

## 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: Hicks Lodge, Leicestershire – part of the National Forest

Hicks Lodge, in the National Forest, is a former coal mining site, that has been totally transformed by the Forestry Commission, with thousands of recently planted trees, new walking and cycling trails, and a great adventure play area. The lakes are a haven for bird life, and the woodland – new and old – provides a host of habitats for small mammals and minibeasts.

Hicks Lodge 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.

Being within easy reach of a number of large cities, Hicks Lodge is popular with families and can get really busy at weekends. However, during the week, in term time, it is much quieter and therefore an ideal destination for school groups of all ages.

### Example school visits

- **EYFS** – Understanding the world – exploring different habitats to look for minibeasts (especially butterflies and dragonflies), discussing where they live and why
- **Primary school** – Design technology – using sticks and other forest materials to build structures such as towers, shelters and bridges (please ask for advice on the best parts of the site to do this sort of activity)
- **Secondary school** – Year 7 settling in, getting to know each other – working in teams to follow a map of one of the trails, or complete the orienteering course
- **GCSE / A-level** – Geography fieldwork – human impact on the environment – potential management problems in balancing conservation (wildflowers, birds, newts, butterflies and dragonflies) with a busy recreation site; considering the process of how an old mining site has been turned into a habitat-rich woodland

### Site [webpage](#)

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

### On-site facilities

- Café, play area, parking for cars and coaches (charges apply), toilets, picnic tables, cycle hire including disabled; small meeting room available for hire.
- Mobile phone signal is generally good.

### Surrounding woodland

- Much of the site is covered with newly or recently planted trees, although there are pockets of more mature woodland; there are three large lakes and several smaller ones.
- There are three waymarked walking trails on the site, including the short trail which goes around the lake, as well as two mountain bike trails. There is also an orienteering course – maps available from the café on site; for more information, contact [Leicestershire Orienteering Club](#)

### Self-led learning opportunities

- Woodland activities – trees, minibests, habitats, shelterbuilding, art, (see FC [downloads](#) and [lesson plans](#))
- Active / sporting – cycle hire available from the [cafe](#) – phone 01530 274533, walking, [orienteering](#),
- Birds – the site has been surveyed by the [Leicester and Rutland Ornithological Society](#)
- Butterflies – for educational resources, contact [Butterfly Conservation](#)
- Hire a 'Ranger in a Bag' at Hicks Lodge
  - 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 Hicks Lodge include shelterbuilding, minibests, natural art, sensory explorers and animal detectives
  - For more information, contact the FC Learning Team on 01889 586593 ext 2

### Learning opportunities from partner organisations

- We are currently finalising an agreement with a local learning provider, who will be able to offer led educational visits for school groups in the near future. Please ask the FC Learning Team for details if you are interested.

### Local Forestry Commission contacts

- The local FC office is in Cannock; reception is staffed 9am-3pm Monday to Friday – [email](#) or telephone 01889 586593
- The local FC learning team is based at Cannock Forest – [email](#) or telephone 01889 586593 ext 2
- The site ranger can be contacted on 07795 801146

### Planning your visit

- **Contact the FC learning team** – 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 purchase trail leaflets and maps from the café.
- **Health and safety** – we carry out regular safety checks of the area around Hicks Lodge 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 Hicks Lodge, please let Learning Team know as soon as possible.

### Accessibility

- The car park and trail around the lake are flat and surfaced.
- Accessible toilet is available and clearly marked
- Disabled parking spaces are provided
- Café is at ground floor level with no steps
- Information about accessibility of trails is available in leaflets and from site 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 Hicks Lodge 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