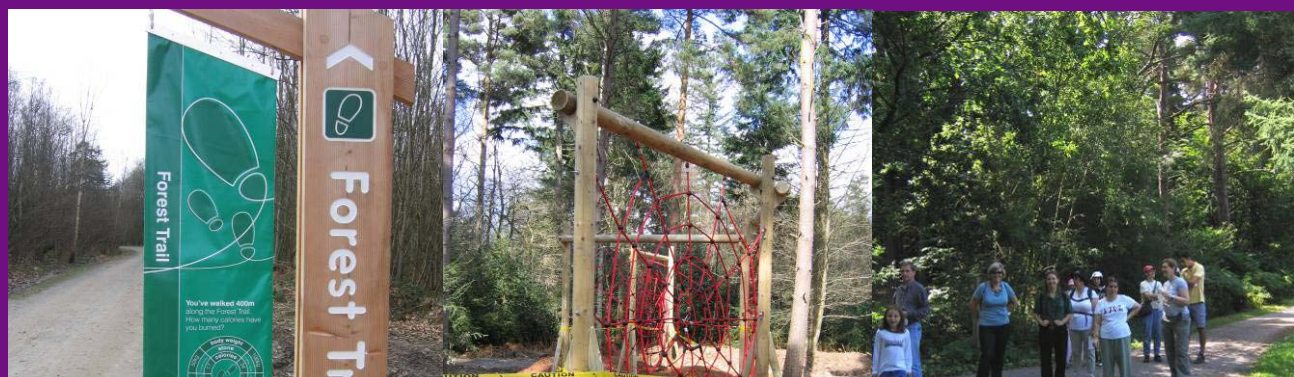


Active England Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest

Liz O'Brien and Jake Morris
Social and Economic Research Group
2009



Contents

1.	Introduction	3
1.1	Key findings	4
2.	Bedgebury: design and implementation	6
2.1	Activities aimed at target groups	6
3.	Results: on site surveys and monitoring	9
3.1	Bedgebury's changing visitor profile	9
3.2	Bedgebury's changing visit profile	13
3.3	Changes in target group behaviour at Bedgebury	16
3.4	Data collected by site staff	17
4.	Results: catchment profiling	20
4.1	Catchment area	20
4.2	Target groups	22
4.3	Targeting qualitative research	26
5.	Results: project evaluation with uses and non-users	28
5.1	Summary of results from users	28
5.1.1	Health walk group	28
5.1.2	Young mountain bikers	33
5.2	Summary of results from non users: low income and young people group	39
5.3	Summary of site representatives' views	41
6.	Discussion	45
	References	46

Acknowledgement

Thanks to Katherine King (University of Brighton) for writing section 5.1.2 based on her PhD research on young mountain bikers at Bedgebury.

1. Introduction

This report provides information about the design and delivery of the Active England funded project at Bedgebury Forest in Kent and the results of monitoring and evaluation conducted by Forest Research between 2005 and 2008. The Active England programme was established in 2003 with Big Lottery and Sport England funding of £94.8 million (Sport England, 2009). The overall aim of the programme was to increase community participation in sport and physical activity in England. Five woodland projects were funded for three years and Bedgebury was one of these. The total cost of the project at the site was just over two million pounds. The other four woodland projects were at Rosliston in the National Forest Derbyshire, Haldon Forest Park in Devon, Great Western Community Forest in Wiltshire and Greenwood Community Forest in Nottinghamshire. The Active England programme focused on key target groups that have been identified as under-represented in sport. These included women and girls, the disabled, Black and Minority Ethnic groups, those under 16 years of age and those aged 45 and over.

A range of methods were used to collect data as part of this research across the five woodland projects and these included:

- 1) On-site surveys to profile visitors and types of visits (391 questionnaires were completed at Bedgebury).
- 2) Spatial analysis to produce a catchment profile of the surrounding population of each site/s (within an approximate 20 mile radius).
- 3) Qualitative research (at Bedgebury with 22 people, 2 staff members and 40 young people through a PhD research project) to explore the benefits and barriers to using woodlands and green spaces for physical activity (targeting both users of the projects and non-users). Interviews with project staff explored the challenges and successes of the projects.

This report outlines the results of the research at Bedgebury. This section provides the introduction and key findings. Section 2 outlines the design and implementation of the project. Section 3 reports on the monitoring activities through the site surveys undertaken in autumn 2005 (before the project started) and 2006 (during the project). Individual monitoring changes at the site were identified through the site surveys which highlight the changing visitor profile and changing visit profile. Changes in target group behaviour and data collected by site staff is also described.

Section 4 compares the visitor profile from the site surveys and Bedgebury's catchment profile provided by the spatial analysis of socio-demographic variables for an area within a 20 mile radius of the site. Section 5 presents results of the qualitative research with groups of 'users' (health walkers and young mountain bikers) and 'non-users' (young low income group) of the project. The analysis of perceptions of the project, the site, health and physical activity levels are outlined as well as the barriers to involvement. This is

complemented by feedback and self-evaluation provided by project staff at Bedgebury. The inclusion of non-users in the overall evaluation constitutes an important innovation of this research project.

This report can be read on its own or in conjunction with the other individual site reports¹. The main overarching report 'Active England: the Woodland Projects' brings together the key findings across the five woodland projects and places the work in the context of current health concerns; it also outlines in more detail the methodology that was used across the five woodlands projects.

1.1 Key Findings

Impact on target groups: on site survey and monitoring

- Visitor numbers rose from approximately just under 51,000 in 2005/6² to just over 273,000 in 2007/8.
- There was a significant increase in families visiting the site, from 22% in 2005 to 41% in 2006. This suggests a significant rise in the number of under 16s using the site due to the new trails and equipment.
- More women than men visited the site and the proportion of female visitors did not change over the two surveys.
- There was a decrease in the 45+ age group visiting the site from 68% in 2005 to 45% in 2006.
- Approximately 2% of site visitors were from Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) groups.
- People recorded under the concessions scheme, which was used to encourage visitors from deprived areas, rose from 671 in 2006/7 to 13,162 in 2007/8.
- There was a significant increase in people doing multiple activities, from 42% to 63%.
- There was a significant increase in the number of people re-visiting the site on a weekly or monthly basis.
- There were significant increases in the popularity of cycling, mountain biking and play activities.
- The average length of visit increased from 2 hours to 2.5 hours from 2005 to 2006.

Catchment profiling

- The spatial profiling of the catchment surrounding the site within a 20 miles radius and the use of Census and Index of Multiple Deprivation data, allowed conclusions

¹ These can be found at: <http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/activeengland>

² In the financial year April 2005 to March 2006.

to be drawn about the level of representation of specific target groups at Bedgebury compared with concentrations of those groups within the catchment.

- The profiling enabled the researchers to identify target groups that were not involved in the project and bring them to the site to explore barriers to access.
- Comparing the catchment profile with the site surveys suggests that people on low income and BME groups are somewhat under-represented at Bedgebury. Women and young people under 16 do not appear to be under-represented at Bedgebury.

Qualitative research with project users and non-users and site staff

- For the health walkers (user group) there were self perceived improvements in fitness and stamina. Socialising with others was a key attraction in joining the health walks. The aesthetic aspects of the site were considered to be very important. The walkers felt that the led/supported health walks made them feel more secure and safe and motivated them to continue their participation as well as giving them confidence to get involved.
- The young mountain bikers (user group) developed a sense of ownership over leisure space at Bedgebury through their participation in mountain biking. The young people formed their own sense of attachment to and knowledge of 'nature' through participation in mountain biking in countryside spaces.
- For the young low income group (non-user group) from Hastings the key barriers to accessing Bedgebury to take part in any of the activities were a lack of transport and money. This group expressed a strong desire to see more woodland such as Bedgebury nearer to where they lived, as they would have limited access otherwise.
- Facilitated access³ and led activities in which project staff provide supported activities such as health walks are of fundamental importance in reaching sections of the community that face barriers to participation.
- A critical lesson identified by project staff was the need for adequate time and staff resources for delivery and a greater lead in time for large scale projects allowing a more thorough-going approach to long term strategic site and business planning.

³ We define facilitated access as project workers going into specific hard to reach communities and identifying suitable groups that are then brought to a site (by coach or mini bus) and guided around the site via an activity such as a walk. This differs from led activities in which participants have to find their own way to a site in order to join an organised activity such as a health walk.

2. Bedgebury: design and implementation

Bedgebury National Pinetum and Forest in Kent is managed by Forestry Commission England (FCE) and consists of 850 hectares of Bedgebury Forest and over 100 hectares for the Bedgebury National Pinetum. Capital investment was made on the Bedgebury Forest site. The total cost of the project was £2,268,366 with £1.1 million gained from the Active England award (Sport England, 2005). This funding was used to create:

- a children's play area - the play area was designed with a theme, connected to the National Pinetum, to reflect the challenges faced by plant hunters through the ages. The area provides opportunities for children to become involved in adventurous play.
- a visitor centre with bike hire facility and café and classroom/community room
- surfaced 10 kilometre (km) track for family cycling
- surfaced walking trails
- free ride area, mini north shore and dirt jump course for downhill riders and dirt jumpers – professionally designed
- a challenging 12 km single track trail for mountain bikers
- showers available for both riders and their bikes
- development of a cycling club
- toll riding for equestrian activity
- concessions scheme (to aid those on low income to access the site for free).

The site was officially opened in April 2006. As well as capital investment in the site an outreach officer and partnership manager were employed to develop the work. Through their efforts and with other staff at Bedgebury a series of events such as guided walks and children's activities have been run along with regular project activities such as health walks, archery and cycling.

2.1 Activities aimed at target groups

As well as improving on site infrastructure as outlined above that can benefit all users of Bedgebury, work has been carried out to try and attract the target groups identified by the Active England Programme. These target groups are:

- women and girls
- 45+ yrs age group
- people on low incomes
- black and minority ethnic groups
- people with disabilities
- young people (under 16).

Low income⁴

One way in which low income groups were targeted was through the development of a concessions scheme set up for those on low incomes (shown by living in a deprived area) or in receipt of a disability benefit. Those in this category could apply for a permit that would give them free access to the site for a year e.g. they would not have to pay the car park fee of £7.50. The education team at Bedgebury, who have been in place for a number of years before the project started, have been able to provide a bursary for schools that come from low income areas.

Disability

Disabled groups and individuals were targeted through close partnership working with Kent Sport Development Unit (KSDU); a project worker from the unit was based two days a week at the site at the beginning of the project. The project worker set up archery and cycling sessions for disabled people. Through these activities others who were not disabled expressed interest in getting involved. Because of the links with KSDU and the Kent outdoor disability project, a Countryside Agency (now part of Natural England) project officer carried out an action research project 'By All Means⁵' and undertook a disability audit of the site. A 'Tramper' is available at the site; this is an all terrain electric buggy that can be used off road by those with mobility problems. An induction session can be booked for those who want to take it out for the first time. The education team also increased the number of disabled groups and groups with learning disabilities they work with over the past two to three years.

Young people and families

A cycling club was set up in 2006 due to interest in using the new facilities at the site, and the Bedgebury partnership manager was heavily involved in setting up and helping to facilitate running of the club. The club has now gained accreditation and has 3 'Go Ride⁶' trained instructors. The club is a membership organisation and members gain an annual car parking pass, access to training programmes, social events, newsletter and regular rides are held, such as night rides every week. Races are also held on site. The cycling has been particularly successful in bringing in young people.

The play area has also been a key part of the new infrastructure in bringing greater numbers of families to the site and the cafe and cycle hire facilities has played a role in keeping people on site for a longer period of time. Playlink (2008) visited Bedgebury and wrote a report for the Forestry Commission. The report highlighted that the play areas were imaginatively designed, with unique pieces not found elsewhere, and the

⁴ In this study we define low income as households on £20K or under per annum.

⁵ By All means was a 3 year action research project organised through the Countryside Agency – now Natural England.

⁶ Go ride is British Cycling Clubs development programme aimed at improving young riders and clubs.

pieces invited play and their location offered good opportunities to use the play space as an invitation for wider exploration of Bedgebury.

Bedgebury has worked with Active Hastings (another project that also gained Active England funding) for example an Active Hastings cycle group uses Bedgebury regularly as a venue for rides. A 'Go Ape' trail was installed and opened in spring 2007 and although not funded through the Active England Project it provides another opportunity to reach young people, families, and also organisations who want their staff to participate in team building exercises.

