A sort of
Magical place

**People's experiences of woodlands
in northwest and southeast England**

Liz O'Brien   Social Research Group

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Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank all those members of the public and representatives from organisations who were involved with this research and gave up their time to be interviewed or become involved with the discussion groups. I would also like to thank Ian Willoughby, Marcus Sangster and Paul Tabbush who all made very helpful comments on the text. Thanks are due to Surrey Social and Market Research who organised and facilitated eight of the sixteen discussion groups and contributed to the analysis of the data.

Contents

Preface

As we move into a new era for forestry which puts further focus on sustainability issues, a greater understanding is needed of the interactions between people and woodlands. What do woodlands mean to people at a personal as well as a community level? What is our understanding of the ways in which people respond to the management and the creation of new woodlands and how are their views and uses of woodlands related to wider issues in their everyday lives? Also of importance is how forestry and environmental organisations view and respond to these new agendas that cover issues such as public participation, health and well-being, social inclusion and education. These are some of the questions explored in this publication through a specific research study which focuses on people's values for woodlands and organisational perspectives on people's use of woodlands. The work was undertaken in urban and rural areas in northwest and southeast England. Data were collected through a series of in-depth interviews with representatives from five organisations and sixteen discussion groups, with people from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds.

This publication aims to give land managers, policymakers and all those with a wide interest in forestry a picture of how people relate to woodlands and the natural environment. The Executive overview is provided to enable readers to obtain an overall understanding of the research and its conclusions. It provides the key research results, briefly outlines the main themes of the research and presents the main research issues. More detailed information is then provided in four main sections describing the specific themes of the research and incorporating quotes from the discussion groups and interviews undertaken. The first section, Background to the research, provides an overview of the importance of understanding the values and meanings people associate with trees and woodlands. This is followed by Research methods which outline the aims and objectives of the work and provide data on respondents and study locations. The third section, Research results, is divided into two parts. The first presents the main results from the public discussion groups in a series of themes. The views and constraints of woodland user groups are outlined and a summary of key issues are discussed in detail. The second part discusses the perspectives of the organisational representatives interviewed, focusing on issues of management, sustainability and education. The final section, Conclusions, comprises a brief discussion which brings together the main points of the work and relates these to other pertinent studies.

Executive overview

Purpose of the publication

Sustainable forest management (SFM) is the central aim of the UK National Forest Programme (Forestry Commission, 2003), and included within this are ideas of community participation. Environmental decision-making in this view includes stakeholders (those with a 'stake' in the outcome) and ordinary people in a process of debate. The nature of this debate is conditioned by the values, beliefs and attitudes that people bring to it. It makes sense to investigate these, to find out how they vary and how they relate to the existing environment and to childhood experiences. This publication provides the findings from a research project undertaken in 2002 for the Forestry Commission. There were two elements to the research: the first was to provide greater understanding of the values and meanings people associate with trees and woodlands in both urban and rural England, to look at the similarities and differences between urban and rural perspectives and explore the implications of the research findings. The second element focuses on exploring the views of forestry and environmental organisations about people's interactions with woodlands. Data were collected through a series of in-depth interviews and discussion groups; these are qualitative research approaches that help to provide a detailed understanding of how different groups of people talk about woodlands and what they mean to them. The research was carried out in rural and urban areas in the northwest and southeast of England as these two regions differ in terms of geography and also woodland cover, overall landscape type and socio-economic characteristics.

Having set the scene, this Executive overview continues by providing the key research results from both the discussion groups with publics[1] and also from the organisational interviews. The research themes are briefly outlined and provide a framework for the ways in which people talk about trees and forests. Finally the issues of importance for forest management raised by the key results and underlying themes are discussed.

[1] The term publics is used to denote plural diverse people rather than a homogeneous public.

Key research results: in-depth discussion groups

- Woodland and forest areas were valued for the escape they provide from everyday life and pressures. Groups focused predominantly on the mental and emotional benefits they received in woodlands rather than the physical benefits.

- Cost is particularly significant, especially for families, those on low incomes, the unemployed and non-car owners, who felt that visiting green space or woodland was a relatively inexpensive day out and was therefore an important outlet for them.

- One of the key gender differences across all areas and ages was the suggestion by the majority of women in the groups that they would not feel comfortable visiting woodlands alone.

- All groups expressed concerns about increasing development. In the urban groups there was a desire not to lose any green space to further business development while in rural areas the concern centred on housing and increasing numbers of people escaping from urban areas to live in the countryside.

- The urban groups tended to prefer managed countryside particularly near to where they lived, with clear trails and information about where they could go and possible walking routes. In rural areas respondents wanted to seek out the wilder more 'unknown' areas.

- All groups saw education as important although urban and rural groups expressed this differently. Urban groups specifically wanted children to learn about and have contact with nature so that they would have respect for it. In rural areas education was seen as an important element of learning and appreciating nature for all age groups.

- People living in urban and rural areas have different attitudes towards the countryside. For the urban groups from Southampton the countryside and specifically the forest were generally not part of their everyday lives but somewhere to be visited on special occasions.

- Publics views of trees and woodlands are related to wider issues over changes in society and concerns over environmental and cultural change.

Key research results: interviews with organisational representatives

- Providing public benefits and understanding what they are was seen to be a key focus across all organisations.

- Adequate resources to manage existing areas, create new woodlands and increase public benefits were thought to be more widely needed.

- Improving people's quality of life and well-being was seen to be a significant concept in sustainable forest management.

- Involving people and sustaining participation were acknowledged as important though difficult. It was seen as vital to engage with publics in both urban and rural areas.

- Partnerships between organisations and between organisations and communities were viewed as increasingly important and becoming more extensive.

- The development of markets for value-added products and the use of local timber were thought to be issues which needed greater consideration.

Research themes

The key research results are presented in outline form. The wider results from the discussion groups with members of the public are described within the main body of the publication, arranged in five themes that emerged from the analysis of the data. These themes are briefly described below.

Woodlands, green space and well-being

The issues in this theme related to people's general use of green space before the discussion was narrowed to woodlands specifically. While the physical exercise people often undertook as part of their use of woodlands was considered important, it was the mental and emotional well-being that had the greatest impact for them particularly in terms of reducing stress.

Conflicting and confused space

This theme related to confusion over who owns land, concerns about the loss of woodlands and green space to development, conflicts over anti-social behaviour and people's perceptions of their own and their children's safety in woodlands.

Management: public benefit, conservation and economic use

There was a widespread acceptance of the need for some form of management so that woodlands could be seen as welcoming and safe. Perceptions of wild and managed nature were discussed in terms of whether people saw active management or perceived an area to be neglected or abused. Woodlands were not associated with conspicuous expenditure and were seen as an inexpensive day out for many low-income groups.

Community, place and personal identity

This theme related not only to people's sense of personal identity but also to their identity as a member of their particular community. People's associations with the places they visited on a regular basis or while on holiday were felt to be particularly important as they were often places to which they had become emotionally attached.

Education and social learning

Education was seen as a key issue for many people particularly in urban areas where access to green space and woodlands could often be limited. This theme also related to perceptions of contact with nature, and many parents worried that children did not have sufficient contact with the natural environment.

Issues of importance in forest management

Equity

People who lack funds, personal transport and access to spare money (not only those considered to be below the poverty line) such as families with young children, the unemployed and those on low incomes felt that visiting woodlands was important because this was an inexpensive activity. The minimal cost of woodland use is an important factor for the above groups. Any charging for facilities should be carefully considered to ensure that these groups are not discouraged from using woodlands. This finding has implications in terms of social inclusion which is currently a strong focus for the government. Excluded groups within society generally have less wealth, less access to private transport and live in more degraded environments with less access to woodlands and natural spaces. The accessibility, location and low cost aspects of woodland use is important in this regard and this research supports recent work by Forestry Commission England to encourage and place greater emphasis on woodland planting in populated areas.

Personal safety

The women who took part in this research felt more insecure in woodlands than men and were less likely to visit these spaces alone. This reinforces previous research findings such as the work undertaken by Burgess (1995) for the Countryside Commission. There were slight differences in the strength of safety worries between urban and rural groups of women. Those in urban areas, some of whom had experienced harassment in open or green space, felt more insecure. When women discussed safety concerns they described how seeing other people, particularly rangers or wardens, made them feel more at ease. A case can therefore be made to develop a better understanding of how women can be encouraged to make better use of woodlands and the countryside. Voluntary rangers are being recruited in the New Forest to carry out conservation work and lead guided walks. One of the key unforeseen benefits of having these rangers, who will be identifiable because they are wearing Forestry Commission clothing, is that they may make some women feel more secure and therefore able to use these areas alone.

There were also widespread parental concerns about children's safety, with parents stating that they were unwilling to let their children have the sort of freedom that they had been given when young, to roam and explore woodlands and natural spaces. Challenge and play form an important part of a child's development allowing them to explore the outdoor environment and increase self-confidence. Childhood experiences of using trees and woodlands seem to have an impact on how people use woodlands as adults. People described going back to the places they had visited and valued as a child. This raises issues of the type of experiences young people today will have of using woodlands. Will the connection to trees and woodlands be lost and what will this mean as today's children grow into adults?

User groups

There were some differences in the attitudes to woodlands from people in urban and rural areas. For example people in urban areas tended to prefer clear signage and managed countryside while those in rural areas wished to seek out wilder and more unknown places. There were however fewer differences in this research across the urban rural continuum and more commonalties between similar groups such as families who wanted safe and secure access and retired people who wanted footpaths that were easy to use and quiet and peaceful recreation. Groups of users with differing needs such as families, young adults and older groups could have their needs specifically addressed by the Forestry Commission through activities, targeted information or improvements to infrastructure. There were also a number of constraints that affected people's use of woodlands such as anti-social behaviour by others, not knowing or being aware of possible places to go and concerns about ownership and possibly being confronted by landowners. Appropriate information on places to visit and possible activities to undertake as well as details of who owns particular sites is important in addressing some of these issues.

Social benefits

The ways in which people value trees and woodlands and the benefits people described covered health and well-being, trees as a symbol of nature and a healthy environment and the opportunities for socialising in woodlands and natural spaces. These diverse and wide-ranging benefits are different for different people. A wood is not only a physical location but can also be a place associated with specific memories and experiences and this can enhance its personal value. People may protest strongly when changes occur to the places that have particular value for them. Having a greater understanding of how people view and use the places that are important to them may help to reduce some of the conflicts that can arise when changes take place.

Participation

Public participation can inform policy and practice by allowing different groups of stakeholders and citizens to deliberate over issues of sustainable forest management. Participation needs to be a fair and transparent process so that different groups and individuals can see that their views and values have been considered and where appropriate incorporated into decision-making. The Forestry Commission and Forest Enterprise[2] are already carrying out a range of participatory work. Research and evaluation of participatory processes can provide insights that can help make good practice more effective.

Participation is also an educative and learning process in which organisations and publics can learn from each other about their different values and ways of viewing the world. For example, through community participation, a woodland group in Stockbridge, Knowsley was able to describe how their local woodland was used, by whom and why it was important to them. They in turn were able to learn from the local council and Mersey Forest personnel of some of the history of the woodland.

Education and learning

The people involved in this research felt that education and learning about the environment was an important topic. This was expressed differently by people in the urban and rural discussion groups. People in urban areas focused more specifically on the need to educate young people about the importance of the environment, particularly those in densely populated areas who had little opportunity to have contact with nature. They wanted to engender, particularly in young people, respect and interest in the environment. People in the rural groups focused more on life-long learning about nature and the environment.

