



Developing an outdoor

engagement space

from scratch



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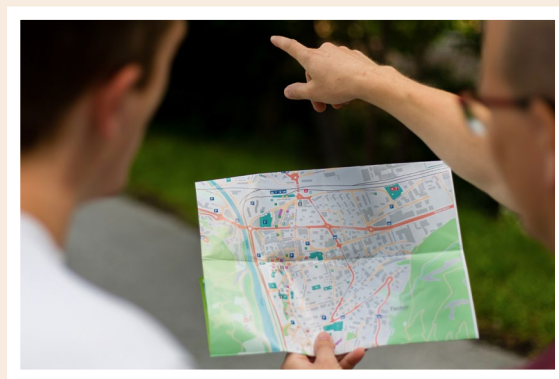


Locating and choosing an appropriate hub space

Nature and its many learning opportunities is all around us in both countryside and urban spaces alike but there are lots of considerations to think about before finalising your chosen hub space. This guide aims to highlight those considerations and support you to find a great location that is inspiring, practical and safe for you and your programme participants.

Seeking permission

Remember that wherever your location, whether it's obvious or not, the site will belong to somebody so permission will be required to use the space. If permission is granted it may include some caveats for certain activities, which could include no open fires; exclusion from a specific area; or a requirement for certain permits or health and safety requirements to be in place. It is important to ask about any restrictions at the point of requesting permission to prevent any inconvenient surprises later down the line, saving both time and wasted resources. Building a positive relationship with the landowner / land management team could also lead to further opportunities for nature based activities onsite or even the possibility for your programme to contribute to a project or permanent feature that supports their objectives too. Landowners and management teams are also likely to have a local knowledge that could provide you with some useful hints and tips for the site and surrounding area.



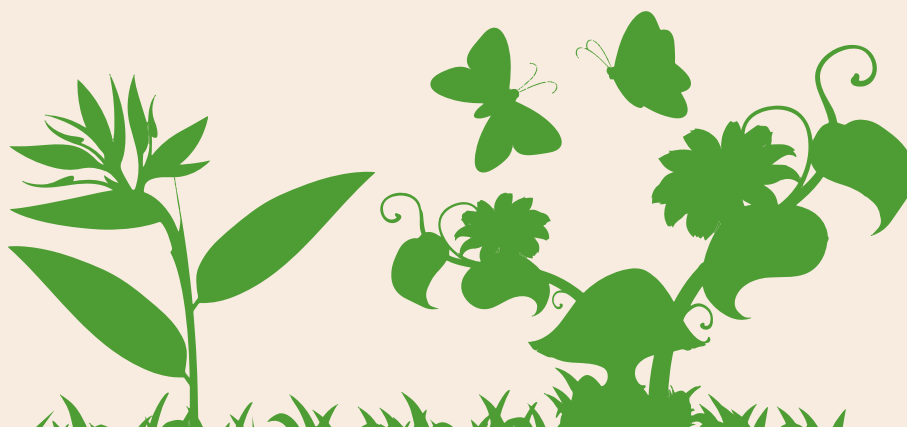
Choosing the environment

Whether you have an environment in mind or not the immediate surroundings will greatly influence the programme activities possible and the type of nature based experiences on offer. Although it is not impossible to move to an alternative location or visit a different site during your programme this will have additional planning and resource burdens. You may not be able or willing to facilitate these so it is important that your chosen hub site has all that you need to support a programmes worth of activities.



In addition to the natural resources, and therefore activities available, you also need to consider your nature goal. Is one of your aims to further your participant's connection, appreciation and support of the nature found on their immediate door step and in their everyday lives? In which case maybe local parks; along a canal or river side; or in a community centre garden and grounds could work. Or would you like to take residents further away from their normal daily lives and introduce them to an existing nature reserve, open space or woodland that's closer than they realise and a great nature resource that they can continue to visit for their health and wellbeing after the programme has finished?

Possible locations include; local reserves, parks, woodlands, the beach, river or canal banks, allotments, community gardens, a buildings grounds, a corner of a school or sports field, a roof top garden or a village green. Options to explore as your potential hub spaces are endless with lots to offer in each and every place.



Facility requirements

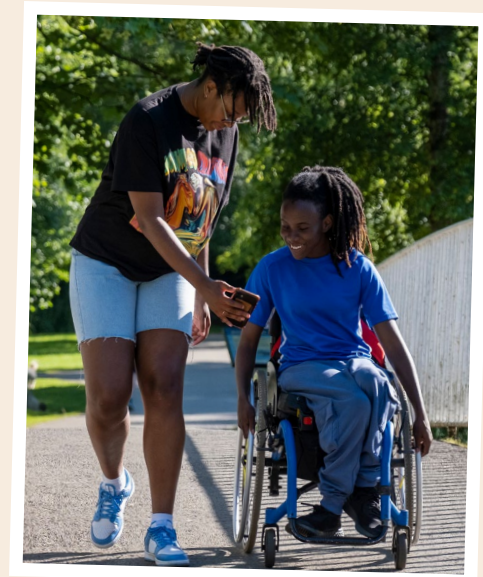
As with all outreach activity it will be expected that certain basic facilities will be available for participants comfort and safety. This is of equal importance when creating an outdoor experience but in reality it can be a little harder to organise and requires greater planning particularly if you have identified a remote location.

