



National
Trust

Calke Explore: a new outdoor hub for Calke Abbey

Frequently asked questions

Q: What is Calke Explore?

A: Calke Explore is a new 'outdoor hub', which provides much-needed facilities at Calke Abbey, and gives you more opportunities to get outdoors, be more active and get closer to nature.

At Calke Explore, you'll find new facilities including a car park, café, toilets and an adult changing place. From here, you can enjoy nature trails and cycle routes, accessible footpaths and outdoor play areas - including a human-sized badger sett!

During the summer holidays there will be some additional elements of natural play, as well as opportunity for fun and games with nature as part of Calke's summer programming - 'Come out and play'.

Sustainability is at the heart of Calke Explore. New recycling bins mean that you can help us to separate waste, and we're also removing single-use cups (so don't forget to bring your reusable cup!).

Q: When is Calke Explore open?

A: Calke Explore is open every day, and you can access the site as soon as the parkland opens. Throughout the summer holidays, the café is open from around 10am to 3pm, and there are staff on site every day from 10.30am until 4pm to help you enjoy the family activities at Calke Explore.

Q: Where is Calke Explore?

A: Calke Explore is located between the park entry point and the main site. You can park in the new car park at Calke Explore (overflow car parking available), which is signposted from the main drive.

Q: How accessible is Calke Explore?

A: Everyone is welcome at Calke Explore, and we've been looking at how we can create solutions for accessibility at the new site, so that you can enjoy the parkland fully. You'll find 10 accessible parking bays next to the facilities, a disabled access toilet, and an adult Changing Places facility if you have additional needs.

Calke Explore is a great way to enjoy the outdoors, with a short trail suitable for wheelchairs and mobility scooters, as well as direct access to the Tramway Trail – a flat, circular route with a hard surface. Families can be inspired by nature in the human-sized badger sett, which is wheelchair accessible.

If you'd like more information about access, get in touch or speak to a member of the team when you arrive. We'll be happy to help.

Q: Does this mean Calke Explore is finished?

A: Not quite! You'll notice that some parts of Calke Explore aren't quite finished yet - but we want you to be able to make the most of the warm summer days, so we've paused work on the site so that you can enjoy Calke Explore while the schools are off.

Contractors will be back on site in September to finish outstanding works, including the cladding of the facilities. Please also be aware that there's no drinking water in the toilets, and we can't currently provide water for dog bowls until the new water supply is approved for drinking in late August.

We expect Calke Explore to evolve over time, and we're keen to understand how you're using the site, so we'll be gathering lots of vital feedback over the coming months. This feedback will inform any future plans and ambitions for Calke Explore. If you'd like to leave us any feedback, pick up a comment card or speak to a member of the team.

Q: Will I still be able to park on the grass field near the pay point?

A: We know that this area, Ragg's Close, is popular amongst our visitors and we've made no changes to this area. However Little Town Leys, (the field beyond the car park at Calke Explore) offers a great alternative, where visitors can enjoy a secluded part of the estate away from the primary vehicle route.

Q: Why have you removed some of the existing natural play?

A: We've removed two items of the natural play which are no longer fit for purpose, and instead replaced them with new activities, such as the human-sized badger sett and outdoor table tennis.

We're pleased to offer a year-round natural play area at Calke Explore (previously only open in summer), and this does mean that the natural play will change and evolve over time, to provide new and safe experiences for your family. We're also keen to learn how you're using the space and what you enjoy most – so do leave a comment card with some feedback.

Q: How is the landscape and wildlife being protected at Calke Explore?

A: The chosen site for Calke Explore was selected partly due to its lower wildlife value compared to other parts of the estate and, throughout the project, we've been committed to safeguarding the wildlife in the area.

This includes large-scale projects such as the digging of an extensive waste trench to protect the habitats of the white-clawed crayfish, and planting new trees in the area, including a range of native species to improve the wildlife and habitat value of the site.

We want you to get closer and learn more about nature so you can help us to look after the special wildlife here - so tiptoe into the bird hide or watch out for the one-of-a-kind bug hotel.

Q: Is Calke Explore environmentally friendly?

A: As part of our commitment to creating a healthy, natural environment, we're taking steps to make Calke Explore as green as possible. We've introduced new recycling bins, environmentally friendly hand-dryers, and in future, we hope to install an electric car-charging point.

We're even banning single-use cups from the café, and instead asking you to bring along a reusable cup. You'll receive 25p off your hot drink, and you'll help us to reduce the amount of waste we produce.

In addition to large-scale projects to protect habitats and wildlife in the area, we've used estate-sourced larch wood to clad the facilities, which means they're more in-keeping with the rest of the estate.

Q: Have you removed any trees and woodlands?

A: A number of trees were removed in the area to create space for Calke Explore, however, we've worked closely with landscape designers and tree and wildlife experience to ensure minimum impact on the surrounding landscape.

Tree felling works were completed in early 2018, and the majority of trees removed were close-grown woodland trees of poor quality. The ash trees were showing early signs of the disease ash dieback, and would have limited life as landscape features.

Q: Why have you created Calke Explore?

A: Calke's visitor numbers are increasing and this puts a lot of pressure on the existing facilities. We know that lots of people come to explore the wider parkland, and Calke Explore is intended to offer you new ways to explore the outdoors and discover nature.

Located away from the main heritage site, Calke Explore will also reduce the pressure on the existing facilities and ensure we continue to protect Calke.

Q: Why was this area chosen?

A: We looked at lots of different locations to find an area that would be suitable for the facilities required, whilst having the least impact on the historic park and wildlife.

Calke Explore is located outside of the historic park and National Nature Reserve to avoid impacting these important areas, but still has good access to the rest of the estate. The site has previously been disturbed by tree felling and has been used for many years for outdoor activities such as the summer play scheme.

Q: Will Calke Explore attract new visitors?

A: The number of visitors to the Calke Estate has been growing each year and we expect this growth to continue in the future.

While the new facilities may generate some new visits, Calke Explore will help to disperse our visitors across the wider estate. This will allow us to better manage the growth in visitors that is already happening, and will reduce the pressure on the house, gardens and stables so we can protect Calke's heritage.

Q: How will you manage the multi-use rights of way with walkers and cyclists?

A: We promote the cycle trail as a family accessible cycle route, for young and entry-level cyclists as well as people with disabilities which, from our research, is less appealing for more advanced cyclists.

Multi-use trails are prevalent throughout the countryside nationally and we believe that the network of trails at Calke will accommodate both walkers and cyclists. We accept and agree that we have a role to play in promoting positive and respectful behaviours from all visitors to the estate, and have implemented an appropriate signage and orientation plan to support this.

Q: Where can I go for more information?

A: We have plenty of information available on the Calke Abbey website, from what to expect during your visit, to further information about the project.

At Calke Explore, you'll find a map, leaflets and further information at the Welcome Point. During the summer, a member of the team will be on hand to assist with any enquiries.