Other groups (including those with health problems or the less active)

Those who were not necessarily active or who wanted to become more active were targeted through the development of health walks. A Kent County Council worker started health walks at Bedgebury at the beginning of the project this was then picked up by the Bedgebury outreach officer. The health walks are now running weekly and a second walk has been started for those who are faster, which is a good indicator of improving fitness and allows those in the original group to move on, when ready, to the faster group. People have been trained as volunteer health walk leaders which assists the outreach officer is running the walks and potentially results in her being able to move on to other work while the volunteers run the health walks. Training sessions for the volunteers are organised by Natural England through the Walking the Way to Health Initiative⁷ (WHI). The walks are advertised on the WHI website.

The Toll rides (off road) Trust (TROT)⁸ was established in the south east in 1990 and they work to develop networks of toll rides. Bedgebury has 12 kilometres of riding tracks and is suitable for carriage riding, the site also has a secure box park. Bedgebury has worked with TROT to develop appropriate facilities on site for horse riders.

Events

A range of other organised activities and events are run at Bedgebury on a regular basis that are open to all or are targeted at young people.

⁷ The Walking to the Way to Health Initiative is a national body promoting and setting standards for led health walks. It's a joint initiative between Natural England and the British Heart Foundation.

⁸ The scheme works by riders/carriage drivers paying a fee according to how many miles of toll routes are open in their 'hackable' radius.

3. Results: on site surveys and project monitoring

This section provides information on the changing visitor and visit profile at Bedgebury between the surveys and presents an analysis of changes in behaviour for respondents from the Active England target groups.

3.1 Bedgebury’s changing visitor profile

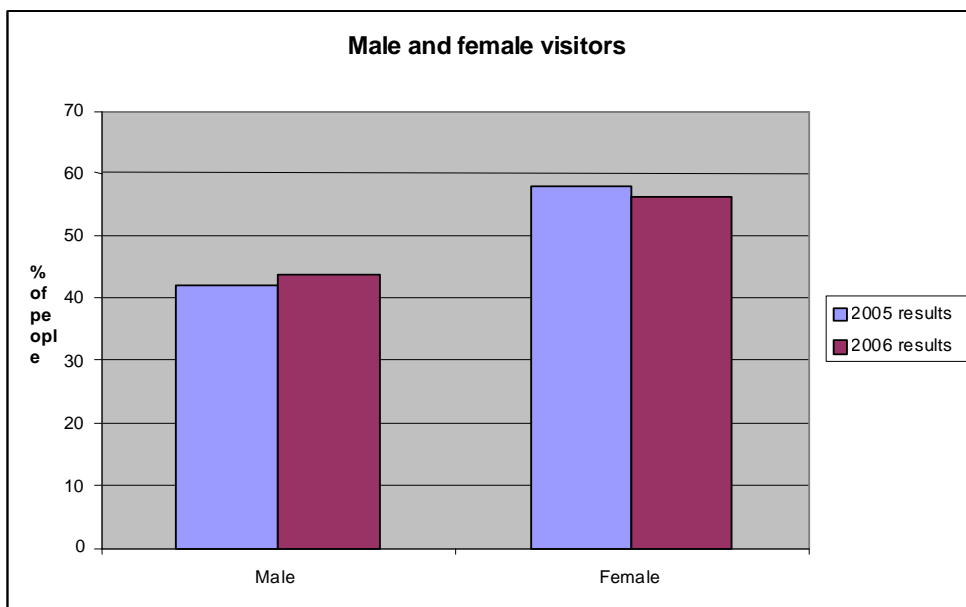
Representation of target groups

A total of 391 people were interviewed on site at Bedgebury during the study period, 249 in autumn 2005 and 142 in autumn 2006. Only people of 16 years and over were interviewed for the on site surveys, however those under sixteen may be represented via the question about whether people visited with their family which would often includes children.

Women and girls

Figure 1 shows slightly more women than men visit Bedgebury. The proportion of female visitors remained similar between 2005 and 2006. The child and family friendly facilities at the site may be one of the reasons that more females visit Bedgebury.

Figure 1: Male and female visitors



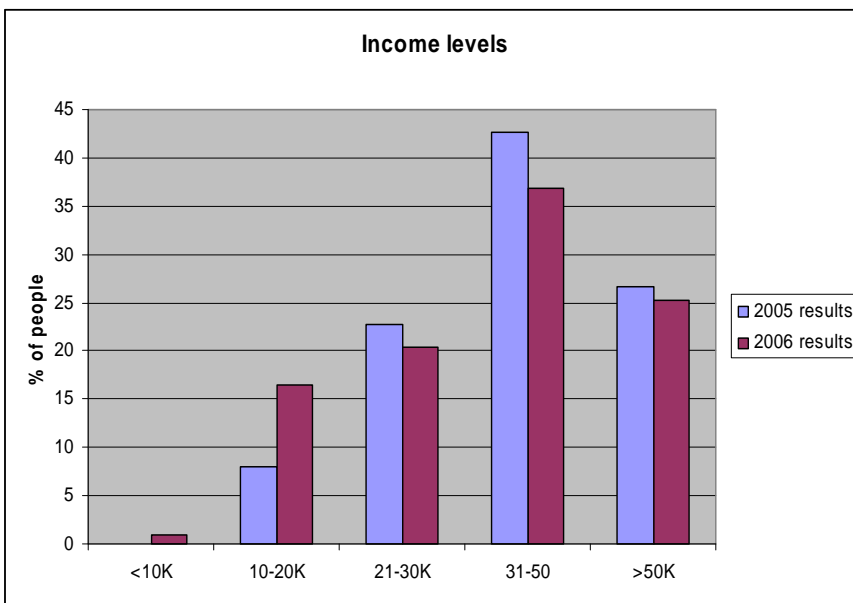
45+ yrs age group

There was a decrease in the 45+ age group to Bedgebury from 68% in 2005 to 45% in 2006. Conversely there was a marked increase in the 16-44 age group visiting Bedgebury between 2005 and 2006 from 32% to 56% ($p < 0.001$). This is confirmed by the question asking respondents who they came to the site with. Basically more families are visiting Bedgebury primarily because of the new facilities such as the play area, family cycle trail, bike hire facility, walking trails and café/visitor centre.

People on low incomes

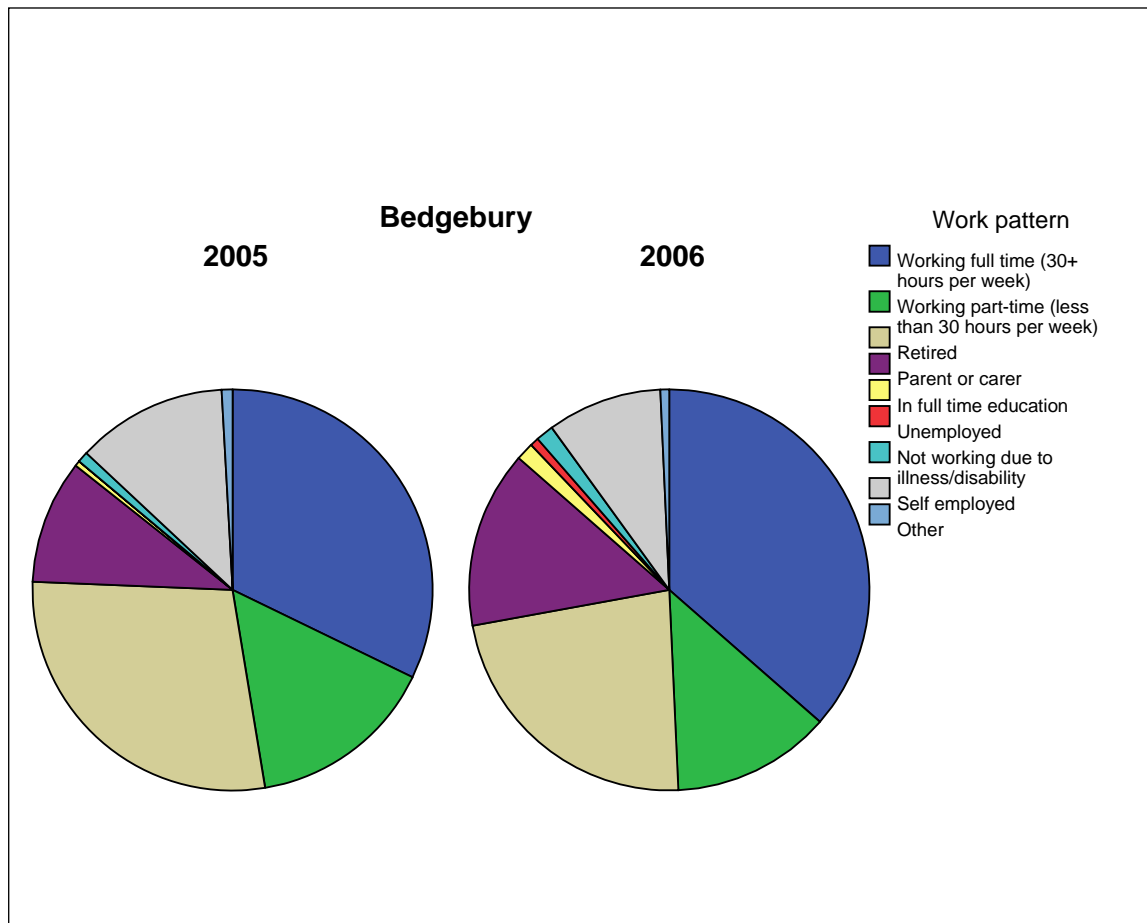
Figure 2 shows little change in the distribution of household income between the two years. However there has been a marginal shift to people with slightly lower incomes visiting Bedgebury but it is not particularly clear why this is the case. There may be a link to the development of the concessions scheme which provides free parking to those who live in deprived areas.

Figure 2: Income levels of site visitors



There were no significant changes at Bedgebury in the working status of visitors. Over the two surveys approximately 34% worked full time, 14% part time, 26% were retired, 12% were parent or carer, 0.8% were in full time education, 0.3% were unemployed, 1% were not working due to illness, and 11% were self-employed (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Work patterns of site visitors



Black and ethnic minority groups

Over the two surveys approximately 98% of respondents classed themselves as White British, 1% were from other white backgrounds (e.g. potentially eastern European) and 1% were either Asian/Asian British, Black/Black British or of mixed race origin.

People with disabilities

In 2005 none of the visitors were blue badge holders (this is a scheme which provides a range of parking benefits for disabled people with severe walking difficulties who travel as either drivers or as passengers). In 2006 there were 4 blue badge visitors.

Registered disabled

In 2005 none of the visitors were registered disabled, in the 2006 survey 1% (n=2) were registered disabled.

Young people (under 16)

In the 2005 survey 25% of respondents had children under 16 years of age living in their household, in the 2006 survey this had risen to 42% of respondents showing a significant increase ($p < 0.001$). This is confirmed by the question asking who people came to the site with. In 2006 there was a significant increase in families visiting the site from 22% to 41%.

Further information about visitors

Exercise levels

In 2005 respondents were doing 30 minutes of exercise a day on a mean of 3.8 days per week, this is below the recommendation of at least 30 minutes of exercise five times a week outlined by the Chief Medical Officer. In the 2006 survey the average was 3.7 days per week. The site therefore is used by those who are a bit active; however they are not being active enough to improve their health.

Current fitness

Respondents were asked how they rated their current levels of fitness from very unfit to very fit. Table 1 highlights differences between the two surveys. Approximately 55% classed themselves as fit in 2005 and 47% in 2006.

Table 1: Respondents' current level of perceived fitness (percentages)

Level of fitness	2005	2006
Very unfit	0.7	1.3
Unfit	3.5	11.5
Neither fit nor unfit	39.6	38.5
Fit	54.9	47.4
Very fit	1.4	1.3

Long term illness

Respondents were asked whether they had a long term illness or health problem which limited their daily activities or the work they could do. In 2005 14% ($n=35$) stated that this was the case and in 2006 only 6% ($n=8$) stated this. This shows a significant decline ($p < 0.05$) between the two years. A potential explanation for this is that the 2006 survey shows more people in the 16-44 age group visiting Bedgebury and this age group may be less likely to suffer from long term illness.