One of the main aspects to emerge from this research was the significant relationship between people's views of trees and woodlands and wider issues of concern over development, loss of green space, having the time and opportunity to access woodlands and personal memories and experiences. Respondents' ways of viewing and interpreting the world around them provides the framework in which people assess their use of woodlands and wider environmental issues. Publics' values for woodlands and trees are a key element of SFM and without a greater awareness of these values organisations may continue to experience opposition over management of the environment.

[2] Forest Enterprise is an agency working as part of the Forestry Commission in England, Scotland and Wales to manage the public forests.

Background to the research

Sustainable forest management (SFM) derives from the Helsinki and Lisbon conferences on the protection of forests in Europe and is based on Bruntland's idea of Sustainable Development (WCED, 1987; Forestry Commission, 1998). The three pillars of sustainability are social, economic and environmental. However, to date, the social element of sustainability within forestry has not received as much attention as economic and environmental issues. People's values are an important component to be considered in SFM as they underline their actions and behaviours, they relate to every aspect of life and are concepts of long-term worth. Values are the standards that people use to judge their own and others' behaviour. What people value about trees and woodlands is an important consideration for forest managers in working towards SFM objectives (Table 1). Bengston (1993) has suggested that woodlands should be managed for *'multiple values rather than multiple uses'* in order to include a wide range of benefits that are not captured by solely focusing on the uses of woodlands. This approach could take account of different cultures and local variations, as it does not narrow values to a single type such as economic value. Economic research approaches to environmental valuation have been dominant over the past 20 years. However, recent developments in deliberative and participatory processes provide new ways of exploring people's values.

Table 1	Reasons for incorporating values into environmental decision-making (from O'Brien, 2003).

- Reducing conflict.
- Informing policy development.
- Providing a knowledge base and framework of the range and depth of values of diverse publics and stakeholders.
- Taking values into consideration in sustainable forest management is more likely to result in decision-making being seen as just.
- Inputting of values into decision-making processes provides people with a sense of local identity, increases feelings of involvement and engenders a sense of ownership associated with local environments.
- Highlighting the factors managers need to be aware of in relation to values.
- Providing an understanding of values that could be incorporated into participatory approaches to develop goals and opportunities for future management.
- Clarifying views rather than making decisions based on assumptions about what people value.

People may have many values in connection with woodlands, for example spiritual, recreational, cultural, economic, environmental and aesthetic, as well as the effects on health and well-being. As Lockwood (1999) has emphasised *'at present we only have limited understanding of individual's values, the ways that they are expressed, and the means of appropriately incorporating them into our decision-making process'.* Agenda 21 adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992 places issues of public participation at the heart of a sustainable environment (Irwin, 2001). The increase in participatory approaches in debates over environmental management emphasises the importance of incorporating values into decision-making. As Beierle and Konisky (2001) noted, if publics' values were unimportant, participation approaches would not be needed. However conflicts can arise over debates on what is or is not valuable about a particular wood, tree or forest and over expectations of appropriate behaviour in specific areas. Cheng *et al.* (2003: 91) acknowledged this by highlighting how views of the management of public and private land may differ *'although the species and size of trees may be identical to those on private lands, the meaning of cutting trees differs dramatically for public lands. The social and political processes that define what is and is not appropriate behaviour on public lands has altered the meanings of cutting trees in recent years'.*

Emotions and feelings often indicate people's values and sometimes can be forcibly stated. Emotional outbursts may be regarded by managers as something to be avoided as they may be considered irrational; they may also conflict with the values held by a particular manager or organisation (Creighton, 1983). Understanding publics' values for forests and woodlands and how they relate to them would help to enable public views to be taken into consideration in policy development and management and possibly reduce conflict. A deliberative and inclusive approach is needed to ensure that a wide cross-section of society's views are taken into consideration (New Economics Foundation, 2000). Deliberative democracy is founded on the belief that citizens can debate, reflect and make judgements about various issues through reasoned dialogue with others. Deliberative institutions such as in-depth discussion groups give people the opportunity to debate issues and consider their importance not only to themselves but also to wider society (O'Neill, 2001). People's values for woodlands are complex and multi-dimensional and cover aspects such as how woodland use makes them feel, as well as cultural, spiritual and historical associations connected to woodlands and trees. Values can also vary over time as people change and have new experiences or are influenced by others or the media. A new woodland ethic is needed which embraces the range of publics' values and accords them importance and relative status compared to environmental and economic benefits (Mather, 2001). This ethic requires a new narrative that tells the story of how woodlands are viewed by diverse publics in the 21st century.

Research methods

Aims

The research has two main aims:

- To provide greater understanding of the ways in which people value trees and woodlands and the reasons for this from both an urban and rural perspective.

- To assess forestry and environmental organisations' views of public interactions with woodlands.

Objectives

1 To explore, examine and describe the values held for woodlands and trees through a series of in-depth discussion groups.

2 To evaluate whether there are differences between the northwest and southeast groups and between urban and rural perspectives within each area or whether there are general values or issues that apply across all areas.

3 To examine how forestry and environmental professionals view public interactions with woodlands through a series of semi-structured interviews.

4 To explore the implications to the Forestry Commission of publics' values for woodlands and provide guidance for future management and policy development.

Qualitative social research

Qualitative research can be characterised by the challenge of obtaining in-depth understandings of the meanings and definitions people give to their everyday lives. Within the qualitative tradition in-depth interviews and discussion groups can be used to allow people to deliberate with others on the values and meanings they associate with woodlands and trees and the importance of these not only to themselves but to society as a whole. This approach provides people with the opportunity to talk in their everyday language about the topic under discussion and how it affects wider aspects of their lives. Respondents were encouraged to talk freely and were surprised and pleased that their views had been sought in this way (O'Brien, 2003).

Selected study areas and groups

Two areas were chosen for the study, the southeast and northwest of England (Figure 1). Classification by The Countryside Agency and former Rural Development Commission denotes Ambleside as remote rural, Heathfield as accessible rural, Southampton as urban, and Liverpool and Knowsley as metropolitan areas (NPI and JR, 2004). The percentage of woodland cover for the northwest is 6.8 per cent and for the southeast 14.1 per cent (Forestry Commission, 2001). These two areas provide contrasting socio-geographical locations. Both areas face multiple social, economic and environmental needs and problems. Both areas have coniferous and broadleaved woodland and private and public woodland.

Figure 1   Woodland cover in northwest and southeast England and study locations.

The types of respondents recruited for the discussion groups are outlined in Table 2 and include a variety of people from a range of ages and different socio-economic backgrounds. People were recruited on the street in the study areas with the use of a short questionnaire to assess whether they fitted specific criteria. So, for example, in recruiting mothers with young children the criteria included whether they had children under five years of age and whether they lived in Southampton. Other data such as what socio-economic background they were from, what age they were, how often they visited woodlands and whether they were part of any voluntary organisations were also collected. The study involved discussion not only with those who used woodlands frequently but also those who visited them occasionally. In total, 123 members of the public were involved in the research. The groups were mixed gender (apart from a group of mothers with young children from the Southampton area). Each discussion lasted approximately one and a half hours. All of the group discussions were recorded onto mini disc and transcribed verbatim. A topic guide, shown in Box 1, was used to direct the discussions.

Table 2	In-depth discussion groups.		
Location	Type of respondents	Age (years)	Number
Northwest discussion groups			
Stockbridge Village, Knowsley	Woodland group	45+	10
Stockbridge Village	Walking group	30–60	8
Liverpool	Residents	20–35	10
Liverpool	Residents	36+	10
Liverpool	Conservation volunteers	20–35	6
Ambleside, Lake District	Residents and students	21–35	6
Ambleside	Residents	36+	6
Ambleside	Ramblers (walkers)	36+	5
Southeast discussion groups			
Southampton	Residents	20–35	11
Southampton	Residents	36+	10
Southampton	Non-white ethnic minority group	20–40	8
Southampton	Mothers with young children	20–40	9
Heathfield, Sussex	Residents	20–35	7
Heathfield	Residents	36+	7
Heathfield	Conservation group members	21–55	4
Heathfield	Members of different interest groups	20–75	6

Discussion groups

A topic guide was used to guide the discussion groups and interviews with members of the public. The guide was not intended as a rigid format that had to be adhered to, and each group was allowed to steer the discussion to topics they considered to be important.

- Green space, public and private space, social, lonely and contemplative space, freedom/confinement, wilderness
- Well-being — feelings, moods, memories and associations; experiences, thoughts and emotions; physical, mental and emotional health (engagement of body and mind)
- Access and accessibility — practical, perceptual, fear/safety, welcoming, exclusivity, rights, knowledge of rights
- Crime and safety — perceptions of fear, feelings of safety/safe space
- Personal use and community use — collective values
- Meaning of the terms forest and woodland

Organisational interviews

The topics listed below differed for each member of staff depending on the objectives and priorities of each organisation. Questions were adapted accordingly and response was made to interviewees when they brought up topics which they considered to be important.

- Aims and objectives of the organisation
- Organisational change
- Key forestry and environmental issues in each area

Liverpool, Stockbridge Village and Ambleside: northwest

Liverpool is a large metropolitan area that has experienced significant economic decline over the past few decades. Many initiatives have been developed in the city by successive governments to try to rejuvenate the fortunes of the area, particularly since the riots in Toxteth in the early 1980s. Stockbridge Village in Knowsley is a large estate that has suffered from high levels of unemployment and many other problems associated with urban deprivation. Two of the Liverpool groups comprised general residents of the area while the third was made up of people who had been involved in a one-day volunteer conservation project. Two groups were recruited in Stockbridge Village, one of which was a ramblers group. The other was a woodland group made up of people who were actively involved in Littlewood. This was a woodland on the edge of the Stockbridge Village estate which suffered from numerous problems such as car dumping, evidence of drug taking and rubbish dumping. Littlewood was viewed as one of the most neglected woods in the northwest and a worst case scenario in terms of the woodlands' condition and its location on the edge of Stockbridge Village.

> Littlewood, it must be the most challenging piece of woodland in Great Britain. The ultimate urban challenge, it's so abused. **Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council**
> **Taken from the organisational interviews: see Research results, part 2.**

The Stockbridge woodland group was working with Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and The Mersey Forest to produce a management and development plan for the wood. The Mersey Forest is one of twelve community forests in England focusing on urban social and economic regeneration through woodland creation. One of the schemes of The Mersey Forest (which included the Stockbridge woodland group) is known as the Community Contracting Initiative (CCI) which brings groups together to undertake the long-term stewardship of woodlands within the Community Forest area. Involvement of local communities in looking after and planning the future of their local woodlands is seen as an increasingly important part of sustainable forest management.

Cumbria's rural economy has traditionally been centred around agriculture, food processing, mining and quarrying although this has changed in recent years as the service industry has grown to provide facilities for the many tourists who visit the area. The Lake District National Park covers an area of approximately 800 square miles (2072 km^2) and is one of the most scenic and widely visited parts of England. Jobs in the service industry are particularly high, at 76 per cent, in South Lakeland where Ambleside is located (Cumbria County Council, 1991). This is a small, attractive, but very busy town placed in a good location for tourists who want to visit central Lakeland.

