

# Bedgebury: Visitor experiences

Report on experiences, impressions and  
knowledge of Bedgebury Pinetum

Clare Hall and Liz O'Brien, 2018



# Contents

<b>Contents .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Executive Summary .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Methods.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. The participants .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>4. Visiting Bedgebury .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>5. Opinions of infrastructure .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>6. Impressions of the site.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>7. Participant knowledge.....</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>8. Participant suggestions .....</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>9. Conclusions .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Appendix 1. Consent form and mini-questionnaire .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Appendix 2. Mini questionnaire - end of session.....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Appendix 3. Bedgebury Research participatory walking focus group protocol..</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Appendix 4. Map of forest walk .....</b>	<b>46</b>

Forest Research is the Research Agency of the Forestry Commission and is the leading UK organisation engaged in forestry and tree related research. The Agency aims to support and enhance forestry and its role in sustainable development by providing innovative, high quality scientific research, technical support and consultancy services.

## **Acknowledgments**

Thanks are due to all those who gave up their time to participate in the focus groups. Without them this work would not have been possible. Thanks are also due to Forestry Commission England Staff – Partrick West and Cath Weeks who organised the recruitment of participants, joined the focus groups and provided information about the site to participants.

## **Cite this report as:**

Hall, C., and O'Brien, L., 2017. Bedgebury: Visitor experiences. Report on experiences, impressions and knowledge of Bedgebury Pinetum. Forest Research, Farnham.

## Executive Summary

**Introduction:** Bedgebury Forest in Kent is managed by Forestry Commission England (FCE). It is a large site of 2,600 acres that offers miles of trails for cycling, mountain-biking, horse riding, walking, and running, as well as Go Ape and play areas. It also includes the National Pinetum, managed by FCE for the nation. The Pinetum is recognised as one of the most complete collections of conifers on one site anywhere in the world, and is a centre for international conservation.

**The aim of this study:** The Forestry Commission at Bedgebury was interested in understanding more about how its visitors use both the area covered by the wider forest, and the Pinetum. Thus the aim of this project was: To investigate the experiences and opinions of visitors to Bedgebury through a series of focus groups.

**The approach:** A qualitative methodology was identified as the most useful approach to understand, in detail, perceptions and experiences of those who visit Bedgebury. The overall approach included a mini-questionnaire, a walk around the Pinetum, with stops at agreed points, and an indoor focus group. The New Economics Foundation 'Five Ways to Well-being' framework was utilised throughout the study. This emphasises five aspects of life that contribute to people's well-being, namely: Connect with people; Be active; Be curious about your environment and be aware of how it makes you feel; Keep learning; and Give or Share your time and experiences with others.

**The participants:** Four groups were held at Bedgebury in September 2017. Each session lasted two hours. Twenty nine members of the public attended the four focus groups. The majority of participants were white, retired or looking after family / home, and were either in the 35-44 year old age group or the 65-74 year old age group. Eighteen of the participants had visited Bedgebury before.

**Key words used to describe Bedgebury:** The mini questionnaires contained a question asking participants to write down three words that came to mind when thinking about Bedgebury. This question was included at the start of the session and again at the end. Most words could be associated with the well-being themes 'Be curious', 'Be active' and 'Keep learning', only a few with 'Connect' and none with 'Give/share'.

**Reasons for visiting:** A lot of the reasons for visiting, and a lot of the activities that people engage in, relate to the wellbeing theme 'Be active'. The wellbeing theme 'Connect with people' emerged very strongly from the comments made when people were talking about why they visit. Comments also included many examples of how visiting Bedgebury fulfils the 'Keep learning' aspect of wellbeing, as people do seek out the information on labels and interpretation boards, and do like to explore the forest. When talking about the activities they do at Bedgebury, participant's comments also included aspects relevant to the well-being theme 'Be curious', as there were many references to things they like to see in the forest environment and how they feel.

**Contribution to well-being:** Responses to the question “How does visiting Bedgebury contribute to your well-being?” included comments about feeling at ease and finding it very peaceful. There was also a sense that it was a place to come to feel connected to other people. Overall, the comments illustrate extremely well how a place such as Bedgebury contributes to well-being, through enabling people to be active, connect with other people, be curious about the natural world around them, and be aware of how it makes them feel.

**Facilities:** Participants were encouraged to talk about their impressions of Bedgebury and the facilities on-site. There was much praise for the play areas. The visitor centre received unanimous praise and only positive comments. The aspect of the infrastructure that received the least positive comments was the car park.

**Paths:** Generally the groups were positive about the fact that there was a mix of footpath surfaces that included some stretches of path that could be used in all weathers and all seasons, with or without children, and with or without buggies.

**On-site interpretation:** People praised the small labels on individual trees. As for the larger interpretation boards, people liked them, appreciated them, and stopped to read them. For those with children old enough to read, understand and be interested, they were felt to be a valuable learning resource. Overall there was a sense that the on-site interpretation that is currently found at Bedgebury is mostly suitable and informative. However, while people positively engage with the learning materials, and the process of learning, they admitted they do not always retain the information and increase knowledge. Hence, there is scope for further investigation to demonstrate what media do lead to increased knowledge and awareness and over what timescale.

**Knowledge of Bedgebury Pinetum:** People had not heard the term ‘Pinetum’ before coming to Bedgebury. Understanding was relatively limited with some able to articulate that they knew it meant specifically evergreens, a range of pines and conifers.

**Suggestions for promotion:** The participants had various suggestions for different ways to promote Bedgebury to potential visitors. Google was mentioned numerous times, with participants saying Bedgebury needed to come up on Google when searching for what to do in the local area. There was a call for leaflets and other promotional materials to be placed in local schools and pre-schools to promote events or meet-ups for parents with children.

**Suggestions for interpretation:** As well as suggesting how to promote Bedgebury externally the participants had some ideas for different ways to provide interpretation on-site. Ideas included having a regular ‘spotlight tree’ feature with instructions about how to find it and then some “nuggets” of information about it. Another suggestion was for information on some interpretation boards about other aspects of the ecology such as fungi and soils, so that it is not just about the trees but imparts a greater understanding of the whole ecosystem.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. Bedgebury Forest

Bedgebury Forest is managed by Forestry Commission England (FCE). It is a large site of 2,600 acres that offers miles of trails for family cycling, mountain-biking, horse riding, walking, and running, as well as Go Ape and adventure play for all ages and abilities. Bedgebury Forest facilities were developed and improved a decade ago when a new visitor centre and lake were created, the car park extended and cycle trails established, for families and for mountain bikes, including a black trail for expert mountain bikers. There is a bike hire facility on site which also runs cycling activities that people can sign up for, such as 'Real Spin' classes. Walking routes were also improved and a children's play area created. More recently the Gruffalo trail was created with a Gruffalo sculpture. The stickman trail was also created and ran for a year, and concerts are held at Bedgebury along with other regular events and activities. There are also orienteering routes on site. Learning is important, and learning activities are led for school and other groups. The site is large and houses the National Pinetum as outlined below.

## 1.2. The National Pinetum

FCE manages the National Pinetum at Bedgebury in Kent for the nation. The Pinetum is recognised as one of the most complete collections of conifers on one site anywhere in the world, and is a centre for international conservation. It contains over 12,000 tree specimens growing across 320 acres including rare, endangered and historically important specimens. It also provides a beautiful setting to enjoy peaceful walks and picnics giving enormous pleasure to all those who visit it all year round. This is brought to life with seasonal trails which highlight particular points of interest amongst the collection. A network of paths throughout enables easy access for all levels of ability.

Since its inception in 1925, the aim of Bedgebury Pinetum has been to grow as many species of conifers as the climatic conditions will allow. As such it has established collections of threatened species that act as living gene-banks and as a genetic resource for future conservation programmes. Indeed many of the older plantings were collected from forests that no longer exist and may represent lost genotypes.

Bedgebury is at the forefront of horticulture and currently holds several national collections of conifer cultivars and genera.

The scale and quality of Bedgebury Pinetum's conifer collection make it an ideal 'safe site' for the International Conifer Conservation Programme (ICCP) run by the Royal Botanic Gardens Edinburgh. The ICCP aims to promote the conservation of conifers through in-situ conservation work, ex-situ conservation work, research and education. Bedgebury Pinetum plays a vital role in conserving the genetic diversity of conifers, particularly those from temperate rainforests. Through its work, Bedgebury Pinetum

supports, protects and is increasing the population of UK Red Data Book species: those species of flora, fauna and fungi identified as in need of particular conservation effort.

Bedgebury is a key partner in Fauna & Flora International's Global Trees Campaign, and makes a major contribution to the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation co-ordinated by Botanic Gardens Conservation International (BGCI). It does this by collecting endangered seeds from all over the world to bring back to Bedgebury for propagation.

More than 2000 tree and shrub seedlings are grown at Bedgebury every year, some of which are planted on site. Surplus seedlings and plants are distributed by Bedgebury to other botanic gardens and safe sites across the United Kingdom (UK) and Europe, and it also provides seeds to the Millennium Seed Bank.

The public can become Friends of Bedgebury Pinetum (FoBP). As members they support Forestry Commission England's management of Bedgebury, gain free admission to the site all year (i.e. do not have to pay a car park charge), receive regular magazines and get admission to other arboreta and gardens.

### 1.3. Aim and objectives

The Forestry Commission at Bedgebury is interested in understanding more about how its visitors use both the area covered by the wider forest park, and the Pinetum as described above. There is scope to investigate the knowledge that visitors have of the Pinetum and their ideas for promotion of the site and on-site interpretation.

