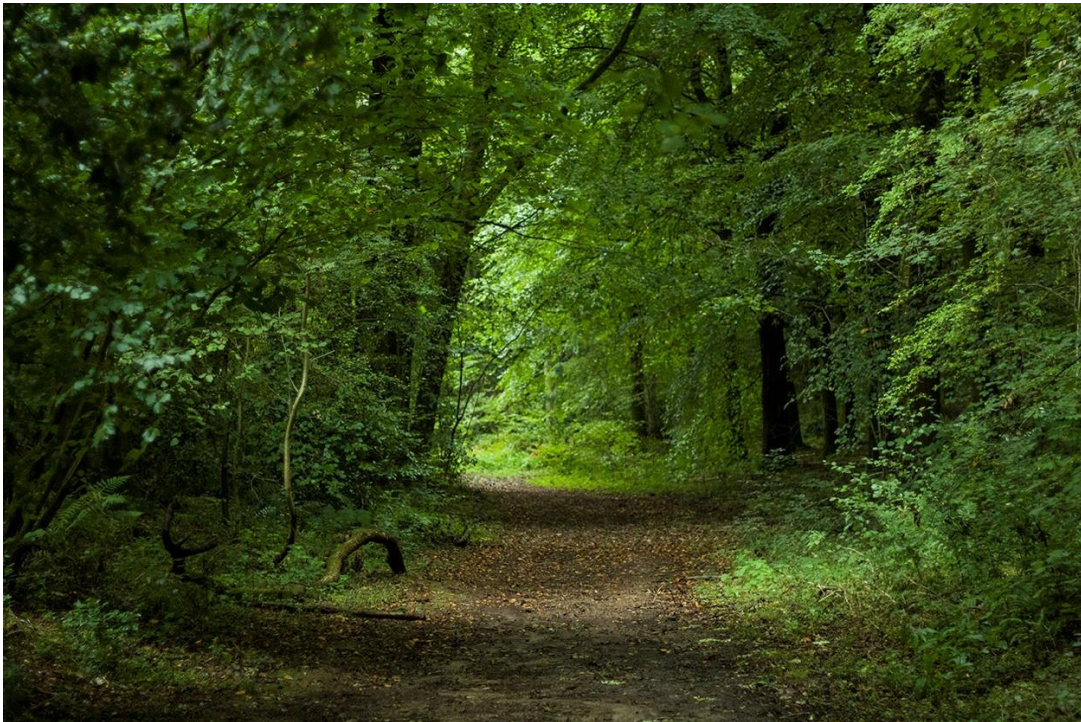




1. Choosing a Site

In this section, we'll start by looking at how you can assess your woodland's potential as an educational space. You might have multiple areas within a woodland block or several woodlands to choose from. Therefore, it's wise to conduct a simple audit of each, to help determine the most suitable site.

Outdoor learning can be delivered for low or no cost so before embarking on building infrastructure consider what it is you wish to offer, to who and for how long. Preparing for the occasional visiting group brings different considerations to offering regular all year round activities. You may also need to consider if groups are self leading their own activities or if you will be offering guided experiences.



Credit Royal Forestry Society

Consider your woodland management objectives

Knowing what the future plans are for your woodland will enable you to consider where and when you can access it with a group. Consider:

- Are there areas of your woodland where access won't be impacted in the near future by planting, harvesting or other processes?



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- Does your site have any designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Ancient Monuments or Tree Preservation Orders that may need to be considered in planning? Any protected species such as badgers, newts or bats and nesting birds?
- How will access from educational groups work alongside other woodland users e.g. those on Public Rights of Way as well as commercial uses such as shoots or charcoal making?

Access into the woodland

Schools and groups with children under the age of 16 may be reluctant to park by the side of the road and walk into a woodland on a busy road if there is no pavement present due to risk from passing motorists.

Consider your options around parking, turning spaces, dropping off and picking up points so that you are clear to visiting groups what their transport options are and you are able to give clear instructions before their visit..

Is the site accessible to:

- Coaches
- Minibuses (Usually 2 for a class of 30 children)
- Cars? If so, how many?
- Visitors arriving on foot / by bike

Once on site, vehicles will need a place to park, preferably some form of hard standing if your site is going to be used regularly throughout the year. If you plan to use an existing area, make sure it is safe for children. This should be a low use area without potential hazards such as machinery, livestock or high traffic flow. If there are hazards, how can measures be put in place to keep visitors safe whilst on site.

If you are planning to create new parking areas, you may wish to consider permeable paving or grass reinforcement systems to reduce the environmental impact and provide safe and durable access.

Access around your site

Take into consideration the audience you wish to invite. Having a long distance to walk or uneven terrain may not be very inclusive and exclude those with physical needs, wheel or push chairs users.



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Think about:

- How will the topography of your site affect access and usability by groups?
- Are there any natural or man-made hazards which you wish to avoid such as steep drops, lakes, busy roads etc?
- What is the terrain like underfoot?

For example, if the site is located at the top of a steep incline, far from the parking space for the minibus, you will find that groups, especially younger children, will struggle to access it. This can lead to an extended period of time getting to the site rather than actually being there. Young children get tired easily and not all of your groups will be used to walking long distances on uneven ground.

A space to gather

Much of the experience of learning and education in a woodland can be spread out, exploring different areas and enjoying the space. Groups will need to safely stand, sit down, squat, be quiet and move around. It is useful to have spaces where groups can come together to discuss, share ideas or enjoy refreshments. Looking for open spaces, glades and clearings which lend themselves to groups coming together is a good first step.

When choosing a 'learning' area and gathering space in your woodland consider what learning opportunities the area offers? Is it near to a range of interesting



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woodland flora and fauna? What will they be able to see from where they are? Or within a 5 minute walk? Are there any unwanted distractions? Will it require seating or shelter from the elements?.

A gathering space before entering the woodland can sometimes also be useful to introduce yourself and quickly explain the programme for the day and what to be careful of e.g. health and safety talk before heading into the woodland.

Creating New Woodland

If you are interested in creating new woodland on your land, for future educational visits, seek professional advice. This can be a valuable long-term project and you can involve groups in the planting, aftercare and learning about the new woodland. And make the most out of the potential space as a learning resource.

A guide to planning new woodland

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/618e79658fa8f503764ed2cf/A_Guide_to_Planning_New_Woodland_in_England_V1.0_Nov2021.pdf

Further Reading

Making a trackway in a woodland

<https://www.woodlands.co.uk/blog/practical-guides/woodland-tracks-and-paths/>

Access, tracks and boundaries

<https://www.woodlands.co.uk/owning-a-wood/tracks-and-gates/>

Visitor access and engagement

<https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/50673/woodland-trust-woodland-creation-guide.pdf>

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