Southampton and Heathfield: southeast

Almost half of the southeast region's population live in rural districts although much of the region is densely populated. The southeast is relatively affluent, compared to the rest of England, although there are pockets of deprivation in rural areas and particularly in some urban areas. Heathfield is a small market town in East Sussex surrounded by rolling countryside. It still retains links with the farming industry and this has shaped the surrounding countryside. The former Heathfield railway line has been turned into the 'Cuckoo Trail' for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders.

Southampton is a large urban area situated within easy reach of the New Forest. The city used to be a major shipbuilding and aircraft manufacturing centre. It has recently seen the development of a large waterfront shopping and entertainment centre which aims to bring tourists to the city. In the southeast a 'mothers with young children' group was brought together to discuss issues specifically related to using woodlands and green spaces with children. Southampton had the highest percentage of non-white residents, and a non-white ethnic minority group was brought together made up of people of different ethnic origins: Chinese, Asian and Mexican.

Census data for study locations

Census data are shown in Tables 3 and 4 for the chosen research locations and also for the wider areas in which they are situated. There are significant differences; for example the unemployment rate in Liverpool, Knowsley and Stockbridge is significantly higher than in the other areas, emphasising some of the economic problems that northwest urban areas are facing. These three areas also have a large proportion of residents who do not have access to a car. Generally, people in rural areas have greater access to the use of cars. In Stockbridge there are higher numbers of those with long-term illnesses. The non-white ethnic population was low in all areas except Liverpool and Southampton. Stockbridge Village is ranked at number 38 on the index of multiple deprivation where a rank of 1 is the most deprived ward in England and 8414 is the least. Ambleside's rank is 7915 and Heathfield is 7024, dramatically emphasising the disparity between these two rural wards and the Stockbridge Village ward. The index takes into account income, employment, health deprivation and disability, education, skills and training, housing and geographical access to services (National Statistics Online, 2003).
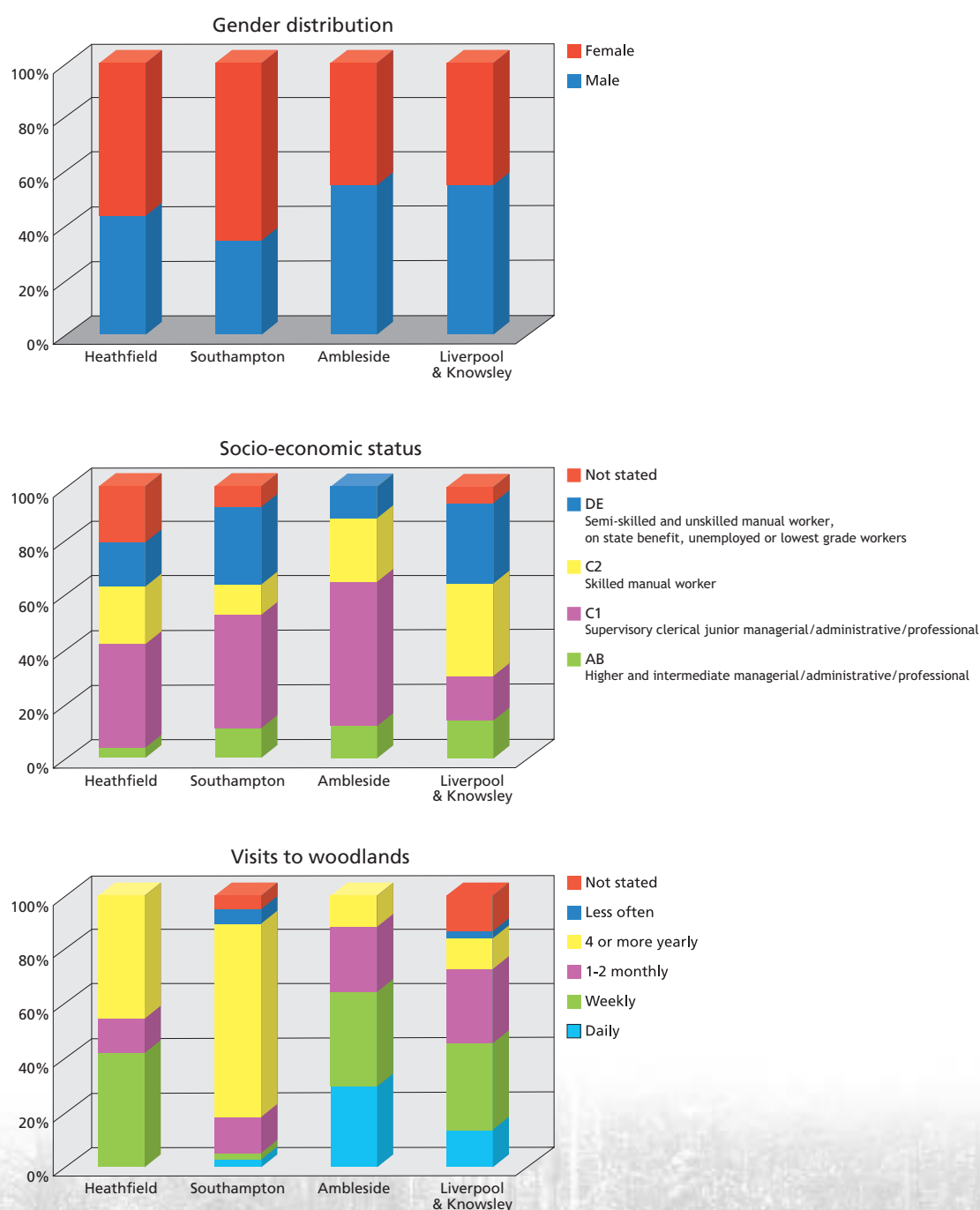
Table 3	Population figures for each location, 2001 Census data and 1998 population estimates (National Statistics Online, 2003).		

Northwest		Southeast	
Ambleside	3 600	Heathfield	7 300
Liverpool	461 500	Southampton	217 478
Stockbridge Village	5 100		

Table 4	2001 Census data: percentages for each area (National Statistics Online, 2003).		

Northwest urban	Liverpool	Knowsley	Stockbridge Village
Limiting long-term illness	24.6	24.7	32.3
Non-white ethnic origin	5.69	1.59	1.15
Unemployed	6.00	5.9	8.5
Households without access to a car	48.3	41.76	61.8
Northwest rural	**Cumbria**	**South Lakeland**	**Ambleside**
Limiting long-term illness	20	18.5	15.3
Non-white ethnic origin	0.72	0.81	0.86
Unemployed	4.5	2.5	1.4
Households without access to a car	24.4	17.4	22.6
Southeast urban	**Hampshire**	**New Forest**	**Southampton**
Limiting long-term illness	14.9	17.8	17.4
Non-white ethnic origin	2.21	1.16	7.62
Unemployed	1.92	1.9	2.88
Households without access to a car	15.6	14.22	28
Southeast rural	**East Sussex**	**Wealden**	**Heathfield**
Limiting long-term illness	19.8	16.8	14.41
Non-white ethnic origin	2.32	1.69	1.56
Unemployed	2.56	1.70	1.76
Households without access to a car	23.4	14.3	13.19

Figure 2 shows the gender distribution of the respondents, their socio-economic status and the frequency of their visits to woodlands within the complete sample. Gender was fairly evenly split between each area with Southampton having slightly more women because of the mothers with young children group. A mix of respondents from different socio-economic backgrounds was recruited and although the proportions were not equal across areas they were chosen to reflect variety in each area as much as possible.

Daily visits to woodlands were higher in Ambleside and Liverpool, reflecting the Stockbridge woodland group and rambler group in Knowsley and the easy access to wooded areas for people in Ambleside. In Heathfield there was a larger proportion of people visiting woodlands on a weekly basis, again probably highlighting that woodlands were within easy reach in this area. Southampton had high numbers of those who visited woodlands less frequently (only four or more times per year) which probably accounted for the day trips respondents described making to woodlands in their surrounding area, particularly the New Forest.

Figure 2   Gender distribution, socio-economic status and visits to woodlands for all groups.

Gender distribution

Legend:
- Female
- Male

Socio-economic status

Legend:
- Not stated
- DE
  Semi-skilled and unskilled manual worker, on state benefit, unemployed or lowest grade workers
- C2
  Skilled manual worker
- C1
  Supervisory clerical junior managerial/administrative/professional
- AB
  Higher and intermediate managerial/administrative/professional

Visits to woodlands

Legend:
- Not stated
- Less often
- 4 or more yearly
- 1-2 monthly
- Weekly
- Daily

Organisational perspectives

Key staff were interviewed in both the southeast and northwest from the Forestry Commission, Forest Enterprise and from The Mersey Forest, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and Icarus (a Community Development Organisation), who carried out a 'planning for real' exercise with the Stockbridge residents. Eleven interviews were undertaken in total. Representatives' views were sought to gain a perspective on their work and their organisation's relationships with diverse publics. Respondents were also chosen because they were able to give an overview of their organisation's work in relation to forest management and use.
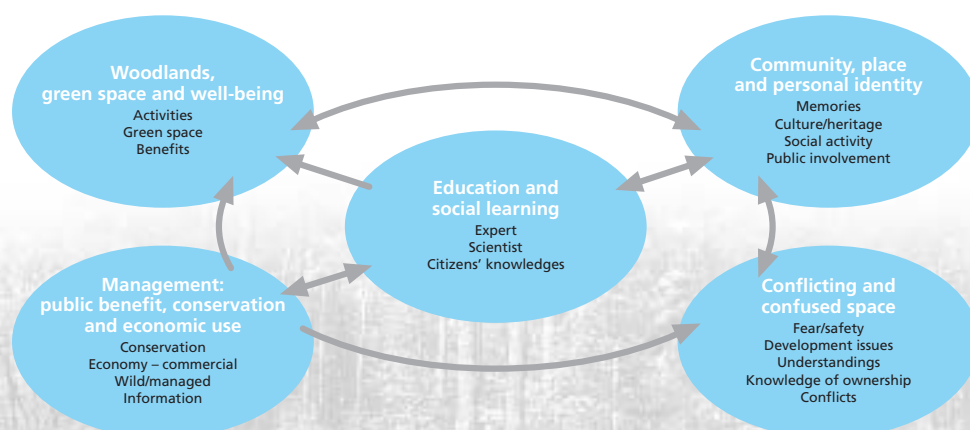
Research results
Part 1

Themes from the discussion groups

This section presents the research results from the public in-depth discussion groups in five major themes. The data from these groups were analysed by methodically reading through the verbatim transcripts and segmenting and coding the text into categories and themes that highlighted what the groups discussed. The categories and themes were then assessed, interpreted and any similarities and differences noted between, for example, what urban and rural respondents spoke about. The summary of key issues for future management were developed from these themes. An outline of the five main themes is given in Figure 3; each theme is then discussed in detail. Each theme includes verbatim quotes with an indication given of the gender of the respondent, their age group or the interest group they belonged to and their location.

The themes are interlinked and are not given in any particular order. In Figure 3 the text underneath the key themes highlights some of the main issues that were raised within that particular theme. Management for timber or recreation, for example, can affect people's feelings of well-being, either positively or negatively. They may enjoy the forest more because of improved trails that provide a pleasant walking experience or be deterred by the clearfelling of an area they know well. If people believe that changes have occurred without consultation or their sense of ownership of a familiar area is reduced, this may lead to conflict or protest and may impact on community or personal identity. Community involvement in management or conservation work might also enhance people's feelings of well-being. Education and social learning can occur in a number of ways, for example through public participation in management and decision-making, and should be a multi-way process between organisations, experts and citizens.