Thus the aim of this project was:

- To investigate the experiences and opinions of visitors to Bedgebury through a series of focus groups.

In order to achieve this aim, a number of objectives were identified:

- Investigate existing visitor's and newcomer's views of Bedgebury;
- Question visitors about their onsite activities and reasons for visiting;
- Explore visitor's impressions of the site and how it contributes to their wellbeing;
- Examine visitor's opinions of the onsite interpretation and facilities;
- Develop understanding of how visitors think FCE could promote the site;
- Present suggestions for promotion and interpretation.

## 2. Methods

In order to meet the aim and objectives of the study, specific research questions were developed. A qualitative methodology was identified as the most useful method to understand in more detail perceptions and experiences of those who visit Bedgebury. Rather than run a focus group on its own; time was spent at Bedgebury *in situ* with participants via a forest walk, during which stops were made at specific points to discuss particular elements such as interpretation and impressions of the site. The overall approach was designed to include a mini-questionnaire, a walk around a route identified through agreement between FCE and Forest Research (FR), with stops at agreed identified points, and an indoor focus group.

### 2.1. Research questions

The study has the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of Bedgebury of regular visitors, infrequent visitors and new comers, and of Friends of Bedgebury, RHS or National Trust members, and parents with pre-school children?
2. What is current public understanding of the Bedgebury Pinetum, the tree collection and conservation work?
3. What are people's suggestions for how the conservation work might be promoted at Bedgebury?
4. What are the perceptions of participants of the interpretation and the general footpaths and footpaths surfaces currently available at Bedgebury?

### 2.2. Sample structure

Four groups were held at Bedgebury in September 2017. The sample was developed based on key visitors of interest to FCE. FCE was able to recruit the participants through its extensive networks. Approximately 12-15 people were invited for each session, with the desire for approximately eight people to attend each session, thus making the groups a manageable size. The following group types were recruited:

- Heritage<sup>1</sup> and Friends of Bedgebury Pinetum<sup>2</sup> (FoBP)
- Heritage but not FoBP

---

<sup>1</sup> 'Heritage' is defined as having membership of organisations such as Royal Horticultural Society or National Trust

<sup>2</sup> Joining the Friends of Bedgebury Pinetum means that members pay a yearly fee and get free access to the site. They can visit as often as they like and receive a newsletter and notice about events and activities on site.

- Families with pre-school children and that are FoBP
- Families with pre-school children but not FoBP

In all, 29 participants were involved in the focus groups, with the two family groups bringing along their children (Table one).

**Table one: Bedgebury focus group participants**

Focus group	Male	Female	Children
Group 1 Heritage and FoBP	3	1	0
Group 2 Heritage not FoBP	0	6	0
Group 3 Families with pre-school children and FoBP	0	9	2 babies and 5 pre-school children
Group 4 Families with pre-school children not FoBP	4	6	3 babies and 8 pre-school children

Each session with participants lasted two hours. At the beginning of each session participants were given an overview of the research and told what would take place on the day. They were given two consent forms to read and sign (if they were happy to get involved), the first consent form was for the adults participating and the second was seeking permission from adults for photographs to be taken that might include their children.

## 2.3. Mini questionnaires, forest walk and focus groups

The mini questionnaire on arrival asked participants to write three words that came into their mind when they thought about Bedgebury; it asked them if they were a member of the FoBP, if they had visited Bedgebury before, how often they visited, which part of the site they visited e.g. the forest, the pinetum or both, and how far they travelled to get to Bedgebury. Once the consent forms and mini-questionnaire were complete the FR researcher and an FCE member of staff set off on the forest walk.

Pre-determined stops were made at four points along the route which was about 1.5 miles in length. These stops included discussions of:

1. Whether or not previous visits had been made to Bedgebury and what motivated those who had visited before to come back to Bedgebury;

2. Footpaths and footpath surfaces – to what extent participants took notice of them, whether they like particular types of surfaces;
3. On-site interpretation – to what extent they look at and take notice of the on-site interpretation;
4. First impressions of arriving on site – to explore how welcoming the site appears, and the layout.

After the walk, which took about an hour, drinks and cakes were made available in the FCE meeting room and the focus groups were run there. During the focus group discussion the FCE staff member who had joined the walk gave a five minute overview of the work related to the Pinetum and its conservation work and status as a tree collection. Participants were then asked to what extent they were aware of the role of the Pinetum and how it might be better promoted. At the end of the focus group participants were asked to complete a second mini-questionnaire asking them to write down three things that came into their mind about Bedgebury now, i.e. after the walk and focus group, and it also asked for demographic information on age, gender, disability and ethnicity. The following incentives were provided to the different groups:

Incentives for heritage visitors included free:

- Tour with an expert from the Pinetum tree team
- Refreshments
- Return day pass for friends and family
- Visit for non-members
- Guidebook

Incentives for visitors with pre-school children included free:

- Refreshments
- Gruffalo pack / toy for the children
- Day admission pass for friends or family
- Visit for non-members
- Guidebook

The questionnaires, focus group protocol and map of forest walk route are included in appendices (Appendices 1, 2, 3, and 4).

## 2.4. Five ways to wellbeing

The New Economic Foundation developed the five ways to wellbeing framework. These five ways to well-being were developed from the evidence gathered for the Government Foresight report on Mental Capital and Well-being which was published in 2008<sup>3</sup>.

---

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/mental-capital-and-wellbeing>

The five ways to well-being framework includes the following:

- **“Connect”** with the people around you.
- **“Be Active”** - Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Discover a physical activity that you enjoy.
- **“Be curious”** - Catch sight of the beautiful. Notice the changing seasons. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling.
- **“Keep Learning”** - Try something new.
- **“Give/share”** - Do something nice for a friend or a stranger..

This framework has been used throughout this piece of research.

## 2.5. Data analysis

### 2.5.1. Mini-Questionnaires

Data were recorded in Excel. Due to sample size, analysis was limited to deriving descriptive statistics and using charts to illustrate the findings.

### 2.5.2. Focus groups

With the participant’s consent, the focus groups and outdoor stops were recorded using a digital voice recorder, and subsequently transcribed in full. All transcriptions were imported into NVivo<sup>4</sup> (V8) and coded. Coding is an interpretive technique used to organise qualitative data and to identify key nodes (or themes). A coding framework is normally used and can be based on a combination of pre-specified high level themes (or nodes), and inductively-derived themes. These themes are labelled with a node that provides an indication of what is included within that theme. Inductive coding requires the researcher to carefully read the data and identify themes within it<sup>5</sup>. For this project, a coding framework was designed, based on the focus group protocol and the research questions. These provided Tier one and two nodes. These are shown in table two.

**Table two: Coding framework showing tier one and two nodes**

Tier one node	Tier two node
<b>Knowledge of Pinetum</b>	
	Suggestions for promotion
	Change in knowledge
<b>Visiting Bedgebury</b>	

<sup>4</sup> A software package designed for analysing qualitative data

<sup>5</sup> Braun, V. & Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3: 77-101

<b>Tier one node</b>	<b>Tier two node</b>
	Reasons for visiting, activities, motivations
	With whom
	Comparison to other places
	Parts of Bedgebury visited
	Frequency of visiting
	History of visiting
<b>Perceptions of Bedgebury</b>	
	Impressions
	How has it changed
	Contribution to wellbeing
<b>Promotion, communication, interpretation</b>	
	Onsite signage and interpretation
	Other ways to communicate or interpret
<b>Opinions of infrastructure</b>	
	Facilities
	Paths
	Buildings

### 2.5.3. Key words from questionnaires

A process of affinity mapping was used to analyse the key words used by participants to describe Bedgebury to facilitate clustering and presentation of the results. Affinity mapping is a process that presents a way to express common ideas without quantifying them. Affinity mapping can be useful when there is a need to organise and summarise a large amount of qualitative information, and present a coherent story from the thoughts and opinions of a diverse group. Through this process, key words were categorised and assigned to the five ways to well-being themes.

### 2.5.4. Quotes

In some cases in the sections that follow, direct quotes are provided to illustrate the points being made. No quotes are attributed by name to any individual but are in all cases distinguished by group.

## 2.6. Challenges and benefits of the methodology

Data gathering outdoors can be a challenge due to weather, wind (making voice recording difficult) or other issues. Part of the first focus group took place in the rain, however the group was able to shelter under trees when the pre-determined stops were made. The two family groups that brought their children were a challenge with the need

to keep the children interested and the discussions being interrupted when the parents needed to attend to their children. Fortunately the method was flexible to allow for adaptation. For example, the third group had their focus group discussion at the children's play area as the children were very keen to stop and play. This meant the focus group discussion was more fragmented with participants moving in and out of the discussion as they checked on their children. The fourth group, which was also a family group, did have the focus group discussion in the FCE meeting room, however the noise from the 11 children in a small space was substantial, and the recording of the session was somewhat difficult to understand. It is worth noting, however, that the families would not have been easily reached if they had not been able to bring their children with them.

Using a qualitative approach allowed for a more detailed exploration of the research questions. Taking a walk around part of the site and stopping to discuss key issues worked well and brought the issues to people's minds, e.g. they did not have to remember what an interpretation board said as they could look at it and discuss the balance of information provided. A FCE member of staff joined the walks and gave a five minute outline during the focus group sessions on the role of the Pinetum, and this gave all those who participated a much better idea of its work. They were also able to ask other questions as they walked round the site.

