

Public Engagement and Forestry: Key Lessons for Working in Urban Areas



This document was produced in association with
Paul Tabbush

Forestry and Social Research Services
Farnham, Surrey

for the **Social and Economic Research Group**,
Centre for Human and Ecological Sciences,
Forest Research

www.forestresearch.gov.uk/peopleandtrees

For further information about this document please contact:

Dr Bianca Ambrose-Oji: Bianca.Ambrose-Oji@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

An appropriate citation for this document is: Tabbush, P., and Ambrose-Oji, B., 2011, Public Engagement in Forestry: Key Lessons for Working in Urban Areas. Forest Research, Alice Holt Lodge Farnham, Surrey.

Public Engagement in Forestry: Key Lessons for Working in Urban Areas

Summary

1. Urban forestry is subject to particular challenges. The intensity of interest and pressure for local access is usually very high, from a large population, concerning woodlands which are small in size. This contrasts with forestry in rural areas where woodlands are generally large and populations much smaller.
2. The implication of this is that a greater intensity of engagement activity may be required, and familiar methods and tools will need to be adapted to the urban context.
3. The importance of conducting a thorough stakeholder analysis is emphasised in urban and peri-urban areas as foresters need to unravel and understand the complexity of catchment populations, and find legitimate representatives from forest user groups as well as non-users.
4. In an urban context, successful engagement processes often begin with information provision reaching a wide audience, and are followed by more focused involvement with smaller groups of people.
5. Experience shows that a variety of methods are needed, and that:
 - methods such as drop-in sessions and open days may not work well in urban areas – attendance is often poor and unpredictable;
 - social events and activities in the forest are an excellent way of raising the profile of a site and providing information to large numbers of people;
 - it is not easy to ensure adequate representation when using data gathering tools;
 - involvement tools require careful planning as they work best with small groups; legitimate representation is a key issue;
 - professional facilitation is an advantage, especially when dealing with groups that have particular needs, or where an element of negotiation and conflict management is required.
6. Genuine, sustained commitment to the principles of public engagement, and adequate resources, are very important when dealing with large and complex communities in urban woodland catchments.

1. Introduction

Urban forestry is becoming more important because of a growing focus on the provision of urban and peri-urban green space, and the growth of communities into areas adjoining woodland. Urban forestry presents particular challenges, which differ from those experienced in relation to rural forestry. Designed to be read in conjunction with the '[Public Engagement Toolbox](#)' (Ambrose-Oji, *et al* 2011), this short document offers practical advice on public engagement for foresters working in an urban context, summarising key lessons from Forestry Commission experience and the wider literature.

2. What is different about urban forestry?

One of the **distinctive features of urban woodlands is high pressure for local access**. Urban forestry has been characterised as concentrating on “the social and environmental values of urban woodlands rather than on wood production and emphasising the importance of communication, ranging from information to participation/power sharing between stakeholders.” (Konijnendijk, 2000).

Another characteristic is a high intensity of interest in relation to the area of available woodland. This contrasts with the more rural situation where issues of importance to stakeholders are more typically related to the rural economy and rural employment, and there may be a greater emphasis on tourism than on local access (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of urban woodlands in relation to public engagement

Rural Forestry	Urban/Community Woodlands
Large areas of woodland	Small areas of woodland
Small populations	Large populations
Economic/employment issues emphasised	Access/public benefits issues emphasised
The role of FC in relation to other agencies and stakeholders is significant	The role of FC is relatively minor; it is one among many influential agencies
Relatively well-known major stakeholders	Greater complexity of potential stakeholders
Volunteers may find access to more remote woodlands difficult	More scope for volunteering with larger populations to draw from and woodlands more easily accessed

According to Konijnendijk (*op. cit.*), “Freiburg, Germany, has no less than 327 m² of forest available per inhabitant within its municipal boundaries; the Dutch city of Amsterdam has only an estimated 1.5 m². The high pressure on urban woodland areas can be derived from visitor numbers, which often exceed 1000 visits per hectare per year and in some cases can be as high as 5000±7000”. A history of relatively high density human habitation also tends to result in more intrinsic cultural interest in the forest, and a greater density of physical cultural assets, including industrial archaeology.

The implication of this is that urban and community woodlands will require a greater intensity of engagement centred on the provision of access and related services to local communities (‘outreach’). This type of engagement is unlike that typical of government decision-making (governance) – it is deeper and more continuous (Table 2).