Recommended exercise by doctor

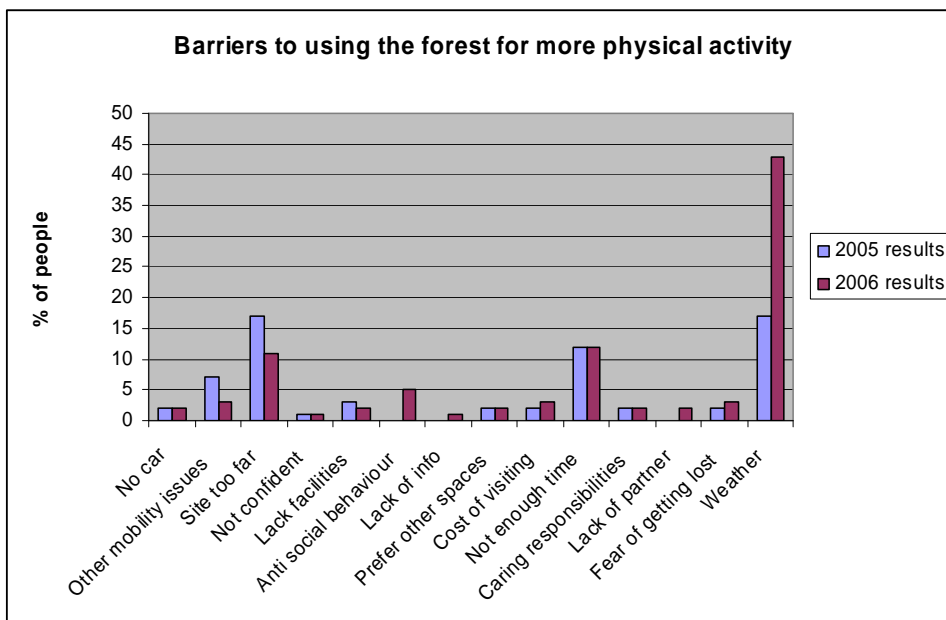
Respondents were asked whether their doctor had recommended that they increase their physical activity levels. Doctors can advise people to become more active or formally prescribe more activity through the GP (General Practitioner) referral scheme. In 2005 7% ($n=17$) stated that their doctor had recommended them to increase their physical

activity, however this declined to 4% (n=6) in 2006. The explanation for this may be similar to that given above of a younger section of the population visiting the site.

Barriers to visiting Bedgebury

Although the respondents in the questionnaire were all at Bedgebury when they were interviewed and therefore had overcome any barriers they may have had in getting to the site, we asked whether there were barriers to using Bedgebury for more physical activity. These categories were pre-determined by the researchers based on previous studies outlining the potential range of barriers to accessing woodlands. There was a large change in the 2006 survey when more people classed weather as a barrier from 17% to 43% (Figure 4). This could be due to the weather at the time that people were interviewed. If the weather was particularly bad when respondents were visiting the site this may have led them to classify weather as a particularly important factor.

Figure 4: Barriers for site visitors



3.2 Bedgebury's changing visit profile

In 2005, 60% of respondents had visited Bedgebury before, in 2006 71% had visited Bedgebury before. This was a significant decline ($p > 0.05$) of first time visitors, however the visitor profile in 2006 suggests that people were re-visiting at a higher rate than in 2005 probably due to the wider range of activities and facilities available.

In 2006, 58% of respondents (n=83) were aware of the new facilities at Bedgebury while 42% (n=59) were not. 27% (n=39) were standard members of the 'Friends of Bedgebury Pintetum' and 7% (n=10) were gold members of the 'Friends'. Joining the

'Friends' group and paying a yearly fee allows people to park at Bedgebury for free as often as they like. Otherwise each car was charged £5 in 2005, this rose to £7.50 per day in 2007.

In 2006 15% (n=21) out of 142 stated that the new activities and publicity for Bedgebury would make them become more active.

How often do you visit Bedgebury?

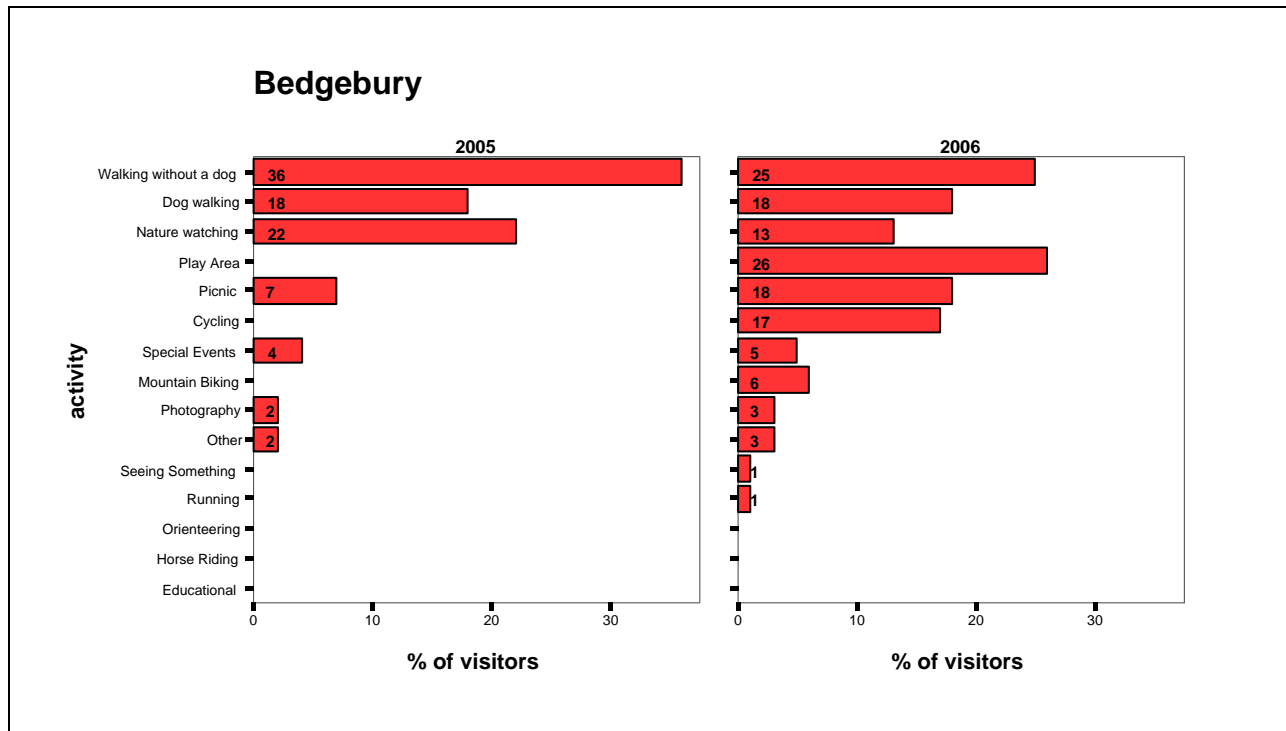
In 2006 there was a significant increase in the number of people re-visiting Bedgebury on a multiple times per week or per month basis (Table 2). This increase in re-visiting is highly likely to be due to the new facilities and activities that provide visitors with a wider range of things to do on site.

Table 2: Frequency of visits

		Every day	4-6 times per week	1-3 times per week	1-3 times per month	4-6 times per year	1-3 times per year	Less often
Year	2005	1%	4%	13%	12%	10%	26%	35%
	2006	0%	6%	21%	28%	7%	14%	23%

What do you usually do at Bedgebury?

There was a significant ($p < 0.01$) increase in people doing multiple activities at Bedgebury from 42% in 2005 to 63% in 2006 ($p < 0.01$). There were significant increases in cycling from 1% (2005) to 17% (2006), in mountain biking 0% to 6% and in the play area from 0% to 26%. This highlights the impact that the new facilities at Bedgebury are having. Figure 5 shows differences between 2005 and 2006.

Figure 5: Activities undertaken by visitors


How did you hear about Bedgebury?

First time visitors to Bedgebury identified a number of media that promoted an initial awareness of the forest. The top 5 media for 2005 and 2006 are given in Table 3 and this highlights the importance of word of mouth from friends and relatives.

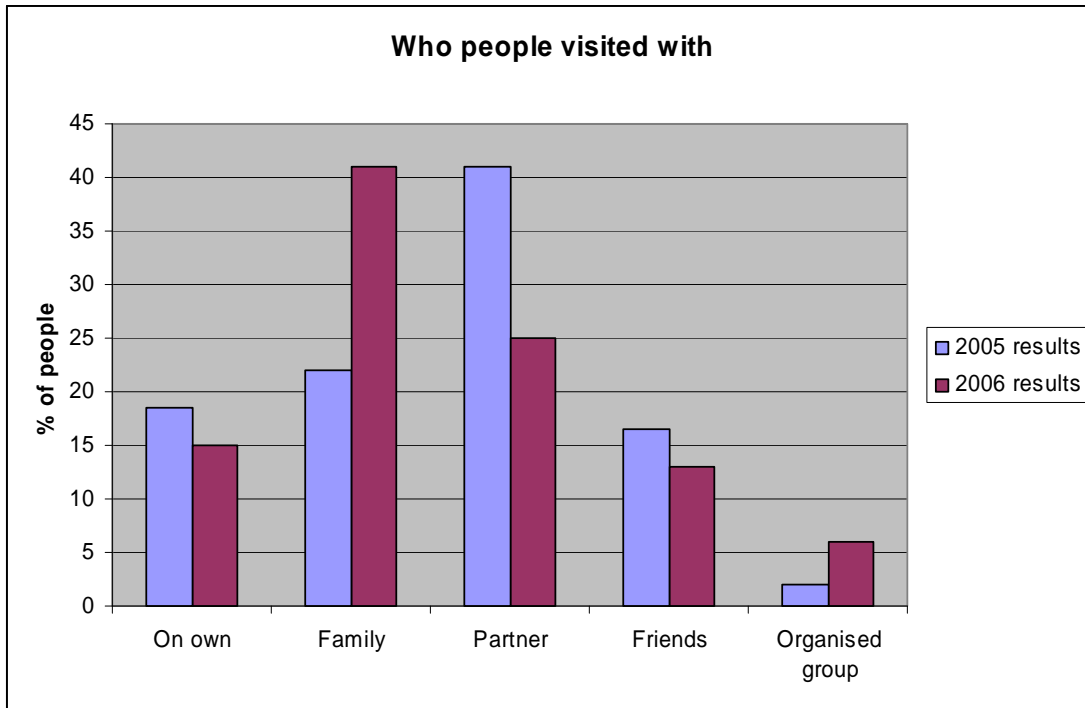
Table 3: How people heard about Bedgebury

2005		2006	
Friends/Relations	36%	Friends/Relations	39%
FC Website/leaflets	15%	Tourist Centre	18%
Local guide book/map	14%	Publicity about new facilities	14%
TV/Radio	13%	Road signs	14%
Tourist Centre	12%	Newspaper Article	7%

Who did you come to Bedgebury with?

Figure 6 shows that more families were visiting in 2006, more organised groups were visiting and there were fewer people visiting on their own.

Figure 6: Accompanied and unaccompanied visits



How did you get to Bedgebury?

In 2005 the majority of respondents came to Bedgebury by car (n=234), six people came by bicycle, one walked and two came by minibus or coach. In 2006 all of the respondents came to the site by car.

How long does your visit last, on average?

Respondents were asked how long on average their visits lasted and options ranged from 15 minutes to over 5 hours. The average length of visit to Bedgebury increased from 2 hours in 2005 to nearly 2.5 hours in 2006 suggesting that the improvements in infrastructure, the visitor centre and café act as an incentive for people to stay longer at the site.

How far do you live from Bedgebury?

Respondents were asked how far away they lived from the site from less than 1 mile to over 20 miles. The average travel distance remained similar between the years with 13.7 miles in 2005 and a travel distance of 12.7 miles in 2006.

3.3 Changes in target group behaviour at Bedgebury

Due to the low numbers of diverse ethnic groups and disabled groups identified through the on site surveys, the target groups discussed here include women, over 45s and those on low income. In this section we explore whether there were any changes in the

types of activities, self-reported fitness levels, exercise levels and barriers to accessing the wood for these target groups.

Low incomes of £20K or less per household

The percentage of low income visitors to the site increased from 8% to 18% ($p < 0.05$) between 2005 and 2006. Their choice of activities showed a similar profile to the higher income bracket. Their rated fitness level was less in 2006 ($p < 0.01$) and there was no significant change in the number of days this group was carrying out physical activity.

The concessions scheme at Bedgebury is playing a role in attracting lower income groups to the site as it enables those in deprived areas to receive a one year pass to gain free access to the car park. Over 13,000 benefited from this scheme in 2007/8.

Over 45s age group

Over 45's were less likely to cycle or take part in "family" activities such as picnics and visiting play areas but were more likely to simply walk in the forest. However some were visiting the play areas with their children or grandchildren in 2006 as this activity rose from 0% to 8% ($p < 0.01$). In 2006 this age group rated their fitness as less than those in 2005 ($p < 0.05$). There were no significant changes in the amount of physical activity being undertaken weekly. In terms of barriers more people in 2006 considered anti-social behaviour a barrier (0%-5% $p < 0.05$) and more people considered poor weather a barrier (14%-37% $p < 0.001$).