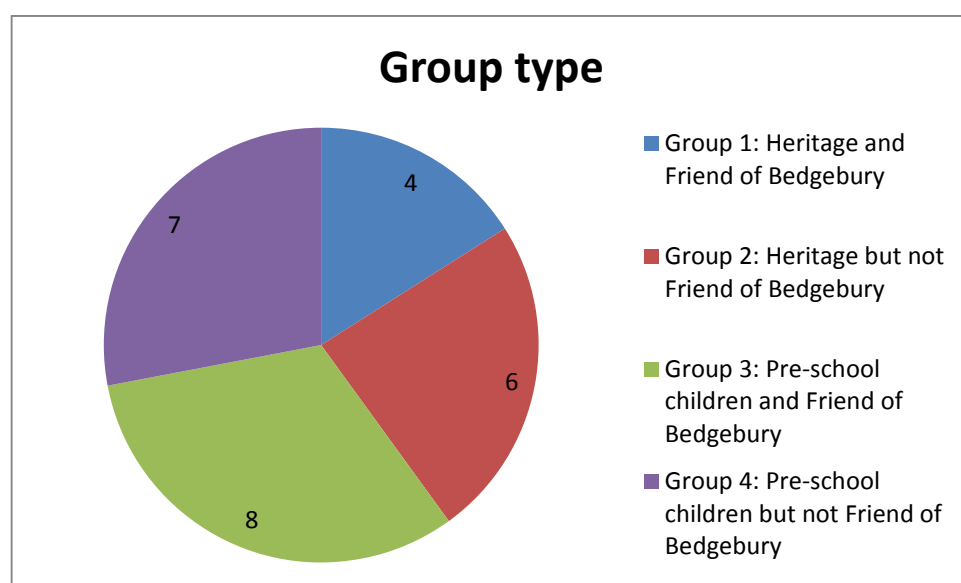


**Focus group participants discuss Bedgebury with staff from Forest Research and Forestry Commission England.**

## 3. The participants

### 3.1. The groups

There were between four to eight participants at each focus group event, with the largest being the group with pre-school children who were also Friends of Bedgebury Pinetum, and hence regular visitors (figure 1).

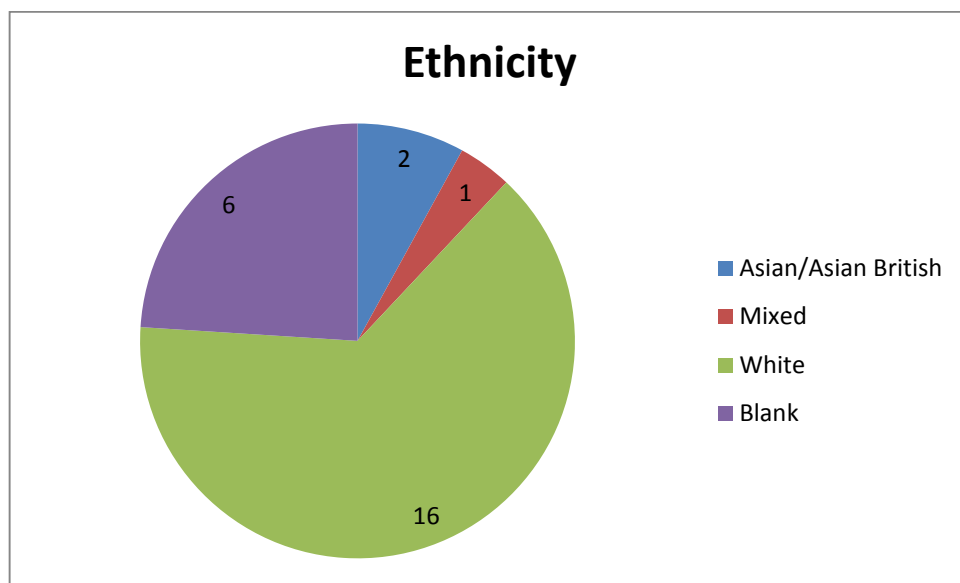


**Figure 1: The focus groups: Group types and numbers of participants**

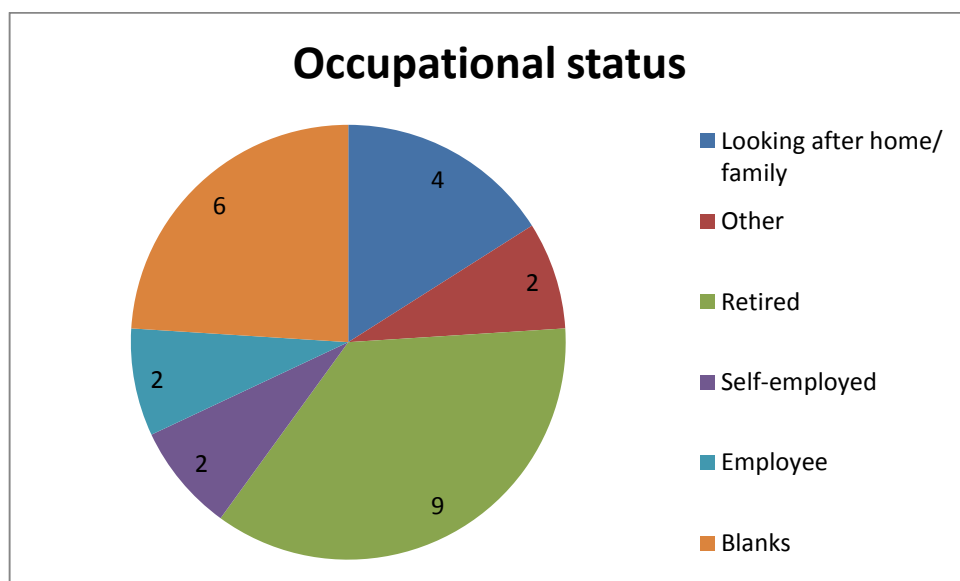
### 3.2. Socio-demographic characteristics

Twenty nine members of the public attended four focus groups at Bedgebury Pinetum in September 2017<sup>6</sup>. There were 22 females and seven males. The following charts illustrate the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants, including ethnicity (figure 2), occupational status (figure 3) and age group (figure 4). As can be seen, the majority were white, retired or looking after family / home, and were either in the 35-44 year old age group or the 65-74 year old age group.

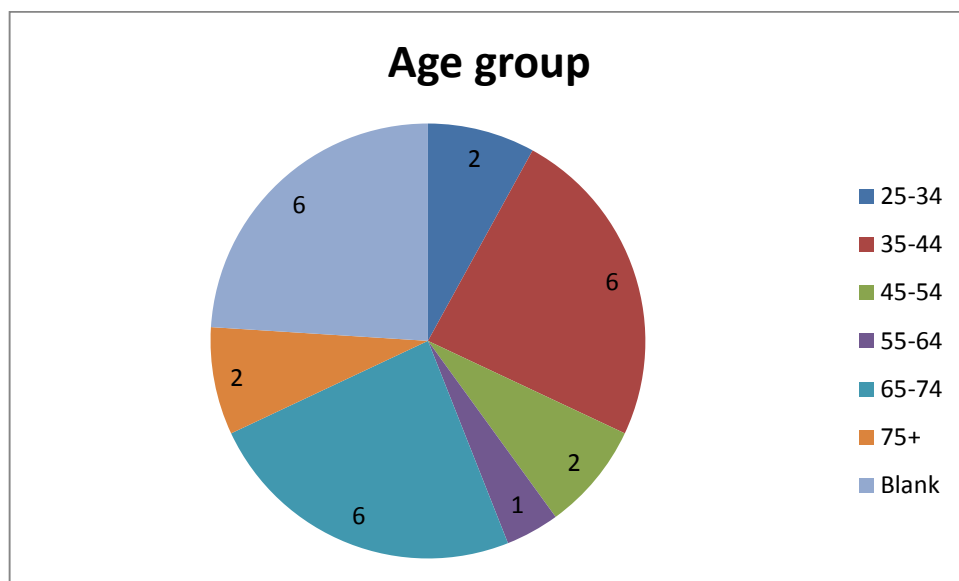
<sup>6</sup> Note that only 25 questionnaires were completed.



**Figure 2: Ethnicity of the focus group participants**

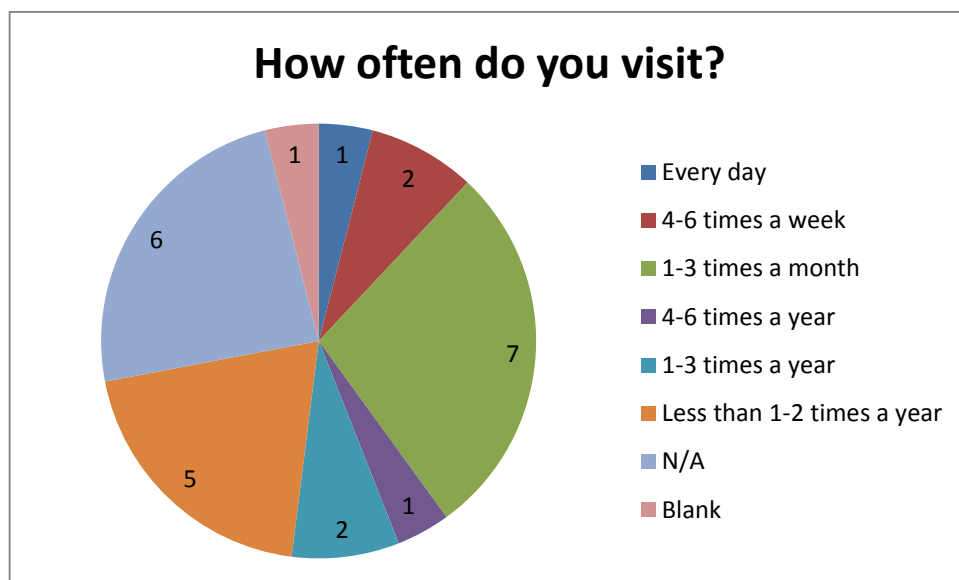


**Figure 3: Occupational status of the focus group participants**



**Figure 4: Age structure of the focus group participants**

Eighteen of the participants had visited Bedgebury before. More than a quarter said they visited between 1-3 times per month (figure 5). More than a third said they visit both the Pinetum and Bedgebury forest. However, more than a quarter were unaware of the distinction between the two parts. To get to Bedgebury the majority travelled more than six miles.



