

# MEMBER CONSULTATION

## FOREST SCHOOLS POLICY



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**Date:** 03/10/19

The Forest School Policy is scheduled to go to Full Council for approval on the 19<sup>th</sup> November 2019.

### Issues for discussion:

1. The Draft Forest School Policy and Draft Fire Policy including charging schedule and H & S arrangements. Please can you feed your comments back to [lindsey.blackstock@chorley.gov.uk](mailto:lindsey.blackstock@chorley.gov.uk) by Friday 18<sup>th</sup> October 2019.
2. It is then proposed to make amendments to the policy and consult with forest school businesses and external partners. The final policy will then be taken for approval on the 19<sup>th</sup> November. Should any significant change be made, it will be fed back through members before being made final.

### BACKGROUND:

#### What are Forest Schools?

3. Forest School developed in the mid 90's to support early years education through providing activities in the natural world that promote learning and personal development. Recent research reveals that three-quarters of UK children spend less time outside than prison inmates, and time spent playing in parks, woods and fields has reduced dramatically. According to a government report, more than 1 in 9 children in England have not set foot in a park, forest, beach or any other natural environment for at least a year. There is now a call to reverse these trends and to reconnect children with nature and the environment. Early years providers are increasingly looking to the forest school approach to develop essential skills through nature-based learning, encouraging children to care and respect the environment.
4. The 'wild', and yet controlled, safe environment of Forest School ensures that children taking part naturally learn to assess risk and are encouraged to make sensible and informed decisions about how to deal with unfamiliar and unpredictable situations (such as exploring or climbing trees, using tools to build shelters and dens, creating and lighting camp fires and using the fire to heat drinks and cook snacks).
5. Chorley Council receive frequent requests from nurseries and small businesses to utilise council-owned land to hold Forest School activities. This land tends to be public open space. These are assessed on a case by case basis by Open Space Officers and Property Services and approved through leader brief. It is proposed that once the Forest School Policy is approved that future requests will be assessed by officers and approved by Director delegation.

#### Background to date.

6. A report was brought to Leader Brief in November 2018 to discuss Forest Schools and instructions given to grant formal agreements with a nursery or small businesses.

7. The Forest Schools are businesses and their activities would be held on a regular/programmed basis and potentially have an impact on the space/management and so require some further formal control/risk assessments/indemnity etc. As such, it is proposed to formalise the use under the terms of a specific Forest Schools policy and annual licence agreement. This would allow businesses to carry out the activities in the first instance and allow for review of the frequency of access, any costs arising from the maintenance of the land etc.
8. The businesses would also be responsible for indemnity/insurance/health and safety compliance /risk assessments etc.

### **Fees and Charges**

9. The minimum annual fee for an annual licence at Chorley Council is £150 plus VAT, therefore it is proposed to charge Forest Schools £250 (verified by their income strategy), this fee will be reviewed annually. By way of benchmarking, The Woodland Trust do not charge for use of their land and The Forestry Commission charge an annual fee of £60. Stockport Council charge £22 per 4 hour session, Preston Council charge an annual fee of £285.

### **Astley Park.**

10. Wild Adventurers Nursery are based at Astley Village Community Centre and have been utilising the land behind the tennis courts in Astley Park for some time now. The nursery has changed hands in the past 12 months resulting in an increased intensity of the Forest School. The area is used Monday to Friday with 10 – 15 children attending for a few hours a day. The nursery is closed in school holidays, but they do run a holiday club for school age children.
11. Property Services and Open Space Strategy Officers have been working with the nursery to agree terms upon which, to draw up a formal agreement. Meetings have been held on site and discussions held about what can and can't take place regarding the fires they create (for cooking etc) and putting away benches etc at the end of a session.
12. Chorley Council have recently received complaints from a resident on Merefield regarding the level of noise, and also Café Ambio/Astley Hall regarding smoke from the fire and the appearance of the space next to a graded listed building, and finally, from a Councillor regarding the general intense use of the space and leaving benches, logs and den areas out rather than tidying the space away.
13. Wild Adventurers have been asked to stop using this area for Forest School whilst further decision is sought. They have instead been using the wider park environment in an informal way to have nature trails, explore new environments etc. On balance taking account of the negative opinions, there are also a large number of positive responses from passes by who see the benefits of Forest School in helping to litter pick and care for the park (environmental), social and physiological benefits.
14. In terms of managing risk, Chorley Council are in receipt of all risk assessments, method statements and insurance for the Forest School.
15. The Open Space Strategy Officer has been working with Wild Adventurers to look for alternative land upon which to hold the Forest School in the vicinity of the Community Centre subject to tree inspections and H&S checks. The ethos of the business is built around Forest School.

16. No fee has been charged for use of the land in Astley Park to date. It is proposed to set the fee for using the land in line with the fees as outlined in paragraph 13.