Women

Female visitors were more likely to walk, with or without dogs, and picnic, but make less use of cycle paths. However, between 2005 and 2006 cycling increased significantly from 0% to 12% ($p < 0.001$). Picnicking also increased from 10% to 24% ($p < 0.01$) and the use of play areas significantly increased from 0% to 30% ($p < 0.001$). There was no change in women's self reported fitness between the years and no significant change of the number of days on which they were doing 30 minutes of exercise.

In terms of barriers to accessing Bedgebury for more physical activity concerns about anti-social behaviour rose from 0% to 6% ($p < 0.01$) and concerns about poor weather from 19% to 44% ($p < 0.001$). However there was a decrease in women thinking the site was too far away from 17% to 8% ($p < 0.05$).

3.4 Data collected by site staff

Development of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) with Sport England and Hall Aitken and Bearhunt (evaluators of the overall Active England programme) proved difficult with mixed advice and support received by the site team. The overall evaluation system for the Active England Programme was supposed to be flexible for each site and a lot of data has been collected at Bedgebury, but not all of the data neatly maps on to the Active

England KPIs⁹. However KPI1 – ‘Participants’ and KPI2 – ‘Throughput’ were collected. The site surveys have helped to contribute to KPI11 – ‘Regular Adult Participation’ and ‘Regular Youth Participation’ KPI12 data has been gathered through education and activity records.

Over and above the evaluation carried out by Forest Research data was collected on site by staff. As with some of the other Active England sites Bedgebury have been collecting data on the numbers of visitors to the site through car park counters. One of the difficulties with woodlands sites is gaining an accurate estimate of visitor numbers. Unlike leisure centres that have a door through which people can enter and be recorded, woodlands have multiple access points. However the majority of visitors to Bedgebury travel by car and a car park counter was thought the most appropriate means of estimating numbers. A people counter and cycle counter were also installed on site but there have been problems with the counters not working as they should and questions rose about their accuracy. To calculate the total number of visitors from the number of cars counted the Forestry Commission often uses an estimate of an average of 2.7 people per car to provide the overall figure.

The Permissions¹⁰ database was adapted and expanded to cover the collection of numbers attending organised sessions and the number of self led groups undertaking activities. Records of the numbers of people joining the concessions scheme are kept along with membership numbers for the Friends of Bedgebury (FoB) and the cycle club.

Other data collection

A PhD researcher at the University of Brighton explored the leisure lifestyles of young adults from 13 to 25 years of age at Bedgebury. The first aim of the research was to investigate the role of mountain biking in woodlands to develop social networks and build identity for young people who participate in sport. The second aim focused on identifying the features of young people’s practices of mountain biking in woodlands and the significance of woodlands in this. The researcher used observations, interviews and went mountain biking with 40 young people as part of the research. Two distinct groups of mountain bikers emerged, identifiable by their riding style (King, 2008):

Dirt jumpers, downhill riders and freeriders

Cross country riders

See section 5.1.2 for more details.

⁹ 17 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were developed for the Active England Programme which projects could choose from when collecting data (see Appendix 1 of the ‘Active England: The Woodland Projects’ report <http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/activeengland>).

¹⁰ The FC has a permissions procedure on the public forest estate in which groups wanting to carry out particular activities e.g. a fun run, group activity etc. need to seek permission so that any safety and logistical issues can be managed appropriately. Through this scheme numbers of groups can be recorded and the activities they engage in.

Results from staff on site monitoring

There has been a very large increase in the number of visitors to the site since the creation of the project as Table 4 highlights. The target set with Sport England was to reach 90,000 visitors in the first year (2006/7), but this target was doubled.

Table 4: Numbers of visitors to Bedgebury

	Number of visitors ¹¹
2005/6	51,837 (before the project started)
2006/7	182,426
2007/8	273,081

In 2006/7, 671 people were recorded as visiting through the concession scheme and in 2007/8 this had dramatically risen to 13,162. In 2005/6, 25,000 visits were non-paying which included the FoB Pinetum members and those attending concerts run on the site. In 2007/8 nearly 46,575 entries were via the FoB. Membership has increased primarily because the membership fee covers parking for a year and if multiple visits are made to the site it is much more economical to join the FoB.

By April 2008 the cycling club had 208 members, 20 people were volunteers and 300 children had accessed 'Go Ride' courses run by the club (Sport England, 2008). The cycling club is now actively engaged in discussions about how trails can be improved on site. The club is also now carrying out outreach work and going to local schools to work with more young people.

Twelve volunteer health walk leaders have been trained to lead health walks.

Next steps in data collection

The outreach officer wanted to collect mini case studies by asking health walkers and those on the concessions scheme to write a paragraph about their experiences of the project. This work is currently on hold due to maternity leave.

A quality of experience survey is currently in draft form to be undertaken at Bedgebury in the near future, this survey has been undertaken on a number of other FC sites. It will provide data on how people rate the facilities and activities that are available at the site.

¹¹ These figures are derived from the site visitor numbers spreadsheet – data comes from the car park counters, cycle club numbers, education visits numbers etc.

4. Results: catchment profiling

Forest Research's evaluation of the project at Bedgebury involved the spatial profiling of Bedgebury's catchment area. A 20 mile radius was identified around the centre of the site. This profiling provided the researchers with basic socio-economic and demographic data (from the 2001 Census) of the sorts of communities surrounding the site. The demographic make-up of the catchment population could then be compared with the visitor profile, as revealed by the on-site surveys. This provided a basis for evaluating the project's success in increasing target group participation in healthy activity. In addition, where comparisons between catchment of visitor profiles reveal under-representation amongst certain target groups, follow-up research could be targeted in order to explore the factors preventing certain individuals and groups from using the site. As such, catchment profiling played a key role in the effective targeting of the qualitative research with non-users, and was an integral component of the overall evaluation.

4.1 Catchment area

Map 1 shows the site in relation to London and the M25 motorway. The on site surveys asked people for their postcodes and in the 2005 survey the postcodes were mapped on to the catchment area (Map 2) and this shows where the site visitors were coming from.¹² There are 235 wards within the 20 mile catchment surrounding Bedgebury. Map 3 shows a clustering of visitors coming from the West and North West of the catchment area.

The numbers on the map represent wards, for example the wards immediately in and around Bedgebury include:

- 122 – Marden and Yalding ward
- 132 – Brenchly and Horsmanden ward
- 133 – Goudhurst and Lamberhurst ward
- 191 – Frittenden and Sissinghurst ward
- 192 – Beneden and Cranbook ward
- 193 – Staplehurst ward

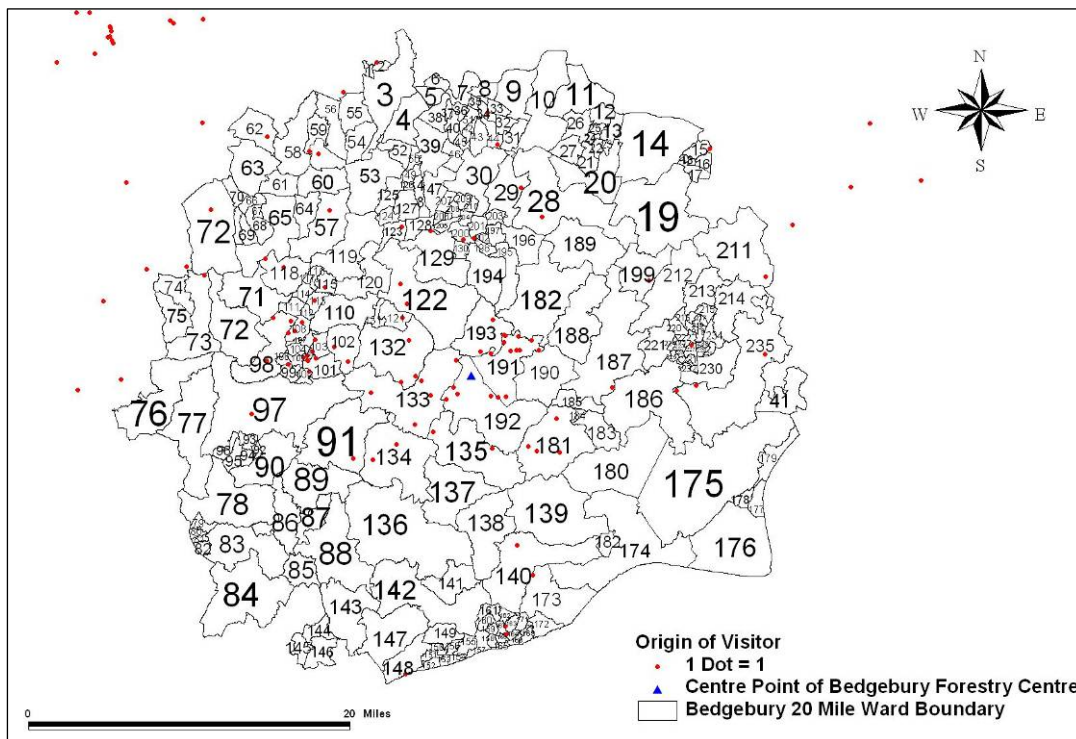
¹² Postcodes from the 2006 survey were not mapped –because the focus was on identifying areas for qualitative work from the 2005 survey.

Map 1: Map of the Bedgebury site (pink circle) in proximity to London



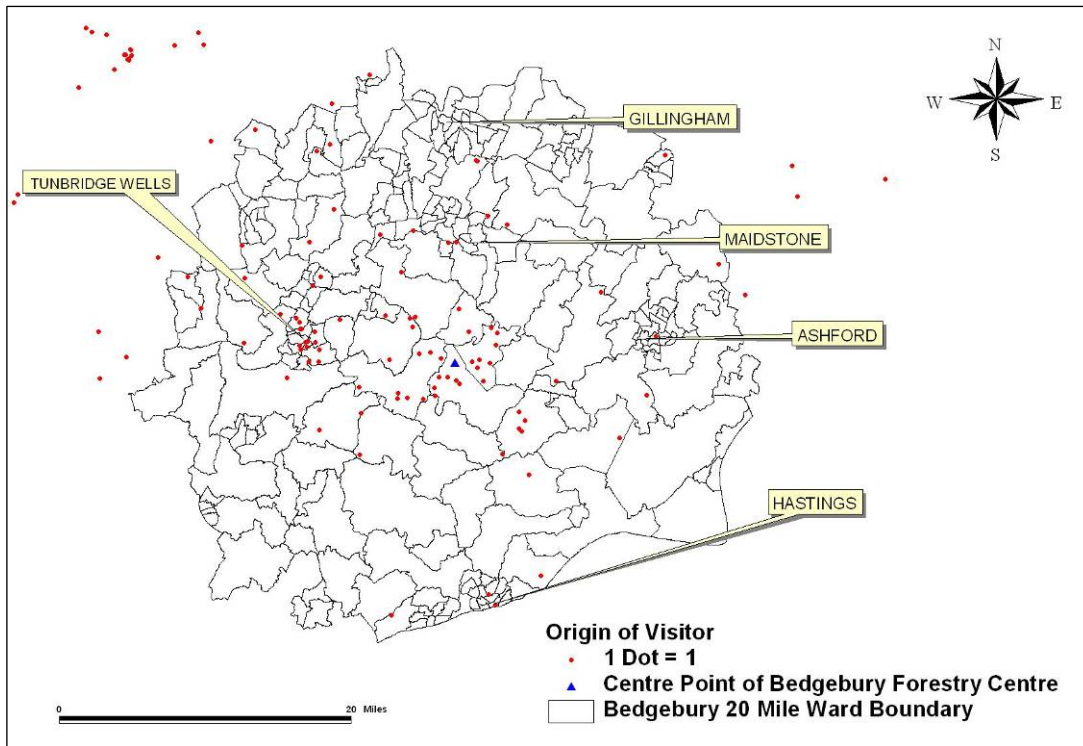
The majority of visitors were coming from an approximate 10-12 mile radius from Bedgebury. A number of visitors were also coming from outside the area potentially highlighting Bedgebury's popularity as a tourist attraction. This may be explained by the proximity of large conurbations and also the A roads such as the A21 and A229 from the M25 and M20 which may play a factor in this emerging pattern.

Map 2: Map of the Bedgebury site catchment with ward numbers¹³



¹³ The red dots denote the postcode of 1 person from the 2005 site survey and the blue triangle is the centre of the Bedgebury site.

Map 3: Main conurbations from which visitors are travelling



Visitors from the 2005 survey were coming from four core areas:

1. Within an approximate 10-12 mile boundary from Bedgebury
2. North of Bedgebury (Gillingham and Maidstone)
3. South of Bedgebury (Hastings)
4. West of Bedgebury (Tunbridge Wells).