Figure 3 Themes and main issues that emerged from the public discussion groups.

Woodlands, green space and well-being
Activities
Green space
Benefits

Community, place and personal identity
Memories
Culture/heritage
Social activity
Public involvement

Education and social learning
Expert
Scientist
Citizens' knowledges

Management: public benefit, conservation and economic use
Conservation
Economy – commercial
Wild/managed
Information

Conflicting and confused space
Fear/safety
Development issues
Understandings
Knowledge of ownership
Conflicts

Woodlands, green space and well-being

The open air

As an introduction, and to put later discussions in context, respondents were initially asked about their enjoyment of the 'open air' and green spaces rather than specifically about woodlands. People were using a variety of green spaces including parks, national parks, woodlands, coastal areas, fields, tree-lined avenues and squares within cities. Urban groups talked not only about green spaces in their local environment but also about visiting the countryside as an escape from urban pressures. Without any prompting, respondents gave a wide range of examples, often combining both 'external' pleasures – the sights and sounds that they experienced – and 'internal' pleasures such as peace and tranquillity, plus, for some, privacy.

For some respondents, in particular the older ones, there was satisfaction and pleasure, and benefit, in taking exercise. Similarly, several people pointed out the pleasures of being in the open air as a contrast to having to work indoors. When the conversation was under way, respondents allowed themselves to be increasingly open about their response to the countryside.

> I went to the Lake District last year and it was the first time in my life I'd been [there], and I was struck by the absolute beauty of the place, it was stunning, I mean stunning…it stopped you in your tracks. The people who live in the Lake District don't know how lucky they are… [When you're there] it's like a big cloud lifted off you from the city…[there's] contentment and peace of mind…for them few hours it's like another life, in fact [it's like] heaven.
> **Male, woodland group, Stockbridge**

In fact, those who lived in Ambleside and Heathfield did not undervalue their surroundings. Though familiarity can sometimes result in what one respondent described as *'complacency'*, in the scenery becoming *'part of your everyday life'* and being taken for granted, it is nevertheless important. Indeed, many of those who took part in the Ambleside and Heathfield groups had moved to the area to improve their quality of life precisely because of the scenery and the ambience, and all of them valued it.

Even relatively small spaces were considered extremely important, particularly in urban areas as well as having the opportunity to visit places nearby for an extended period of time such as a day trip.

> I think in Liverpool you are very lucky because you have got access to the peninsula [Wirral] and then we have got Southport and Formby. There are big woods in Formby, lots of [red] squirrels, it's really nice. Although we are in the city it doesn't take long to get out into the fresh air does it?
> **Female, 36+, Liverpool**

The Southampton respondents enjoyed being out in the 'fresh air' principally as a change from their regular, essentially urban, lives. They enjoyed being unable to see houses or traffic. While many also liked to go into their gardens, they could still see buildings and people and hear traffic and people shouting, so this did not provide the same form of escape as going to a place such as the New Forest. A small number of rural respondents viewed their surrounding landscape as a garden.

> I don't have a garden, we have chosen not to. The National Park looks after mine.
> **Female, 36+, Ambleside**

Ambleside is a major tourist area. The local towns can become seriously congested, particularly at Easter time and in the summer months. Though this can be a nuisance, the following are accepted and acknowledged:

- it is an unavoidable price to pay for living in a beautiful area;

- tourists in effect fund the area's relative wealth;

- those with local knowledge can escape the tourists with minimal difficulty even at the busiest times, since tourists tend to limit themselves to the 'guidebook' areas and the major paths.

Though respondents initially, and perhaps not surprisingly, found it difficult to talk about the pleasures of being in the fresh air (people rarely talk straight away about sensual or emotional matters except, perhaps, with their closest friends and family), once the conversation was under way, a number of pleasures were identified. These included clean air, varied greenery, wildlife, contentment and emotional and psychological pleasures such as freedom, escape, quietness and being away from pressure.

Woodlands and forests

When the discussion was directed to woodlands all respondents said they enjoyed visiting these areas as an escape from everyday life (e.g. see Figure 4). The rural respondents felt very privileged to live in the country where they could see trees and walk in woodlands often more easily than their urban counterparts. Even a number of urban respondents felt themselves to be very fortunate because they had relatively easy access to woodland areas or other green spaces within the urban environment.

As respondents continued to discuss being in woodlands, they again mentioned, volunteered, both sights, sounds and smells that gave them pleasure, and also a range of other, more subjective satisfactions. One older respondent in Ambleside described the smell of the woods as 'green smells…I always think it smells like green'. Though there were many similarities between the items mentioned here and in response to the earlier questions about the open air, there seemed to be more intensity in respondents' experience with trees and woodlands. A member of the woodland group in Stockbridge, obtained pleasure from relatively simple sights such as 'the colours of the leaves [which are] gorgeous'. In Ambleside, respondents mentioned the lichens.

Others enjoyed the range of shapes, sizes and colour in the trees themselves. It was also noted, again by a woodland group member, that woodlands do not have to be large to give pleasure: one respondent described a local copse in Knowsley that was:

> …about as big as a football pitch [but] when you get in there you're in another country 'cos the noise of the traffic goes.
> Male, 45+, Liverpool

Particular experiences unique to woodlands were often mentioned, including the light through the trees, the sounds (sometimes unidentifiable) of the forest, different birds and wildlife and, for many, the smell, which tends to be based on leaf mould and dampness. One Ambleside respondent described the woods as 'very sensual'. All these things, plus the solitude that can be achieved in woodland, were a source of considerable pleasure to the respondents. The thought of being unable to be contacted also appealed to some, emphasising woodlands as a place to get away and experience some sort of contact with nature.

> I love anywhere like that, if I can't get a signal on my mobile phone I feel so much happier for some reason. Because then I'm cut off and no-one can get you, I much prefer that, I love that feeling.
> Male, 20–35, Liverpool

During the foot and mouth crisis in 2001 most respondents had felt very constrained by the restrictions on visits to woodlands. Those with dogs had found this particularly difficult and those with children were forced to find more structured, and more costly, activities when they would have preferred to allow them the freedom of woodland and countryside use. This crisis had helped them to realise the extent to which they simply accepted having this facility freely available to them. Therefore, woods and forests emerged as a welcome, important and integral part of outdoor pleasures rather than being something distinct. The emotional and psychological pleasures of woodlands and trees were described with more detail and emphasis than the physical pleasures. This occurred particularly when people talked about escaping the fast pace of contemporary life and having some contact with what they perceived as natural space. There is increasing evidence within academic and wider literature of the benefits to health and well-being of using and viewing woodlands (Ulrich, 1986; Hartig, 1996). Respondents often described these benefits, for example:

> It's like a connection with nature 'cos we are part of nature. It's part of us because if it weren't for trees we wouldn't be here because they provide our oxygen so there has to be some sort of connection. And when you do walk in the park it really makes me feel like it improves my well-being. Your walking so it exercises me but you get the smells and beautiful nature and when you think about it and look at the trees you can really start to appreciate it and think wow and look at all the little things flying around.
> Female, 20–35, Liverpool

When respondents, after some prompting, turned to the environmental aspects of woods, there was agreement that they were important. The 'oxygenation' of the atmosphere was mentioned and the reduction of pollution noted, with some respondents claiming they could feel this as having a beneficial effect on their health.

I just think you can notice the difference, but if you are out in the forest [New Forest] or in Eastleigh or Southampton you can notice the difference in the air quality. Just from the fumes side of it and the peace and quiet is nice as well.
Female, 20–35, Southampton

But I mean, me I love it, I honestly love walking in the rain. You know in one sense you could, if the rain was a bit cleaner, you know with all the pollution I always think it's like clothing because it just washes a lot of it away you know. It's like when the frost comes it kills all the bugs and stuff, you know it's just natural cycles of life you know of the earth. We get so alienated, we're all in our little room and you know we all sit there and watch the telly or you go to the pub and everyone forgets about the outside.
Female, 20–35, Ambleside

There were a number of expressions such as the one above concerning how people had become separated from contact with nature. Respondents felt this happening to them as they became caught up in the practicalities of everyday life.

When you're working, obviously I'm not working now, but it's wonderful to come away from the hustle and bustle. I worked at the airport [Gatwick], it was horrendous at times. It was lovely just getting in the car and driving through the forest especially if I was on a late. Midnight you would see deer running across the road, it was wonderful.
Female, 20–75, Heathfield

Activities in woodlands which respondents described undertaking included walking (the most popular activity), horseriding, picnicking, cycling (Figure 5), playing games with children and even, for a couple of students, a place to study. While the activities undertaken were often mentioned explicitly, what appeared to be more important were the social opportunities that woodlands afforded people: as a place to be with friends, family, partners; and woodlands were often only one component of a wider day trip.

Figure 5	Family cycling in the New Forest.

I wouldn't specifically go to walk in a wood. We would pick out a walk that would include a lot of elements including woods so you try and do something varied that will take you through a village that will take you through woodlands. For example in winter it's great because you see a lot of things you wouldn't normally be able to see during the summer because of the leaves. So I think it's just the variety and it's not just woodlands round here, we are very blessed with hedges and very small fields. The Wealden area is all small fields so there are a lot of hedgerows which comes into the woodland side of things.
Female, 21–55, Heathfield

Spring and autumn were particularly mentioned as enjoyable times of the year in which to visit woodlands; with new growth in the spring and peoples' need to get out after being indoors in the winter, while the autumn colours were enjoyed for their sheer aesthetic pleasure. Somewhat surprisingly, a wide range of respondents talked about going out in all weathers with some disliking the heat of summer and enjoying the views through the trees that were more accessible in winter time.

Lack of private transport

Not having a car was a significant restriction for some people, mainly the urban residents. The census data in Table 4 (page 17) show that more households in urban areas lack access to a car. It is often assumed that people generally have access to a car but this is not necessarily the case. Those on low incomes tended to have less access to private transport as the quotes below suggest. Even when transport (generally buses) was available a number of people felt they could not rely on this. Cars therefore allowed people to explore different areas more easily.

I find you need a car really to get out to these places, I haven't got a car and I haven't got a garden and I haven't been to the park in ages. But I do like going to the park and I do like going out and things. I used to go with my dad, he always used to take us because we had a dog but I just don't go anymore really. I suppose I will when I've got a car in the future. ...well coming here has made me discover this [Sefton Park] because I live quite near but I didn't really know [about it].
Female, 20–35, Liverpool

I'd like to go more often but as I say like you know it's just access to places. If you don't drive you have to wait for someone else maybe going and go along, some member of the family.
Female, 36+, Liverpool

…but I don't have a car either so its difficult to get around. One of my colleagues at work picked me up today. It is difficult to get to some of these places.
Male, conservation volunteer, Liverpool

Conflicting and confused space

This theme related to confusion over who owned land, a small amount of conflict between different woodland user groups, conflicts over anti-social behaviour in woodlands, concerns about women's and children's safety and people's general perceptions of safety in woodlands.

Land ownership

Respondents were often unclear as to who owned woodlands and forests and in most cases it appeared to be something to which they had given little, if any, thought. They did not feel that they needed to know as long as the areas they used remained accessible to them. There was the possibility that they would need to know who to complain to if they saw things happening in the forest that they did not agree with, but at present they were generally happy with the way the areas they used were being managed. The older group in Southampton was aware of the rights of commoners in relation to the New Forest but most were aware that this was something different from actual ownership.

