

CLOtC accredited forests for self-led learning visits

The Council for Learning Outside the Classroom ([CLOtC](#)) is the national voice for learning outside the classroom. The Forestry Commission is proud to be working with the CLOtC to create and improve opportunities for self-led learning on the public forest estate.

We are working towards [CLOtC Site Provider Awards](#) for Forestry Commission sites across England. This award recognises organisations which actively welcome schools onto their site/s for self-led visits and ensure that the sites and any other services provided meet the needs of schools.

CLOtC accredited site: Jeskyns Community Woodland, near Gravesend, Kent

Jeskyns Community Woodland, sitting on the edge of Gravesend, a heavily populated urban area, provides excellent opportunities for numerous local schools to engage with the natural environment.

The site was acquired by the Forestry Commission in 2005. This former arable farmland estate was opened to the public in 2007. Jeskyns is now a mosaic of new habitats, providing 360 acres of new woodlands, ponds, orchards and wildflower meadows. Managed by the Forestry Commission, Jeskyns provides a haven for both people and wildlife and is a great place for all ages to play, relax and explore.

Jeskyns Community Woodland is part of the public forest estate, which is made up of more than 1500 woods and forests in England that are cared for by the Forestry Commission. We practise multi-purpose sustainable forestry: multi-purpose means that our forests are managed, not just to supply timber, but also as valuable wildlife habitats and places for visitors to enjoy; sustainable means that we follow long term forest design plans, so that the public forest estate continues to provide timber, and benefits for people and wildlife into the future.

Jeskyns is popular with local families and dog walkers, and during summer weekends, the car park can become very busy. However, the site tends to be much quieter during the week in term time, making it an ideal destination for a school visit. We welcome enquiries from teachers and group leaders, and can recommend Jeskyns as a great place to investigate a range of different habitats, including open grassy meadows, orchard, pond, and of course young woodland.

Example school visits

- **EYFS** – Understanding the world – exploring different habitats to look for minibeasts, discussing where they live and why
- **Primary school** – Design technology – explore the various children’s play areas and natural play features, then plan, design and create mini play equipment from natural materials
- **Secondary school** – Year 7 settling in, getting to know each other – working in teams to complete the orienteering course, OR use the site [map](#) to discover all of the various features eg orchard, meadow and lake – on a pre-visit, teachers could produce a list of questions based on the information panels on site, and then ask the pupils to find the answers, by following the map
- **GCSE / A-level** – Geography fieldwork – human impact on the environment; change of land use, from arable to recreation / wildlife; grazing animals as land management engineers

Site webpage

- has information about trails, site facilities, opening times, parking charges, directions and events

On-site facilities

- Café, play areas, parking for cars and coaches (coaches by prior arrangement – charges apply), toilets (open during café opening hours), picnic areas, and 6km of hard surfaced trails, children’s activity trail (theme changes seasonally)
- The mobile phone signal is good throughout the site

Surrounding woodland

- The café and one of the picnic areas are very close to the car park
- The two main children’s play areas are accessible via hard surface tails within approximately 15 minute walk of the car park
- Further afield are areas of new planting, including a special block of trees to demonstrate what woodlands may look like in the future with the onset of climate change
- In addition, within 20 minutes walk, there are orchards, ponds, meadows, a community tree nursery and Jeskyns Grove – an area planted with spring barley to provide winter food for birds including skylarks and corn buntings
- A herd of Hereford cattle can be seen conservation grazing the meadow habitat
- Four waymarked walking trails start from the car park, two of which are designated all ability access
- Jeskyns is linked to four other countryside sites by the 10km Darnley Trail: Ashenbank Wood (Woodland Trust), Shorne Woods Country Park (Kent County Council), Cobham Woods(National Trust) and Ranscombe Farm Reserve (Plantlife)

Self-led learning opportunities

- Woodland activities – trees, minibeasts, habitats, (see FC [downloads](#) and [lesson plans](#))
- Active / sporting – cycling, walking, map reading, orienteering
- Hire a 'Ranger in a Bag' at Jeskyns
 - Ranger in a Bag (RIAB) is the Forestry Commission's bookable self-led activity pack for school groups
 - RIAB contains all the equipment and instructions needed to lead learning activities in the forest (no experience necessary!), as well as introductory and plenary activities
 - RIAB is suitable for a group of up to 35 children aged 4-11
 - RIAB topics available at Jeskyns are Amazing Animals and Fantastic Forests
 - For more information, [email](#) or phone 01474 825118

Local Forestry Commission contacts

- The local FC office is based at Shorne Woods Country Park, Brewers Road, Shorne, Kent, DA12 3HX Tel: 01474 825118 or [email](#)
- The Forestry Commission East England District learning team is based at Bedgebury Pinetum – telephone 0300 067 4855

Planning your visit

- **Contact the [Jeskyns Ranger](#)** – we'd like to know you are coming and, depending on your plans, there may be a booking form to complete
- **Pre-visit** – we strongly recommend that you make a pre-visit to the site before bringing your group – you'll need to know where to park, where the toilets are, and where and how you will carry out your activities; you'll need to be able to write your risk assessment and will also be able to pick up a site leaflet (also available on the website)
- **Health and safety** – we carry out regular safety checks of the area around the car park and play areas and of the waymarked trails; we do not however, check every path and every part of the forest; if you are bringing a group to the forest, it is your responsibility to carry out a pre-visit and write your own risk assessment; we cannot provide you with a site risk assessment because the forest is a variable environment, which changes as a result of weather conditions, time of year, forest operations etc; we do offer a [sample risk assessment](#), which may be of use, when you are writing your own and a [guide to group leader responsibilities](#); if a member of your group has an accident while visiting Jeskyns, please let the ranger know as soon as possible.

Accessibility

- Access statement for Jeskyns is available [here](#)
- The site and car park are relatively flat, with dedicated disabled parking bays and toilets at the cafe for disabled visitors.
- Jeskyns has 6km of hard surfaced trails.
- The café and toilets are at ground floor level with no steps.
- Information about accessibility of trails is available in the site leaflet available at dispensers on the main noticeboard in the carpark and from the café.

After your visit

- **Feedback** – we'd like to know how you get on with your self-led visit to Jeskyns and have provided a short [online survey](#)
- **Further opportunities** – if you would like to find out more about learning opportunities on the public forest estate, please [email](#) and ask to be put onto our mailing list