4.2 Target groups

The maps in the rest of this section present statistical data at ward level from the 2001 Census. Wards in the catchment area are colour coded in accordance with the ward categorisation system adopted in the Census. The distribution range for any given statistic is divided into quartiles (for example, Map 4 reflects the categorisation of wards in relation to the Index of Multiple Deprivation where 25% of English wards contain a high IMD score of 3-16). By showing the origin of the visitors surveyed in 2005, it is possible to see whether visitors were coming from wards in which a high representation of citizens fall within the Active England target groups.

Income and deprivation

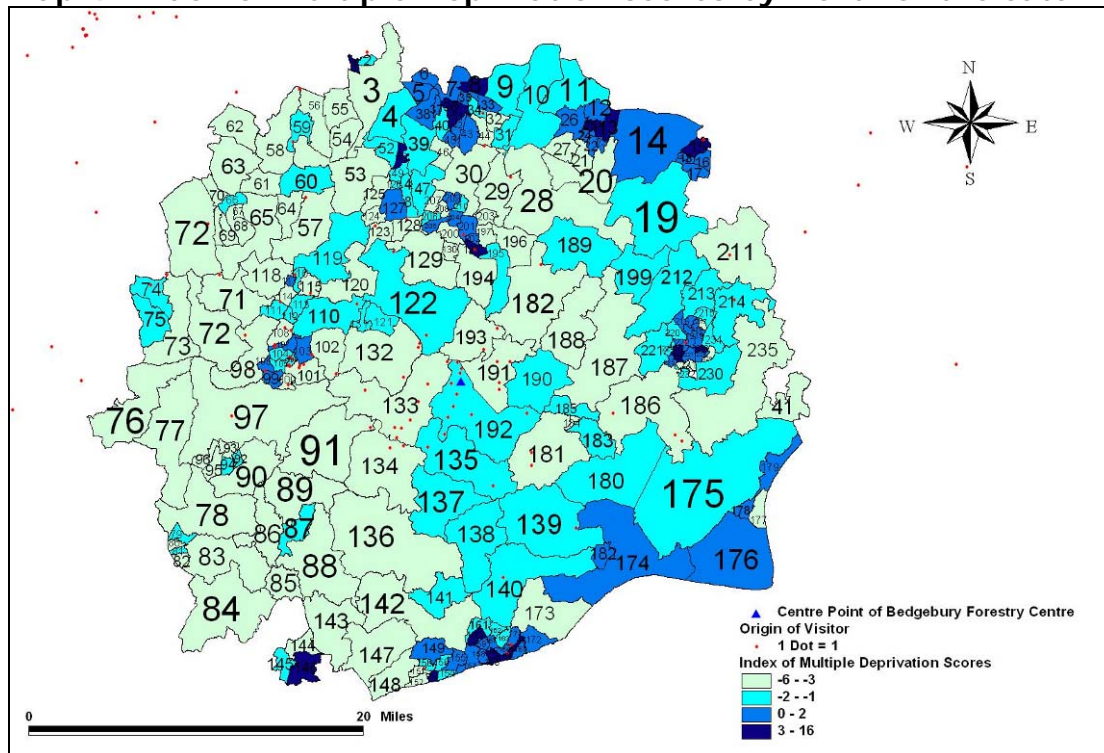
The majority of visitors surveyed in 2005 came from areas where there is a relatively low concentration of families on low incomes. These wards include, Goudhurst and Lamberhurst, Park and Frittenden and Sissinghurst that are in close proximity to the centre of the Bedgebury catchment. It should be noted that the more affluent wards

seem to be in the South and South West of the catchment and few visitors came from this area.

Oxford University produced the ward level Indices of Deprivation 2001, for the Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions (now Department for Communities and Local Government), and the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2001 (IMD). The six domain indices include: income; employment; health deprivation and disability; education, skills and training; housing; and geographical access to services. Wards with a high IMD score (3-16) are amongst the most deprived, whereas wards with a low score (-6 to -3) are amongst the least deprived.

Large conurbations tend to have the highest IMD scores. There were a large number of visitors from Tunbridge Wells and wards in and around this area have relatively high IMD scores compared to wards in and around the centre of the catchment. There was an increase in low income visitors to Bedgebury from 8% in 2005 to 18% in 2006. The majority of visitors in 2005 came from wards in and around the centre of the catchment and these wards have relatively low IMD scores in comparison to the peripheral conurbations of the catchment (Map 4). Therefore the site surveys suggest people with low incomes are somewhat under-represented at Bedgebury, however the concession schemes is having an impact allowing those from deprived areas to access the site with free parking.

Map 4: Index of Multiple Deprivation scores by ward for the catchment area



Women and girls

There is little correlation between the origins of visitors interviewed during the 2005 survey and gender distribution within the catchment. However, it should be noted that there are a relatively high percentage of females within the Southern wards compared to lower percentages in Northern wards of the catchment area. The ward with the highest is Mayfield (56%) and lowest is River (45%). More women than men were visiting Bedgebury in both survey years and therefore women are well represented at Bedgebury.

Black and minority ethnic groups

There are a relatively high percentage of people from BME groups at the peripheries of the catchment area in the South, East and North of the boundary (wards in Hastings, Ashford, Maidstone and Gillingham). However, most of the visitors interviewed during the 2005 survey are from wards with either a 1%, or a 2-4% representation of black and ethnic minority groups. There are wards with no BME groups; these wards are Rolvenden and Tenterde, Frittenden and Sissinghurst and the North Downs. Over the surveys in 2005 and 2006 approximately 2% of visitors were from Black and Minority Ethnic groups which highlight a slight under-representation of BME groups at Bedgebury.

45+ years

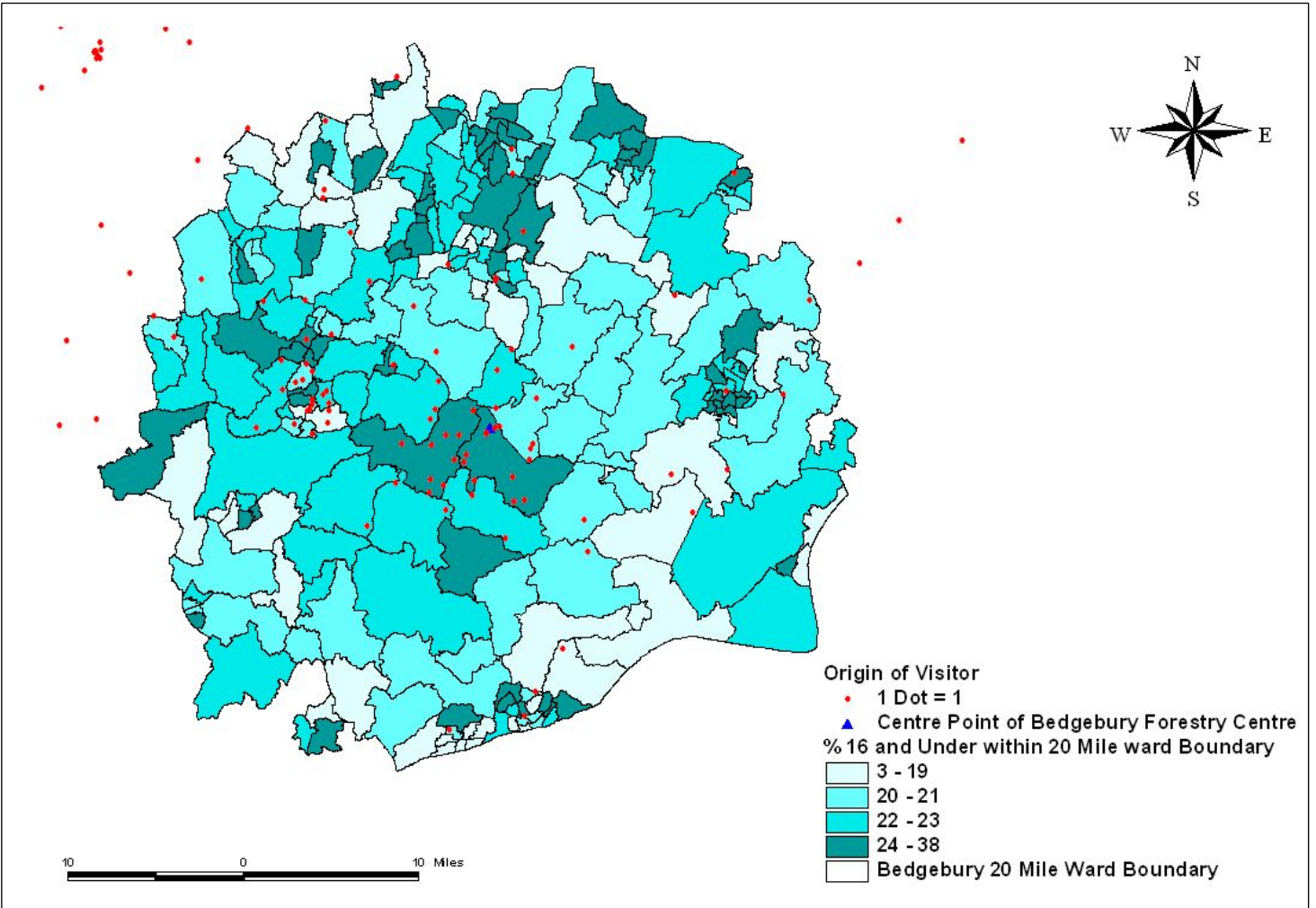
A number of wards have a high concentration of elderly people. These wards are concentrated in the South and South East of the catchment. It should be noted that there is a high percentage of the 45+ age group within the more affluent areas. Wards with a high proportion of elderly citizens also have a low percentage of BME groups and a low percentage of people with a limiting long-term illness. For example, Collington in Hastings has 71% in the 45+ yrs age group, 8% on low income, and 25% with a limiting long-term illness, 56% are females, 2% black and ethnic minorities and 12% are 16 yrs and under. There was a decline in over 45s visiting Bedgebury from 2005 to 2006 highlighting that the site is attracting more families and younger visitors.

Young people 16 and under

There was a high concentration of young people (24-38%) in the wards of Beneden and Cranbrook, Goudhurst and Lamberhurst and Salehurst near to Bedebury (Map 5). Given the spatial distribution of respondents to the 2005 survey, these are the most likely areas from which Bedgebury will be able to draw in more young visitors. Because under 16s were not interviewed in the 2005 survey it is difficult to draw very robust conclusions about the participation of young people at Bedgebury from the survey data. However, in both 2005 and 2006 respondents were asked if they had any children living in their household aged 16 and under. In 2005 the results indicate that 25% of visitors were from households with children under 16 years of age, while in 2006 this number had risen to 42%. These results indicate that 'family use' of the site increased between the two survey years. This is corroborated by responses to the question 'Who did you

come with?’ which showed an increase in family use from 22% in 2005 to 41% in 2006. Therefore, we conclude that young people are not under-represented at Bedgebury.