Any hub location will ideally need to provide a source of clean running water and toilet facilities. These can be a short distance from your base but must be easily accessible to participants when needed, alternatively they can be brought on to site at various costs, for example a porta-loo. A guide to setting up a hub has also been provided that offers information on core hub requirements and includes some additional nice to have's too.





Ensuring Access

Finally, when choosing a hub location it is important to consider the access arrangements with regards to both travel and onsite access for those with mobility issues. If participants are making their own way to site using public transport do the appropriate transport links exist? Are you covering transport costs, in which case does the distance travelled impact on your budget? Where can you or the participants park, is it close to the hub itself? If you are looking at a rural location what is the terrain between the parking facilities and hub and what about the site itself, how will you overcome any physical barriers for participants with disabilities? And how will you transport any kit to the site?



Public spaces vs Private spaces

Many of the options detailed previously will be public or communal spaces with pros and cons to be considered for their use as a hub spot. Below is a quick overview of public vs private spaces:

	 Public spaces	 Private spaces
PROS	<p>Typically easy to get to via public or private transport.</p> <p>Onsite infrastructure may already exist eg: bathroom facilities, outside tap, seating or shelter.</p> <p>Likely to have better or good access for those with access needs.</p> <p>More opportunity to share the work with the community through profile raising and communication with passers-by.</p>	<p>Few or no passers-by to disrupt or put off participants.</p> <p>Greater potential for creating a secure permanent or semi-permanent hub space.</p> <p>Opportunity to share the work through signage and interpretation.</p>
CONS	<p>Curious passers-by may stop and ask questions or want to join in.</p> <p>Passers-by may be off putting to the participants, particularly during any quiet, grounding or reflective moments.</p> <p>Unable to leave equipment on site when not in attendance.</p> <p>Noise from other users or the surrounding areas.</p>	<p>Might be off the beaten track with few or no public transport links meaning transportation for participants will be required.</p>

Finally, we have some amazing green spaces in the UK and your journey to finding a hub location could introduce you to lots of places that you hadn't previously known about. Prepare a check list of your requirements in advance, it's surprisingly easy to get distracted by the beauty of a location or carried away in the moment and forget to ask or seek all the information that you need.



Equipping up your hub space

Choosing the most suitable location and natural surroundings for your hub is important to the success of your programme. It is unlikely that you'll find a spot that already contains all the necessary items you'll need to provide a welcoming, comfortable and safe learning environment. There are a few essential core items that must be in place in order to proceed with delivery and some additional optional extras, or nice to haves, that can enhance participants in nature experience.



This guide will provide you with some hub ideas and inspiration and to help you in your search for potential suppliers. It is not a definitive list of everything you may want and need for equipping your wellbeing hub nor is it a definitive supplier list, there will be other suppliers available that you may prefer.

Supplier Key:

Outdoor Educational & Play

Muddyfaces – a specialist supplier for Forest School and outdoor play whose website includes advice, activity ideas and events information as well as an on line shop.

Forestschoolshop.co.uk – a specialist outdoor school and events online store that also offers a range of wholesale goods and branding, trade accounts, loyalty points and an affiliate scheme.

Outdoor Learning Resources – an online specialist in forest school equipment and tools with a focus on

Outdoor and camping

Available as both online and in person stores these outlets tend to have everything you need for outdoor activities. A simple internet search should provide you with lots of options to choose from.

Generalist High Street or Online

These products are available from many easily accessed stores ranging from supermarkets, department stores, DIY outlets, garden centres and internet retail giants. A simple internet search should provide you with lots of options to choose from.

Core items and essential requirements

Seating

As well as keeping everyone off the ground, providing a more comfortable and dry place to sit, appropriate seating could mean the difference between a participant accessible programme or not. Solutions don't have to be sophisticated, a log circle is a favourite of past participants; pop up camping chairs or stools are a simple portable solution and hammocks are also a popular choice. Kneeling pads are an easy solution for floor based activities or for kneeling around a fire circle but keep in mind your audience and any access needs they may have.

Recommended suppliers

Log seating: 🏠

Pop up chairs or stools: 🏠🛒

Permanent ie: heavy or built ideas: 🏠



Shelter

Shelter offers you the security that your programme can go ahead in all but severe adverse weather conditions, an event day necessity within the British Isles. For hubs located on your organisations own land, shelters could be a semi or permanent structure eg: a purpose built shelter or a yurt. Options for borrowed or public spaces could include a tarp and rope construction, a parachute shelter, a vehicle, or a pop up canopy. The options are endless and will be determined by your location and its terrain and access.

Recommended suppliers

Tarp and rope options: 🛒 Pop up canopies: 🏠

Yurts or build structures: 🏠

Handwashing facilities

Important for the health, safety and comfort of the programme participants some form of handwashing facility is essential. Options are plentiful, from simple squeeze bottles to larger portable water containers with plug in taps. If your hub space already has a usable clean water source options could be as simple as providing nature friendly soap. Or for an eco-solution to make together consider a 'tippy tap' with readily available instructions on the internet.

