



2. Before your first visitors

Now you've decided which area within your woodland you're going to use for your educational visits, it's time to think about how your groups will use it and what activities will be on offer. It's important to think about the site itself as well as how this new use could impact the flora and fauna. You also need to consider the needs of your groups and how the health and safety of all other users will be maintained.

Land Use

You may need to contact your local council to discuss the correct land use designation for educational visits. Seek professional guidance from an independent planning consultant for support with this.

Talk to any neighbours or other users of the land who could be affected if the site will get a lot of use, keeping them happy can foster good relationships and ensure everyone is happy with the increased access and additional visiting vehicles.

Woodland and planning legislation
<https://www.woodlands.co.uk/owning-a-wood/woodlands-and-planning-legislation/>

Insurance

You will need to ensure you have public liability insurance for your land which covers the types of activities that will be taking place.



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Training

Consider what training may be required for the person running the activities. Check what experience they have and / or certificates to demonstrate they have the skills and knowledge when working with children.

Tree Safety

Before you start using your woodland for educational visits, you'll need to get a tree survey done on the trees to ensure (as far as possible) that they are safe and are not going to harm anyone. This needs to be carried out by an arboriculturist or forester with a qualification in tree inspections and surveys. You may search for a contractor using: [Arboricultural Association - ARB Approved Contractor Directory \(trees.org.uk\)](https://trees.org.uk).

This survey will look at individual trees and any risks they pose. Remember to survey not just the identified learning / gathering space but the access routes in and out of the woodland. The surveyor will consider the health of the tree and any visible damage to the trunk, roots, branches and canopy; they will look for signs of pests, disease and fungi and write a report on this for you. It will probably suggest trees to monitor, it may suggest trees that could pose a risk.

If you can be on site when the tree survey takes place, it's worth showing the surveyor the site and any trees you are worried about. Talking to them afterwards will give you more information and you can ask questions about anything you are unsure of. You can also explain to them how you intend to use the site and the areas which will get the most frequent use.

Once visits are taking place, the woodland owner or the leader of any activity should check for any new concerns before every session, particularly after storms. It may be necessary to close educational access to your woodland in high winds.

Risk assessing trees in your learning area

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRb94nJsaU4>

Risk assessing a woodland space before visit

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiXZaML0sfU>



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Ecosystem Impact

The level of usage will need to be considered to avoid any unintended damage to the woodland environment. Impacts may include things like:

- Noise and disturbance of habitat
- Trampling and compaction of the soil
- Removing deadwood for fires or other activities
- Cutting of vegetation to improve access
- Using trees and shrubs for den building or shelters
- Bringing organic materials, live and dead, on to site. This can potentially spread disease
- Collection of live organic materials by groups
- Bringing non-organic materials onto site, especially plastics!
- Soil degradation linked to growing produce
- Uncollected rubbish, especially plastic and other non-composting waste

You may wish to consider:

Are there spaces in your woodland that you want to avoid?

Do you wish to avoid these areas all year round or at certain times of year to protect particular species or when the ground is at its wettest?

If so, how will you highlight this to your groups? It may be enough to talk to them about these areas, or you could mark them out with a visual sign such as a rope.



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