An exception to this was the Stockbridge woodland group who knew the local authority owned the woods due to their close contact with Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, and The Mersey Forest personnel due to their work on local woodlands in the area. In contrast, the Heathfield groups were the most confused probably due to having a larger number of private woodlands in their vicinity, some of which has recently changed ownership. The Heathfield groups felt they had a range of places available to them and did not mind if some were private with no access but they did resent private areas that had previously been open to the public being sold and new owners erecting 'keep out' signs.

It was important to these respondents to be clear where they were allowed to go, as they generally wish to respect the privacy of privately owned land, but can only do this if such areas are properly marked. The need and importance for respondents to have a sense of ownership of areas they visited was often viewed as significant. This sense of ownership can have an important impact on the meanings people attach to particular areas. The feelings of uncertainty expressed in the second quote about where people are allowed to go also raises issues about inclusion in countryside use, and whether people sometimes need encouragement to use unfamiliar places.

> The New Forest is owned by us isn't it? My dad used to always tell me that I owned a bit of the New Forest, I used to be well chuffed about that. We used to go out and he would say you own this and I would stand on a bit and say this is mine.
> **Mothers with young children, Southampton**

> I think that's quite difficult especially in the countryside, you've got public footpaths but often you go trekking off down them but you come to a dead end and you're not quite sure where you're allowed to go. Often it's enclosed by farmland which is private so then you tend to use National Trust areas or Forestry Commission. I remember in the past when we went on family holidays we had pets and the dog would be on farm land and the farmer would be shouting his head off, so it's difficult. I think a lot of the countryside is private and you're excluded and that doesn't help to encourage people to use open spaces because you're not certain what you can and can't use.
> **Female, 20–35, Liverpool**

Development concerns

There were considerable worries about increases in building development and the subsequent loss of woodland or green space in both urban and rural areas. One respondent stated that there was always a struggle between nature and progress while another spoke of places that should be regenerated in built-up areas before consideration was given to building on green belt.

> There is always the danger that our trees will be denuded for what seems like a good reason at the time but they are not always put back.
> **Male, 21–55, Heathfield**

> They are talking about changing the rules with the green belt and lifting restrictions on expanding the urban sprawl so it will sprawl further. I don't know if that will be approved or not. That's really bad because there are so many inner city areas that are just wasteland that could be regenerated. It's probably cheaper to build on new land rather than clear the mess.
> **Female, 20–35, Liverpool**

While the groups generally felt that a balance was needed between green space and development, there were often feelings of powerlessness in the face of any development that did take place as it changed the places people knew and valued. Discussions often came back more than once to the topic of development and loss of green space, emphasising the importance of these issues in people's minds. While respondents recognised the need for a balance, there was not, for example, a simple view with all change being seen as bad; rather their concerns revolved around changes about which they often felt uninformed until something had happened or it was to late to stop it from happening.

> I think it matters because you see all the green disappearing and you go in towards the town centre and all you're seeing is just derelict land so why take the green? Why not build on the land that's in the centre of the city doing nothing first?
> **Male, 36+, Liverpool**

The exchange below between females in the non-white ethnic group emphasises that many respondents acknowledge the need for future development while also worrying about losing further green spaces.

> Well there are never enough houses for people are there? I suppose if they had their own way they would probably rip the woods apart and build properties.

> Yeah they would build everywhere.

> You know where my parents live they built over 100 flats from one street to another. They have had their own way but obviously they are not allowed now.

> It should be green belt definitely.
> **Females, non-white ethnic group, Southampton**

Personal safety: perceived and actual

Personal safety was an issue for women in all of the groups. Most people liked to visit woodland in the company of other people, or at least with their dogs, as they felt uncomfortable on their own; this was particularly the case for women. Female respondents acknowledged however that this feeling was not entirely straightforward as they were probably as safe in the forest as they were in the middle of Southampton, for example. None of the women in Southampton felt safe entering woods on their own and a number would only take their children in company with another mother with children or with their partners. Women in Heathfield generally felt more comfortable with being in woodland, apparently because they were more familiar with them. A small number of women in both Liverpool and Southampton had been accosted by 'flashers' (men who expose themselves) in the past, although not necessarily in woodlands, and this had made them wary of who might be lurking in and around green spaces. People talked about high profile murders that had taken place in green space or woodlands or where murdered bodies had been dumped and how media stories of these attacks stuck in their minds, so they did not always feel easy about being alone. Men generally tended to feel more comfortable alone in woodland, as the last quote suggests, and thought that attacks were probably rare.

> …that young girl getting hammered to death… that's probably just one in millions, you don't know but you hear about it and it frightens you. It stays with you and you think it's going to happen to you.
> **Female, 20–35, Liverpool**

> I've been cat-called in Sefton Park and 'flashed' at in Calderstones.
> **Female, 20–35, Liverpool**

> I know its easy to say but there actually isn't much reason shall we say to fear. You know fear is based on false information a lot of the time and what you read in the papers. The papers blow everything up out of proportion and when I start to see old ladies transferred to the middle pages [who have been beaten up] I'll start to worry but [now] they are headline news.
> **Male, woodland group, Stockbridge**

| **Figure 6** | Littlewood with houses on the Stockbridge estate, Knowsley, in the background. |

Only one woman in the southeast mentioned that she would feel entirely comfortable in woodland at night and this was because she had experience of camping in a woodland for a number of weeks. Some others felt similarly within the Heathfield groups, but mentioned that they only felt safe if they knew the woodland reasonably well. One man had discussed with his girlfriend what they should do in case they were attacked or approached when out walking in Ashdown Forest, emphasising some people's caution and wariness of wooded areas. Most people would not like to be alone after dark: male or female. Noises became more noticeable in the dark and people were uncertain what was making those noises. Young men spoke of not using woods after dark because of worries about physical attacks but felt that during daylight hours this was not a concern for them.

Paradoxically, even those who were wary of being in woodlands alone, because trees and other vegetation allowed people to be hidden from view, appreciated woods and trees as an important part of the landscape (Figure 6). Principally, they seemed to regret that their children did not have the freedom that they had been given to explore woodlands when they were young. This was not available to children today as none of the respondents would allow their own children to go into woods without their direct supervision. People who had children, particularly under twelve years of age, were concerned about their safety in connection not only with woodlands but also in every day life. There was widespread feeling that today's children are missing out on possible adventures by this restriction but their safety is considered to be paramount. Opinion was divided and ambiguous as to whether more children are actually harmed today (particularly in places such as woodlands) or whether people are simply more aware of the possible dangers. As exemplified by the following three quotes, feelings of unease can also change at different life stages when people's outlook and responsibilities change:

> I think it's different depending on the time of life as well. My memories of woods as a child they seemed huge and really exciting and full of adventure. Whereas as a parent I'm more anxious because I am the one with the responsibility worrying about whether the children are going to be safe or get hungry. So now the thought of being in woods and being secluded especially if it was just me and I was walking with the children there's an anxiety about being alone somewhere that is enclosed. But when I was a child it was somewhere you could roam and be free and wild.
> **Female, 20–35, Liverpool**

> I think it would be nice to have more rangers in the woodland because of the safety purposes as well, if you get lost or just as a woman. I've got three daughters and I wouldn't like to think of them walking through woodland on their own now.
> **Female, 36+, Southampton**

> I've watched it changed over the years because I've got a 14-year-old teenager and an 18-month-old and with that age gap so much has changed. Danny, when I first moved in where I live now, I could let him go out and play. To do that now with my other son, no way. I would not allow him to go to the park or anything like that, I would have to be with him. It has changed in just that short gap not like in generations.
> **Mothers with young children, Southampton**

The mothers with young children group in Southampton were particularly concerned about having somewhere safe for their children to go where they could let off steam and use up surplus energy. They talked about their own experiences when young and the feelings of freedom they had felt and compared that to their children's current experiences which were thought be too restricted.

> There are too many rules for kids these days, they grow up being told do this, do that. When we were younger we used to run riot.
>
> We used to go scrumping.
>
> But your parents could just leave you to go in to the forest and say off you go.
>
> Everywhere they go [now] there is a rule and it just makes them backfire.
>
> Don't do that, keep off the grass and they get sick of it when they get to a certain age.
>
> There is nowhere they can go to let off steam is there, and not get told off for doing something?
> **Mothers with young children, Southampton**

The respondent quoted below (who was in his late twenties) understood why young people 'hung out' in woods and parks, as he had done when young, and realised that the majority of youngsters were probably harmless and no threat to anyone, although he still described feeling uneasy sometimes when seeing groups of young people in woodlands.

> I don't know, I imagine kids are doing what I used to do when I was a kid and going there to hang out and get away from the parents and just chill out. But your perspective changes as you start to get older and you start to worry about gangs and people trying to mug you and stuff. But I imagine the majority, if gangs of youngsters do use this, are going there to chill out and be together and not really up to no good. Although I've seen a lot of car wrecks [in Littlewood] so clearly there's something going on that isn't exactly wholesome as well and all the beer cans and stuff as well.
> **Male, conservation volunteer, Liverpool**

Safety issues also related to property, particularly worries about cars. While the need for car parks, particularly in larger forest areas, was widely recognised, these could present a problem with security as they advertised the fact that the occupants had left the area for a walk. For this reason some respondents, particularly those visiting the New Forest, were unwilling to leave their cars when there were only one or two other cars in the car park, although this might mean that their access to a less crowded area for walking was reduced. A couple of respondents in the Southampton group had had their cars broken into in the New Forest.

Conflicts

The conflicts described by respondents were mainly related to what was viewed as anti-social behaviour rather than conflict between different user groups although this sometimes occurred. It was noted that paths in general facilitate and perhaps encourage the use of mountain bikes and trail (motor) bikes in woods and forests, which can result in damage and in making areas less welcoming to others. There is a difficult trade-off between allowing access for all and keeping woodlands friendly for those on foot and in particular those who are perhaps elderly or frail. Indeed, one woodland group respondent in Liverpool suggested that formal paths, though undoubtedly necessary, could *'invite the wrong sort into the woods'*, meaning those who might often disrupt activities for others.

There could be conflicts over what people viewed as anti-social use of woodlands. For example, the groups in Stockbridge Village described how Littlewood had become a no-go area because groups of young people were setting fire to the trees, stealing cars, driving them into the woods and setting them alight. Drugs were also being taken in the woods and a few young people wandered around with air rifles shooting wildlife. The residents disliked this type of behaviour and wanted to use the wood themselves without feeling threatened by the actions of others. Residents often connected this type of anti-social activity to the lack of anything constructive for young people to do on the estate.

> I mean the biggest problem in any open space area around here are kids stealing cars and abandoning them or setting fire to them. You've got kids on scrambling bikes, they've wrecked the woods and because you don't know where they're going to come from people won't ramble in the woods. It becomes a no-go area, kids have got air guns high powered. They are extremely good shots, I mean they can knock a bird off a branch from you know a sniper's rifle.
> **Male, 36+, Stockbridge**

Management: public benefit, conservation and economic use

There was widespread acceptance of the need for some formality to be imposed on what would otherwise be wild areas, vulnerable both to inadvertent damage by the public (thoughtlessness, the use of motor bikes, dropping litter) and to more organised misuse such as the dumping of household rubbish and even of cars and furniture. For the larger forests, the provision of car parks, colour-coded nature trails of various lengths, refreshments and information centres, was seen as sensible (see Figure 7). Such woods were also seen as more welcoming and safe. This generally positive view, it should be noted, was shared by virtually all respondents, including those whose preference was for 'nature' and solitude.