Table 2. Characteristics of service delivery and decision making

	Service delivery (facilities, events and activities)	Decision making (governance)
Scale of operation	Often smaller scale	Often larger scale
Approach	Proactive: Establish and deliver stakeholder needs	Reactive: Maintaining forestry operations and planning processes
Key ingredients	Outreach: Individuals and Groups Using local knowledge Longer term or continuous process	Selected representatives Use of expert knowledge common and use of local knowledge less common Often time bounded and periodic May be linked to formal processes
Style of public engagement	Consulting, involving and partnership	Informing and consulting

3. Identifying users in urban and peri-urban contexts

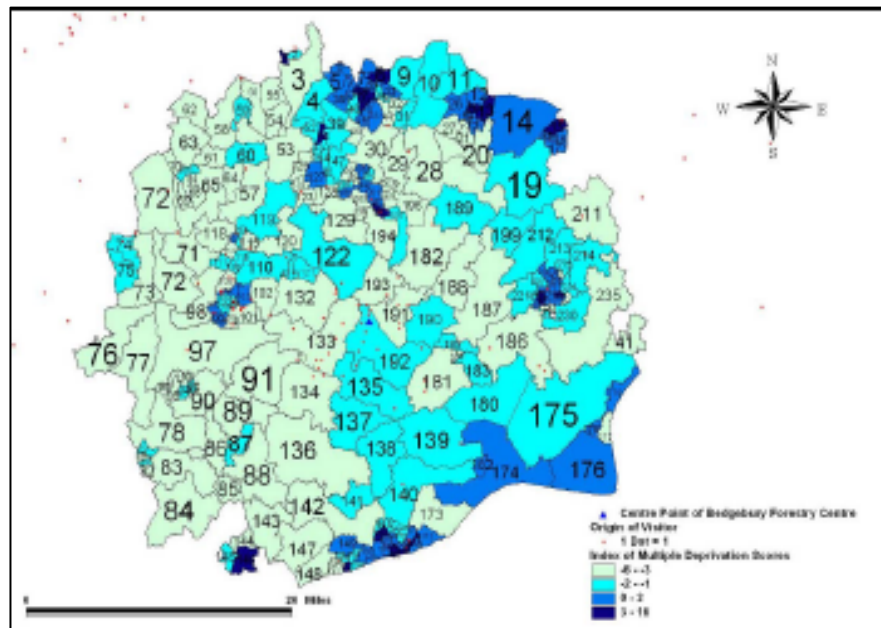
In the complex environment of an urban or peri-urban forest, brainstorming to identify and categorise stakeholders, as outlined in the Public Engagement Toolbox, is probably only a first step. Existing users and their patterns of usage are relatively easily identified through car park or on-site surveys and interviews. However, it is equally important to identify *potential* users.

To do this, it is often helpful to construct a *catchment map* describing the area from which visitors are likely to come in most numbers, bearing in mind transport routes and

methods and alternative woodland recreation sites. A target group of stakeholders will be the non-woodland users who live within this catchment. Key concerns for the forest manager will be to understand why this group has not been accessing the forest in greater numbers, what the barriers may be, and what actions could help encourage them to make more use of the wood.

Catchment map for forest in urbanised South East of England showing Index of Multiple Deprivation by ward

It may seem impractical to contact the apparently high numbers of potential stakeholders, but this is usually achieved through a network of representatives. If possible, individuals or groups that are able to represent wider groups effectively can be identified and encouraged to participate. For instance, friends groups, cycling or walking groups, wildlife interest groups, church and other faith groups, service



user support groups and civil society organisations including charities may all have something to offer. These groups may often be willing to help in service delivery through volunteering or by providing other resources. Where they do not pre-exist it is sometimes possible for foresters or partner organisations to encourage their creation. Faith groups and a charity dedicated to enhancing the health benefits of woodland were effective in a woodland access project near Bedford (Tabbush, 2008). Similarly, local schools may wish to benefit from enhanced access and may be able to provide representatives. They will also be a source of local knowledge and may point you in the direction of other useful contacts and stakeholders. This applies equally to local health services.

Local authorities will also be a useful resource. It is worth noting however, that local political representatives often have economic or other stakes in the area and cannot always be relied on to represent accurately the needs, values and aspirations of local communities. The technique of 'snowballing' i.e. using a small core of reliable stakeholders to identify a wider group of stakeholders is likely to be most effective.

4. Engagement methods for urban forestry

The engagement process for service delivery is likely to take the form of a continuous dialogue, rather than periodic formal events. Events such as a guided forest walks, coffee mornings or other social gatherings will be more effective than formal public meetings as they allow for extended periods of dialogue in an environment that stimulates relevant comment (e.g. “How are visitors to know that *that* particular path is open to walkers and leads to the attractive pond/ ancient monument that attracts visitors?”). Communication methods should be kept simple and direct. Complex representations of ideas, including technical maps and written plans can form a barrier to effective communication, and should be replaced wherever possible by direct experiences such as accompanied forest walks, and talks followed by two-way discussion. It will be important to record the content of any discussions and to demonstrate that opinions and suggestions are listened to and that appropriate action is taken. Where suggestions cannot be acted upon, e.g. because of financial constraints, this should be made clear and discussed with the participants.

[Drop-in days](#) (and [Open Space](#) events) have become popular, but they suffer from a number of drawbacks:

- Attendance is unpredictable, and this can result in a waste of staff time and other resources. They are better attended in cases where there is a strongly contended proposal or other public concern
- Because the timing of attendance is sporadic, opportunities for constructive debate occur unpredictably. They may take the form of one-to-one discussions with staff, or group debates if large numbers of people turn up at once, but typically the debate is very low key, those attending taking the opportunity to browse the displays, and possibly to fill in a questionnaire. As a result substantive dialogue with stakeholders is not recorded and can be lost.

