**SITE APPRAISAL – Its suitability for use by your setting**

You need to make a written comment for each part – the more detail the better so that the landowner/manager know you have really thought through what the site is offering you and your children.

Remember that many things are not permanent; think about how easily changes could be made to improve an aspect for security, wellbeing or learning.

**ACCESS** - In terms of access it is important that the group can enter and leave the site with relative ease. For example, if the ground is too tricky to negotiate then it may be necessary to look elsewhere.

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| **CONSIDERATION** | **Comment**  |
| Is the site within **walking distance** or will it is necessary to request that parents drop off and pick up children from the woods? |  |
| Look for **safe parking/drop off and assembly points including for emergency access** within or just out with the greenspace. How suitable are the paths leading to this point for easy evacuation? Can a vehicle access the paths? |  |
| Consider other access to the woods too, e.g. by walking or by bicycle. Are there any locked gates, stiles, etc.? |  |
| Think about the **network of paths** – does this exist? If not, how easy is it to walk across the area, especially for pre-school children? |  |
| Think about the **ground cover** – leaves, grass, needles, heather. Or is it very boggy, or have too many “inhibitor” plants such as brambles and nettles? Remember this will change with the seasons. Will thinning be needed in the summer? |  |
| **Terrain**– ideally a mix of flat and sloped areas with dips and hollows. Think about its aspect (north or south facing) and when the sun reaches the slope or whether it is in shade during your session. |  |
| **Boundaries** – are there natural boundary features within the area you want to be, e.g. a line of trees, a hedge, path, etc?Will you need a marker system to identify boundaries? |  |
| Think about a **designated place of safety** in the event of a serious incident. Is this going to be your setting or another facility that is nearby? You will need to make contact to check this is okay.  |  |
| Is there a **suitable gathering place or shelter** where equipment is put and snack is organised? Is the shelter natural or man-made or will you need to provide temporary shelter? |  |
| Are there historical or archaeological remains nearby? You will need to consult the landowner here. |  |

**SITE CHARACTER**

This is how the place feels. Ideally it should have a feeling of “wildness” about it. Do remember that even small places can feel wild and isolated for a young child.

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| **CONSIDERATION** | **Comment**  |
| Traffic noise, including that from air or rail transport |  |
| Mix of trees: young, mature, different species |  |
| Mature trees, especially those with limbs suitable for low level tree climbing and for rope swings and structures |  |
| Young trees for coppicing and shelter building |  |
| Shrubs for hiding, den building, hanging things on |  |
| Stumps for standing on, using as a table, mixing potions in |  |
| Fallen trees for climbing on, walking along |  |
| Open canopy and cover – glades of light |  |
| Variety of plants and fungi |  |
| Availability of sticks and other loose materials on the ground |  |
| Presence of stones, rock outcrops |  |
| Multi-sensory variety: sights, sounds, smells, shapes, colours |  |
| A variety of places: enclosed, open, to hide, roll, sit, have physical challenge, be quiet, a good view, etc |  |
| Evidence of wildlife. Opportunities to watch wildlife. |  |
| Presence of water, e.g. stream, river, loch, bog/wetland, ditches, sea, etc. and safe access to it. |  |
| Historical evidence, e.g. old walls, buildings, ditches, tracks. Are there any restrictions around these places? You will need to consult the landowner here. |  |
| Ability of the site to cope with the frequency of your visits and numbers in your group so that environmental impact is minimised. You will need to consult the landowner here.  |  |

**POTENTIAL HAZARDS**

Think about whether these are manageable and the level of risk posed. What can be done to enable visits to go ahead? Bear in mind the risks may also be seasonal. Think about “heads, shoulders, knees and toes” when looking for hazards at different levels in the woodland canopy.

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| **CONSIDERATION** | **Comment** |
| Litter – including drug paraphernalia and sharp objects |  |
| Standing dead trees or dead wood in trees. Do you need an aboriculturalist to check your trees and provide advice? Check with your council or the landowner if they can advise. |  |
| Water – location, feature, ease of access. Will this require measures to prevent young children from accessing unsupervised?  |  |
| Steep drops – how steep, how deep?  |  |
| Animals, e.g. excessive midges, ticks, livestock, dogs and dog mess, nesting birds, use of wood by ponies and riders |  |
| Quantity and type of potentially harmful plants – ask owner or environmental professional for advice here, if needed. It is important to check.  |  |
| Security of the area – think about whether structures and children’s creations are likely to remain or be removed/destroyed. How important is this? |  |
| The amount and type of * passers-by
* other users – who else uses the site and is it appropriate for children to be playing there?
* degree of seclusion needed – consult your local crime prevention officer, if necessary
 |  |
| Informal toileting options – seclusion, ability of the site to cope with waste. Will you need to erect a toilet tent? Availability of public toilets |  |
| Power lines and electricity substations: location and possible ease of access by children |  |
| Site work by landowner: tree felling, footpath improvement, grass cutting, spraying, timber operations and their aftermath |  |
| Wifi and mobile phone connectivity. Note location of any blackspots. |  |
| Nearby industry which may create pollution (noise, air, land, water, etc.) |  |
| Location of nearest GP surgery and hospital. |  |

**What actions do you now need to take? Make a list and follow up.**