. Patronising language - "to simplify things", "you get the idea". Everyone without exception was irritated by this! (aesthetic) (all)
3. Conversational style takes up more space and is wordy - straight forward, concise facts, preferable. The voice seemed contrived, rather than authentic compared to the quotations from the taxidermist which had real passion and integrity. People were aware of the copywriters voice (aesthetic)

Recommendation: An editor brought in to look at simplifying the language for all visitors

4. Sentences spread over 3 lines and names spread over 2 lines problematic, difficult to follow (learning disability, dyslexia, visual impairment)
5. Given available caption card size, only a small portion taken up. Can the text be better arranged? (aesthetic)
6. Repetition e.g. 'closely-related' and 'close' appear in proximity in Order from Chaos panel. (aesthetic)
7. Lack of hierarchy of information - prefer a clear title followed by a simple concise introduction followed by detail to enable quick scan. (aesthetic, learning disability)
8. Jennifer the taxidermist was badly photographed for someone with black skin: her facial features, particularly her eyes, were difficult to see. It was felt for clarity that it was important to see her in a range of situations, not just posing with a specimen, to make her role clear - too much repetition of the same image (aesthetic)

9. Overlaying of images on the taxidermist panel was confusing for some. (learning disability, visual impairment) (aesthetic)
10. None of the group could believe the image of the neat rows of carrots in a supermarket. Carrots aren't normally lined up like this! 'not in Asda's anyway' (aesthetic)
11. Image beneath reference to stag beetles and ladybirds did not appear to contain either of these. (learning disability)

## Other interpretative tools discussed briefly

### usability/accessibility

#### Virtual Guides and suggested alternatives

There was some apprehension around the use and idea of 'virtual guides'. It was felt that alternative devices, options and considerations would be needed for some disabled audiences, as to appropriateness (representation - 'people like us'); visibility (by virtue of being a wheelchair user or finding crowds difficult); control of what is said (options for repetitions and volume management); and therefore the accessibility of such a device.

Subtitles are preferred by deaf people to on-screen sign interpretation. 2D is less convincing, of poorer quality. Sign language is a visual, spatial language i.e. 3D. The deaf community ultimately prefer specific deaf-led narrative tours in British Sign Language/Sign Supported English and this at other museums and galleries e.g. Tate Modern and Greenwich Maritime Museum has been a wonderful way of building new audiences.

Use of MP3s and pod-casting were discussed. It was felt important to watch developing technology and how disabled people are utilizing alternative means of getting information on their terms.

People felt that access to more information on the web pre-visit and available on terminals within Explore itself and in the Atrium would re-enforce key messages. Exhibits would need to be numbered to enable random access from audio guide and for trails.

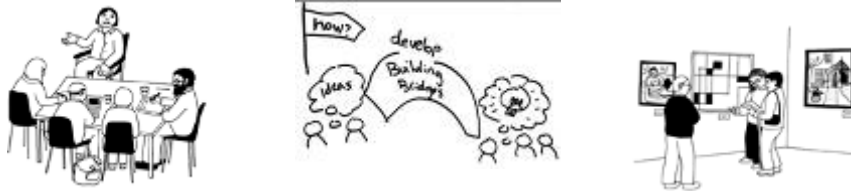
There were mixed feelings from the group around the idea of audio guides: some said that disabled people would be willing to pay for use of a hand-held audio and or visual guides, with a concessionary rate as this might be the only way they could access the exhibition. Others felt it was an adjustment that should be available for free as a matter of principle. To add to this, a clamp-on facility option for the guides and hand-held devices to free up hands as holding or wearing a device can be very tiring or painful and also difficult to additionally steer a wheelchair for example - light and portable devices needed.

## Darwin Centre Phase 2

### Access Consultation 1 (Access for People) Natural History Museum

Interpretation: SLI Sharon Cox, Mark Schofield

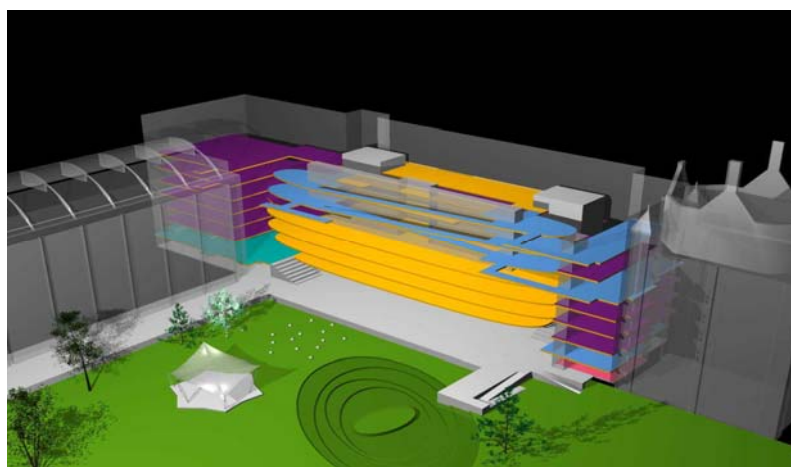
Audio Description : Willie Elliott



24<sup>th</sup> June 2008  
11.00 - 4.00p.m.  
(gather 10.30 a.m.)

A day considering DC2!

**'the stories we tell in the Darwin Centre will open up the often hidden world of scientific research and give real insight into the workings of science....' interpretation NHM**



## A picture of DC2 - the new exhibition

### Timetable

**10.30a.m** Refreshments and some exercises to get you thinking!

- **positive museums**

what has worked for you and what works for people you know

- **interpretation - 'hotties and horrors'**

great access? - your examples of good and bad practice

- **your ties to the Natural History Museum**

been here before? - your past visits

**11.00a.m** OPEN - Ground Rules - Overview - Orientation

what's happening, why are we here, why now? being clear and communicating well

**11.15a.m** Introduction 'Science & Self'

a sculpture exercise for us to all 'map' our relationship with Science - in pairs, then feedback

**11.45a.m** An Interpretation Developer for DC2 - takes us through a virtual journey

a 'talk walk' through the exhibition - and a chance to plot questions, confusion, light bulb moments

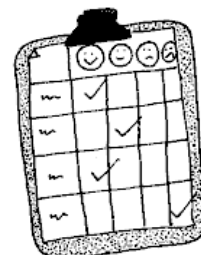
**12.30p.m** discussion

**1- 1.45p.m** LUNCH

**1.45p.m** PANELS - your response!

looking at the information panels for colour, contrast, height, text etc

**3.00p.m** Tea Break



- **gathering info as you go**

where, what and how much of it - accessing information

- **audio and audio relay and translation**

what you hear, where, how and audio translation

- **advance information**

ways to make getting around easier

- **interaction**

ways to respond, take part

- **disability relevance?**

sense of 'belonging'

**4.00p.m**

**CLOSE**