> [Those woods] are managed, you can see they're managed…you can walk through with no problems… [With a] formal layout there is safety and security – you know, people feel safer – but you can still see what's going on… They haven't taken a lot of trees away and the wood's still there, but the pathways have been properly laid and you can get in and out.
> **Male, woodland group, Stockbridge**

> I've always noticed in Liverpool that the gardening section of the Council does a fantastic job. You find that in places like St Luke's Garden started in a bombed-out church, and that garden is beautifully kept.
> **Female, 20–35, Liverpool**

The need for information points, and specifically information about directions, ownership and approximately how long it takes to walk a given path, were frequently mentioned by the groups as well as information on the wildlife people might encounter on their visit.

> They put up yellow arrows don't they if it is a public footpath? But sometimes I think the signs should be better for footpaths, for public rights of way.
> **Female, 36+, Heathfield**

> I think it would be nice everywhere, if there are walks that you can go on, people want to go walking, then its nice to have the information there 'cos if you haven't got a guide to take you round you don't even know what you're looking at, really, what kind of trees.
> **Male, 36+, Heathfield**

| **Figure 7** | Grizedale Forest Visitor Centre, Lake District. |

Woodland use as an inexpensive activity

The mothers with young children group were particularly aware of the cost of taking their children out for the day, especially if this was to a theme park or somewhere where admission charges could be significant for a family. They wanted information on places to go to that did not cost much money but could still provide an enjoyable day out. They also worried about the focus on consumption within contemporary society and spoke of the pressures they experienced from their own children concerning spending money, as the following exchange emphasises:

> More information on places that you have not got to pay £20 per head to get into. Like say if you were to get in a car and go to the forest and pay your petrol you don't mind that.
>
> Everything is so money orientated nowadays.
>
> There is not an advert on the telly that says come to visit the New Forest, if it does, it's come and eat in our restaurants.
>
> [It should be] See the New Forest visitor centre, go here, go there. Come here, this is where the horses are and this is where the cows are, this is mainly where you see the deer. Or this is a really nice walk with trees, or this is a walk with rivers and it doesn't cost you nothing. You have only got to pay to park. You don't get that, it's just like this is where you can spend your money. When you have got young kids you can't afford to go out to places like that.
>
> You are certainly not going to pay £60 to go somewhere for the day when I could get a week's shopping for £60. I think there is more important things than the cost of places. We tend to try and take our kids where it doesn't cost anything.
> **Mothers with young children, Southampton**

This group felt that they had to constantly remind their children that there were things they could not afford to buy. Frustration was expressed at children's persistence and their ability to pester their parents for the things they wanted or the places they wished to visit.

> We are trying our hardest to make sure that our kids know that there is more to life than playstations and telly. If I was to turn round and say to my son, I haven't got any money to do that, then he says alright then.
>
> You get some kids that are so money orientated, [they say] I need at least a tenner to go into town.
>
> I'm going through that stage at the moment with mine.
>
> Mine is 6 and I am just getting to the stage where I literally only had pence in my purse the other day and she is saying can't I have that. And I say no not unless you steal it, I haven't got the money. She really is at that stage where I am really having to drum it into her that we haven't always got the money to do things.
>
> She hates me if she doesn't get what she wants, I get called all the names, storms off.
> **Mothers with young children, Southampton**

Wild and managed woodland

The distinction between what was perceived as wild and what was not, was an interesting one. Some respondents described wild pieces of woodland even in urban areas. If places looked unmanaged they were often perceived as wild. The wilder areas local to Southampton were generally thought not to be woodland, but commons or heathland, as the woodlands were thought of as managed. All the Southampton respondents liked the idea of managed woodland; they did not see this as in any way an intrusion. Although the older respondents recalled a time when it was possible to pull up at the roadside and simply walk, they acknowledged that this was no longer practicable and that car parks were a necessity. Different views were expressed concerning the possibility of charging for car parks in the forest. The younger respondents were in favour of a charge if this was then used to help maintain the forest, but older respondents felt that a charge would reduce the accessibility of the forest. The latter felt a stronger sense of 'ownership' of the New Forest as local people and felt that the area should be freely available to them as it always had been.

> Yes, that's what I was going to say, that it's just little restrictions a little bit at a time and you get used to them.
> **Female, 36+, Southampton**

> Hundreds of years ago we didn't have the areas we've got now which need maintaining, you just used to walk through it as we said earlier. Now you've got the car parks, you've got areas that are made specifically for us to go to and they need maintaining.
> **Male, 36+, Southampton**

Wilder woodland had a greater attraction for the Heathfield respondents than those in any of the other groups, particularly the younger respondents. This perhaps stemmed from their greater familiarity with their local woodland and hence a desire to seek out more 'unknown' places and also to the area being more heavily wooded than the other regions. A couple of respondents described the pleasure derived from finding a wilder overgrown area which no one else appeared to have visited recently.

> It's a hardly trodden path, right through the trees….it's very, very nice.
> **Male, 36+, Heathfield**

> Ashdown Forest then isn't…[wild]. It's managed and everyone does what they're told to do…In the depths of my old back lane there's plenty of wood…I mean it's wild because no one [visits], you hardly ever see any people apart from locals going out.
> **Male, 20-35, Heathfield**

However a number of the older respondents here liked to walk in well-tended woodland. Heathfield is not specifically a tourist area to the same extent as the New Forest and the Lake District, and respondents may not therefore have seen the need to have the same facilities such as visitor centres and toilets.

It was acknowledged that woodlands 'swallowed up' people so they often did not feel crowded. However, even here the need for some form of control to maintain the accessibility and enjoyment of the beauty of the woodlands was noted.

> Some woods, the undergrowth is so bad that the primroses and bluebells get smothered….if it could be cleared, you get more wild flowers growing.
> **Female, 36+, Heathfield**

Figure 8   Family on the reptile trail, New Forest.

Respondents generally liked marked trails (Figure 8) as this provided security in direction-finding while not preventing people from straying from these if they wished. However, the paths should remain paths and not be developed as larger tracks. Any waymarking or path edging should continue to be carried out using natural materials. In Sussex, the Cuckoo Trail was much liked and used, but the fact that it is a track that attracts cycle riders as well as a wide variety of other users had led to it being despoiled by litter in the areas closest to habitation. Information, trails and activities were seen as important, particularly in larger woodlands or parks which were thought of as places for days out while in smaller woods these were not considered necessary.

> You just feel safer when you're on paths you know that even if you don't know where the specific path is going if you walk on it long enough you're going to meet something or someone and you'll be able to find your way back.
> **Male, 20–35, Southampton**

> It's not concrete is it and it's not tarmac, it's natural you know but at the same time it's a route, it's a proper track they've laid down but it's made with like natural things.
> **Male, 20–35, Southampton**

There was frustration expressed at not being able to access certain areas which brings to the fore questions such as who or what are woodlands being managed for? The Stockbridge respondent below who had a disabled son questioned the attitudes of some managers who, sometimes, favoured conservation over public access.

> Well sometimes you speak to the people who are managing woodland… and you ask for you know access for wheelchairs and they become very pure in their attitude. Because [they say], if we put a pathway in there what happens to the wildlife? So I say what about our life you know aren't we allowed to access the woods like you guys? I think like access for all as far as possible is far more important than just to let everything overgrow.
> **Male, woodland group, Stockbridge**

Even in managed and 'structured' woods it should be possible for people to leave the pathways if they wish, and it was also pointed out that unless there are satisfactory paths, access to woodlands and forests will be limited, and may be impossible, for those in wheelchairs or for parents with young children in pushchairs.

> It's not so easy for me 'cos I've got a wheelchair so there's not many places you can just get up and go.
> Female, 20–35, Southampton

Respondents from Southampton were very keen on refreshment facilities within the New Forest, both teashops and pubs, possibly because a visit to the forest was a 'day out' rather than part of their everyday lives. These facilities were not favoured by the Heathfield respondents as they were felt to detract from the natural surroundings that they were seeking. Those visiting the New Forest with children or grandchildren liked having specific areas with entertainment for the children, such as animal centres and activity parks. Such attractions were mentioned in these groups to a much greater extent than any of the others, perhaps because the Southampton residents were themselves often acting as tourists or visitors when in the New Forest.

> And there's cycle tracks, there's the train, there's a lake, there's picnic areas, there's play things, there's a trail through the forest and that's absolutely fantastic. If there were more of those then that would be brilliant [Moors Valley Country Park].
> Female, 20–35, Southampton

This need for entertainment over and above that provided by the forest itself was exemplified in the Southampton groups in many references to playing ball games, such as rounders, in the cleared areas, particularly on a day out with wider family and friends (Figure 9). Those in other areas appeared more content to enjoy the woods simply by walking, with the natural surroundings providing all the entertainment that was required, although there was an acceptance of the need to cater for tourists in the Lake District. Those in Ambleside were familiar, and largely comfortable, with extensive facilities being provided for the public in major areas such as Grizedale Forest. In addition to car parks, information centres, refreshment and picnic areas and bike hire, there are sometimes special attractions and centres of interest within the forest itself, such as sculpture at Grizedale.

> …different artists have come along and put things in the forest so you've got sculptures and signposts and things hanging up. It's more aimed at the tourists than nature seekers, 'cos nature seekers just stroll through the forest and they'd appreciate whatever's there…
> Female, 20–35, Ambleside

Although they could almost be described as entertainments, such attractions might seem to clash with the nature of a forest, particularly in the Lake District, yet there was a perhaps surprising acceptance of them by the majority of local respondents. This acceptance seemed to be based not only on fear about what tourists might otherwise do, but also, by implication, because both tourists and local residents found them of interest. Catering to tourists was seen as inevitable and useful in managing the wider environment.

… they are going to come anyway so you might as well cater to their needs rather than let them stroll openly wherever they want to go… Tourists will end up going wherever they want to in the end so if you don't make your paths on the fells… they'd do it anyway and you'd absolutely destroy the environment in the end. So you might as well cater to their needs and keep them to the paths you would hope, so that it doesn't you know ruin the environment any more than it already is doing.

Female, 20–35, Ambleside

In summary, when the groups discussed the trade-off between 'wild' and 'managed' forests there was a broad acceptance that to a significant extent management of public access was necessary. This was partly to help ensure that the environment was protected and was not vandalised, and partly because publics generally welcome and benefit from paths, directions and even (in the larger forests) facilities such as picnic areas and barbecue facilities. The wild areas of forest are still available for those who want them, but a gentle form of guidance and control was felt to be to everyone's advantage. The current balance between wilderness and management was generally admired.

Commercial management of coniferous and broadleaved woodland

There was some feeling that specially planted areas, with trees in rows and little or no undergrowth, could be boring to walk through since there is 'no variety'. In the Ambleside sessions there was an awareness that forest management also covers activities at a broader level, dealing with what one respondent described as 'vista, aesthetics, the landscape [and] what it looks like'. There was also an awareness of forest management such as felling and replanting in the Ambleside groups in nearby Grizedale Forest but, on the whole, it was not seen as a problem or even a cause of concern for the respondents: it was distant from their day-to-day lives. If anything, it was seen as a practical source of income as long as it did not become intrusive and significantly affect the environment or the views which were considered to be more important. Only a few people specifically related forests as places where commercial timber management took place.

