

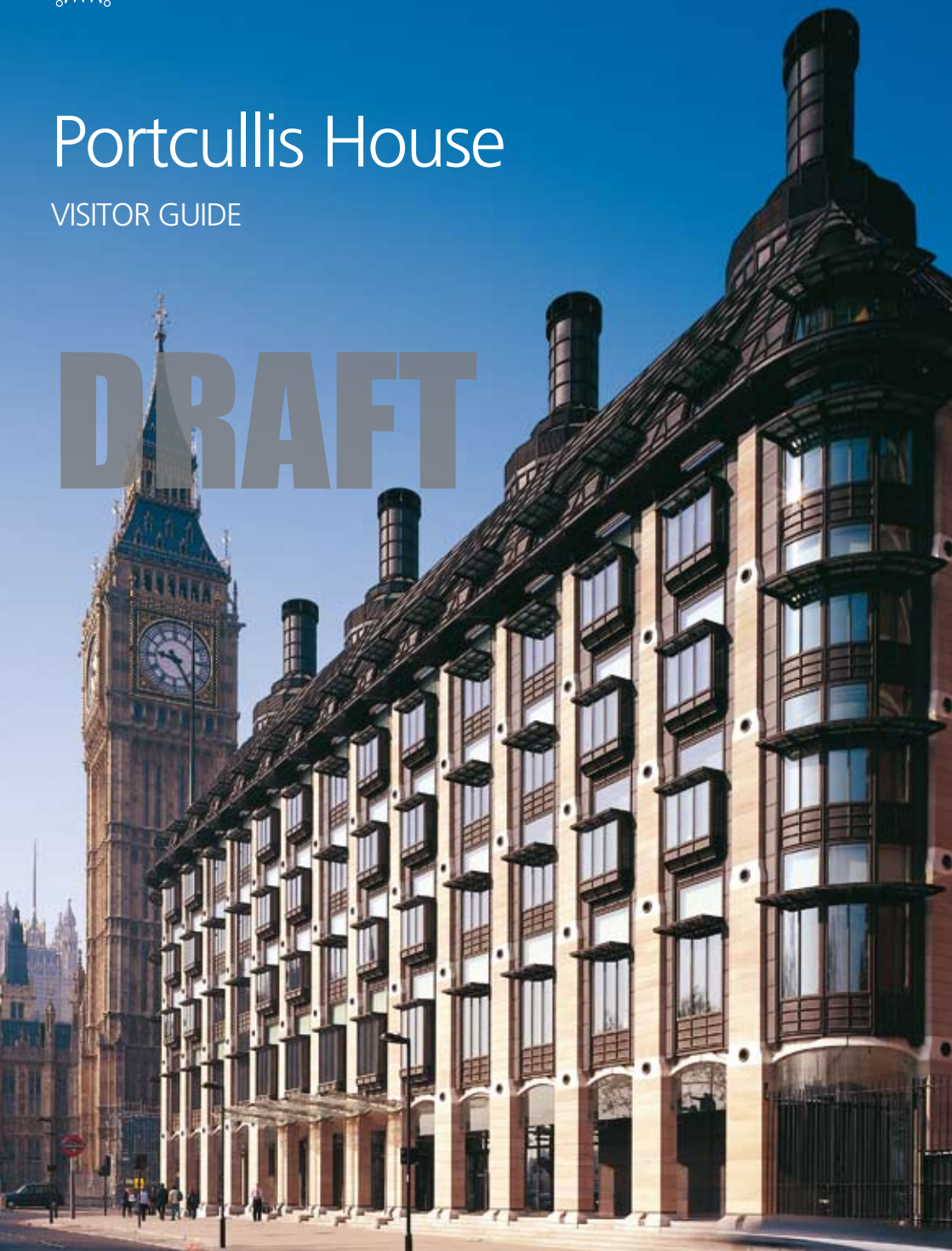


HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT

Portcullis House

VISITOR GUIDE

DRAFT





Welcome to Parliament

Whatever your reason for visiting Portcullis House please take the opportunity to admire the architecture of the building, to view the works of art displayed on the first floor and to learn more about the work of Parliament, and what takes place within this building itself.



About Portcullis House

Portcullis House is the first addition this century to the Parliamentary Estate, the buildings which, together with the adjoining Palace of Westminster and other nearby office buildings, provide a working space and facilities for members of both Houses of Parliament and their staff. It was officially opened by Her Majesty the Queen in February 2001.