Map 5: Concentration of people under 16 years within the catchment

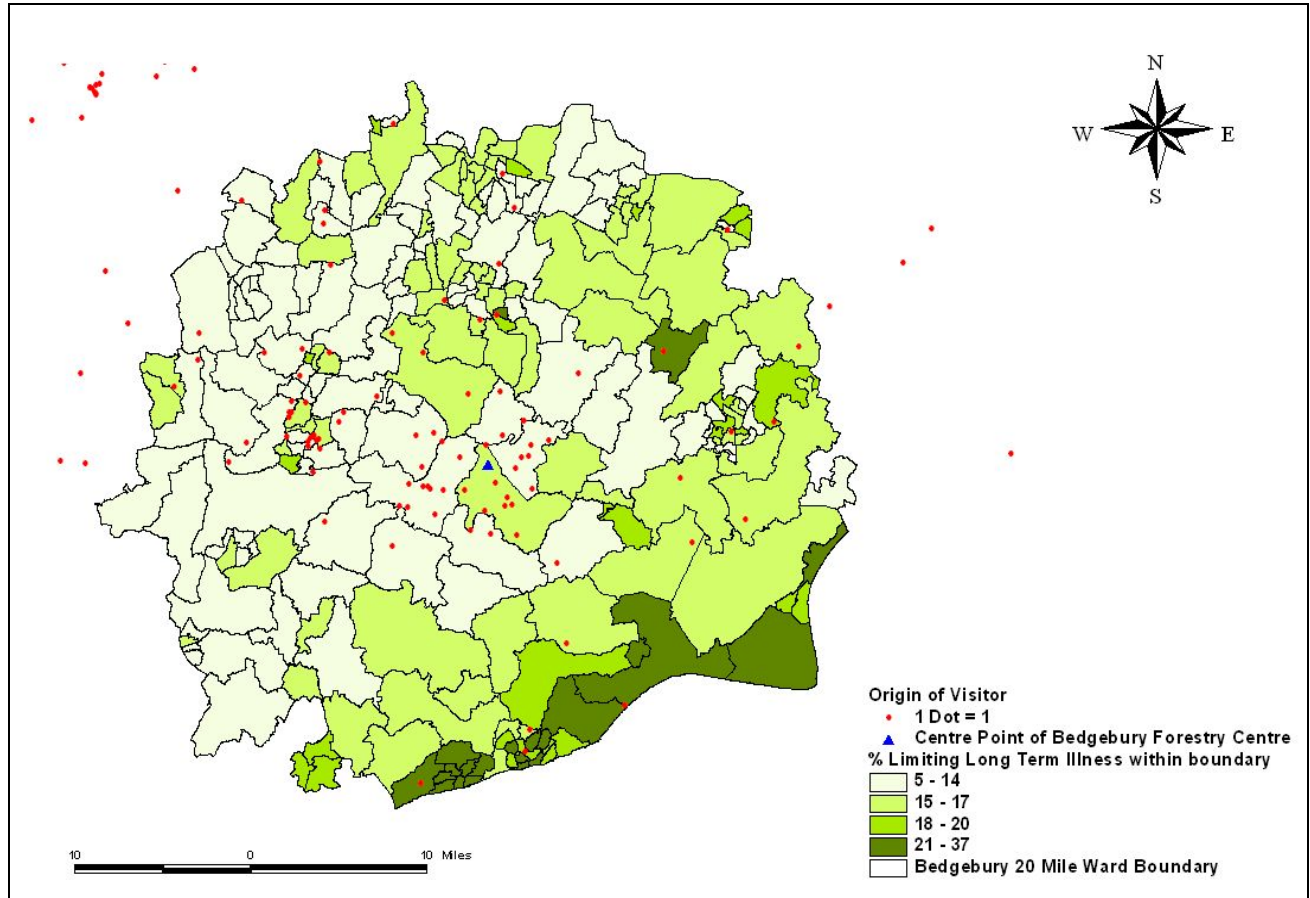


Health

Bedgebury’s catchment area was profiled using the Census indicator ‘limiting long-term illness’. The results showed that areas with people who had long term illnesses were primarily in the south of the catchment along the coastal areas. Wards such as Marsham, Eastern Rother, Lydd and St Marks and those in and around Hastings had a particularly high occurrence (21-37%) of people with limiting long term illness (Map 6). Many visitors who were interviewed in 2005 came from wards where a relatively low percentage of people suffer from a limiting long-term illness. Goudhurst and Lamberhurst and Frittenden and Sissinghurst have a particularly low occurrence of people with limiting long-term illness and a significant cluster of visitors came from these wards. The majority of visitors come from wards with low representations of people who

suffer from bad health. The few people in the 2005 survey with a long term illness or who had been recommended to exercise by their doctor did not come from wards with a high representation of people with long term illness. In the 2005 survey 14% (n=35) stated that they have a long term illness, however this decreased in 2006 to 6% (n=8) possibly due to younger groups of people visiting the site.

Map 6: Concentrations of people with a limiting long-term illness within the catchment



4.3 Targeting qualitative research

Relatively low representation of those with low incomes, over 45s and BME groups were revealed by comparison between the catchment and visitor profiles from the on site survey work. This information was used to inform the qualitative research phase that was used to provide explanations of low attendance levels and to explore factors that might be acting as barriers to using the site.

Through this analysis and through discussions with the project staff on site key groups to target were identified for qualitative research. In terms of non-users a young, low income group were targeted from Hastings for in-depth data gathering to explore, through activity on site and discussions, views about Bedgebury, green space, health

and physical activity. The health walkers were chosen as a key user group as they meet regularly every week to participate in their activity. The young mountain bikers were included as they were being studied by a researcher undertaking a PhD.

5. Results: project evaluation with users and non-users

This section presents a summary of the qualitative research phase. Results from activities and focus groups with selected target groups are presented focusing in particular on the outcomes and benefits derived by people involved in the project at Bedgebury (referred to as users) and on the barriers to people who have not been involved (referred to as non-users). In addition the results of interviews with members of staff are presented providing insights into project delivery. Therefore this section presents a summary evaluation of the project at Bedgebury and is informed by and both complimented and build on the quantitative analysis in sections 3 and 4.

5.1 Summary of results from users

5.1.1 Health walk group

Introduction to the group

The researchers joined the regular Friday health walk which lasted approximately one and a half hours. Ten people attend the walk and four¹⁴ other people joined the researchers for the focus group discussion afterwards, which was followed by lunch. It was apparent that some of the walkers had been visiting Bedgebury for many years and had seen the infrastructure changes that had taken place through the Active England Project. Most of them were enthusiastic about the changes saying that it attracted more groups of people to the site and that the woodland was big enough to incorporate many people. Quite a few of the walkers appeared to participate regularly, some having been attending since the health walks were set up as part of the project nearly two years previously. Three women and a carer came from a nearby residential home; two of them had mental health disabilities. One man was wheelchair bound; he was a single parent and had been coming to the health walks for a couple of years.

Table 5 shows that there was a mix of ages from 35 to over 75 years, half of the participants were retired. Most participants chose not to provide their income levels but the few who did show that there was a range of income levels. Just under half of the participants were not meeting the recommended five days a week of activity levels required to improve their health. Ten participants were using green space several times a week. Table 5 shows that a good mix of participants joins the health walks, it highlights that target groups such as the over 45 age group and low income people are

¹⁴ These were usual walkers in the group but they were either injured or due to other commitments could not join the walk but only the discussion.

included as well as those who are currently not meeting the five days a week of recommended exercise.

Table 5: Health walkers (numbers represent the number of respondents)

Working status		Age		Income level		Exercise for 30 minutes per day per week		Green space use	
Full time	2	35-44	4	Under 10K	2	1 day a week exercise	2	Everyday	2
Part time	3	45-54	3	10-20K	2	3 days a week	4	4-6 times a week	1
Retired	7	55-64	1	31-50K	1	4 days a week	2	1-3 times week	6
Un-employed	1	65-75	4	50K	1	5 days a week	6	1-3 times a month	5
Long term illness	1	75+	1						

Reasons people joined the health walks

At least three people stated that they had joined the health walks because a nurse or doctor had advised them to participate due to sciatica, blood pressure or weight gain. Another person started because she had arthritis in her knees and wanted to stop them stiffening.

'My doctor said I should walk a mile every morning and every evening for my back' (Female).

'I wanted to lose some weight and she (the doctor) said well why didn't I join the health walk' (Female).

One person saw the walk advertised and another heard about it through a friend who had been employed temporarily on the site. This person has now gone on to become a volunteer health walk leader. At least two people had mentioned the walk to others and suggested they get involved, highlighting as the quantitative data has done the importance of word of mouth. Others were familiar with the site and wanted to socialise and meet people. It appears very important from this research that some encouragement or being advised to get involved can motivate people to start participating.

Benefits of the health walks

The group outlined some of the main reasons why they enjoyed the health walks and these were related primarily to the aesthetics of the forest environment, socialising and feeling safe in a group. The following list provides the key reasons people gave and the quotes add more detail from people's personal perspectives:

- Mixed group including different ages and abilities

- People talk to each other and do not stick with the same person throughout the walk
- Set time for the walk so that participants can plan for it
- Socialising
- Feeling safe as there is a walk leader and voluntary walk leader – ‘we have our bodyguards!’ I think it feels safer cause we’re escorted (Females)
- Enjoying the variety of the woodland and the scenery
- Seeing different seasons – particularly autumn colours
- Tranquillity
- The forest is big so there is variety in the paths and places people can go
- The forest can absorb a lot of people so there is a feeling of not being crowded
- The health walkers can do the walk at their own pace depending on how they are feeling
- Getting out into the fresh air.

‘I think it’s a good way, as you say, of meeting people. It’s not the same when you go for a walk on your own; you haven’t got anyone to talk to. So if you come at least you are meeting other people’ (Female).

It’s very important isn’t it when particularly, as you were saying, you are at work four days a week and my feeling is that there is within all of us a need to be grounded with the natural world and the woodland is one of the places where one can achieve that. I also like walking across meadows but we are just so lucky to have this place here on our doorstep’ (Female).

You’ve got value here it’s inspired actually. They are very very well used at weekends or bank holidays it’s absolutely throbbing with people. The adventure areas for children were absolutely inspired I think’ (Male).

What keeps people participating?

The benefits people gained from their involvement provided a strong motivation for their continued participation. The most important benefit was meeting and socialising with people while walking, this seemed to motivate people to get involved and also motivated them to continue attending the walks. A number of participants particularly liked the mix of people who participated in the health walks and this was seen as making the activity more interesting and rewarding. Physical benefits were mentioned as well as mental benefits such as relaxing and de-stressing. The fact that the walk is on a certain day and at a particular time was mentioned as useful by most people. They suggested that this was a spur for them to make the effort; they just had to turn up and did not really have to think about where to go. Being away from traffic also seemed to be important with people mentioning fresh air in the forest.

Attitudes to health and exercise

Respondents considered health issues to be important. The benefits of the health walks were discussed alongside the exercise that can be gained from household work and walking to the shops for example. People were agreed that these were not as pleasurable a way of keeping fit as walking in the forest. Quite a few of the participants also seemed to get some exercise from their gardening activities. The participants were appreciative of the walk leader who they felt did a very good job in leading the way and taking them on different routes and encouraging them to keep going.

One woman raised the issue that some of the hills could be seen as a challenge and you could feel satisfied if you met that challenge. At least three people stated that they felt energised after the walks and another said that it lifted her spirits. One man suggested that if you ached the next day then you knew the exercise had been good for you.

'Well as I say, when I came before I was in a rush, on one of the walks you turn the corner and you see the hill and say gosh here's the Eiger, [Laughter] and then you get up there and by the end of the walk you feel really great. I used to look at that thing.... Oh my little legs, how are they going to get up there but once you've done that then the rest feels lovely...' (Female).

'Your sense of achievement and accomplishment and it takes you out of yourself' (Male).

'I know that I feel actually able to work harder if I do exercise' (Male).

'Don't you feel elated as well? I mean I feel really good and positive and much more proactive when I've done that exercise... I've got energy' (Female).

However, finding the time for physical activity was difficult for some of the respondents.

'I work and I spend a lot of time in front of the computer so it's really really hard to work out with 2 daughters. Come evenings I'm cooking and doing things like that and I don't get out, I can't physically find the time. My one day off is Friday's and here I am!'(Female).

Changes in other areas of life due to involvement in the project

An important aspect of the Active England Programme is encouraging behavioural change in people, particularly towards carrying out more physical activity in their everyday lives. The health walkers did describe changes; one woman had started to drop her car off further away from work and walk further to work. Another woman started going to the gym and stated that she had done this because she was thinking more about her health, others agreed:

'It makes you more conscious of what you should do' (Male).

'I think I am more aware now I won't catch a bus I'll walk instead' (Female).

One woman whose doctor had suggested that she join the health walks has since gone on to do the race for life (a charity 5 kilometre race that participants can either run or walk):

'If I hadn't been coming here I wouldn't even have considered doing that, the race for life, whereas coming here I thought, well if I can do this.. we do about 5k and you can walk or run so I walked' (Female).

The volunteer walk leader who was assisting the outreach officer was undertaking some training and wanted to try and get work at Bedgebury. He loved the health walks for the scenery, meeting people and the exercise; which he felt he needed.

Attitudes to woodlands and green space

The walkers were appreciative of Bedgebury and said that a particular bonus of the health walks was undertaking them on the site. It was clear that some of the respondents visited the site on a reasonably regular basis. Wild orchids, butterflies and the trees were all mentioned as important things to see in the forest and the broad aesthetics of Bedgebury and the Pinetum as a very scenic site was much appreciated. Some felt that there was more to see in woodland than in other green spaces and the changing seasons was something respondents liked to observe. The group also spoke about enjoying other woodlands such as Ashdown Forest, and habitats such as meadows.

Barriers to participation in the walks

A couple of people stated that having an alternative day for a walk would be useful if they could not make the Friday session. Transport was an issue for some; for example the residents who came from a nearby home did not always have a driver that could bring them to the site. One man, who had a concessions pass to get into Bedgebury, said that one week he could not afford the petrol to get to the site as he has spent all his money on an MOT for his car. Lack of interest was cited as a potential barrier for others to get involved. The weather was not seen as a barrier unless it was very bad. Most people suggested that they would participate all year round. Time was also mentioned as a potential barrier for others particularly if people were working full time. The issue of safety was raised in relation to using woodlands and green spaces alone, particularly for women if they were alone. One woman commented that she felt safer on the health walks as she was walking with the walk leaders and other participants.