**Figure 5: Frequency of visiting Bedgebury**

### 3.3. The key words

The mini questionnaires contained a question asking participants to write down three words that came to mind when thinking about Bedgebury. This question was included at the start of the session and again at the end. These data were content analysed, and affinity mapping was used to cluster words under the 'five ways to wellbeing'<sup>7</sup> themes of: 'Connect'; 'Be active'; 'Be curious'; 'Keep learning'; 'Give/share'. (See table three). As can be seen, most words could be associated with the themes 'Be curious', 'Be active' and 'Keep learning', only a few with 'Connect', and none with 'Give/share'. There appears to be some change from before the session to after the session with more words relevant to the theme 'Keep learning' after the session.

**Table three: Key words used by participants to describe Bedgebury before and after the sessions**

Five ways theme (number of words/phrases)	Key words from participants (number of times mentioned, if more than once)	
	BEFORE THE SESSION	AFTER THE SESSION
<b>1 Connect (with people) (2)</b> Connect with the people around you.		Connected Family
<b>2 Be active (32)</b> Go for a walk or run. Step outside. Cycle. Play a game. Discover a physical activity that you enjoy.	Delightful walk Walking (6) Walks (2) Cycling (2) Outdoors (2) Fresh air (2) Picnics Gruffalo (3) Gruffalo trail Playground Play areas Playtime Fun (2)	Gruffalo (2) Gruffalo trail (2) Play area Relaxing (2)
<b>3 Be curious / take notice (74)</b> Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Notice the changing seasons. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling.	Nature (2) Close to nature Trees (12) Conifers Forest (3) Woods Wildlife Birds	Contrived landscape that is natural Vibrant (nature) Trees (2) Leaves Green Autumn (2) Colours (2) Peaceful (2)

<sup>7</sup> [https://issuu.com/neweconomicsfoundation/docs/five\\_ways\\_to\\_well-being?viewMode=presentation](https://issuu.com/neweconomicsfoundation/docs/five_ways_to_well-being?viewMode=presentation)

Five ways theme (number of words/phrases)	Key words from participants (number of times mentioned, if more than once)	
	Green (2) Seasons Autumn colours Colour Evergreen Peaceful (4) Peace Tranquility Calm (2) Diverse Varied Versatile Variety Beautiful (3) Invigorating Relaxing (2) Wholesome	Tranquility Calm At ease Varied Beautiful (3) Wonderful Shapes Textures Views Clean Fresh Multi-faceted Come-backable
<b>4 Keep learning (11)</b> Try something new.	Interesting Adventure	Interesting Exploring Exploration (2) Adventure Conservation Environmental Scientific Professionalism
<b>5 Give / share (0)</b> Do something nice for a friend or a stranger.		

## 4. Visiting Bedgebury

### 4.1. Reasons for visiting and activities engaged in

People were encouraged to explain what activities they engage in when they visit Bedgebury, and why they like to visit (for those who had been before). Their responses have been analysed according to the Five Ways to Wellbeing framework.

#### 4.1.1. "Be active"

A lot of the reasons for visiting, and a lot of the activities that people engage in, relate to the wellbeing theme "Be active". Examples of the activities people said they go to Bedgebury to do are: walking, cycling, playing in the playground, and in the play areas, the trees and rhododendrons, picnicing, bird watching, collecting leaves and other items from the forest, walking the dog, doing Go Ape, trying the mountain bike trails, joining the park run, following the Gruffalo trail, attending concerts, and playing tree bingo. Thus, the activities are a mix of organised and informal or self-directed activities.

#### 4.1.2. "Connect with people"

Although the key words from the mini questionnaires did not commonly relate to the wellbeing theme "Connect with people" this theme did emerge very strongly from the comments made during the focus groups and walk round the Pinetum. Almost all comments included reference to family members – most frequently children, husband and dogs but also others such as nephews – or friends. People either took their visiting friends to Bedgebury for a trip out, or met like-minded friends at Bedgebury, and commonly this was on a regular basis. As one group four (Families not FoBP) participant said *"It's a place for meeting friends in the summer holidays with all the kids, to do the forest playground"*.

#### 4.1.3. "Keep learning"

Again, the key words from the mini questionnaires only infrequently related to the wellbeing theme "Keep learning". However, the comments made during the focus groups included many examples of how visiting Bedgebury does in fact fulfil this aspect of wellbeing. Participants in group one (Heritage FoBP) noted how they like the diversity of trees, especially when there are labels so that they can try to learn the names of those trees. Another participant in the same group commented that his son is very academic and loves reading all the labels. Participants in groups three and four, with young children, made numerous comments about how their children love to collect leaves and other forest objects and use them to learn about the trees and the forest. There were also frequent references made to going off to explore the forest, across many participants, including those with and without young children. For those without young children the exploration aspect of their visits involved continually finding new paths and tracks through the forest, and going 'off-piste'. The mention of exploration by those

with young children referred to letting the children run off amongst the trees and shrubs, hunt for items such as conkers, and use leaves to learn about the trees. In one case, items were used by the child to create forest artwork.

#### 4.1.4. "Be curious"

When talking about the activities they do at Bedgebury focus group participant's comments also included aspects relevant to the well-being theme "Be curious". This theme is summarised in the following text: "Be curious. Catch sight of the beautiful. Notice the changing seasons. Be aware of the world around you and what you are feeling".

Relevant comments from participants in this case include *"we like the diversity of trees"* from a couple in group one (Heritage, FoBP). From group four a parent stated that her child likes to pick up leaves and other bits and pieces. From group three (Families FoBP) one comment was *"a lot of my friends are still in London, so they love a bit of a country walk when they come down for the weekend"*. A parent from group three had participated in tree bingo with her daughter and commented that *"my daughter absolutely loved that"*. Again from group three (Families FoBP), a mother stated that they try and get their young son interested in the tree and how it feels and the shapes of trees. She also mentioned that they get him to touch the *"swishy grasses or the prickly bits"* and get him to think about which is softer. Another parent said her daughter loves finding the different pine cones and leaves and "collecting stuff". In another case children would go looking for conkers, they would go off and explore, and pick up logs and different spiky leaves, and according to the parents *"they loved it"*. One more example from the same group (three) was that *"there's a massive tree with a hole in it and they like hiding in that"*. Overall, these examples show how visiting Bedgebury may contribute to experiencing wellbeing through encouraging both adults and children to be curious about the world around them and how it makes them feel.

## 4.2. Well-being benefits of visiting Bedgebury

Participants were also asked explicitly how visiting Bedgebury impacts on their well-being. Responses have been analysed according to the Five Ways to Wellbeing framework presented earlier.

#### 4.2.1. "Be curious"

Responses to this question included comments about feeling at ease and finding it very peaceful. This included comments about it being peaceful because you cannot hear the road. However, in a slightly different vein, one of the older participants in group one (Heritage, FoBP) stated that after a busy life he is now slowing down and Bedgebury is a place that allows him to do that. It was not only the older participants who appreciated the peace and calm of Bedgebury, however. One parent explained in some detail:

*"Part of the reason I enjoy coming is because it's so peaceful and when everything is manic at home, you come here and it just absorbs the noise. If everyone is having a shout and a wail it doesn't matter so much because it all just disappears and it calms".* (Group three, Families FoBP)

Participants did not just experience calmness through the peace and quiet but some also stated that they found the colours calming and peaceful. Thus, participants referred to how they experienced Bedgebury through different senses, from always having *"something lovely to rest your eyes on"*, to hearing birdsong and *"the wind through the trees"*.

One of the focus group participants described how she comes mid-week sometimes, when it is quieter, and this allows her to *"take a deep breath and it's calming"*. As another participant said, one of her friends describes the experience as having an air bath. Another participant said that *"anything you can see that is beautiful is good for the soul"* demonstrating his belief of the connection between what can be seen in the natural environment at Bedgebury and personal well-being arising from that. There were also various statements about feeling connected to or at one with nature.

#### 4.2.2. "Connect with others"

There was also a sense that it was a place to come to feel connected to other people. One quote in particular explained this, as one participant said:

*"And don't forget we're in the older age group when people may be on their own and therefore to come out to a place like this and get air and see other people around you, that is very important".* (Group two, Heritage non-FoBP).

#### 4.2.3. "Be active"

There were also some more practical, physical examples of how Bedgebury was thought to contribute to health and wellbeing. For example, one parent liked the fact that the playground was not next to the lake (as it was elsewhere) so she did not have to worry about her child so much but could let him play. Some of the older women felt safe because they could walk in the forest either alone or just two of them without feeling it was too remote.