From early morning to late evening the ground floor atrium will be busy with MPs holding meetings with their constituents, guests and staff, and using the administrative and refreshment facilities available to them. There will be a constant stream of visitors to the first floor, attending the many meetings, launches and receptions which take place in there.

When Parliament is in session MPs can be seen rushing over to the Commons Chamber to cast their vote when a division is called. MPs, witnesses and members of the public attend oral evidence sessions of some of the select committees which meet in the committee rooms. During the school day, educational groups make their way to the various workshops available to them as part of their educational visit to Parliament.

On the upper floors MPs and their staff work in their offices, dealing with constituents' business, holding private meetings and preparing for their daily parliamentary business.

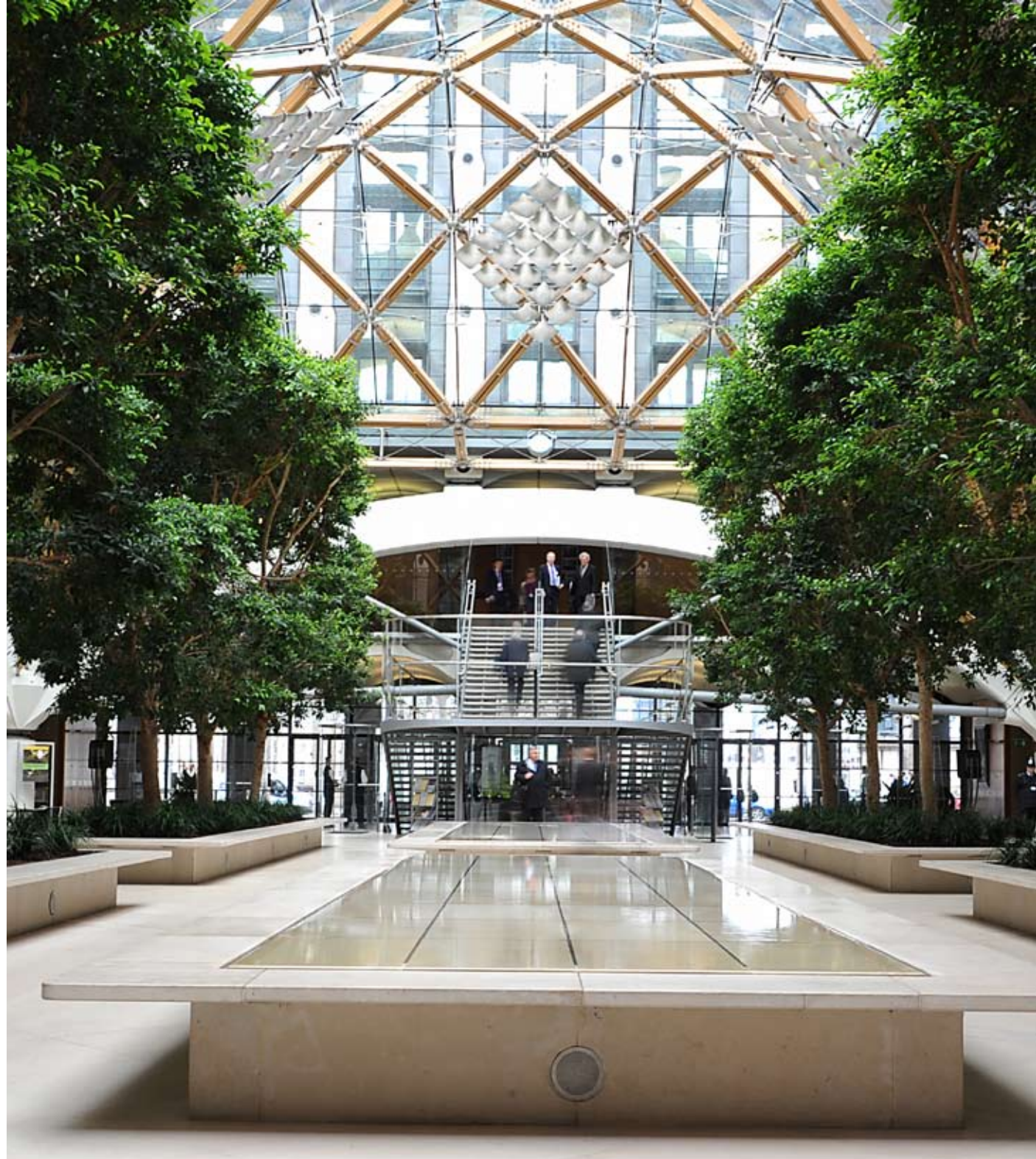
A new building

A space audit of the whole parliamentary estate, carried out in the late 1980s by Michael Hopkins and Partners (MHP), revealed an urgent need for more than 200 offices for MPs and a new suite of select committee rooms. The building of the new Westminster Jubilee Line station provided the opportunity to clear the corner site and to build a new free-standing building which was to be named Portcullis House.