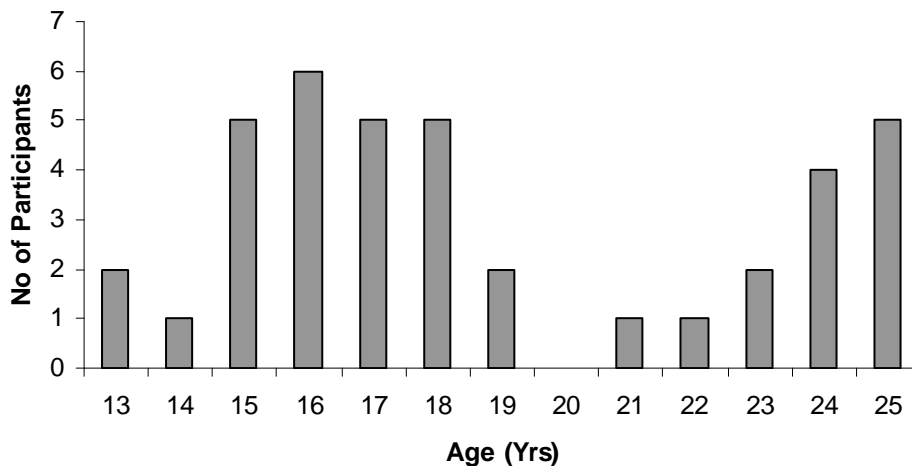
5.1.2 Young mountain bikers

Introduction to the group

Research with young people who participated in mountain biking at Bedgebury during 2007-08 was conducted as part of PhD research at the University of Brighton (linked to this Active England evaluation and part funded by Forest Research). The researcher attended Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club meetings, joined cycle club organised rides, attended British Cycling organised youth Go-ride courses and youth race meetings, and participated in local online youth mountain biking forums. The research also involved semi structured in-depth interviews with young people who were also observed during participant observation or took part in a recorded ride with the researcher according to their riding discipline.

40 participants between the ages of 13 and 25 participated in the research process, of which 36 were male and 4 were female. Therefore approximately 10% of the sample was female replicating similar profiles of participation of women in mountain biking in the United Kingdom (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Breakdown of participants by age.



All the young people had previously or currently visited Bedgebury for mountain biking. 20% of participants visit Bedgebury for mountain biking once a week or more and 38% schedule a visit once or twice a month. The remaining participants visited less often and 15% of the sample had only visited the site on one occasion. The sample aimed to obtain a mix of formal and informal mountain bike participation and this was achieved; ten participants were members of Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club, three participants were members of external cycle clubs and the remaining 27 participated in mountain biking independently. In addition, participants were differentiated according to their mountain biking discipline (Table 6).

Table 6: Participant mountain biking disciplines

Discipline	No. of Participants
BMX Dirt Jumping (jumps and tricks on BMX)	2
Dirt Jumping (jumps and tricks on mountain bike)	5
Dirt Jumping, Freeride and Downhill (DDF) (combination of jumps, tricks and platform cycling)	12
Cross Country (mountain biking on single-track)	14
Cross Country and DDF (combination of all forms mountain biking)	7
Total	40

Reasons for mountain biking at Bedgebury

All forms of mountain biking were important in the formation of youth identity and lifestyle and represented a leisure choice which they felt distinguished them from other youth activities in particular from what they considered to be mainstream sports. One participant (Male, aged 16) claimed '*mountain biking is the only thing I've really been any good at sport wise*'. For some participants mainstream sports were exclusionary and constrained whereas mountain biking was self regulated and free from external controls and in general, was perceived as not being organised or run by adults. Youth mountain bikers differentiated themselves from mainstream sporting youth cultures as 'alternative' notably, through attitudes towards competition, commitment and community.

Mountain biking provided a large proportion of the young people with a sense of belonging as part of youth mountain biking lifestyles that would often depend upon an intense immersion within the lifestyle and the community.

'If you can pedal then you're part of the community' (Male 17).

Much of the activity of mountain biking took place collectively either through 'sessioning', building or riding trails together. Mountain biking lifestyles were often lived as shared social worlds and participants were largely considered to have similar values, attitudes and outlooks. The young people described their sense of ownership over mountain biking leisure space at Bedgebury. Often this sense of ownership was reinforced because of a contribution to the formation of a particular place through the building and maintenance of trails on club 'dig' days, but ownership was also linked to a group of riders who maintained sustained contact with a particular place.

Bedgebury offered leisure facilities for both cross country and Dirt Jumper, Downhill and Freeride (DDF) disciplines, and respondents distinguished it from other managed sites because of a particular social atmosphere that welcomed all skill levels and was associated with a lack of external control. Bedgebury was considered important particularly for less experienced mountain bikers providing a space to practice and improve their skills and to form social relationships with other mountain bikers.

Bedgebury was valued by youth cross country cyclists for its technical single-track and also for its location in a region where much of the landscape is considered unsuitable for mountain biking. For DDF riders, the freeride area provided a place to meet with friends seeks thrills and take risks. The lifestyles of DDF and cross country mountain bikers were perceived as different, yet young people described a mutual respect of other disciplines.

What keeps young people mountain biking?

Accessing a local and known spot is important for mountain bikers and Bedgebury was valued as a local leisure space, but also as a mountain biking destination for young people from further afield. Participants travelled from Dartford, Hastings and London and many of these were regular visitors. The facilities for various forms of mountain biking has given Bedgebury a distinctive status within the South East.

Figure 8 shows the geographical distribution of riders interviewed at Bedgebury. Although participants visited a wide variety of countryside spaces for mountain biking, for many Bedgebury was considered their 'local' cycling spot and represented an important woodland space for local mountain bikers and retained a small population of regular youth users.

'I'm here all the time; it's definitely my local riding spot' (Male, 25).

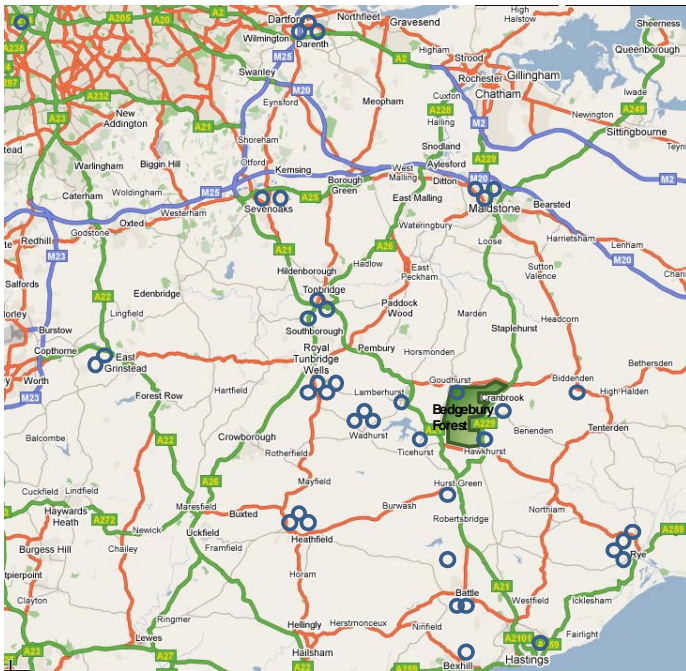


Figure 8: Residential location of participants
Source: Adapted from Google maps (2008)

There was a strong ethic of commitment as part of being a proper rider, and youth mountain bikers differentiate themselves according to how committed they are and who are the real insiders and outsiders. Many of the participants discussed how many of their friends had given up when they were old enough to drive or blamed getting a girlfriend. They would identify with those who would maintain a commitment to the sport whilst others would drop out.

‘as soon as someone gets a car, they can’t be bothered like I started off biking in the first place just to go places, and then when you’ve got a car you don’t need it to go places anymore are you, and it’ll just slowly go away. But we’ve got a single track mind for biking haven’t we...’ (Male, 16).

For many of the young people, participation in mountain biking was participation in both a sport and a lifestyle; that values dedication and commitment to the sport.

Attitudes to health and exercise

Some of the young people associated mountain biking with improving and advancing their own physical abilities. Participants described mountain biking as an important form of exercise, although fitness was often associated with an adult attitude to leisure, and therefore young people were often careful not to over emphasise this point.

'I'm always petrified that I'm gonna get obese when I'm older so I'm always like stay riding stay riding. I'm not exactly a fitness freak but I know that it does me good' (Male, 17).

Participants described what distinguishes them from other youth leisure primarily through their association with active or extreme forms of leisure. For young women, participation in mountain biking at Bedgebury was linked with potential health benefits and in particular the ideal of weight loss and physical fitness. In addition to benefits to physical health, young women in particular cited 'getting out in the countryside' (Female, 23) as part of this.

Attitudes to woodlands and green space

The young people made important connections with a variety of countryside spaces through mountain biking and the relationship between rider and place was a crucial part of the leisure experience. Youth mountain bikers differentiated themselves from some other youth leisure pursuits such as playing computer games or watching television and asserted an identity which they termed 'outdoorsy'. Youth mountain bikers associated countryside space with feelings of freedom and a sense of escapism as a space to relax and meet with friends.

'it's an escape, if you're outdoors somewhere away from a town or a city it's just more relaxing because you're away from people and cars all trying to get somewhere so you can sit there and nothing is happening' (Male, 17).

Woodlands facilitated a particular type of cycling experience and respondents appreciated woodland environments for the challenge and the variety of terrain they offered and the proliferation of shade and the 'natural' features of woodlands made them preferable cycling spaces to open fields for example. *'Just by taking a spade and digging a hole'* (Male, 16) riders developed particular kinds of knowledge about the conditions needed for supporting mountain biking environments.

Young people demonstrated a less formal type of nature knowledge than traditionally understood. Many of the respondents talked for example about different types of 'muds' and worked this in to their understandings of how different landscapes provided a range of riding environments.

'Being in the woods, you learn a lot like what kind of mud's and stuff you need to build jumps and if it's really rooty it's really hard to build stuff' (Male, 16).

This being said riders were dismissive of any outward appreciation of nature rather it was appreciated as background to the activity. In general, appreciation of nature was not considered relevant to the leisure experience of youth but associated with an adult mountain biking identity. Nevertheless some participants considered mountain biking to be a sport that held 'green' values and this was something that appealed to them.

Barriers to participation in mountain biking

Transport was cited as one of the main constraints by young people accessing Bedgebury. Public transport was restricted to Etchingham train station situated approximately 4 miles away and although accessing Bedgebury is free, car parking is charged at £7.50 per car. Consequently, many participants described using a range of alternative forms of access when using the site. Those who lived locally would usually cycle to Bedgebury some of whom lived up to 13 miles away in Tunbridge Wells. Cycling represents a cheap and accessible form of transport and although issues were raised over the risks of cycling on main roads some participants viewed this simply as part of the leisure experience, or commented on the fitness benefits of accessing the site in this way. Other methods included travelling by train, travelling by car, either their own, with friends or parents or a combination of these.

'My mum's partner drives past here on the way to work, I get the train and cycle or I get a lift with a friend. I basically grab a lift from anyone. To get to Wales a mate's got a van and we just organise it so like six of us get a lift with him' (Male, 18).

In accessing Bedgebury respondents rarely used the formal entrances instead gaining entry through footpaths or from local lay-bys either to avoid the car parking charge or to travel the shortest distance to the freeride area from surrounding villages. The cost of accessing particular cycling spaces was important to respondents who valued mountain biking as a cheap form of leisure and few respondents mentioned paying for car parking at Bedgebury.

Women mountain bikers experienced additional perceived barriers to participation. Male participants believed mountain biking was often not suitable for girls and did not fit with their understandings of a 'girly identity' (Male, 13). For example one participant, claims *'I just think so many girls think its un- ladylike to be out in a wood, well, girls my age'* (Male, 18). Some young women disclosed they felt embarrassed or unconfident about mountain biking in front of other male participants for fear of being judged and chose mountain biking spaces away from other male mountain bikers. Nevertheless for others, distancing themselves from traditional feminine identity appealed and some women constructed mountain biking as a masculine space to distinguish themselves from other females.

'I don't like to follow the crowd all the time, I like to be different. I don't know any other girls who do it, like people think I'm a tom boy but I'm not I just don't like stuff like other girls' (Female, 19).

5.2 Summary of results from non-users: low income and young people group

Introduction to the group

Six men and two women aged 16-24 participated in a health walk and focus group discussion at Bedgebury in May 2008, followed by lunch. They were all from Hastings and were a low income target group (Table 7). The walk lasted approximately forty minutes, one of the young women was pregnant and the group had to stop a couple of times on the walk to let her rest. The group were difficult to engage with in the focus group discussion as they were self-conscious and very aware of the reactions of their peers. On the walk around the site there was much banter between the young people who obviously knew each other well.