In terms of Bedgebury contributing to physical health and well-being there were a few comments about the fact that they (and the children) do not notice they are walking up hills because of the distractions around them. This was therefore an excellent way to get exercise. Another parent described the experience of visiting as being *"very wholesome"*. She went on to explain that you do not need tablets or have to pay for anything else to feel well and get health benefits for the family from being active and relaxed. One female participant felt very strongly the importance of a place like Bedgebury for keeping the children active. As she said:

*"It's so important the children get out, there is so much TV and xbox, I want them to get out and love it, exercise, getting messy is so important". (Group four, Families, not FoBP)*

Finally, one of the participants shared a personal story about recovering from a serious bout of flu and how visiting Bedgebury helped. In her words:

*"A couple of years ago I had proper flu and I was quite poorly and it took me a long time to get over it as it does with flu, and I felt really quite depressed in my spirits and so tired I could barely stagger around. [My husband] was brilliant and he brought me to Bedgebury every day and I could stagger out of the car and we would walk a short distance. It's what kind of got me through it, it really did, because just arriving you felt better". (Group one (Heritage FoBP))*

Overall, the comments and examples illustrate extremely well how a place such as Bedgebury contributes to well-being, through enabling them to be active, connect with people, be curious about the natural world around them and be aware of how it makes them feel.

### 4.3. Barriers to visiting

There were also comments about why some people are put off, or might be put off visiting, and why some of the focus group participants were not regular visitors or had not been before.

#### 4.3.1. Car park / admission charge

A participant in group two (Heritage non-FoBP) stated *"I've heard that a lot of people have been put off by the car parking charges"*. As another person put it *"the charge for a car is a bit anti"* (Group two (Heritage non-FoBP)).

This was echoed by a participant from group four (Families non-FoBP) (who had not been before) who said that they had driven past Bedgebury several times, so they knew about it, but that the cost has restricted them from coming. He said *"We hadn't come just because we couldn't afford to sometimes, although we would have liked to have done"*.

Another participant noted that they had chosen alternatives because of the admission cost, stating that there are other places that are cheaper to visit. However, there was a small amount of discussion about the yearly FoBP membership fee being better value, (given all the activities and facilities on site), if people visited the site enough times to make membership cost effective. Not all of the participants were aware of the cost of the yearly FoBP membership option.

#### 4.3.2. Lack of awareness about Bedgebury and what there is to do

For others, it was the distance (in one case, a forty minute drive) that had put them off visiting. This was particularly because with young children the parents did not want a drive of that distance without being sure that it was worth coming with the family.

In a similar vein, another parent said that she did not have the information to know what there was for the children to do at Bedgebury, and it was important for her to know what there was that was going to entertain them before paying the admission charge. She had not been able to find enough information about what there would be for them to do and so had not come before.

Related to this, there were some comments that people had not found it very easy to find information on the website.

Others were keen to stress that there were no particular barriers that had prevented them from visiting Bedgebury, they just had not heard of the place before the focus group (group four: Families, non-FoBP).

#### 4.3.3. Being alone or a single parent

Another family-related reason for not visiting Bedgebury was that some parents are on their own with their children during the week while their partner is at work, and visiting somewhere like Bedgebury with more than one child can be difficult (Group three (Families FoBP)).

One of the older participants from group two (Heritage non-FoBP) said she would not visit on her own because she would find it boring with no-one to talk to, hence this could be another barrier for some people on some occasions.

#### 4.3.4. Need to appeal to all age groups and life stages

There was some discussion about who wants to go out and enjoy the countryside at Bedgebury and look at different trees, with some being of the opinion that it is more the retirees interested in such activities rather than younger generations. Hence they considered life stage might be a barrier preventing some from visiting.

#### 4.3.5. In conclusion

Overall, these comments point to a range of barriers and potential barriers preventing people from visiting Bedgebury. In some cases the Forestry Commission might be able to do things differently to overcome the barriers.

### 4.4. Intention to return to Bedgebury

One of the barriers to visiting described above was that some people were unaware of what there was to do at Bedgebury. Attending the focus group proved to be a successful way of removing such a barrier by raising awareness of what was on offer. It led to

some of those participants who were new to Bedgebury or infrequent visitors expressing intentions to come back, now they were more aware of what was on site.

Two friends from group two (Heritage non-FoBP) stated that they like walking together and that they *"ought to remember that this is here to come for a winter walk"*. This was particularly because their local common can get quite muddy and they were pleased to note that Bedgebury had some good paths through the Pinetum that would be better when it was wet. They also discussed the idea of hiring bikes and learning to ride a bike again, now that they knew that was on offer and had an idea of the terrain.

Another participant from group two (Heritage non-FoBP) said that what they had learnt that day that would encourage them to come back was the variety of things to do and number of things of interest. Specifically she referred to the birds and different plants that were interesting to see.

Generally, there was an acknowledgement that Bedgebury has a lot to offer and that *"you could spend the whole day here easily"*, something that they had previously been unaware of (Group two (Heritage non-FoBP) participant).

There were similar comments from a group four (Families non-FoBP) participant who said that previously he *"wasn't aware of how much there was for families"*. He continued *"I'm one of these people that says 'let's go and explore', and I think after seeing it today we're going to explore more"*.

One participant expressed interest in coming back for the autumn colour, having seen the extent and variety of trees at Bedgebury.

A participant from group three (Families FoBP) said *"hopefully I will be able to come by myself and do a bit more running"*.

Overall, these comments demonstrate how some barriers can be overcome if people are given the opportunity to discover more about Bedgebury and realise what opportunities it presents to them. This emphasises how important promotion and access to information is for potential visitors. These issues are discussed in greater depth in later sections of the report.

## 4.5. Comparison to other places

Participants were asked to name other places that offered an alternative to Bedgebury. Other local places that were mentioned by the participants included Scotney Castle, Bewl Water, Wakehurst Place, Penshurst Place, and Sissinghurst.

Comments about the comparison were mainly positive in favour of Bedgebury. Primarily this seemed to be that other places were more limited in terms of what there was to do and see, and thus how much time could be filled. This was particularly the case for those with children who felt that Bedgebury was much more likely to occupy their children for longer, and that the play areas were much better.

## 5. Opinions of infrastructure

Participants were given the opportunity to comment on different aspects of the infrastructure at Bedgebury.

### 5.1. Facilities

There was much praise for the play areas including the fact that there are additional play areas besides the main one that some people do not know about, meaning it is possible to find less busy play facilities for the children if you know where to look.

However, one parent in group three (Families, FoBP) who relies primarily on the main play area, reported experiencing the problem that the *“kid’s areas are absolutely rammed most of the time when the schools are out”* suggesting a shortage of these types of facilities for the demand at peak times.

Other facilities that received particular mention were the cycle runs, which according to one participant (who was quoting his son) are superior to runs elsewhere in the world. Finally, a couple of participants praised the fact that there are quite a few seats around, and were particularly pleased that they could always *“find a little bench somewhere... even in off-piste places”* (Group one, Heritage and FoBP).

### 5.2. Car park

One aspect of the infrastructure that perhaps received the least positive comments was the car park. Comments included someone from group four who had found it slightly confusing on arrival and not clear how close to the visitor centre she could park. Someone else agreed, saying that she was unsure if they were going the right way to get to the meeting place for the focus group.

Another participant was concerned that they could not see any parent and child parking spaces, and others agreed that they had not noticed any, only the disabled parking places. Others were concerned that not having designated parent and child parking spaces near to the edge of the car park and the visitor centre would mean having to walk with their children through the open car park, something that concerned them. Concerns were also expressed about needing wider parking spaces for getting children in and out of child car seats, and how difficult it could be, especially when the car park is busy, and people park too close to each other.

### 5.3. Buildings

Receiving unanimous praise and only positive comments was the visitor centre. Comments were that it is *“wonderful”*, *“fantastic”*, and that *“the job they’ve done is amazing”*. The positive comments continued that the architecture *“doesn’t hurt your*

eyes", and *"it just all fits in really nicely"*, with one participant saying *"I like the building very much, it's very good"*.

## 5.4. Paths

Of particular interest to the FCE team at Bedgebury is visitor's opinions of the paths around the site, so this was included as a separate area of questioning in the *in situ* walk around the site with each group.

### 5.4.1. Positive comments

Generally the groups were positive about the fact that there was a mix of footpath surfaces that included some stretches of path that could be used in all weathers and all seasons, with or without children, and with or without buggies. This gave some participants a welcome alternative to other more local areas they walked where paths would become too muddy during winter months.

The mixture of path surfaces seemed to be particularly important to some who said they wanted it to feel a *"little bit wild"* and that they *"don't want it too smooth"*. For some they even felt that having surfaces that were a bit bumpy for a buggy was fine and all part of the fun. One woman from group three (Families, FoBP) commented *"my son notices and says 'stones' if the path is stoney, listening to the sound of the buggy over the bumps"*. This was part of the experience for him. Hence some visitors do not want it all too landscaped and like it being rugged in places.

Others though were more pleased about the fact that there are 'good' paths for their children to ride their scooters and good paths from the carpark so that they do not have to worry about their children getting all muddy.

There was a notable distinction between the groups in their opinions about footpaths and the kind of concerns and comments they had. Thus one comment from group two (Heritage non-FoBP) was that at their age they have to watch where they are putting their feet and so do notice footpath surfaces. There was a feeling from some members of this group that at Bedgebury, some paths are good but some are not.