The advantages and disadvantages of a range of tools and methods from particular urban forestry case studies have been listed by Janse and Konijnendijk (2007). They show that:

- Tools and methods that aim to provide information are relatively simple and effective at reaching the larger populations in urban areas, but, there is little scope for feedback. How the information is interpreted by the wider population is not always clear.
- Public events aimed at strengthening the project image are a very effective form of informing the public and reaching large numbers of people, although the costs can be high and attendance variable depending on other events competing for people's attention.
- Data gathering tools and methods are perhaps the hardest to apply with large populations, as the needs and abilities of different groups must be recognised and

methods tailored to accommodate these. Data gathering tools are also not easy to apply where issues are complex and there are competing interests involved in design and decision making processes.

- Involvement tools are best for building trust and collecting different visions and perspectives from different groups. However, in an urban context the biggest problem with these time consuming tools is that they are not suited to large audiences so the issue of ensuring fair representation is crucial but difficult to address.

In urban areas there is always going to be a trade off between contacting large numbers of people on the one hand, and organising engagement events and methods which provide real opportunities for individuals and communities to make effective contributions. This emphasises the need to establish early on and quite clearly, through the use of stakeholder analysis tools, who should be involved. It may also be better to arrange one-to-one discussions with key representatives, and group discussions to develop ideas concerning access. The [Focus Group](#) technique (often used as part of market research) can be helpful in eliciting views of actual and potential users (and non-users) on woodland access needs (Tabbush, 2004).

Focus Group discussions provide a chance to examine issues in depth

Here, typically 10 participants at a time are involved in discussions (perhaps in a community hall) lasting 1-2 hours, and the discussions are audio-recorded. The participants are recruited (e.g. in a shopping centre) to represent the local community in terms of e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic group, and are often given an honorarium for attending the discussion.



Coffee mornings, guided walks or other social events are useful in breaking down barriers and engaging in a constructive dialogue concerning community needs and the possibilities for self-help including volunteering around woodland issues.

A list of techniques that are particularly suited to enhancing service delivery is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Engagement tools particularly relevant in the context of service delivery

Tool/technique	Context	Comment
Focus Groups	Can be used to contact people who are not already engaged	Members are recruited systematically, and usually rewarded for attendance. Needs expertise.
One-to-one contact	Key stakeholders and 'gatekeepers'	Helps with building trust and empowering stakeholders
Open space (drop-in days)	Can provide opportunity for information exchange and collection of views and opinions from large numbers of people	Participant numbers may be variable depending on competing events.
Site visits	An effective way of discussing important issues and looking at design and decision making criteria	Builds trust and facilitates exchange of information as well as stakeholder interest. May not be suitable for use with large numbers of people.
Small informal meetings	Building trust and establishing an atmosphere of open communication	Can take the form of social events.
Working Groups	To address a single issue, e.g. to set up a new trail or footpath	Usually a temporary group. Should have clear terms of reference.
Workshops	Can be a series of workshops to discuss and plan for community needs	Method well understood and a useful forum for discussing issues and developing plans when well managed.

5. Evidence from case studies in the UK

Three case studies of urban and peri-urban forestry are presented in Annex 1. Examples that typify the 'service delivery' situation include the Bishop's Estate Access Project at Greater Easterhouse (near Glasgow), and the Sherwood Forest Community Rangers Project (Nottinghamshire). In contrast, the Newborough Forest (North Wales) example concerned a major decision to deforest part of the area and was consequently much more about governance processes than providing services.

The key lessons to emerge from these case studies reinforce the points made earlier and show that:

- **Commitment to the principle** that engagement will be meaningful and provide opportunities for the public to make a difference is absolutely crucial – **sufficient time and resources** must be allocated to make this a reality
- Contracted **professional facilitation** can help forest managers run effective engagement processes which balance the interests of different parties
- It is important to use a **variety of methods suited to the objectives** of the engagement and the stage at which the process has reached. Combining information provision, site promotion and data collection with the largest possible contact group is important in the early stages
- Electronic methods of engagement are best used once **trust and legitimate representation** has been established
- Forest managers need to **maintain a flexible approach** tailoring engagement processes and activities to the needs, demands and perspectives of the concerned populations.

Drawing lessons from the practical experience of urban foresters and partners in these and other case studies shows differences in approaches to community and public engagement methods and processes between service delivery and decision making. These differences are summarised in Table 4 shown below.

Conclusions

The process of public and community engagement follows similar principles in urban and rural areas, but in areas of high population, where pressures on woodlands are greater, the emphasis is often on the provision of facilities and activities and positively encouraging access to a wide range of actual and potential users. Public engagement in

these circumstances is most often concerned with finding out what people want for the area, and encouraging higher levels of usage. The Forestry Commission's experience indicates that working in partnership with community groups, and organisations with similar objectives, can be highly successful in achieving these aims.

Where environmental decision-making is the key focus, the emphasis will be on contacting those who may be affected, and making sure that their views are fully taken into account. A well-ordered decision-making process, will be required, often including a professional facilitator experienced in communicative decision-making.