Portcullis House has seven storeys built around a rectangular courtyard. At ground level, an open arcade extends along the two street frontages, sheltering the entrance to the tube station, a row of shops on Bridge Street, and the main public entrance on Victoria Embankment. The courtyard is covered by a glass roof at second floor level and surrounded by a two storey cloister.

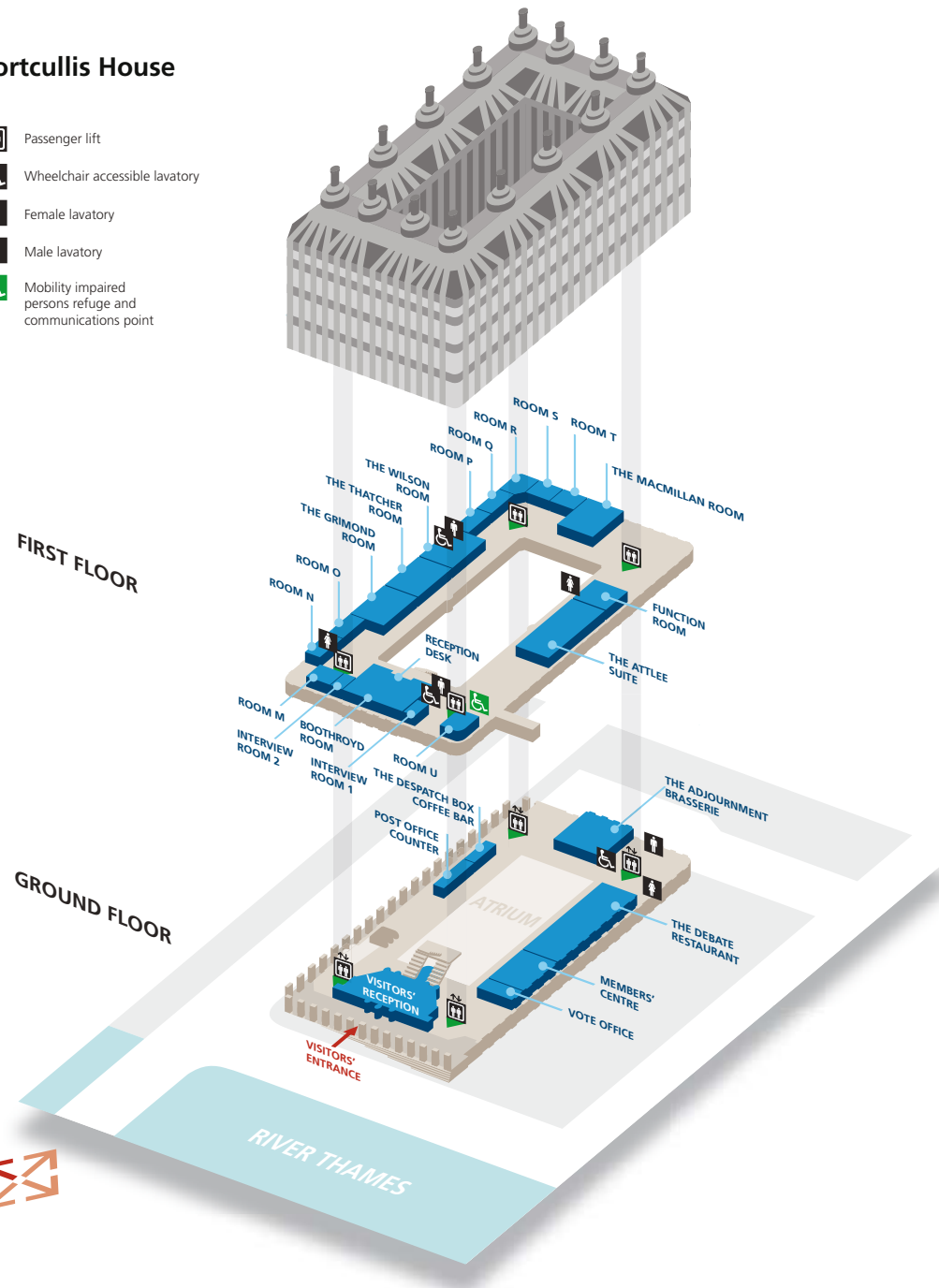
Michael Hopkins designed Portcullis House in conjunction with the seven storey high underground chamber of the new tube station. A continuous substructure was available round the edge of the site to support the outer rooms, but the inner rooms and spaces round the courtyard had to be supported on only six columns, arranged to provide primary structural support to both Westminster station below and the building above. Shallow, asymmetrical concrete arches braced by steel tension members span between these columns at the level of the first floor cloister, forming what is effectively an above ground structure.