However, overall, it seems that many of the participants were happy that Bedgebury has the balance right between providing "good" paths for those who want them, while not detracting from the fact that it is a forest.

### 5.4.2. Negative comments

Nevertheless, there were some other opinions expressed that were not wholly positive. One participant in group one (Heritage, FoBP) with some slight mobility restrictions was conscious of the sudden change in surface at a particular place near the lake when the path alters from a boardwalk to become loose gravel. In his opinion this was not acceptable and he considered that the paths were not up to scratch at this point.

Another not so positive comment from a different participant in the same group (Group one (Heritage FoBP)) was the problem of getting a wheel chair back up to the car park from the lake. At this point the path is rather steep and it has put her off bringing some elderly neighbours for a visit, as they are wheelchair users.

Another parent said that it is difficult for her daughter on some paths as she currently rides a bike with stabilisers.

An additional issue raised about the paths related not to the surfaces but about finding the way around the site. One regular visitor said she had been approached numerous times by people who were confused about how to get to the café.

### 5.4.3. What parents want

Some members of some of the groups were clear that they wanted pushchair friendly paths, and that this was a key motivator for choosing somewhere to go with their children.

## 5.5. On-site interpretation

Overall there was a sense that the on-site interpretation that is currently found at Bedgebury is suitable and informative. People praised the small labels on individual trees and while they would like them on all trees, they accepted that this was not realistic. Some more keenly hunted out the labels than others and it was evidently an important part of their visits to the Pinetum. Some of the participants with children also encouraged them to try to learn tree species using the tree labels, but in some cases where the children were still too young this was not yet possible and in fact the younger ones prevented them getting the most from the information. Interestingly those regular visitors who expressed the strongest motivation to find the small labels also acknowledged with a laugh that they would be unlikely to remember the names. This suggests that while people engage with the process of learning, and value the opportunity to read information on-site, this does not always result in actual learning and new knowledge. While they engage with the information provided in a positive way, if the aim is to increase knowledge, there may need to be other ways to achieve that.

As for the larger interpretation boards, there were some similar comments, that is, people like them, appreciate them, and do stop and read them. For those with children old enough to read, understand and be interested, they were felt to be a valuable learning resource. Something that seemed to be particularly liked was the information about how parts of particular trees are used and in what every day items. This helped people to make a connection between their own life and the tree before them if they understood how that specific species was utilised. This appealed to both adults and children.

Importantly, it was felt that having access to the interpretation boards connected people to each other as well, as it was a shared activity of reading and learning together, for example, for a grandparent and grandchild.

Participants who were interested felt that the interpretation boards contained just the right amount of information and that if people wanted to know more they could go away and investigate (perhaps using Google was one suggestion) themselves.

One further aspect of onsite information that was mentioned was the displays in the visitor centre relating to the seed collection. This was felt to be a useful addition to the outdoor information.

Some of the relevant quotes are below:

*"My little girl probably doesn't really care but my little boy always wants to know what they say and he's really interested in what they're used for. One of them somewhere says that it's used in nappies or something and he's really interested in that".* (Group three (Families FoBP))

*"I've got 2 boys. We come round, do this walk. My eldest is really academic, he loves the little signs and information".* (Group one (Heritage FoBP))

*"It's for all ages, nothing intellectual but there's an awful lot of information".* (Group one (Heritage FoBP))

*"I think it's exactly the right level, it's informative enough, to spark your interest and you can carry on afterwards".* (Group one (Heritage FoBP))

*"And it tends to link things to daily life, like this wood is used in such and such, to provide a cure for such and such, so you've got a connection".* (Group one (Heritage FoBP))

*"It's all interesting and it's nice to read them with the grandchildren".* (Group two (Heritage non-FoBP)).



**Focus group one (Heritage, FoBP) participants discuss interpretation at Bedgebury**

## 6. Impressions of the site

### 6.1. Impressions of Bedgebury

Those who were new to Bedgebury, including those who may have visited a long time ago but not recently, and those who were regular visitors were all able to comment on their impressions of the site.

For some this amounted to one word superlatives, such as glorious, fantastic, and beautiful.

For others, their impressions were of the “*amazing and very unusual species*” of tree to be seen.

First impressions, on approaching from the north, driving past the boundary, and arriving at the carpark, were generally positive, with participants mentioning the lovely views, seeing the woods in the distance, the different shades of the trees, the variety of trees, the colours, the lake, the beauty of nature, and the “*fantastic visitor centre*”.

However, some of the comments recorded above in the ‘facilities’ section about arriving in the car park for the first time, are obviously not so positive.

Other participants commented with surprise about the scale of the whole site and how vast it was, and the fact that you can see on arrival that it is quite a big site was of particular importance to numerous participants. For one visitor this piqued her curiosity on first visiting, making her want to get out, explore, find out how much there was to see, and try to work out where they could go. As one participant said, “*once you’ve parked up, you definitely want to go for a walk. It’s inviting*” (Group four, Families non-FoBP).

Others had a growing realisation on the day of the focus group that it could be a good place to come in all weathers as it would be atmospheric and misty on wet days.

Another thing that made a positive impression on the participants, and that they commented on, was that they could see the site is well looked after, and that it looked really well maintained and clean. They also noted that the staff are always really friendly and people say hello.

When asked about her impressions of Bedgebury one participant recalled one specific occasion a few months earlier when she saw deer near the entrance. Her reaction at the time (she reported) was something like: “*Oh my god, look at that. It’s lovely, a magical little place*”. While this was a one off event for the person concerned, it is the kind of experience that can leave a lasting impression on people.

The final comment of note in this section came from one of the participants in group one (Heritage FoBP), a long time and regular visitor to Bedgebury, who said that, on

arriving, *"I kind of feel it's mine, here I am in my garden as it were"*. This clearly emphasises the strength of connection to place and sense of belonging.

## 6.2. How has it changed?

Participants who had been visiting Bedgebury for years were able to describe changes that they had witnessed. In most, if not all, cases, they were of the opinion that the changes were for the better.

Participants could recall when there were no facilities apart from some toilets and a small honesty box where they parked. However, their memories are that it was *"a lovely place to wander around... it just felt like a piece of old parkland with these unusual trees in"* (Group one, Heritage FoBP). Nevertheless, they still felt that *"everything that has been done really enhances it"* and that *"it's much more interesting"*.

Changes and new additions that the participants were aware of and mentioned specifically included the cherry avenue, a lot of additional planting, the labels on the trees, and the facilities such as the visitor centre and car park.

For one participant who had been a long time ago but not recently, commented that it was very different to how she remembered it.

The range of comments emphasises how the experience of change is very different to those who visit regularly and see the change as it evolves and those who return after a long absence and are struck by the extent of change. Nevertheless even with these different perspectives on change the impression was of changes for the better.



**Group two: Heritage, non FoBP**

## 7. Participant knowledge

### 7.1. Knowledge of the Pinetum

The participants were asked about their knowledge of the Pinetum and what it is. People had not heard the term 'Pinetum' before coming to Bedgebury. They had heard of arboretum which is perhaps a more common term, but not Pinetum. Understanding was relatively limited with some able to articulate that they knew it meant specifically evergreens, a range of pines and conifers. Some were unsure of the pronunciation and very few seemed to think of conservation activities as being part of what it is about. However, there was some limited grasp of the idea that it represented a national collection of pines. Some of the participants had previously learnt about the work at the Pinetum through previous visits to Bedgebury, in particular through joining a guided walk led by a member of staff. During that they had learnt about the seed collecting and conserving rare tree species.

One participant from group three (Families FoBP) noted that she is a member of Bedgebury and that they are good at providing updates about their expeditions through Facebook. She added *"I don't think it would make me more likely to visit but it's nice to know that that is part of what they do here"*.

This is a noteworthy comment and if it is a viewpoint widely held then it may be worth questioning how much resource should be dedicated to letting people know about the work at Bedgebury if the primary interest is in attracting more visitors. Additional research is required to establish how many people would be more likely to visit if they were made aware of the work of the Pinetum.

### 7.2. Change in knowledge

Following a short talk on the day of the focus group about the Pinetum and the work undertaken at Bedgebury, the participants were asked whether they had just heard anything new about the Pinetum. In most cases, most of what they were told on the day was new to them, as might be expected, given the limited knowledge expressed above. In particular the participants learnt about the international work of the Pinetum, seed collection from around the world, and the fact that many of the collection are not native trees. For one of the participants in group four (Families non-FoBP) she saw the value of the site for the home education of her child, stating:

*"it's quite interesting to know that you've got ones from other places as well and it adds a whole new element for the home education for us to come and explore that. We can do projects on that and then it will be nice to be able to then see ones from different countries because I'm not going to be traipsing them around the world to go tree spotting any time soon, so that would be really good"*.

This aspect of the Pinetum being able to 'bring the world' to people's doorstep could therefore be a valuable asset to promote.

The change in knowledge also led participants to realise that the site had even greater value in more ways than they had previously realised, and that it added to the interest. The realisation of the long term work and the value of that also struck people.

Another aspect of the talk that struck people was the realisation that it was the national Pinetum for the country.

Overall, it led one participant in group two (Heritage non-FoBP) to state "*We've learnt a lot today I think*".



**Group two (Heritage, non FoBP) participants discussing the on-site interpretation**

## 8. Participant suggestions

Given the limited extent of people's pre-existing knowledge of the Pinetum and the work being carried out Bedgebury staff wanted to know if people had ideas for promotion of the site.