Non-traditional users of forests are often an important stakeholder group in urban areas

Working in urban areas is likely to require a more comprehensive approach to the planning of public engagement than is the case in rural areas. In addition, a greater level of resources is usually needed in the implementation phase of the engagement due to the scale of the process (e.g. offering a number of different consultation / engagement events tailored



for different groups and issues), and the fact that it is more likely to involve engaging the public in day to day service delivery. In all cases, arrangements for monitoring and evaluation should be considered at the beginning, to ensure that lessons from experience can be captured, and to provide evidence as a basis for future projects.

Table 4. Approaches to public engagement for service delivery and decision making.

Service Delivery (facilities, events and activities)	Decision Making (governance)
The engagement plan should identify all possible links between the communities of stakeholders and the forest manager (Forestry Commission), and seek to avoid multiple approaches from different parts of the forestry organisation.	The engagement plan should identify which engagement tools in the ' Public Engagement Toolbox ' (Ambrose-Oji <i>et al.</i> 2011) require specialist facilitation for their implementation (e.g. citizens' jury); and which require some training (e.g. focus group).
Identify users and potential users through "snowballing" ¹ and catchment analysis ² .	The use of professional facilitators is highly recommended for all (public) decision-making processes, especially in cases concerning significant and politically sensitive environmental decisions.
Stakeholders include individuals, user groups, and people who might be affected by the site usage and/or their representatives. Stakeholders will also include people and organisations who may not be traditional users but have been identified as target groups and future users of the woodland	Stakeholders should be identified through a formal stakeholder analysis, and are likely to include statutory consultees as well as the public and civil society groups.
Encourage the establishment of user groups.	Consider the influence, importance and legitimacy of each stakeholder or stakeholder group (Figure 1), as a basis for considering how they should be involved.
Site meetings and social events are better than drop-in days and public meetings (see Table 3).	As part of the stakeholder analysis, it may be helpful to categorise stakeholders according to role (Figure 2).
Where community engagement aims to promote usage and to find out what people want, drop-in days and similar tools are the most effective forms of engagement.	Drop-in days connected with this kind of decision making process are often poorly attended and not cost-effective. Site meetings, social events, and well-organised meetings are a more effective means of engagement in this context.
Community 'wants' are addressed through discussion, if it is not possible to meet some particular demand; clear reasons need to be	Public meetings can be useful in disseminating information, but they are difficult to manage as a means of gathering and reconciling views. They

¹ This is a technique for identifying stakeholders by asking one individual or organisation to recommend other people and organisations it is aware of with similar interests or relevant interests in the project or issue being discussed.

² Catchment analysis involves looking at the demographic characteristics of the population surrounding a particular woodland site and/or the visitors who use the woodland in question.

Service Delivery (facilities, events and activities)	Decision Making (governance)
given. The limits of what is on offer from the forest manager must be clearly outlined at the start of the engagement process.	tend to be captured by the loudest voices. Again, targeted and well-organised or facilitated meetings are more effective.
The involvement of individuals, groups and school children in physical activities on site is highly effective in promoting woodland usage.	Expert and local (lay) information must be gathered and made equally available to all parties. This is one of the IAP2 "core principles" *
Information should be gathered in advance of meetings, so that all parties are fully informed.	The important issues need to be identified and stakeholder points of view considered so as to identify possible areas of conflict.
The exclusionary effect of antisocial behaviour is a recurrent theme. Solutions need to be found in discussion with local communities and police.	Space should be made available for structured discussion, so that all issues and points of view can be made clear, and possible solutions debated.
Monitoring and evaluation need to be built-in to the process from the beginning.	Monitoring and evaluation need to be built-in to the process from the beginning
When acquiring a woodland, it will be important to begin community engagement at the earliest possible opportunity, for instance by informing people of the organisation's intentions/objectives for the site. It may be necessary to delay the provision of services until an engagement plan is in place.	In the context of formal consultations like those involved in an Environmental Impact Assessment, the process is easier if trust has already been built with significant stakeholders through prior discussions or joint activities.
Changing circumstances, including changing policies, changing stakeholders, changing forest structure and changing economic circumstances will make it necessary to revisit debates and conclusions reached with communities and other stakeholders.	The scope for stakeholders to influence the decision should be made clear at an early stage in the process.
It is important to make clear what can be influenced through community engagement, and what cannot.	It is important to make clear to stakeholders how their views have been taken into account in arriving at the decision.
	The decision will be the final responsibility of the relevant authority. It is important to identify who this is at the beginning of the process.

