



## Risk Assessment for Books in the Woods Outdoor Playgroup - Ashridge Site Updated April 2025

Description of the site: 200m clockwise along meadow path, away from main car park/visitor centre.

Ashridge: The Ashridge Estate is owned by The National Trust and the site is accessible by members of the public, including dog walkers & on the nearby meadow path, horse riders. Ashridge is a biological site of International Scientific Interest and home to a wide variety of life, including deer, nationally rare breeding birds, amphibians and invertebrates. There is no access for public motor vehicles into the woodland area. The site has no water sections. The area of beech copse is near a temporary den-building site, 200m clockwise along the meadow path.

A mature oak fell across the original site in 2020 and has been left to decay in situ..

| Hazard     | Harm  | Who      | Level (L-M-H) | Existing measures / New measures   |
|------------|---|----------|---------------|--|
| Security   | Public access to site                                   | All      | High          | Remind parents that they are responsible for their own children at all times; precise directions to the site are only given once booked.<br>Call to gather everyone together in case of a suspicious intruder: three blasts on the whistle |
| Dogs       | Dogs frightening or harming children; dogs taking food. | All      | High          | Attendees are reminded to cover food. Remind parents that they are responsible for their own children at all times.<br>Advise all to keep still if an unleashed dog bounds in.   |
| Boundaries | Escapees  | Children | High          | Remind parents that they are responsible for their own children at all times. The trees and fallen tree provide a natural boundary to the storytelling site. Bunting marks playgroup from the path.  |
| Food       | Choking,  | All      | Medium        | See Food policy. Parents are responsible for providing their own snacks and  |

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|---|---|-----|---------------|--|
|   | allergic reactions, risk of spreading germs/viruses                             |     |               | minimising the risk of harm.   |
| Hot drinks  | Scalding; risk of spreading germs/viruses                                       | All | Medium        | Parents are to bring their own drinks. Given the outdoor location, there is a reasonable expectation that these will be stored in lidded containers. Remind parents that they are responsible for their own children at all times.   |
| Weather: excessive heat, cold, rain or wind, or thunder and lightning | Overheating, chills, hypothermia, injury from falling debris, lightning strikes | All | High          | <p>See Weather and Cancellation policies.</p> <p><b>Session to be cancelled if there is a risk of lightning, gusts over 25mph, and/or a MET office weather warning.</b> If the session is already in progress, the group should be moved to the Meadow, away from the woodland. Seek shelter at the Visitor Centre and dismiss early.</p> <p>Use the shaded area of the site in summer and move under thicker foliage in light rain.</p> <p>Share weather reports on social media when needed and advise on appropriate clothing (e.g. sun hats, sun cream, waterproofs).</p> <p>Volunteers to keep aware of adverse weather conditions so they can take appropriate action (e.g. cancelling or modifying the session and notifying attendees)</p> |
| Mud, boggy terrain  | Slips and falls, getting stuck in the mud                                       | All | Low           | Session leaders to walk around the site before it begins to check for any boggy terrain or mud.. Take advice from Ashridge regarding site conditions, including risk when parking. Remind attendees that vehicles should only be parked in designated parking areas. Make parents aware of any boggy sections  |