### **Yarrow Valley Park**

17. An enquiry has been received from Ace Forest School to run a weekly play group session at Yarrow Valley Park including songs, short story telling session about the season or nature and some mixed child led and adult led activities focusing on nature and confidence in the outdoors. This is a different set-up as parents would be with their children.
18. There is already a space set up for Forest School within Yarrow Valley. The Rangers are on board with this activity and there are no concerns from staff about granting a licence for this business to commence in April 2020. The fee in the first instance is proposed to £250 to draw up the licence with an annual fee of £1 as this is a new business and will take time to build up the customer base. Ace Forest School have pledged to help litter pick the areas they are using and to also help with management of the land. This is proposed to be reviewed after 12 months.

### **Duxbury Park**

19. A recent enquiry has been received from Forest Frontiers regarding holding a Forest School at Duxbury Park working jointly with Glendale to utilise the walled garden and café and with Chorley Council to utilise the woodland. The Policy will be used to inform decisions.

## **Appendix One Forest School / Outdoor Learning DRAFT Policy.**

### **Background:**

Forest School sessions take place in a woodland environment and offer different opportunities for child learning, development and play. The aim is to increase participants' self-confidence through contact with nature and to encourage participants to develop long-term environmentally sustainable attitudes. It is however vital that the risks associated with Forest School/outdoor play sessions are fully understood and identified and appropriate measures adopted to ensure both the safety of participants and that potential damage to habitats and biodiversity will be prevented.

### **Factors to be Considered:**

Prior to booking a Forest School session(s) consultation must be carried out with the relevant Council Officer and Site Staff to discuss the suitability of the site for the session(s) and proposed activity(ies). The following factors must be considered:

- Suitability of the location of the activity/session and potential for impacts on other users of the Countryside/Park Site. It should not impinge on the current use of the site, not impact on the through flow of visitors and is best if it is overlooked from within the rest of the site and neighbouring properties to help reduce antisocial behaviour outside core hours
- Level of use. How much use can the site support before it becomes degraded? Does the number and/or size of sessions need to be limited or are two locations needed to reduce long lasting impacts?
- Suitability of the activity(ies) for the location and potential for impacts on habitats and biodiversity within the Countryside/Park Site.
- Wear and tear – what impact will the activity/session have on the existing infrastructure within the Countryside Site?
- Current maintenance regime and level of risk associated with the land. Check with Streetscene for tree inspection records etc.

The Forest School Leader will need to provide a risk assessment and method statement to be agreed with Chorley Council (CBC). If specialist equipment is needed for running the activity, then the activity provider must be able to demonstrate that they have received appropriate training and/or hold appropriate qualifications; a register of equipment and equipment checks are kept.

With activities that may have a greater impact on Countryside/Park Sites, some additional inspections may be required by the CBC Staff. Additional inspections above the normal inspection regime may incur charges.

Once the Forest School session(s)/activity(ies) have been approved, a review date will be set by the relevant CBC Officer. This will be on an at least termly basis, but may be more frequent depending on the activity and site concerned.

### **Required Criteria:**

For Forest School Session applications (or similar) the following criteria need to be met:

1. The site concerned is able to support the activity
2. The Forest School Leader has spoken to the relevant Officer and agreed the activity/session location.
3. The frequency and level of use must be agreed with the relevant Officer
4. A full site-specific health and safety risk assessment must be carried out and submitted with the application.

5. The potential impact sessions will have on the fabric of the Countryside Site – including infrastructure, habitats and biodiversity must be considered.
6. The Forest School Leader has the relevant qualifications, (Level 3 Forest School Practitioner qualification or other suitable similar as agreed by CBC) insurances and documentation – i.e. DBS check (if working with children or vulnerable adults); evidence of appropriate First Aid Certificate (with an outdoor element to the training); evidence that appropriate liability insurance is in place.
7. Any fires must adhere to CBC Fire Policy. (See below)
8. A levy will be charged in line with current fees and charges.

Where possible, the council will try and accommodate all requests for Forest School Session(s), however, where a site is deemed inappropriate, the council withhold the right to refuse use an application for Forest School Session(s).

### **Minimising Impacts on Habitats and Biodiversity**

Forest Schools are expected to operate a Leave No Trace policy. All activity infrastructure must be removed at the end of each session and the site be left in as good a condition, as it was found, if not better, i.e. natural and untouched. The Forest School leader is responsible for turning the site back to its original state following completion of a Forest School session. Any dens or shelters should be collapsed and/or removed at the end of the session. CBC Fire Policy must be adhered to.

Forest School programme must constantly monitor its ecological impact and any required mitigation works to alleviate site impacts will be agreed with CBC Staff. It is the responsibility of the Forest Schools Leader to ensure any such mitigation works are completed.

Special attention should be given to habitats and species listed under the UKBAP so as to minimise impacts on these priority habitats and species. It is important to be aware of the potential for activities to disturb habitats and wildlife to enable appropriate mitigation and monitoring to be implemented. This will then prevent any long-term damage and ensure the future enjoyment of the site by all.