Recommended suppliers

🏠 Or for an eco-solution to make together with your participants consider a 'tippy tap' with readily available instructions on the internet.

Fire Pit

It is important to check with the owner or manager of your chosen space before investing in this item as there may be rules in place regarding fire. You may have the option to create a more permanent fire pit area or you may choose to follow the 'leave no trace' ethos and create a new fire area each time. Apart from meeting the need for a source of warmth, a fire provides the potential for more outdoor activities and acts as an inviting central meeting space for group activities, another favourite of past participants. A fire pit with a grill offers the most activity flexibility. You will also need: a fire safety bucket, a fire lighting kit and a fuel in the form of kindling & logs.



Recommended suppliers

- Fire pits:   
- Fire safety:  
- Fuel: 

Optional extras dependant on chosen site and activites

Outdoor clothing

Consider the environment and activities you have chosen and whether the participants would benefit from being loaned some specific outdoor clothing that they are unlikely to own themselves. Are wellington boots needed for stream or lake side activities? Do you need waterproofs or sun hats to combat any weather situations? If your activities involve more physical conservation work would steel capped boots be appropriate or safety / gardening gloves?

Recommended suppliers

- Weather proof clothing:  
- Work/ safty clothing:  



Cooking utensils

If your site has allowed some form of fire or outdoor cooking facilities, there are a number of simple cooking utensils or meal preparation kit that would allow a number of simple and tasty outdoor cooking experiences; A hanging pot, Kelly Kettle, ladle or large spoon, mugs, cooking skillet, utensils and a tripod for hanging pots over the fire.



Recommended suppliers

All supplies:  

Outdoor tools

Depending on your chosen nature or conservation activities the chances are you will need some outdoor tools, the recommended basics would include: whittling knife, border spades, claw hammers, pruning shears, wheelbarrow, mallet, handsaw and hand brace drill.

Recommended suppliers

All supplies:  



Blackboard

Useful for all sorts of activities from establishing and communicating group rules, re-iterating activity instructions or providing participants with a place to share their thoughts or end of day reflections.

Recommended suppliers

Ready-made: 



Or consider making your own as a participant activity as part of the hub set up with a board and some blackboard paint.

Identification books or chart

Unless you have an encyclopaedic knowledge of UK wildlife and plants it is likely some form of identification tool would be useful. As a data signal is not always reliable, books or printed cards are the most useful aide. Subjects to consider and potentially influenced by your chosen environment are: flowers, birds, insects, trees, animals, river & ponds.

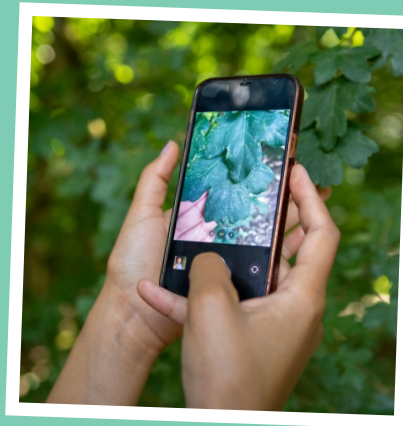
Recommended suppliers

Including the Wildlife Trust's own selection ,
The Woodland Trust or FSC guides.



A selection of recommended Nature Based Apps

Although not strictly a piece of hub equipment, there are a number of nature based apps that are really useful for capturing, logging and identifying any finds. They are of course reliant on access to a mobile device and having available data so hard copy reference books may work better for reliability or audience access but these do offer the opportunity for nature spotting and curiosity to continue on an individual basis post activity day or programme.



Recommended Apps

iNaturalist – uses a crowd-sourcing approach to provide help with species identification.

Smartbird ID - Identify birds by sound or image and learn more about birds in your area

Picture This – A flower and plant identification app that if purchased can also identify diseases

A workbench or table

An off the floor, raised flat surface to use as a work space or lay out activities and materials is worth considering. Although it is not essential it can make things more accessible for those with mobility or dexterity issues. A simple portable / pop up table will do the job in most cases but if you are undertaking more physical tasks, using hammers for example, something sturdier should be considered for safety purposes.

Recommended suppliers

Pop up table:  

Or make you own with the group with found materials on site.

And finally, what about storage and bathroom facilities?

Do you have somewhere on site to store any portable equipment securely? Is there a shed or storage facility already there? Could you buy or build a secure space? Is the site accessed by other groups or the general public? Do you have to remove everything from site after each session, and if so have you considered transportation methods?

Do you have suitable bathroom facilities? On many occasions nature wee's are suitable, but it isn't the most accessible option. If you are delivering full day sessions it is recommended you provide some facilities. Whether this is using a business's or a friendly neighbour's nearby, public toilets or having a temporary or permanent fixture on site. Consider the most suitable option for the site you're working on.

Download more activity ideas at:
cheshirewildlifetrust.org.uk/nature-connection-toolkits