Figure 1. Example of stakeholder analysis by importance/influence

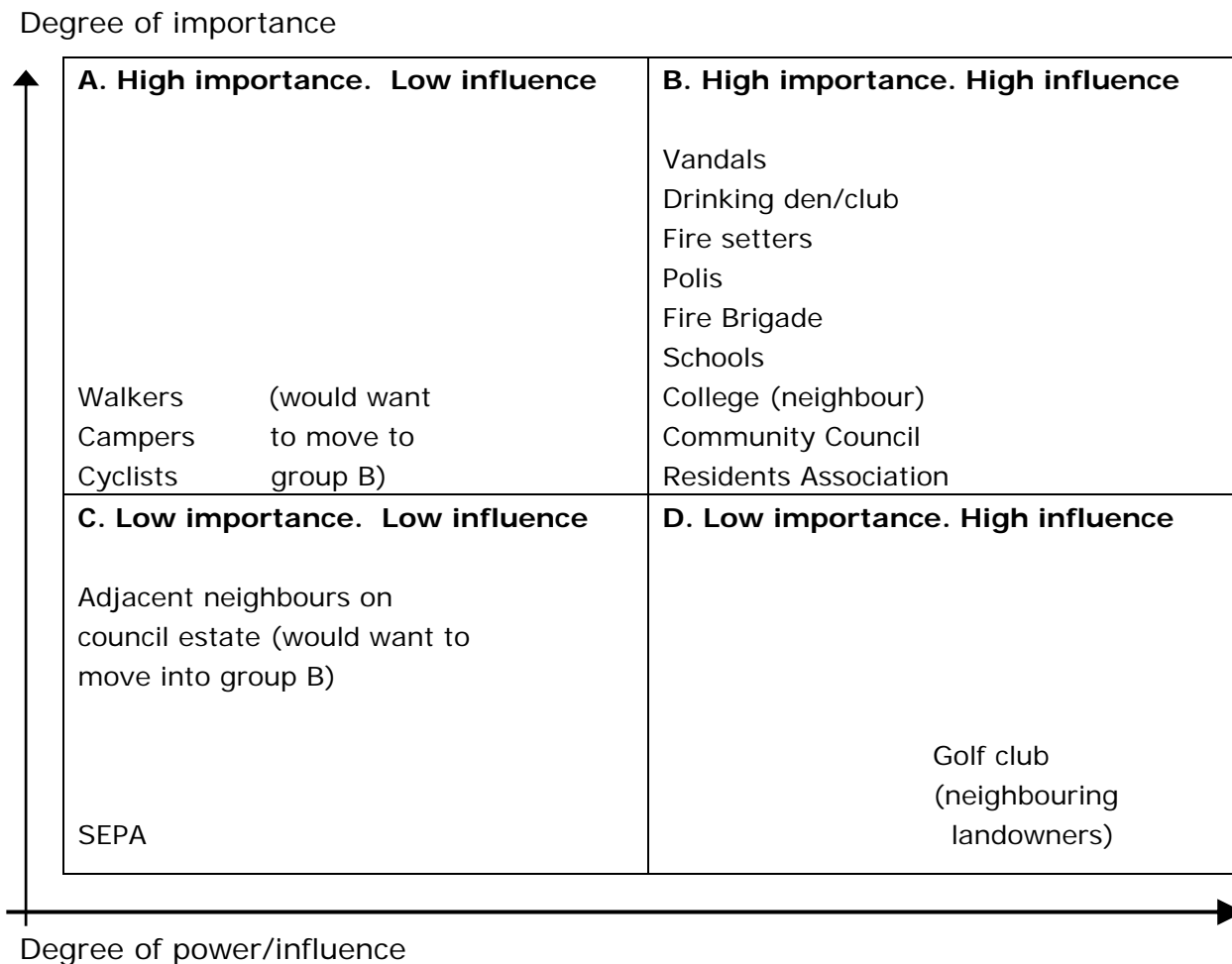


Figure 2. Stakeholder Roles

Role Stakeholder	Provision of information/expertise	Actual/Potential User	Partner in delivery	Conflicting or constraining interests
Mountain bikers	*	**	*	*
Caravan park			**	
Farmers	*		*	**

References

- Ambrose-Oji, B., Tabbush, P., Frost, B., Carter, C., Fielding, K. (2011). Public Engagement in Forestry: A toolbox for public engagement in forest and woodland planning. Edinburgh, Forestry Commission GB. Available at: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox>
- Janse, G. and C. Konijnendijk (2007). "Communication between science, policy and citizens in public participation in urban forestry—Experiences from the Neighbourwoods project." *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* **6**: 23-40.
- Konijnendijk, C. (2000). "Adapting forestry to urban demands - role of communication in urban forestry in Europe." *Landscape and Urban Planning* **52**: 89-100.
- Tabbush, P. (2008). Maulden Faith Woodland: an Investigation. . *Unpublished report*, Edinburgh, Forestry Commission.
- Tabbush, P. (2010). Cultural Value of Trees, Woods and Forests. Farnham, Surrey, Forest Research. Available from <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-874EMN>
- Tabbush, P. M. (2004). Consultation and Community Involvement in Forest Planning: Research in Cranborne Chase and North Dorset. Forest Research, Farnham, Surrey. Available from: <http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/fr/infd-632cl2>

Annex 1. Case Studies in Public Engagement in urban and peri-urban areas

The case studies cover processes that are mature if not complete, one each from Scotland, Wales and England. Each is presented according to the structure recommended for the Community Engagement Plan, and this also formed the basis for the semi-structured interview questions used to gather the information:

1. How was the project defined – what was it that was to be discussed?
2. How were decisions taken on who to include in the discussions?
3. What methods were used, and how were they arrived at?
4. What were the resource implications?
5. What were the important issues that arose?
6. Were there any conflicts that needed resolution and how were they resolved?
7. How was the process ended – was there feedback to participants on how their views had been taken into account?
8. What arrangements were made for monitoring and evaluating the process?