### **Vandalism**

Where a site is being vandalised or used for unauthorised/inappropriate use the following must be considered:

- Could unauthorised use be occurring as a result of copycat behaviour? Could more be done to remove residual traces of activity so as to discourage this behaviour?
- Would a short break in activity reduce the likelihood of further incidences?
- Is it appropriate to continue with activities on site?

The arrangements need to be re-visited when the site is being used for something different than agreed, when the site is being used more often than envisaged or if there has been an act of vandalism linked with the site and activities.

## **Fire Policy Statement DRAFT Policy**

### **Background:**

Fires are not an essential component of a Forest School programme, however when properly undertaken it can be a rewarding and educational experience for participants. It is acknowledged that such activities can help children to manage risk as part of their learning and development. It is however crucial that the risk associated with fires are understood and identified and appropriate measures adopted to ensure the safety of participants and how potential damage to habitats will be prevented.

### **Greenspace Fire Policy – General Statement:**

It is the responsibility of Forest School leaders to assess and manage the level of risk associated with a fire. A full and comprehensive risk assessment will be required. Fires should only be considered when it has a clear and demonstrable purpose in improving outcomes for children as part of the Forest School programme

The CBC Officer withholds the right to allow individuals or groups to light fires, barbeques, gas burners or similar in line with the byelaws of Chorley Borough Council except:

- As part of a Forest School (agreed on a case by case basis)
- As part of an agreed land management programme
- As part of a booked and agreed event

### **Appropriate Use of Fire:**

1. Fires must be supervised by a qualified Forest School Leader or similarly authorised person who has suitable experience in fire management (Qualified Forest Schools Leader Level 3 unless otherwise approved by CBC Staff).
2. An up to date health and safety risk assessment must be completed for each site where a fire is to be used and appropriate safety measures in place, including fire bucket and fire blanket.
3. The use of a fire in a session must have a clearly identified purpose in meeting the aims of the Forest School programme
4. The fire must not be constructed on the ground but in a raised fire pit or Kelly kettle.
5. The weather conditions must be considered as to whether a fire is suitable – i.e. risks associated with prolonged dry spells prior to the session and/or high winds to be assessed.
6. Where sources of wood are limited, Forest School Leaders must bring fire wood (commercially bought) to the site (and any unburnt wood removed at the end of the session) to prevent a dearth of deadwood within woodlands and the associated impact to woodland habitats.
7. When fires are extinguished they are done so carefully. Forest School Leaders must not leave the site unless the fire and surrounding area is fully extinguished.
8. Subsequent to the session where a fire is to be used, all traces of the fire must be removed from the site. CBC has a strict 'LEAVE NO TRACE' policy which aims to leave a site looking as it was found, if not better, i.e. natural and untouched. This reduces incidences of unauthorised fire use encouraged by witnessed authorised use or from evidence of remaining arisings.

## **General Conditions in a Forest School Licence Agreement.**

The Licensee is to:

- a) Only use existing fire-pits for open fires with adequate safety equipment and undertake an appropriate fire risk assessment (The Regulatory Reform Fire-Safety Order 2005) to ensure that emergency response is planned and adequate provision for such is made. Adhere to the NoTrace Policy
- b) Remove all rubbish left by each group / each session and to dispose of adequately and properly
- c) Ensure that appropriate first aid and other appropriate training required for the determined use is undertaken by the Licensee and any other staff, agents, employees that are appointed to deliver the forest school activity sessions
- d) To regularly carry out risk assessments particularly in relation to health and safety and ensure compliance with current legislation and demonstrate compliance upon the request of the Licensor
- e) Not cause nuisance, loss or damage to other users of the park or obstruct footpaths or other users
- f) Have adequate / up to date DBS checks on all staff
- g) Not to camp overnight
- h) Not to affix any signage or other articles to any trees, fences, gates, buildings etc and any pop-up banners to be approved.
- i) Not to use fireworks, Chinese lanterns or any other such thing
- j) To keep and maintain financial records and make them available to the Licensor if required for calculating / considering future licence fees
- k) Not to play loud music or use PA or amplifier equipment unless by special arrangement with the Licensor
- l) Indemnify the Licensor for any loss, damage or injury to any third parties or to the Licensor or their employees or agents
- m) Not fly drones, kites or other aircraft
- n) Not to engage in metal detecting
- o) Attend any user group meetings
- p) Ensure compliance with planning regulations
- q) Not bring any animals such as livestock onto the park or to plant any vegetation
- r) Not to bring the Licensor into disrepute
- s) Not to operate during special events such as Chorley Flower Show, Chorley 10k (prior notice to be given by the Licensor)
- t) All equipment to be used in the delivery of the forest school activity shall be taken to the location of the activity session on foot.
- u) Not to prune any living trees / shrubs or alter the site infrastructure without prior agreement of the Council.