Many of the features are designed to help with energy saving. The fourteen tall, bronze chimneys are terminals of a vertical duct system which allows fresh air to travel down the supply ducts. Exhaust air enters the return ducts through the inward projections of the light shelves. Cooling is provided by ground water taken from boreholes 160m below the building.



Portcullis House

-  Passenger lift
-  Wheelchair accessible lavatory
-  Female lavatory
-  Male lavatory
-  Mobility impaired persons refuge and communications point



Ground floor: Administrative and Refreshment facilities

The ground floor atrium of Portcullis House is a busy meeting area and the administrative centre of the building with facilities including a Post Office, Vote Office (from where copies of Parliamentary papers may be obtained) and Members' Centre which allows MPs to make enquiries and discuss problems with representatives from some of the specialist departments of the House of Commons.

The main focal points of the atrium are the twelve fig trees (*Ficus Nitida*) which, together with the water features, help to condition the environment within the courtyard space and help the building to conserve energy. Fig trees were chosen as the species most likely to thrive in an indoor environment with a constant temperature.

The space and facilities in the atrium have made it a very popular place for meetings for MPs, staff and their guests. MPs will often give TV and radio interviews from here. **Public access to this area is only available to guests of Parliamentary pass-holders and not to the general visitor.**

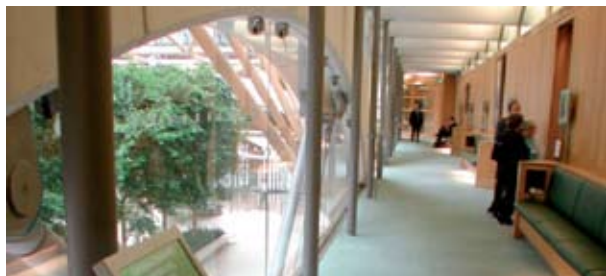
First floor: Committee and meeting rooms

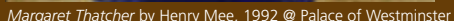
One of Parliament's main functions is to scrutinise the work of Government. Departmental Select Committees undertake this role by examining the policies, administration and expenditure of Government Departments. They do this mainly by holding inquiries into specific issues: recent inquiries have been as diverse as press standards, food security, knife crime, green jobs and skills and looked after children. Select committees are cross-party and their members are back-bench MPs.

Inquiries can range from an in-depth examination of a complex subject lasting for several months to a short inquiry carried out within a week. At the start of an inquiry, a committee will agree terms of reference, publish a press notice and issue a general invitation to submit written evidence. Then the committee takes oral evidence, where MPs question ministers and a range of witnesses. Nearly all evidence is given in public. As well as attending a 'live' committee, you can watch or listen to all public evidence sessions on www.parliament.tv. Once it has finished taking evidence, the committee will publish a report and recommendations. The Government has two months to respond. Some reports will be debated in either the House of Commons Chamber or in Westminster Hall.

As well as modern committee rooms, the first floor also contains two larger multi-function rooms, the Macmillan Room and the Attlee Suite (where translation facilities are available), which can be used for conferences, presentations, meetings and receptions. There are also a number of general meeting rooms.

Committee and the larger rooms on the first floor are all named after 20th century politicians who are commemorated in paintings and/or busts both inside and outside of each room.





The Parliamentary Works of Art Collection consists of nearly 8,000 works and documents the history, people and activities of Parliament. The works are displayed throughout the Parliamentary buildings and are loaned to public exhibitions around the country.

Portcullis House is home to the House of Commons contemporary art collection and showcases the many portraits commissioned and acquired by the Works of Art Committee in recent years.

In addition to the paintings, prints and photographs displayed in Portcullis House there are three display cases on the first floor which house

a changing programme of displays of three dimensional works in the collection and on loan to the House.

From time to time public access exhibitions are held in Portcullis House. Details of these can be found at: www.parliament.uk/visiting/exhibitionsandevents/exhibitions.cfm.



The upper floors of Portcullis House provide office space for 210 MPs and their staff. MPs offices are functional and vary in size and layout.

These upper floors are private and access is by invitation/appointment only.