> Yes, the forest are where the trees are planted for a reason aren't they. They are regenerated for what they cut down, they plant back and whatever. That is what I understand the forest to be, it's actually working, the forest is actually making money from the trees that they have got grown there. Whereas with woods and copses they are just left to it. There is not a commercial side to it. But I think in the forest there is a commercial side to it. Because you see them felling the trees and then planting the new ones.
> **Female, 20–35, Southampton**

> It depends whether the Forestry Commission are in it to make money and the type of trees that they actually plant or whether they're going back to planting what would be natural indigenous trees for this area, you know, and have a reasonably good mix.
> Yeah but then they would say that they need the money that they get from the trees that they've felled in order to keep the woodlands that you want going. It's getting the balance.
> **Male and Female, 36+, Ambleside**

When talking about the different terms, forest and wood, people had different views over what they meant. Size seemed to be a significant element in the definition of a forest as it was a place in which people could get lost. A few expressed dislike at the apparent lack of wildlife in plantations of pine, for example, and this equated with the perceived tedium and boredom of this type of habitat.

> I think a forest is much bigger than just a wood, a wood to me is you know something that's like between like a village or something like that you know and it's got however many trees but it's generally quite thin.
> **Female, 20–35, Ambleside**

> You can get lost in a forest you can't get lost in a wood.
> **Male, 36+, Heathfield**

> If you go into a pine forest it's so quiet you can hardly hear anything, bird, or…, whereas if you go into an unmanaged wood it's just like a constant [sound], but [not in] the pine forest.
> **Male, 20–35, Heathfield**

> I don't really like pine forests, I mean I've walked in several, there's not much to look at. It seems pine itself has taken over all the light or most of the light and everything else. If you look on the ground there's nothing growing, it stops the growth and stops like anything else being there, you know it's just boring.
> **Male, 20–35, Heathfield**

> Forest is man-made.
> **Male, 36+, Ambleside**

Community, place and personal identity

This theme was related not only to people's sense of personal identity but their identity as a member of their local community, with the particular place in which they lived and the places they visited for pleasure and relaxation.

Personal memories

Respondents were asked about their earliest memories of woods and forests and there was a feeling of warmth and excitement in the reactions.

> …there was this big wood, and there were six or seven of us and we used to go and look for conkers and things like that… [And] I remember the tall ferns…and a big stone wall. We used to love going over that wall.
> **Male, 20–35, Ambleside**

> I just remember going to play and the trees and it was brilliant.
> **Female, 30–60, Stockbridge**

> Picnics with the family, horses and ponies running past.
> **Male, 20–35, Southampton**

Childhood memories of using woodlands were strong and included mainly positive memories of running around, using the imagination. There was also a scary and eerie element to these memories that were not altogether unpleasant. Other respondents remembered the woods being dark *'because of all the tall trees'*, or spoke of the pleasures of *'running in the streams…in your wellies'*, and of climbing and swinging from trees. Childhood was recalled by many as a period of freedom, and a time when, on your own or with friends, you could run risks and be adventurous. For some of those in the Stockbridge sessions, there was the added advantage (in the past before more houses were built) of the woods and fields being near their homes.

> It was great because you went there and then when it was mealtime your mother just went to the edge of the field, and just shouted…and everybody would just come [home], they knew you were safe [there].
> **Male, 30–60, Stockbridge**

> I think mostly all like the New Forest; it's mostly your memories are down at the forest, it's like a social thing with friends. You remember all your memories are from being outside.
> **Female, 20–35, Southampton**

Most people's earliest memories of woods were of something 'exciting' and a little 'scary'. This early use of woodlands was often a reason why people continued to use such places as adults and eventually took their own children to the same familiar places. Although nowadays they would only let their children visit woodlands accompanied by themselves or another adult.

> I mean when I was young I used to play in the woods that were quite close and I actually live next door to a wood now and there's no way I'd let my daughter play in those woods.
> **Female, 20–35, Southampton**

People's memories of woods and forests as children were overwhelmingly positive – they had represented fun and independence. Even physically unpleasant occasions, such as damp camping in the New Forest, were now viewed as special and memorable times with considerable detail often being recalled.

> We used to build dens as well you know, you can't do that now, you'd see people traipsing up the woods with a couple of bits of wood over their shoulder.
> **Male, 36+, Southampton**

> Families, when you're a young kid you used to sort of, if you weren't in school, you were in the park, all day Saturday and all day Sunday from the time you got up until it went dark, I was anyway. We were in the park, you know, a group of friends, playing football most of the day and the rest of the time climbing trees and the rest of it.
> **Male, 36+, Liverpool**

Even young men looked back fondly on their memories and spoke to their friends about the times they had spent together in the woods when they were young.

> building dens and playing cards… the same area is still marked up with all our names and all that you know.
>
> Researcher: Oh right, so it's the same wood?
>
> Yeah it reminds you of old times… it is still the same but I am older now and won't do the silly things that we used to do [then] but just sit down and talk about it.
> **Male, non-white ethnic group, Southampton**

Several respondents noted that they had come to value woodlands and trees more as they grew older, as they perceived woodland areas were being reduced and as they appreciated their good fortune in having access to remaining natural areas. A number of respondents suggested that children no longer got much exercise or enjoyment from being outdoors. Parents have less time to devote to their offspring. Children would now often prefer to play with computer games or watch television, and take far less exercise overall because parents often take them to school, activities and clubs in cars. The gulf between children, young people (who were thought to be less healthy than they were) and the countryside is seen to be widening. Those children who live in the countryside and for whom woods are a part of their everyday lives are therefore felt to be particularly fortunate (Figure 10).

> The children that benefit are the ones that see it [trees, woods] all the time, but they don't realise they're benefiting. People don't go out into the countryside any more, they haven't got the time.
> **Female, 36+, Heathfield**

> But they'll sit and watch Playstations or play on the internet or anything but go outside, so I'm afraid that I drag them out.
> **Female, 20–35, Heathfield**

Some tried to rationalise this change in recreational activities among the younger generation and generally comments suggested that this might be explained by the modern need for instant recreational gratification, and also due to time constraints within contemporary society.

Public involvement and participation

When talking about public involvement in decision-making in relation to woodlands, rural respondents talked about parish councils as bodies to protest to about unwanted activity or sources of information while urban groups talked about city councils. It was felt by the majority of groups that local people should have input into what went on in their local environment. One person described how *'ordinary people have more of a say now than they used to'* although a number of others were sceptical about whether organisations would take much notice. The groups debated who should be involved; in Ambleside a group know as the 'Friends of the Lake District' (often made up of people who lived outside of the area) was thought to have more of a voice in environmental issues than local people and this was not viewed positively. Respondents mentioned surveys, telephone responses, questionnaires and public voting as ways of involving people. Often people said they would generally not get involved unless something happened which they did not like; often they were too busy to get involved in issues of this type on a regular basis. The second quote below seems to suggest a past perception of the FC as unresponsive to public opinion. It was thought that the public was now more concerned and interested in environmental issues and therefore organisations such as the FC needed to be more aware and responsive to this.

> We went to one place and I was really like; 'this isn't suitable for the pushchair' and then the next day we had a survey popped through the door asking us what we thought should be done and within a few months they had put paths all around. I obviously put down on the survey that it would be good 'cos like when you've got a young family you can't always offload the baby. So that survey they sent round, there was quite a lot of feed back on it, they did do quite a lot of things that were suggested.
> **Mothers with young children, Southampton**

> I think there's more say. Ordinary people have [more of] a say now than there used to be. When they were first planted it was plant, plant, plant we are the Forestry Commission, we are going to do this. Now people are much more interested in what is going on so they wouldn't get away with it.
> **Female, 36+, Ambleside**

If they say we're going to knock down this wood behind you and it's been there for years or something you would say well stuff that mate you know, I'm well against that. So you would actually take the time to do it I think if it was really important to you.
Male, 20–35, Heathfield

Engaging with communities to regenerate areas and tackling decline, particularly in cities and areas of high deprivation is seen as increasingly important. It has been suggested that this approach can help to capture community knowledge and experience, and allows people to develop skills and networks – an important element in trying to reduce social exclusion and generate social capital (Burns *et al.,* 2002). The woodland group in Stockbridge Village fits into this category and was making a lot of progress with the restoration of Littlewood. Funding was obtained from The Mersey Forest and Objective 1 (European funding) to put up a new fence and stop cars being driven into the wood. Clean-up operations had been undertaken as well as trimming some of the trees that were blocking out light from houses adjacent to the wood. The group was also trying to involve youngsters on the estate by organising events and developing a junior ranger group as they saw this as the best way of ensuring the future use and condition of the wood.

We're trying to start this Stockbridge junior rangers… the idea would be something like boy scouts, girl guides, both sexes. But it would be aimed at environmental issues, take them out to different places, let them see you know. We've got binoculars, one or two microscopes you know, anything to interest the kids.
Male, woodland group, Stockbridge

What motivated the woodland group in Stockbridge Village was the desire to give Littlewood back to the community and make it a community amenity after years of problems associated with the woodland. The respondents were mainly in their fifties and sixties and got satisfaction from doing something positive. They also wanted more contact with similar groups in other areas in order to have the opportunity to learn from others doing similar work. They recognised the importance of ensuring that anyone who did volunteer did not see their efforts being wasted. This had happened in the past with the clearing of burnt out cars from the woodland; a lot of effort would go into clearing the wood only for more cars to be driven in and set alight. Now with the erection of a fence to keep cars out it was felt that this problem had been solved.

As well as improving Littlewood, so that the community could enjoy the resource, the woodland group's outlook had changed with their continuing involvement in the wood. They increasingly came to feel that education was important, particularly for youngsters on the estate who had little contact with nature (Figure 11).

Well I think actually it's grown with the group, the awareness that I've just spoken about, the learning process that's grown that's evolved with this group.
Male, woodland group, Stockbridge

Associations, literature and symbolism

Trees in themselves were felt to have historic significance with some having been alive for generations. For the Southampton groups oak was a symbol of British life, with its importance to the historic shipbuilding industry being widely acknowledged.

> The British Navy was built on English oak wasn't it?
> **Male, 36+, Southampton**

Trees were felt by a number of respondents to be in some way essentially symbolic or representative of specific concepts or ideologies. Specific examples related to those who thought the oak tree represented 'Britain' as strong, sturdy and reliable. Associations with folk heroes such as 'Robin Hood' fuelled the fascination and interest in woodland areas. The only other specific literary associations made were to Children of the New Forest and with the Dorset author Thomas Hardy. Recollections of poems concerning trees were generally vague.

The longevity of trees was also a factor that people appreciated and seemed to provide a connection for them between the past, present and future. While the groups did not explicitly talk about spiritual feelings they sometimes expressed awe in relation to mature old trees and the thought of nature in general. This view has a strong cultural component in Britain, stemming from the romanticism of the 18th century when views of nature as sometimes ugly and daunting were replaced with appreciation and awe when poets such as Wordsworth extolled the virtues of being in contact with nature (Solnit, 2001). Choosing to walk in the landscape to contemplate nature, seek spiritual fulfilment and to appreciate the aesthetic experience stems from this cultural European romantic tradition.