Case Study 1. Bishop's Estate Access Project, Glasgow

The Bishops Estate Access Project is a joint initiative between Glasgow City Council and the Forestry Commission, in accordance with the Gartcosh Green Network Strategy and Management Plan (see Box 1). This management plan emphasised that the area was potentially important for biodiversity, and the strategy was expected to ensure that those living and working in the Greater Easterhouse area of Glasgow would benefit from the social, economic and environmental opportunities that a natural heritage resource can provide.

The engagement process was based on an education project initiated by Glasgow City Council, and it was agreed that this would centre on the Bishop's Estate Access Project. It was the Forestry Commission community ranger's suggestion to concentrate on access, with education delivery a secondary aim. The engagement approach was one of consultation.

A contractor was appointed, by competitive tender, to help with the consultation process (with the active involvement of the forester and community ranger). The FC was in the process of leasing the land for the project, and it seemed the ideal time to re-launch people's enthusiasm for the use of the sites. The consultation had two aims:

1. to promote site usage and 2. to find out what people wanted from the site. This was therefore principally about the delivery of services, rather than about decision-making and governance. People readily voiced their opinions on the things that they wanted and the barriers to access in relation to these sites. A steering group was constituted from key community contacts, and this group helped design a questionnaire used to record public responses, identify the locations for the public consultations and the format for the key event. This group also reviewed the key event. At the end of the process the steering group continued as a project group.

The consultation targeted four different adjoining communities and included school children. The method used here was based on four 'drop-in days' at different times, including weekdays and week-ends and evenings to make it possible for as wide a constituency as possible to attend. These events were advertised in the local paper and on the 'Pathfinder' website set up by a local further education provider in the area. The public consultation also included questionnaires. The community action team from Glasgow City Council took children out for site visits (from five local schools), and the children also filled in questionnaires.

Another strand of consultation included governmental and non-governmental organisations, mainly through one-to-one contact between the contractor and these stakeholders, but there were also some site visits with the community ranger. The consultation was widened through 'snowballing', based on an original list of environmental stakeholders, with these stakeholders suggesting who else the contractor should include, e.g. the local health partnerships and the local regeneration agency. Presentations were also made at local council and housing association meetings.

The main stakeholder event, a long morning workshop, including a broad range of statutory bodies and key community organisations, was then able to benefit from the information gathered in advance. The consultant was able to present results from the surveys and consultations, including from the schools, and the key findings were presented. The stakeholders were then split into groups based on themes (environment and natural heritage; education, training and volunteering; health and recreation), and these groups then considered best and worst scenarios, how to take the sites forward, and barriers to progress. Antisocial behaviour was a significant problem affecting the sites and there was an issue concerning dangerous dogs, the presence of which was preventing access by ordinary dog owners. The groups then allocated agencies to do the work (put names beside tasks). This event was focused on organising delivery based on the results of the consultation, rather than on consultation itself.

In summary, the process had the following strands:

- A steering group with key community and statutory stakeholders, providing local and expert knowledge
- A key stakeholder consultation involving the statutory stakeholders and community groups, including those that could help with delivery of the access and educational aims
- A community consultation reaching the key adjoining communities, which included an element of information collection using questionnaires and promotion of the site through drop-in days
- A main stakeholder event focused on partnership and delivery

The budget, from Glasgow City Council sources, amounted to around £25,000 and was used to employ the contractor, for the production of a map-pack, and for the setting up of a website. This did not include the FC staff cost, mainly related to the community ranger.

At the end of this consultation, the contractor was given a further follow-up contract to evaluate the impacts of the project, including people counter readings, and consultation visits leading to a short evaluation, based on the effectiveness of delivery (i.e. increased site usage).

Box 1. Key Features of the Bishop's Estate Access Project

The Bishops Estate Access Project is a joint initiative between Glasgow City Council and the Forestry Commission, in accordance with the Gartcosh Green Network Strategy and Management Plan. This management plan emphasised that the area was potentially important for biodiversity. The phased implementation of the Strategy should ensure that those living and working in the Greater Easterhouse area benefit from the various social, economic and environmental opportunities that this natural heritage resource can provide.¹

It is hoped that key outcomes from the project will include:

- an increase in visitor numbers to the Bishops Estate;
- routes for walking and cycling in the area;
- a map pack to encourage access to Bishops Estate green areas;
- highlight the benefits of outdoor learning;
- link with educational strategies and provide training for teachers to encourage use of outdoor facilities.



