Developing a woodland space for educational access

3. Boundaries, Paths, and Signage

Boundaries

When planning your activities consider if the educational groups will have full access to your woodland? Do you wish to keep them to certain areas for their own safety, away from sensitive / unsafe areas or for the protection of the woodland ecosystem?

If your current boundaries include barbed wire or electric fencing, think about how this potential hazard can be communicated to people using the site, particularly in gateways or near uneven ground where someone may put a hand out to steady themselves.

Nettles and brambles can provide an effective natural boundary that children are unlikely to climb through. Where a boundary is needed, something as simple as a length of rope outlining the area in which the group are allowed to venture unaccompanied will be enough, or you could point out a landmark, or pop coloured tape around key trees to make sure the group know that is the boundary.

Dead-hedging is a cheap and effective way to install a visual boundary that can also act as a valuable habitat for woodland fauna. These can be built with brash from the woodland itself and constructed with older groups if appropriate.

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Paths

Rides and tracks which are suitable for adults who are used to being in a woodland may not be suitable for children, particularly if they are very young. Low branches and over hanging vegetation after wet weather can be cause potential harm if it is at eye height.

Credit Royal Forestry Society

Children's wellies are not that high for wading through puddles in gateways and they are easily sucked off in deep mud. Even if you have prewarned group leaders to ensure everyone is suitably dressed you will always have some children who will come in trainers, think about whether your paths are accessible to them. Chip can be helpful to reduce slipping and visually highlight pathways however it may not always be necessary. If you don't have your own chip, contact a local arborist, they may be happy to oblige.

Although nettles and brambles have their uses as boundaries, think if your paths are wide enough for groups of children to pass down them without brushing through the undergrowth at face or hand height? Children will often want to walk next to a friend or adult rather than in single file.

Depending on the terrain of your site, it may be necessary to construct raised sections such as boardwalks to help people move through thicker areas of understory or wetter areas. This can be especially important if there is ground flora or habitats that you want to preserve and protect. Bear in mind that these boardwalks can get very slippery over time, so think about installing a non-slip surface or wire mesh to mitigate this risk.

Safety Signage

If your woodland is being actively managed, signage to alert participants of these activities is essential.

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It is also important to consider signage to alert people of hazards both natural and man-made, for example, wet areas, ponds, steep banks, log stacks and machinery. Remember, people can become 'sign blind,' so avoid overwhelming the site with excessive signage. Ensure that signs are removed when they are no longer needed, such as after felling operations have ended.

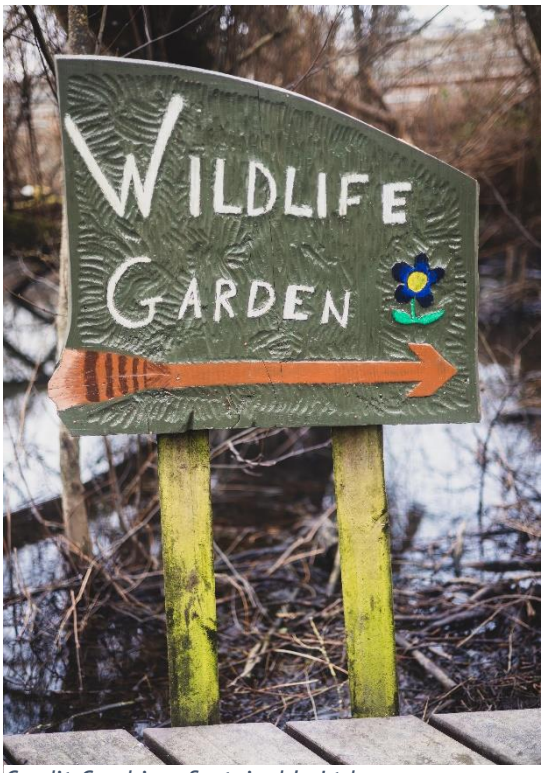
Guidance on signage for public safety

https://www.forestryengland.uk/sites/default/files/documents/Managingpublicsafetyonharvestingsites.pdf

Educational Signage

If groups are conducting self guided visits to your woodland, signage can help them to understand a bit more about the woodland ecosystems, management, and history. Think about the educational value of any signage you plan to install and how it will add to the experience of those visiting your site.

When designing signage, use durable, sustainable, weather-resistant materials, ensuring longevity and minimal maintenance. You could incorporate QR codes or interactive elements on signs for a more immersive learning experience. Signage can explain some of the sustainable management techniques used in your woodland, highlighting areas of interest such as wetlands, fallen trees, dead hedges, coppicing, habitat areas and more.



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