### 8.1. Suggestions for promotion

The participants had various suggestions for different ways to promote Bedgebury to potential visitors.

Included in the suggestions were the need for more advertising, perhaps using local newspapers, and at a local cinema (the Kino at Hawkhurst).

Google was mentioned numerous times, with participants saying Bedgebury needed to come up on Google when searching for what to do in the local area.

Other technology-related suggestions included a request for a mobile friendly website, and a website with a lot more photographs of what there is so that families know what to expect and to help them decide if it is a good place to take the children. A few of the participants wanted more information about what they can do with smaller children.

The groups with children had specific suggestions, including taking displays along to local nurseries to explain what they do at Bedgebury and what there is to do. There was a call for leaflets and other promotional materials to be placed in local schools and pre-schools to promote events or meet-ups for parents with children. For home educators it was suggested that publicising events through the home education community would be very effective.

As one of the barriers to visiting was thought to be the cost of the carpark one attendee suggested that a good promotional tool would be to give members some free tickets to share with friends. This would allow more families to try out the site as a place to visit and the feeling was that once people had been once and realised how much there was to do they would want to join too and become more regular visitors. Hence free 'taster sessions' was thought to be a good idea.

### 8.2. Suggestions for interpretation

As well as suggesting how to promote Bedgebury externally the participants had some ideas for different ways to provide interpretation on-site.

Ideas included having a regular 'spotlight tree' feature with instructions about how to find it and then some "nuggets" of information for children about how high it grows or how far the seeds travelled to get to Bedgebury. Participants thought you could spotlight a particular tree when it is at its best in terms of the time of year. By continually

changing the 'spotlight tree', perhaps every two weeks, people could be encouraged to come back again and again.

Another participant was keen to have more information about the history of the site, including a timeline.

Another suggestion was for information on some interpretation boards about other aspects of the ecology such as fungi and soils so that it is not just about the trees but gets across a greater understanding of the whole ecosystem.

There were other specific aspects of information that some people suggested could be provided through interpretation boards or other means. For example, someone was keen on the idea of talks about issues such as working with other countries (China was mentioned) for conservation purposes and suggested promoting this through Facebook.

Others wanted boards with more pictures that would be more appropriate and appealing for smaller children.

One participant requested more maps of the site around the place, near some of the key paths and the car park.

There was some discussion about having QR codes on the boards to provide a means of getting additional information. One parent was very enthusiastic about the idea as a means of getting his sons engaged and interacting with the topic.



**An example of the tree labels used within Bedgebury Pinetum**

### 8.3. Suggestions for activities

The participants in groups three and four who attended with their young children had many ideas for activities to get children engaged, and also comments about activities that already run that they were very positive about. These included:

- tree planting,
- tree bingo,
- the Gruffalo trail,
- a forest school for pre-schoolers,
- a wildlife trail to follow,
- something that is *“exercise based that gets them out and walking, and doing a bit of jumping and skipping”*,
- a teddy bear’s picnic,
- worksheets for a scavenger hunt,
- half term activities.

They wanted materials on site that they could pick up from the visitor centre (so that they did not have to think about bringing extra things with them) and use to go on a tree hunt or something similar. Overall, they said that it is about keeping the children occupied, as illustrated by this quote:

*“For us it’s just keeping the kids active, because as soon as they’re bored and start whining, then you’re kind of hurrying through and having to get back to the car. So the more distracted you can keep them, and happy, then the longer we will be here”* (Group three: Families, FoBP).

## 9. Conclusions

### 9.1. Key points

- Participants – both new visitors and infrequent visitors – had little idea of what the site had to offer, and were pleasantly surprised at how much there was to see and do.
- There was little realisation of the importance of the Pinetum as a tree collection and the conservation work.
- There was a strong and positive appreciation of the site by all, of its size and what it has to offer.
- Realisation that the site can offer activities and opportunities for a wide range of visitors but some room for improvement.
- The on-site interpretation was viewed largely positively.
- Participants expressed positive opinions of all facilities, the visitor centre, and generally of the paths.
- There were some concerns about the apparent lack of parent and child parking spaces in the car park, and about accessibility to and from the car park for wheelchairs (given the steep gradient down to the lakeside).
- There were concerns about the cost of car parking to non FoBP members – this was seen as a significant barrier to some.
- While people positively engaged with the on-site interpretation, they admitted that they do not always retain the information. Thus, there is scope for additional investigation into what media are most effective for helping people to retain information and knowledge about the site.

### 9.2. Suggestions for promotion

- Participants said there was a need for better targeting of existing information at specific groups.
- More locally targetted promotion was suggested, focussing on local media and other local leisure facilities.
- Outreach to pre-schools was called for – parents are reluctant to come if they do not have a clear idea in advance of what there is to keep young children occupied.
- Use of online media – Bedgebury needs to be more readily found through Google searches.

- Mobile friendly website was requested.
- There was a suggestion for free car park tickets for FoBP to share with their non-member friends.
- Participants were unsure whether promoting the Pinetum and the work there would bring more visitors to the site, and were more focused on promoting the wider Bedgebury forest.

### 9.3. Suggestions for onsite interpretation:

- Participants requested more information if possible;
- They wanted to see more individual trees labelled;
- They wanted the large boards to contain additional information about the wider ecosystem and place of the tree within that;
- They wanted more information for smaller children, to make it accessible for all children.
- There was a suggestion for a regular and constantly changing 'Spotlight Tree'.

# Appendix 1. Consent form and mini-questionnaire

## Bedgebury Pinetum and Forest research project

This research is part of a study by Forest Research for Forestry Commission England. The research focuses on public perceptions and experiences of visiting Bedgebury Pinetum and Forest. Participation in the research is voluntary and you can stop your participation at any time.

We would like to **record** the discussion with digital audio-recorders. This helps us to remember what you actually said in your own words. Any material we may use from this session in a report or presentation is **anonymised**; that means we will not use your name. We follow data protection laws in how we use and store the data.

If you have any questions about today's research, you can speak to the researcher directly (details below).

*Please tick*

Please read the following statements carefully	Yes	No
1. I understand that my participation is <b>voluntary</b> , and that I can leave at any stage and do not have to answer any/all the questions.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that the discussion will be <b>audio-taped</b> , for us to remember what you said in your own words.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I understand that any material used will be <b>anonymised</b> ; that means we will not refer to your name, unless we have your permission to do so.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I agree to participate in the study and for the data to be stored and analysed in line with Forest Research's code of research ethics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I understand that the information gathered today will be treated and stored in line with principles of the Data Protection Act 1998.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I am happy for my photograph to be taken and used as part of the research reporting	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Signature: .....  
 .....

Date:

Your Name in block letters:

.....

*Contact for questions about the research*

Dr Liz O'Brien, Forest Research

Tel No 0300 067 5700

[Liz.obrien@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:Liz.obrien@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

**Please turn over the page**

Please write down three words that come into your mind  
when you think about Bedgebury

**1)**.....

**2)**.....

**3)**.....

**Are you a member of the Friends of Bedgebury Pinetum?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**Have you visited Bedgebury before?**

☐ Yes

☐ No

**How often, on average, do you visit Bedgebury?**

☐ Every day

☐ 4-6 times a week

☐ 1-3 times a month

☐ 4-6 times a year

☐ 1-3 times a year

☐ Less than 1-2 times per year

☐ Not applicable

**Do you usually visit?**

- ☐ The pinetum
- ☐ The forest
- ☐ Both
- ☐ Not aware of the difference

**How far do you have to travel to get to Bedgebury?**

- ☐ 0-2 miles
- ☐ 3-5 miles
- ☐ 6-10 miles
- ☐ Over 10 miles

## Appendix 2. Mini questionnaire - end of session

### Bedgebury Pinetum research project

Please write down three words that come into your mind when you think about Bedgebury now

**1)**.....

**2)**.....

**3)**.....

Please add your initials here.....

### Demographics – Are you? (add X to appropriate box)

**1. Sex:** Male ☐ Female ☐

**2. Age:** 16-24 ☐ 25-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55-64 ☐  
65-74 ☐ 75+ ☐

### 3. How would you describe your ethnic background?

☐ White ☐ Mixed / multiple ethnic groups ☐ Asian / Asian British

☐ Black / African / Caribbean / Black British

Other ethnic group (*please specify*).....

**4. Are you a registered disabled person?** Yes ☐ No ☐

**5. Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months?**

Yes, limited a lot ☐ Yes, limited a little ☐ No ☐

**6. Are you?** (tick most appropriate category you belong to:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Working as an employee     | <input type="checkbox"/> Retired                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-employed or freelance | <input type="checkbox"/> A student                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Long term sick or disabled | <input type="checkbox"/> Looking after home or family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Job seeker / unemployed      |

# Appendix 3. Bedgebury Research participatory walking focus group protocol

## **Aims of research**

1. What are public perceptions of Bedgebury for visitors and infrequent or non-visitors?
2. What are current public understandings of the Bedgebury pinetum, the tree collection and conservation work?
3. What are people's suggestions of how the conservation work might be promoted at Bedgebury?

## **Equipment needed**

Dictaphone/batteries

Consent forms and demographic forms.

Pens/clipboards for writing on forms

Cards for 3 words to describe Bedgebury

## **Topic Guide and moderator's questions:**

The sessions will be split between two elements:

1. Shared walking activity in the pinetum for approximately 40-45 minutes
2. Focused discussion in Bedgebury classroom after the walk (including a 10 minute presentation by a Bedgebury staff member on the pinetum and the conservation work at Bedgebury .