Case Study 2. Craig y Ddinas, Heads of the Valley's region, South Wales

The southern border of the Brecon Beacons National Park in South Wales runs close to the edge of the industrial, post-industrial and urban areas of Neath Port Talbot and Rhondda Cynon Taff. Urban and peri-urban communities in this part of the country tend to be located close to the natural resources essential to previous industrial economies including rivers and woods for power, and the hilly landforms which held them. This means there is often a very close association between urban communities and forested valleys. Pontneddfechan is typical of the region. It is an old silica and limestone mining community with a strong industrial heritage, located next to Craig y Ddinas a wooded hillside. The Craig y Ddinas woods are managed by Forestry Commission Wales (FCW), and they provide an access point to the well known 'Waterfalls Country' one of the most visited recreational sites in the Brecon Beacons National Park. The Heads of the Valleys road provides excellent accessibility not only to local residents, but also to visitors from the wider urban/peri-urban catchment, from the South Wales Valleys and from urban areas in England (most visitors live within one hour's drive of the site – 57% from Wales, 38% from England).

More than 200 different businesses from the surrounding area as well as wider into South Wales, bring approximately 35,000 visitors into Craig Y Ddinas and the area beyond, to take part in a range of outdoor activities including gorge walking, climbing, caving, and wild country walking. A large proportion of these visitors drive into Pontneddfechan to start their visit. Until recently, the only car park has been the FCW car park at the end of a residential cul-de-sac and across a small bridge. The Pontneddfechan community hall and car park is located at the end of the cul-de-sac less than 100 metres away.

In common with many sites of recreational and conservation interest located close to urban areas, there is very high pressure on a relatively small woodland resource. This comes from a wide range of users and interest groups. Not all of these users are easy to contact because they come from such a wide urban catchment. The value of the area to businesses and commercial groups has added an important set of very tangible stakeholder interests.

There have been two important sets of issues that have arisen as a consequence. The first relates to the ecology of the area and the general site condition of Craig Y Ddinas and the Sychryd Gorge behind it. The second is to do with the lack of facilities for visitors and the impact this has had on local residents, the difficulty they had accessing

the community hall, and the absence of any economic benefits to the local community from the visitors.

As a consequence, the issues that required attention were defined by two sets of people. The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) on the one hand and local residents on the other. Residents expressed their concerns to FCW the land managers, about the disruption caused by visitors. FCW and BBNPA also needed to take note of the concerns of conservation bodies such as the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) worried about the state of the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and the sensitivity of the habitat at the site.

The BBNPA responded by working in partnership with FCW to find a resolution to the issues. It was clear that public engagement was key to decision making about site use and management. As such, this example is less about service delivery, and more about environmental decision making. The first step was to understand the complexity of the stakeholders involved and to prioritise which of those BBNPA and FCW should concentrate their efforts on. It was decided that the most clearly defined group of users

and most pressing issues centred on gorge walkers and their use of the site.



Formal and informal contacts with the various businesses and groups involved in gorge walking led to a seminar and workshop which involved not only a wide group of gorge walking interest groups, but also representatives from CCW, FCW and other conservation groups. External facilitators were used to run the workshop. The objectives of the meeting were to provide a forum to exchange information and views and begin work towards finding a suitable solution in the form of a Code of Conduct. The facilitators were important to initiating a positive engagement process: they provided neutral guidance and leadership that fostered genuine engagement or buy-in by the interest groups. The interests of residents were maintained

through regular contacts and liaison with the Hall Committee. They were happy limiting their engagement to consultation on progress through discussion with FCW staff.

A series of formal and informal meetings pushed forward the development of the Code of Conduct, but it became clear that some additional agreements would be needed to meet the health and safety issues linked to landowner responsibility, as well as addressing visitor behaviour travelling to and around the site. This led to the development of an additional Concordat – again through small and larger meetings but this time with the help of a Steering Committee and closer liaison with FCW.

The exchange of information between stakeholders in the process meant that everybody involved began to understand much more about the others' needs and limitations. The outcome of this was the establishment of the South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers group which provide a one-stop-shop for companies and groups to sign up to the Concordat and Code of Conduct including training, and one representative institution for FCW to work with. By understanding more about the needs of the gorge walkers and other visitors, the Pontneddfechan community spotted an opportunity to realise economic benefits and have made the community hall available for hire by the outdoor groups, provide packed lunches, provided additional car parking spaces outside the hall, and provided places for visitors to change into gorge walking gear. The summer of 2011 will be the first with all the new arrangements in place: The prospects for a successful outcome from public engagement look very positive.

Box 2.. Key Features of the Craig y Ddinas / Sychryd Gorge engagement process

Forestry Commission Wales and the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority recognised that certain access points into the Waterfalls area were becoming so heavily used that both the site ecology and the local communities were being negatively impacted. The area around Craig y Ddinas was subject to a process of public engagement to try and solve some of these issues. Working with businesses and organisations interested in gorge walking a Code of Conduct and Concordant has been developed through engagement which should begin to ease the identified pressures.