Table 7: Young people from Hastings

Working		Age		Income		Exercise for 30 minutes per day per week		Green space use	
Part time	2	16-24	8	Under 10K	7	3 days a week exercise	1	Everyday	1
Full time education	2			10-20K	1	4 days a week	2	1-3 times a month	1
Un-employed	3					5 days a week	5	4-6 times a year	3
								1-3 times a year	2
								Less often	1

Attitudes to health and exercise

Most of the young people described themselves as active, however not all were meeting the recommended activity levels (Table 7). This highlights a potential mismatch; either they perceived themselves to be more active than they were or they did not know what the current recommended level of physical activity was. The men said they got involved in playing football or basketball in Hastings. The woman who was pregnant described walking a lot and one man was a street dancer. The group also talked about walking as a means of getting from A to B, e.g. to go to work and see friends. The group were part of Active Hastings and met once a week to do various activities, they described getting a free card for the local leisure centre that they could use on certain days of the week i.e. to go for a swim or to the gym.

When asked whether being active was important one of the young women said '*you have to keep fit to do your day to day life really*'. One man said you needed to be active to stay healthy, he described how sitting on the sofa all day would leave you unfit and therefore climbing the stairs '*would kill you*'. The group outlined some of the health

benefits of being fitter such as not getting out of breathe, not being lazy and feeling fitter.

Attitudes to woodlands and green space

The group talked about Hastings as 'scummy' and full of traffic; they also suggested that the activities available were limited, particularly for their age group.

'There's not a lot to do in Hastings to be fair for the 18s to 24s. You've got to find your own activity really. So I walk to meet friends or just to play football' (Male).

When asked about green spaces in Hastings, one man said there was a few and described Alexander Park which they used to play football. However the park was surrounded by busy roads which they found unpleasant.

'It's not like it is up here, this place is really secluded and quiet. But with Alexander Park there's so many people and so many cars around the perimeter, it's not really advisable to be playing football there' (Male).

The group also talked about being moved on by the police for being in a large group:

'Course a lot of places in Hastings if you play somewhere you get told off'
Researcher: Do they come along and move you on?
'Yeah no matter what you're doing they think you're making trouble' (Male).

One man said that they got branded and moved on but with no suggestion from the police of where they might go. This is a re-occurring problem within society of young people in groups being viewed as a threat to civil order. Although the group were involved in Active Hastings the main activities through the project took place in the summer and they described the need for new and exciting activities and mentioned quad biking and bungee jumping as possibilities, however they then realised that these might not be particularly physically active pursuits.

The majority of the group had not been to Bedgebury before and they described it as clean and fresh and how it was good to be away from the traffic; in Hastings they said they could hear traffic all the time.

'It's nice and peaceful to be honest (agreement from the group) you can't actually hear traffic anywhere' (Male).

The group talked about the views and how peaceful the site was, they were also surprised to see a pheasant while they were on their walk; some had not seen one before. They stated that there was nothing like the site in Hastings. Three of the group said they would definitely come again and the rest said they would like to. They asked about whether they would have to pay and were told about the charge of £7.50 per car

for parking and how for £40 they could get a pass for the year and come as often as they liked. The group felt that this was reasonable value.

Barriers to participation in the project

Transport was mentioned as a key barrier to accessing the site. The majority of the young people did not have access to a car.

'Yeah most of us don't really exactly have a lot of money between us. To get up here is probably one of the hardest things to actually do. Apart from that we could come up here any time but it's just transport really' (Male).

The group were unlikely to return to Bedgebury unless they had friends with transport or they participated in a trip to the site organised through Active Hastings. The group were frustrated by their dislike for Hastings, the lack of activities available in the area and being moved on by the police. Money was also mentioned as a key factor, however the outreach officer was able to tell them that Bedgebury runs a concessions scheme and those living in deprived areas (identified through their postcode) could fill in a form and get into the site for free, however transport would still be an issue for the young people.

5.3 Summary of site representatives' views

Interviews were undertaken at Bedgebury separately with the outreach officer and partnership manager; the two people employed specifically as part of the project. The interviews were an opportunity for the researchers to elicit feedback from the Bedgebury staff on the successes of the project and any difficulties and challenges. This presents a self-evaluation of the project by members of staff responsible for its delivery and enables the recording of insights and lessons learnt that might inform future project design and delivery. There was discussion with both about the meaning of outreach work. This can be a difficult term to define but often refers to activities that make contact with specific target groups in their own settings i.e. at home, in clubs or community spaces. Underpinning this type of work is an ethos of empowerment. Both representatives felt that what was taking place at Bedgebury was 'in-reach' work in which the site facilities and the development of specific on site activities such as the health walks and archery could be used to attract the target groups to the site. For many of the target groups providing facilities such as the visitor centre and infrastructure improvements is not in itself enough to enable them to start using the site. On-site organised and led activities had to be created to enable some of these groups and individuals to access the project. Even though the funding for the project suggested the need for a focus on under-represented groups the project staff were particularly keen that the site is accessible to all.

'Coming to Bedgebury can break down barriers within people, having contact with nature and the courage to discover new areas'.

There was some concern expressed that targeting specific groups and bringing them to the site could potentially maintain exclusion as they would not necessarily mix with other people.

Successes

The two staff members were clear about the key successes of the project. The improvements to the site infrastructure provided many more opportunities for people to undertake physical activities and multiple activities if they wished. Providing a diverse range of activities were seen as important in the increased popularity of the site providing opportunities for people to participate in activities they might not have done so before. The very large increase in the number of visitors to the site since the creation of the project show how well used it has become. The membership of the FoB has increased dramatically as people want to gain a car park permit so they can make repeat visits.

The imaginative play area has drawn more families to the site. Locating the play trail away from car park has ensured that people have to walk to the area, thus exercising, and the trail itself is located over a reasonable area which encourages the children to explore a greater area of the forest over a potentially longer period of time.

Cycling has become very popular at the site both for families and for mountain bikers and downhill, freeriders and dirt jumpers. The cycle club has become well established and active, and is now carrying out outreach activities at local schools.

The health walks have become well established over the past couple of years and there is now a fast group and a slower group as well as trained volunteer health walk leaders. In addition to providing an invaluable human resource for delivery of the project the volunteers themselves have benefited considerably from their involvement. Many volunteers have developed in terms of their own abilities and in terms of self-esteem.

Disabled groups, young people, women, and low income groups have benefited from the project activities, through the concessions scheme, through the led and supported activities and by having more options on site for different types of activity.

The project has captured people and partners' imaginations and generated a 'feel good factor'; the site won a Tourism Excellence Award in 2007. It is also now part of the 'Seven Wonders of the Weald'; these are described as unique places to discover in the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (Seven Wonders, 2008).

Challenges

A range of challenges have come about through the project. A critical lesson to draw from the delivery of the project is the time and staff resources needed to undertake this

type of project. Also a greater lead in time is needed for projects such as this in terms of longer term strategic site and business planning. There is also a need for specialist staff development through training for the delivery of community engagement to hard to reach groups. These issues are not always dealt with. It takes a lot of work to bid for funding such as this. If successful, there is sometimes a short timescale in which to spend the funding gained. This can lead to the lack of time and opportunity to consider long term sustainable issues.

Other specific challenge identified by staff included:

- There was a certain lack of understanding about the project and the role of the project workers from some existing FC personnel, potentially due to the point below and the targeting through outreach of under-represented groups. The Forestry Commission (FC) is undertaking more outreach work and employing people specifically for this type of work however not all staff see this as important as it moves away from the more traditional FC approaches.
- A Heritage Lottery Bid proposal was originally put forward for the site, this did not get funded and instead a Lottery Bid was made to Sport England. The projects were obviously very different and it took time for some staff to adjust to the very different focus on sport rather than heritage.
- Having staff resources to deliver activities was an issue. Once the cost of employing the project staff was met, and infrastructure improvements paid for the rest of the revenue to run the project was limited. The increasing numbers of visitors and interest in the site also meant that resources and all site staff were stretched.
- There was a realisation early on in the project that the visitor centre particularly the café would probably not be big enough to accommodate the increased numbers of visitors.
- A planning application for an overflow car park was made at the beginning of 2008 and permission was still trying to be obtained in January 2009.
- The changing client base attracted through the project has highlight were staff may need further training to cope with the changes i.e. the outreach officer outlined training she was going to undertake with the RNIB (Royal National Institute for the Blind).
- Success brings with it challenges e.g. coping with numbers of visitors and pressure on the Pinetum.
- There can be difficulties with targeting groups. For example these may not map onto what people want. Women may not want a 'women only' walk group as they may want to mix with men. Single target group activities potentially do not integrate people with other visitors as they categorise people and bring them to the site in an isolated way.
- There were some internal FC administrative difficulties in the time taken to try and get a licence to employ external instructors e.g. to run courses such as archery.

- Sharing and learning across the other Active England Woodland Projects was not easy, project staff often have little time or opportunity to find out how others have progressed, however they have had some contact with Haldon Forest Park staff.
- Transport to Bedgebury is a specific challenge as there is limited opportunity to get to the site by bus which restricts opportunities for those without their own car.

Future development

There is going to be an expansion of the food outlet at the visitor centre into the cycle shop and the cycle shop is being moved into the car park. Planning permission as mentioned above is being sought to make the overflow car park into a permanent parking space. Work is on-going to try to get funding for a cycling coach through Sport England. The partnership manager became Director of Bedgebury in 2008 and will oversee the Pinetum and forest as a whole and the outreach officer became the partnership manager. A period of consolidation is sought after the rapid growth in visitor numbers over the past few years.

6. Discussion

The Active England Woodland Project that took place at Bedgebury was a significant success in attracting a wider variety of people to the site and in terms of increasing overall visitor numbers substantially. The project has engaged successfully with some of the key Active England target groups of women, under 16s, disabled people, and those on low incomes. The physical infrastructure and human resources developed through the project put Bedgebury in a strong position to deliver similar future projects and programmes.

The quantitative research outlines how the visitor and visit profile to Bedgebury changed once the project was up and running due to the new infrastructure at Bedgebury, the led activities and the cycling club and cycle trails. These attracted new people to the site and encouraged existing users to become more active.

The qualitative research revealed that the ways in which people think about physical activity does not match the ways in which government talks about physical activity. For example not everyone is aware of the recommended levels of activity needed to improve health, a number of people talked about the previous recommendations of 20 minutes of aerobic exercise on 3 days a week rather than the current recommendation of at least 30 minutes of moderate exercise on 5 days a week. Many of the respondents did not feel that housework or some of their daily chores counted as exercise. They generally thought about exercise through leisure activities such as walking.

The qualitative research with the health walkers highlighted the importance of led activities that encouraged people to participate, motivated them to keep attending, and made those who felt vulnerable feel safe and secure i.e. they would not get lost or feel unsafe. The socialisation opportunities that arose from the health walks were seen as critically important and the walkers enjoyed having a diversity of people participate including those with mental health problems and disabilities. This research reveals that led activities provide potentially greater opportunities for embedding physical activity into people's everyday lives as they often take place on a regular basis providing support and encouragement for people to keep participating. A critical lesson to learn from this research is that people often join led activities primarily for the social opportunities they provide and for the pleasure of the activity rather than to increase their physical activity levels. However the health walkers did describe how their involvement led on to them thinking more about their health in general and to sometimes becoming more physically active.

The young cross country mountain bikers and downhill, dirt jumpers and free riders highlight how young people can develop specific identities around these types of activity building confidence and self esteem as well as developing social networks.

Through action research the non-users of the project were able to find out more about what was happening at Bedgebury and how they could participate if they wanted or were able to. However, some of the barriers faced by the young low income group in terms of finance and transport meant that it was unlikely that they would be able to access the site unless they came along as part of an organised group activity.

In terms of the overall project a critical lesson to learn is the importance of having an adequate staff resource for project delivery on-site (activities, events etc.) and community engagement work to reach target groups. The success in terms of visitor numbers has stretched the capacity of a lot of the site staff not only the two people employed specifically as part of the project.

Key recommendations and 'lessons learnt' are presented in the main evaluation report, drawing on research findings from across the five woodland projects.

References

- King, K. 2008. Progress report to Forest Research. Internal Document.
- Playlink. 2008. Assessment of provision for play. Report to the Forestry Commission.
- Seven Wonders of the Weald. 2008 <http://www.sevenwonders.org.uk/wonders.asp>
- Sport England. 2005. Active England Awards Sport England South East. <http://www.sportengland.org/sitesearch.htm?st=21&charset=iso-8859-1&col=seinter&qt=active+england+awards> accessed 05/08/2006.
- Sport England. 2008. Active England Learning Zones: Bedgebury Forest Case Study. <http://www.aelz.org/index.asp?key=27>.
- Sport England. 2009. Active England: Final Report. Report by Hall Aitken and Bearhunt for Sport England, London.