

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: Thames Chase Forest Centre and Broadfields, Upminster, Essex

The Forestry Commission owns and manages ten community woodlands within the Thames Chase Community Forest, which aims to help promote the creation and continuing development of green space on the edge of East London and South Essex.

Broadfields community woodland is at the heart of the Thames Chase Community Forest, and with a variety of trails, ponds, meadows, play equipment and even an orchard, it provides a wide range of possibilities for school visits. The woodland surrounds the Thames Chase Forest Centre, managed by the Thames Chase Trust, which provides facilities including car and coach parking, toilets, a café, education room and shop.

School groups are also welcome to visit the nine other Forestry Commission woodlands in the Thames Chase Community Forest. These also offer surfaced trails, picnic tables and a variety of habitats to explore. As these sites have limited parking and no indoor facilities, we suggest that they are more suitable for local schools within walking distance.

Broadfields and the other local FC sites are 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.

Example school visits

- **EYFS** – Understanding the world – exploring different habitats to look for minibeasts, discussing where they live and why
- **Primary school** – Sensory exploration – looking listening, smelling and touching, the trees, grasses, mud etc; habitats and wildlife – pond dipping (seasonal)
- **Secondary school** – Year 7 settling in, getting to know each other – working in teams to follow a map of the site, to discover the play sculptures, then plan, design and create play sculptures of your own using natural materials
- **GCSE / A-level** – Looking at changes in land use and man's impact on the environment, conflicts in land use between people and wildlife; compare the habitats and species at a newly planted woodland (Broadfields) against an ancient woodland (e.g. Mardyke Woods, Belhus Woods)

Site [webpage](#)

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

On-site facilities

- Thames Chase Forest Centre and Broadfields – visitor centre, café, shop, interactive displays, and meeting room / education room (hire charges apply to education room – contact the Thames Chase Trust on 01708 642970)
- Play areas, parking for cars and coaches (£1 all day), toilets, seasonal cycle hire
- The mobile phone signal is good

Surrounding woodland

- Within a few minutes walk of the forest centre are areas of woodland of varying ages – some newly planted and some more mature, as well as meadows and ponds
- There are walking trails following simple routes around Broadfields and to the various play sculptures and other points of interest; the routes are not waymarked, but a map can be collected from the Thames Chase Forest Centre or downloaded [here](#)

Self-led learning opportunities

- Woodland activities – trees, minibeast, habitats, shelter building (see FC [downloads](#) and [lesson plans](#))
- Hire a 'Ranger in a Bag'
 - 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 Broadfields are Amazing Animals and Fantastic Forests
 - Cost: £40 cash deposit, paid back on return of the RIAB pack
- Self led children's activity trails (themes change seasonally – e.g. Superworm activity trail runs between March to October 2015 at Broadfields)
- Active / sporting – [cycling](#), walking, cross-country running, map reading
- Local landscape history / heritage – the Thames Chase Forest Centre has a wealth of information on the natural and built heritage of the landscape within the Thames Chase Community Forest
- Wildlife – the Thames Chase Wildlife Group has excellent knowledge on the species found at Broadfields and in the surrounding community forest (for contact information: www.thameschase.org.uk)

Local Forestry Commission contacts

- The local FC office is in Upminster at the Thames Chase Forest Centre; the office is staffed 9am-5pm Monday to Friday – [email](#) or telephone 01708 642964

Planning your visit

- **Contact the Community Ranger on 01708 642964 or by [email](#)** – 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, 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 collect free trail leaflets and maps (also available to [download](#))
- **Health and safety** – we carry out regular safety checks of the area around the play areas and 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 any Forestry Commission site in Thames Chase, please let the Community Ranger know as soon as possible; Contact 01708 642964 or [email](#).

Accessibility

- All site car parks are relatively flat, with dedicated parking for disabled visitors.
- Many of our sites offer all-ability surfaced trails (less than 1:12) – please ask the Community Ranger for advice
- Accessible toilet is available and clearly marked at the Thames Chase Forest Centre
- Thames Chase Forest Centre café, shop and education room are at ground floor level with no steps, and have automatic doors to allow easy access when needed
- Information about accessibility of trails is available in the site leaflet and from Forest Centre staff
- With prior notice and for genuine access for less physically able learners, it may be possible to provide vehicular access to some areas of the forest

After your visit

- **Feedback** – we'd like to know how you get on with your self-led visit to the Thames Chase Community Forest 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