About Parliament

The UK Parliament consists of the House of Commons, the House of Lords and the Monarch – about 1400 people in all – from all political parties as well as independents. Parliament is the law making authority in the UK, and is also known as the Legislature.

The Government, which is also known as the Executive, runs the country by developing and implementing policy and drafting new laws. It is led by about 120 senior MPs and Lords – Ministers – chosen by the Prime Minister.

In addition to making laws, Parliament also has a duty to hold the Government to account, scrutinising its actions. It does this in a number of ways including asking questions and committee work.

Members of the House of Commons (MPs) are elected by the voters in their constituencies approximately every 4-5 years. As our elected representatives they have the final say when Parliament decides to raise or lower taxes and how this money is spent.

Members of the House of Lords are appointed (a few are elected by other members of the House), mainly for services to the country in all walks of life. They use their independence and expertise to complement the work of the House of Commons.

The role of the Monarch has been reduced over time and most of the powers have been given over to the Prime Minister.

Visiting Parliament

The Palace of Westminster is the home to both Houses of Parliament and is open to the public in a number of ways:

Tours of the Palace of Westminster

- Free fully guided tours of the Palace of Westminster, can be booked in advance through the office of your MP or a member of the House of Lords.
- Timed and ticketed tours on Saturdays from 3 July (charge).
- During the Summer Opening Programme – generally August and September when Parliament is not sitting – timed tours run from Mondays to Saturdays. A charge is made for these tours.
- School groups can book an educational visit through Parliament's Education Service.
- You can undertake a virtual tour of the building by going to www.parliament.uk/virtualtours.

Watching proceedings as they happen

You can visit the public galleries of either House of Parliament, or the Westminster Hall Chamber, at any time when they are in session.

Entry is free and does not have to be arranged in advance – use the main Cromwell Green visitor entrance to the Palace of Westminster – although it may be necessary to queue. A limited number of free tickets are available to MPs and members of the House of Lords, thus reducing the possibility of having to queue.

Attend a Select Committee session

Select Committees are an important part of Parliament's scrutiny of the Government. Evidence sessions are held in public and a limited number of seats are available to the public on a first come first served basis.

Exhibitions and Display

Occasionally exhibitions are held which are freely open to the public. Entry to such exhibitions does not give access to other parts of the building.



Get involved

A Parliamentary democracy is only as strong as those who participate. The issues which are decided in Parliament affect all of our everyday lives. Help keep our democracy healthy and make it work for you. Learn more about Parliament's work and how you can get involved.

Find out more:

- Visit the Palace of Westminster for a full guided tour either through your MP (free) or as part of the Summer Opening Programme (August and September only) or on Saturdays from 3 July (charge).
- Watch the proceedings of both Houses from one of the public galleries by either booking a free ticket in advance from your MP or joining the public queue at any time when Parliament is in session
- Attend a Select Committee session
- Explore the UK Parliament website
- Watch a debate on-line or on the Parliament channel
- Phone or e-mail the Public Information Offices
- Request some of our free publications
- Take part in our Education programmes designed for school groups
- Ask your MP or a member of the House of Lords to visit your school or community group
- Ask one of our Outreach Officers to visit your community group

For more information about Parliament

Visit www.parliament.uk to find a vast array of information. Or contact any of these public services offices:

House of Commons Information Office

For information on the work, membership and history of the House of Commons:

House of Commons
London SW1A 2TT
Phone: 020 7219 4272
Fax: 020 7219 5839
hcinfo@parliament.uk

House of Lords Information Office

For information on the work, membership and history of the House of Lords:

House of Lords
London SW1A 0PW
Phone: 020 7219 3107
Fax: 020 7219 0620
hlinfo@parliament.uk

Parliamentary Outreach

For information on how to engage with the work and processes of Parliament:

Houses of Parliament
London SW1A 2TT
Phone: 020 7219 1650
parliamentaryoutreach@parliament.uk

Education Services

For resources and support for students and teachers about the role and relevance of Parliament, including a range of Visit Parliament programmes:

Houses of Parliament
London SW1A 2TT
Phone: 020 7219 4496
Fax: 020 7219 0818
education@parliament.uk

Parliamentary Archives

For access to Parliamentary documents:

Houses of Parliament
London SW1A 0PW
Phone: 020 7219 3074
Fax: 020 7219 2570
archives@parliament.uk

Parliamentary Bookshop

For a range of publications about Parliament and its business:

12 Bridge Street
Parliament Square
London SW1A 2JX
Phone: 020 7219 3890
Fax: 020 7219 3866
www.bookshop.parliament.uk