| Hazard                    | Harm   | Who                                  | Level (L-M-H) | Existing measures / New measures  |
|---------------------------|--|--------------------------------------|---------------|---|
| Damage to flora and trees | Crushing, breakage, other damage               | Plants including bluebells and trees | Low           | No activities are to include picking of live flora or peeling of bark. No pins or staples to be used - signs to be fixed with string/wool only.<br>Remind attendees of Ashridge's status as a biological site of International Scientific Interest, and ask them to avoid areas where bluebells might be growing. |
| Injury                    | Cuts, grazes                                   | All                                  | Medium        | First Aid Kit to be available at every session. First Aid Kit to contain plasters, eye wash, bandages and antiseptic wipes  |
| Serious Injury            | Crushing from falling branches, dog bites, etc | All                                  | High          | Leaders to carry mobile phones to contact Emergency Services. Ensure phone signal at start of session and ensure phones are fully charged.<br><b>First Aid Trained: Jenni, Charlotte, Anna F, Bryony, Hannah, Christina</b>   |
| Nettles and Brambles      | Stinging, scratches, trips and falls           | All                                  | Medium        | Make parents and children aware of hazards. Advise on wearing of long trousers and looking out for trip hazards.  |
| Berried flora             | Poisoning                                      | Children                             | High          | Inform all parents and children not to pick or eat berries. Wash hands before eating. Call 999. Observe. First Aid where necessary. Keep sample of sick for ambulance.  |
| Tree roots and stumps     | Tripping                                       | All                                  | Low           | Inform all to take care in woods; adults reminded that they're in charge of their own children at all times.  |
| Sticks                    | Hitting, eye injuries                          | All                                  | Low           | Remind parents that they are responsible for their own children at all times. Carry eye wash pods in first aid kit. Only smaller sticks to be used for activities (shorter than the child's forearm)  |
| Animal faeces             | Contamination                                  | All                                  | Low           | Team to check site on arrival each week. Make parents and children aware of the probability of deer, rabbit and dog poo.  |

| Hazard                             | Harm  | Who      | Level (L-M-H) | Existing measures / New measures   |
|------------------------------------|---|----------|---------------|--|
| Debris/rubbish                     | Cuts and contamination from glass, discarded drug paraphernalia, metals | All      | Low           | Pre-visit & continuous risk check, adult to potentially remove safely; remind parents that they are responsible for their own children at all times.   |
| Mushrooms and fungi                | Poinsoning  | Children | High          | Remind parents that they are responsible for their own children at all times; inform all children and adults to look only, no touching. "No Pick. No Lick. No Sick"  |
| Ticks                              | Tick bites, risk of Lyme disease  | All      | Medium        | Display a link to NHS website for info on tick bites and lyme disease: <a href="https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lyme-disease/">https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/lyme-disease/</a> .   |
| Bees, wasps, ants, spiders, snakes | Stings and bites  | All      | Medium        | All Check area for nests, avoid contact; carry a first aid kit with afterbite spray Ice packs. Call 999 for spider or snake bite.  |
| Ancient trees                      | Falling trees and branches  | All      | High          | Cancel playgroup in adverse weather conditions including high winds over 25mph (even if Ashridge still opens).<br>Tree climbing: Remind parents that they are responsible for themselves and their own children at all times. Highlight the unstable condition of fallen tree trunks and branches. Remind parents that fallen wood rots and can be very slippery when wet. |
| Low level branches                 | Head injury, scratches, eye injuries                                    | All      | Low           | Remind parents to be aware of risks such as these, and to be responsible for themselves and their children at all times. Carry eye wash pods in the First Aid Kit  |
| Newly Fallen trees and branches    | Head injury, scratches, cuts, bruises, eye injuries                     | All      | Medium        | Highlight potentially jagged branches or newly fallen trees (exposed broken wood or roots).Remind parents to be aware of risks and to be responsible for themselves and for their children at all times. Some trunks may be unstable. Dead wood may still fall from trees after the storm. Carry eye wash pods in the first aid kit.                                       |

**Emergency Arrangements**

**Serious Accident:** Seek additional adult help, provide basic first aid, call ambulance 999, finish group early and clear the area of onlookers. Write up accident report form, inform Ashridge NT, assess risk assessment and make new adjustments for future.

**Minor Accident:** Provide basic first aid\*, assess risk assessment and make adjustments for future.

**Weather change:** Make dynamic risk assessment, seek shelter and finish early.

**Safety Advice****Clothing:**

Long trousers and long sleeves, warm clothing in cold weather, waterproof clothing in wet weather.

**Communications:**

Mobile phones

**First Aid:**

Help Bag with BITW first aid kit to be taken for each session, including blanket.

**Children's safety advice:**

Parents to be in charge of their own children at all times.

The overall hazard rating for the site is **low** as long as health and safety guidelines are followed.

\*Review site assessment form and update annually or before should incidents or changes occur.

| Signatures | Role                         | Date       |
|------------|------------------------------|------------|
| C. Bird    | Books in the Woods Secretary | April 2025 |