Essential ingredients of the engagement process were:

- Defining the priority issue
- Identifying the key stakeholders amongst many users of the site
- Using neutral facilitators to initiate engagement
- Using meetings and site visits to communicate needs and discuss key issues
- Stakeholders forming a representative association
- Keeping residents informed and responding to ideas



Case Study 3. Sherwood Forest Community Rangers Project, Nottinghamshire

The Sherwood Forest Community Rangers Project SFRP (2002-2007) was part of the Sherwood Initiative, which also included habitat restoration, education projects. The SFRP aimed to get local communities involved with their sites, focusing on seven former pit tip sites that had just been re-landscaped by Nottinghamshire County Council, and were in the process of being handed over to the Forestry Commission to manage. The Council as land owner, had an objective to provide community woodland space. The SFRP was about engaging with local communities, to increase awareness of the sites and access to them. The stated objectives were:

- To engage with communities living in former coalfield areas and encourage a sense of ownership of the newly regenerated sites
- To facilitate joint working between local landowners and communities in the development of land management projects
- To provide volunteer training, increase volunteering opportunities and improve the employment prospects of local people
- To provide educational opportunities for schools and other learning groups
- To increase partnership working in the area
- To provide physical and mental health and well-being benefits to local people.

The project developed very differently on the seven different sites. Some communities became involved in the physical management of the sites, others became involved mainly through schools, with less involvement from the wider community. Friends groups were also formed to provide continuous community engagement over the delivery of access, education, health and well-being. This project was therefore much more about service delivery than it was about decision making and governance. The sites belonged to the coal authority, originally; this organisation paid for them to be re-landscaped. FC involvement did not begin until the sites had been restored in this way. This was too late in the process to give people the chance to influence the landscaping. People were involved in decisions like the siting of benches, but again, this was more about service delivery than it was about governance.

The team of community rangers employed by the FC were charged with achieving the project objectives through day-to-day contact with local communities, while their manager was more involved with stakeholder organisations, maintaining partnerships with local authorities, and the local wildlife trust, for example. The team also worked with other landowners in the area to seek opportunities to extend community access.

The project was guided by a project plan that had been created in partnership with the other stakeholder organisations.

In 2000, a study group composed of more than twenty organisations ([“The Sherwood Study”](#)) had investigated what local communities and businesses wanted for their area. The study presented a clear vision for the area as a cultural landscape, and concluded that people did want to have more opportunity to be involved, both in having their say, and in terms of physical volunteering on the sites. This study was the original inspiration for the SFRP. Local communities were reached through established groups, who then provided further contacts through a “snowballing” process. Local papers and newsletters were used to disseminate information and seek voluntary involvement. Local schools provided a particularly valuable entry point. Contact with a wider constituency of organisations to create delivery partnerships increased as the project progressed, for instance with health partnerships to create healthy activity and healthy food days on one of the sites (see Box 3).

The methods of engagement were often innovative, for instance “dog pit-stops”, where a ranger with a van, and bags of dog food, encouraged dog-walkers to stop and talk. This was followed by “duck pit-stops” where food was provided to feed the ducks, and again this gave the rangers the opportunity to engage visitors in conversation about what they liked and disliked, and what their aspirations were for the sites. Drop-in sessions were organised in libraries and community centres, and sometimes this worked well, but in other areas there was hardly any response. Communities can be identified as suffering from “consultation fatigue” and in these cases it was more effective to identify specific groups and arrange to go out and talk to them. This then led to contacts with further groups and individuals. People are more likely to attend drop-in sessions if they think they are going to lose something, or if they mistrust the organisation. Rangers who are interested and enthusiastic were the most valuable asset in terms of engaging local communities. The original idea was that after local involvement had been established, it would be possible for the FC ranger to withdraw, but in the event this didn’t prove possible – the local communities saw the presence of the community ranger as essential to their involvement.

One of the sites was near a community with high levels of deprivation, also described as ‘over-consulted’ and consequently reluctant to form a friends group or become actively involved in the management of the site. The site was difficult to access, and had become a haven for motor-bikers over the years, often illicit in terms of road tax and insurance, and the age of the riders. There were very split opinions on this initially, but through a process of community dialogue, including a whole-day workshop, it was agreed that it was not possible to exclude the motorbikes, and a motorbike project was initiated, with a formal motorbike area, and the provision of training in motorbike safety and proficiency, with the involvement of the police. The location of the motorbike area was

negotiated with local residents, and funding is currently being sought to establish the facility.

Because this was an externally funded project, monitoring and evaluation was always part of the contract, with regular reports, mainly based around key performance indicators (e.g. number of school children involved). Funding finished in 2007, but the FC have continued to monitor performance. Since the funding ended there has been a renewed interest in equality and diversity, and this has also fed into the monitoring indicators. In 2010 FC received a Civil Service community engagement award for this project.

Box 3. Key Features of Engagement and Service Delivery the Ollerton and Boughton Brake Woods

Ollerton and Boughton Brake Woods



Getting active whilst trying to fly kites

Forest View Primary School joined forces with the Community Rangers to get their children out and about. Year's 5 & 6 got active for four weeks during the summer term walking the mile and a half each week to and from school to their local woodlands, Boughton Brake and Ollerton Pit Woods. These enthusiastic young people continued in their activity by getting thoroughly engrossed in exploring the woodlands shelter building, kite making, pond dipping and orienteering.

"It's a great way to get kids active and moving. Not only do we get the children walking to their local woodlands but also getting stuck into further activity by disguising exercise in fun environmental sessions. Over the four weeks the children will each have walked a total of 8 miles to and from the school and another 6 miles around the woodlands!"

Amy Chandler, Community Ranger