## **Introduction**

- Thank you for coming. Introduce self, colleague (if applicable), outline that I am from FR which is part of FC and we are involved in a research project. The overall focus of the research is to explore people's experiences of Bedgebury and their awareness of the pinetum.
- Outline how the session will be run.
- Outline that people are free to say they do not want to participate or can leave at anytime. We would like to record the conversation indoors and outdoors and use

the recording for research purposes, but nothing you say will be attributed to you personally, everyone will remain anonymous. [check this is okay with everyone].

- Ask participants to fill in consent forms giving their permission for recording/photos.
- Ask participants to write down three words that describe Bedgebury for them (on a card and add their initials to the card).
- Start walk

### Outdoor questions while on walk

#### Stop 1

##### Qu1. Have any of you visited Bedgebury before?

If yes

- When did you first visit?
- What do you usually do when you're here?
- Do you keep to certain areas of the forest? Why?

If not visited

- Are there particular reasons for that [prompt – didn't know of it, not interested, not got round to it]
- Are there any barriers to visiting Bedgebury [prompt – public transport, distance, not aware of site, not interested, don't want to visit alone, not sure what to expect]

##### Qu2. What motivates you to /keep coming / what would motivate you to come again?

**Qu3. When you first enter the site what are your first impressions?** [prompt – do you feel this is a welcoming site, looks interesting/not interesting – something new to see each time, feels well laid out, do you feel it gives information you need to make the most of it]

#### Stop 2

*Stop at a specific interpretation board in the pinetum (need to agree which one and stop at the same one each time)*

##### Qu4. Do any of you stop to read the interpretation boards like this as you walk around the site?

- What makes you stop to read them or not stop? [prompt – interested to learn more about the site, want to know interesting facts, learn more about trees, learn more about conservation or not interested, want to do my activity and relax]
- Does this type of interpretation catch your interest?

- What does capture your interest / what might you like to have information on? [prompts – anything other than boards e.g. apps, info elsewhere on site]
- Would you just stop once and never again or more than once?

## Stop 3 and 4 at different surfaces

*Stop at specific path surfaces (including board walk)*

**Qu5. As we go for our walk we are walking on different footpath surfaces. Do you ever take notice of the type of path surface as you walk around on site in this visit or previous ones? Why?**

What kind of footpath surfaces do you like walking on or find it easy to walk on?  
[prompt: how important is it to your visit, do you take any notice of the path surfaces? Or only when they are damaged / impacted by the weather]

## Indoor questions

**Qu6. Now that we have been for our walk, what would you say are your overall impressions of Bedgebury as a site?** [prompt – got a range of things to do, nice place to visit, somewhere to bring others]

**Qu7. Is there a comparable place to Bedgebury to visit for a day out in this area** [prompt – Scotney castle, Kew, Thorpe park, Wakehurst place etc]

**Qu8. “Are there any impacts of coming to Bedgebury on your sense of well-being?”**

- See what the initial response is to this question - allow people to say whatever they like, but, obviously be prepared to explain what we mean by wellbeing, ie a person’s mental and physical health, sense of belonging and satisfaction with their environment and community.
- Follow up with prompts if needed for the five ways to wellbeing, ie:
  - Being active – e.g. doing exercise, feeling healthier, being outdoors
  - Connect – e.g. connecting to nature or to other people
  - Share – your time, effort, skills, knowledge
  - Keep learning – to develop skills, do something new or different
  - Take notice – of beautiful / attractive spaces, look around you, observing wildlife

**Qu9. Are you aware of that Bedgebury is also the National pinetum?**

If yes

- What do you know about it or have heard about it? [prompt: know it’s a collection of conifers]
- How have you heard about it? [prompt – from the friends, from FC website, from interpretation on site, other]
- Have you heard the term pinetum before?

- Do you know that Bedgebury carries out tree conservation work in relation to conifers?
- Do you visit the site because it is a pinetum?

Talk by FCE staff member on the pinetum, its purpose and links to global conservation and importance for native wildlife e.g. dragonflies.

**Qu10. Does what you have just heard surprise you or not?**

Is it what you knew already

If yes is this because you weren't aware of the role that Bedgebury plays in conifer conservation and as a collection

**Qu11. Now you know this does it or will it affect how you view Bedgebury or what you do or where you go on site?**

**Qu12. When you usually visit do you come into the pinetum area or stay in the wider forest** or you don't distinguish between the two or it depends on what you want to do?

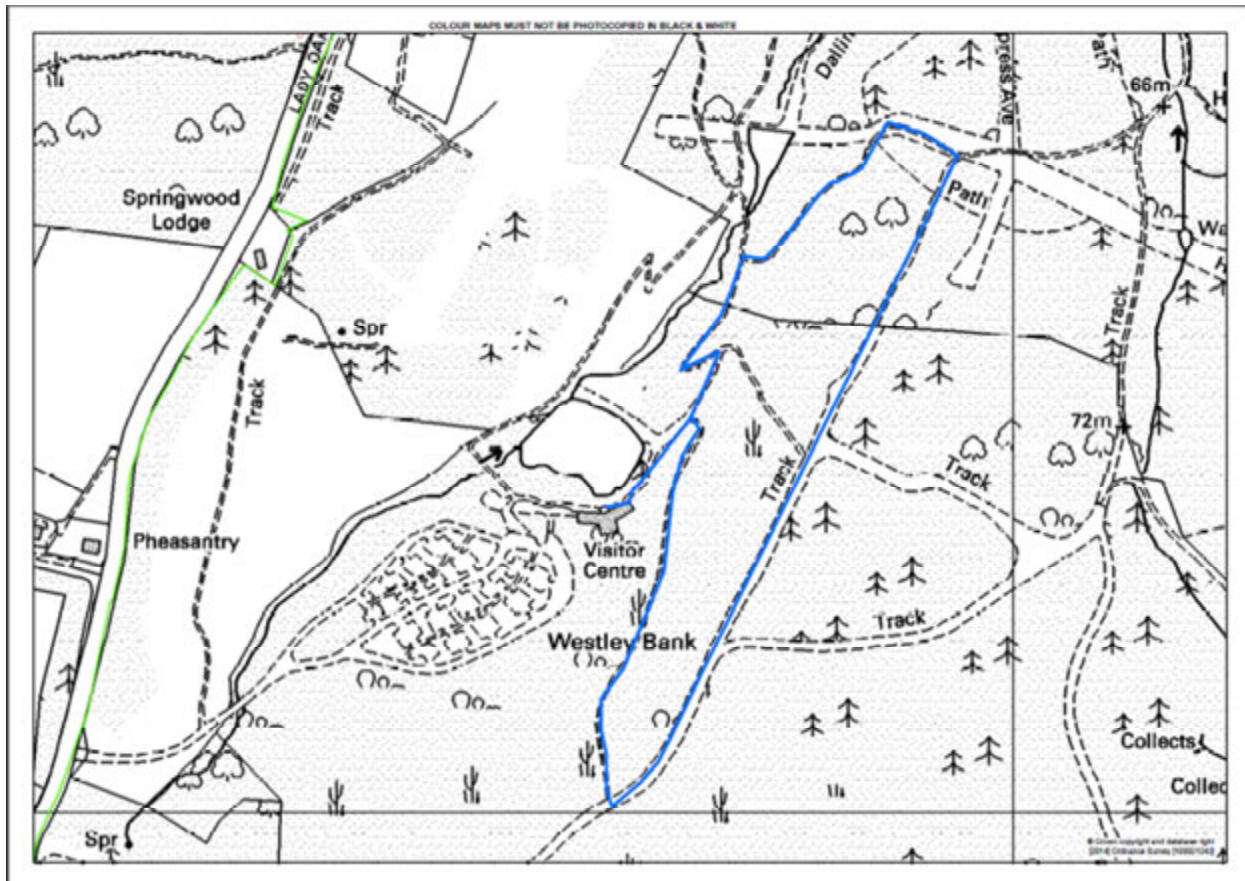
**Qu13. Do you have any ideas as to how you think the work of Bedgebury pinetum might be made known or better publicised?** [prompt - website, on site, through events, walks, talks, other]

**Qu14. What might encourage you to visit and take more notice of the pinetum and the work that is done to manage and conserve the collection?**

**Ending the focus group**

1. Check with the participants if there anything else anybody would like to say about Bedgebury and the pinetum that they haven't been able to so far
2. Thank all the participants warmly for their time and input, outlining the importance of getting the views of those who come to Bedgebury and those new to the site
3. Ask them to complete a short demographic questionnaire and ask them to write 3 words to describe Bedgebury after all they have heard today and initial it. [the idea is then to compare the 3 words at the beginning of the session and the 3 at the end]

## Appendix 4. Map of forest walk



Alice Holt Lodge  
Farnham  
Surrey GU10 4LH, UK

Tel: 0300 067 5600

Fax: 01420 23653

Email: [research.info@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:research.info@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)

**[www.forestry.gov.uk/forestresearch](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestresearch)**

Northern Research Station  
Roslin  
Midlothian EH25 9SY, UK

Tel: 0300 067 5900

Fax: 0131 445 5124

Forest Research in Wales  
Edward Llwyd Building  
Penglais Campus  
Aberystwyth  
Ceredigion  
SY23 3DA

Tel: 01970 621559

If you need this publication in an alternative format,  
for example in large print or another language, please  
telephone us on 0300 067 5046 or send an email request  
to: [diversity@forestry.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:diversity@forestry.gsi.gov.uk)