> If you see some of the trees in Reynolds Park and they have obviously been there for a couple of hundred years. They are massive trees, you walk around them and you think, I wonder what these trees have seen.
> **Male, 36+, Liverpool**

Other associations were chiefly of evergreens with Christmas. Horse chestnut trees also formed an important part of people's memories of woodland, as they had collected and played with conkers when young.

Value to society and as a location for social activity

Respondents were asked about the value of trees and woodland, not only to themselves as individuals but to the environment and to society as a whole. Overall, environmental concerns seemed secondary to many of the respondents. The immediate response from many people was to re-emphasise the advantages to the individual, but to position them as a benefit available to all, and thus a gain to society overall. And as before, the pleasures and benefits of woods and forests were seen in contrast to other elements of life.

> I think life is just too regimented, we get up, we go to work… I'm sick of the rat race, so to me keeping more [woods and forests] gives us a chance to think what [life's] actually all about.
> Female, 20–35, Ambleside

Many of the areas visited regularly had childhood associations for these respondents. They took their own children or grandchildren to areas they had visited as children. There was clear evidence of happy memories and associations and these were something people wanted to hand on to the next generation. This was particularly true of the Southampton respondents, many of whom had lived in the area all their lives. These associations added to the relaxing and calming effect of being in woodland.

The importance of the social element of using green space and woodlands should not be overlooked. This is a very important part of people's activities and what they remembered from past experiences, such as using woodlands with friends when young, going with families to the park and woods. This socialising component is also significant in helping people to feel safer in woodlands if they are with friends. The following quotes emphasise how valuable this is and that people often seem to feel cut off these days from activities that families used to do together, such as eating and watching television, but now tend to do separately.

> The funny thing was going back 2 years ago, I took the dog in the park and there was this guy walking around with two big Labradors and he was walking a bit funny you know and he was trying to throw a ball to his dogs. I found out this guy had had a stroke the year before and he was recovering from a stroke but I didn't realise at the time. Anyway I started throwing the ball for his dogs and dogs just love picking the ball up and coming back, you know. I got on quite well with him and he is now one of my best mates. We get on really well. He has a completely different background to me but just by talking in the park [we got to know each other].
> Male, 36+, Liverpool

> Yeah 'cos society is becoming more and more isolated with mobiles and you can go off anywhere at any time and not meet anyone. So it's good to have the actual people there for a change all together, all having a laugh.

> There's so few things that everyone in the family can get something out of. There used to be television because there was so little choice everybody used to have to watch Morecambe and Wise but now it's got to be the woods.
> Males, 20–35, Southampton

> It's better if there is someone with you, you can talk to them and if you see something you can discuss what you see.

> You bump into people and talk to them.

> I think dog walking is one of the things where you do meet people. I retired a few years ago and bought a terrier and the amount of people I have met at the park is just unbelievable. But I tend to go at the same time everyday and you meet the same bunch walking round.
> Males, 30–60, Stockbridge

Education and social learning

There was a much stronger desire within the urban groups in Liverpool and Stockbridge, particularly in the woodland group, for the need to pass on knowledge to the younger generation. This was partly because respondents felt that the only contact young people would have with any sort of wild animals was in the zoo.

The Stockbridge woodland group involved in improving the condition of their local woods saw the woodlands and green space as a means of educating young people to a greater extent than in other areas, although this aspect was mentioned in all of the groups. Education could be both specific, teaching youngsters about trees and birds, but also more wide-ranging, instilling some understanding of social responsibility and of respect for property and the environment. This education had not been their intention when the woodland group members started their work in Littlewood but had, as one respondent put it, *'evolved en route'*, not least as a response to the damage being done by some locals to the trees and woodlands. One respondent described some local children as 'the destroyers'.

> I don't think people try to educate [young people about] wildlife, horticulture, there doesn't seem to be enough of it about.
> **Male, woodland group, Stockbridge**

> It's not all the kids [that cause trouble]…it's like anywhere else I suppose, you've got a few bad eggs…that strip the bark off a tree but you try to talk to them and educate them. Tell them where they're getting their oxygen from, and what a tree does, and hopefully it gets through to some.
> **Male, woodland group Stockbridge**

One woodland group member from the Liverpool session described taking some young people from the estate to a managed forest elsewhere in the Merseyside area. The youngsters' enthusiasm and keenness to learn surprised him.

> …what struck me was the kids we bought from the estate, they were walking ahead and they were all from this estate. I thought they'd start messing about, but they got interested…[they were] asking the ranger 'What's this thing?' and 'What's that?'…I couldn't believe it, [it was] instantaneous.
> **Male, woodland group, Stockbridge**

> [When we were there] the warden was interesting, the way he was telling [the kids] about things, and explaining things to them, and showing them…whereas in our [local] woods there's nobody to tell you anything.'
> **Female, woodland group, Stockbridge**

> So I know I got through to them kids and I think if you can talk to kids, not talk down to them but speak to them and listen to what they've got to say as well.
> **Male, woodland group, Stockbridge**

This emphasises that interest and enthusiasm can be generated among young people, and many groups felt this should be encouraged. It is worth noting that for many of those in the Stockbridge sessions, education and learning about the things around you was seen as a pleasure, a way of getting more enjoyment from their day-to-day lives and their environment. This was a view they had come to relatively late in life and, without being aggressive about it, they wanted to pass it on to others. They were well aware that the message would only get through to a few people but, at this stage, they seemed content to continue with the work. Efforts in Stockbridge to encourage local children to make use of and protect the local woods had also involved creating a totem pole (designed by local schoolchildren) in a clearing in Littlewood. In Ambleside several of the older respondents also mentioned the pleasures of getting to know more about their environment as a whole, particularly the local flora and fauna.

One woodland group respondent suggested that there were some signs of hope since although a recent generation of local children had been essentially destructive, the current youngsters seemed less aggressive and, in general, were playing in the woods rather than vandalising them or setting fire to things. Respondents felt that the important issue was to influence children at a young age, *'when they're four or five'*, before peer pressure starts to push them in the wrong direction. It was, as another respondent from the same session suggested, a matter of taking *'negative energy [and] turning it round and making it more positive'*. Providing opportunities for activities and places for children and teenagers to go was seen as a very important way to channel their energies. The Heathfield group spoke of a skateboard park that had been built within the town and which proved very popular with young people. Thus in both urban and rural areas it was thought that a variety of opportunities should be made available for young people.

The destructive element within society was less immediately evident in areas other than Stockbridge, hence there was less emphasis on educating young people as a whole, and respondents were generally less vocal about the educational role of woods and forests. However, a number mentioned the ways in which they endeavoured to pass on their own knowledge of woodlands and the life within them to their children and to their grandchildren. There was widespread acknowledgement of the role of environmental education in limiting anti-social behaviour, even where there were no particular local problems.

> It's like this lady was saying… she would ask her dad, because your dad used to take you and hopefully in years to come my children will ask me, 'dad where was that place you know'. So it's something you can actually pass down. If it's still there, who knows if it's still going to be there or not?
> **Male, 20—35, Southampton**

> My youngest granddaughter, her and I go out a lot together and I pass on a lot of my [knowledge] 'cos her mother is not that way inclined, I mean a buttercup or a dandelion wouldn't make much difference to her. But we go out together and look at things. I enjoy it as it gives me something to do.
> **Female, 36+, Southampton**

Respondents who saw the countryside, and woodlands in particular, as a source of education emphasised the importance of providing information to people, whether on noticeboards detailing local wildlife, or by providing rangers or wardens who would explain and identify different aspects of a woodland. Bringing together the questions of education and memory, it was suggested that woodlands and forests can be an important part of a child's upbringing, as a generalised 'non-home' experience and as a source of exercise but also as a way of learning about trees, birds, animals and the countryside. As they became more involved in Littlewood, the woodland group took pride in increasing their knowledge of the local area and the wood in particular. They had personal experience of using and viewing the woodland over many years and were eager to know more and pass that knowledge on to others.

> I mean them woods over there right nobody knows the history of the woods but I do. ..what I do know is what I've read by a local historian that the sweet chestnuts that are over there are very very old and some of them have regenerated. But they were actually planted by — oh I'm getting romantic – French prisoners of war during the Napoleonic War when they were domiciled in Lord Derby's estate.
> **Male, walking group, Stockbridge**

Summary of key issues from the public groups

This section explores the main issues raised by the research for consideration in future management and policy development in England. It also includes brief discussion and reference to contemporary social research concerning sustainability, deliberative democracy and social learning. Some of the points raised have a practical application while others highlight areas where greater understanding is needed of a particular topic; for example the importance of place and the many meanings people associate with familiar places appears to be significant. This subject is still relatively unexplored in forestry and forest management.

Equity

The fact that woodland use was inexpensive was particularly important for urban groups with young families, those who were unemployed and those on low incomes. Parents spoke of the pressures of living in a society focused on consumption as a leisure pursuit and the pressures they received from their children, advertisements and the media in general to spend money. Parents described how visiting woodland for the day and taking a picnic was a way of having an enjoyable day out that was inexpensive, unlike for example going to a theme park. Jackson and Marks (1999: 421) explored the complex relationship between human welfare and consumption and suggested that contemporary western societies may be *'seriously adrift in their pursuit of well-being'*. Economic theory posits that increased levels of consumption lead to an increase in human well-being although Jackson and Marks (1999: 439) argue that *'well-being does not consist of the accumulation of material possessions'*.

Social inclusion is also an important issue for the government, and excluded groups include, for example, those who live in deprived areas on low incomes. Excluded groups generally have less wealth, less access to private transport and less access to woodlands and natural spaces. This research highlights the importance of accessible woodlands near to where people live. Proximity to woodlands and other green space was an important factor in the frequency of people's visits, suggesting that easy access and closeness enable and encourage use. Even small spaces can be very important, particularly in urban areas, breaking up the built environment. This research supports recent work by FC England to encourage and place greater emphasis on woodland planting in populated areas. The majority of the groups (particularly urban groups) also appreciated key sites for day trips that provided a variety of facilities, often play areas, and other attractions for children and visitors.

Physical access, for example the availability of the land for use by the public and the ease with which it can be reached by private or public transport, is also important. There are examples from around the country of new bus services introduced in National Parks to enable people to visit scenic areas for the day, which aim to allow access for those without a car and encourage those with cars to leave them at home. Respondents with disabled relatives and those without cars stated that they had problems in accessing areas. The respondents, particularly those in urban areas with fewer financial resources, advocated better public transport and more information on areas suitable for wheelchairs and pushchairs. Even those with cars sometimes expressed the wish to leave them behind but were reluctant to do this because of the unreliability and infrequency of public transport to and from the areas they wanted to visit.

Personal safety

Women, in particular, often felt insecure in woodlands and worried about using them alone. People generally felt safer in obviously managed areas and in areas where wardens or rangers were present or were known to be present at some point each day; for example when checking play equipment. Woodlands that appear neglected or abused seem to generate greater feelings of discomfort over people's sense of personal safety. The obvious lack of management was a cause for concern and people were generally not as happy to use these areas. The Forestry Commission in the New Forest is currently training and using voluntary rangers to carry out guided walks and provide information for the public. These rangers may also play a major role just by being visible to people who are concerned about safety issues.

It is important to try to encourage a cycle of use so that people can become more familiar with woodlands. Respondents generally felt more at ease in areas that they knew and used reasonably regularly. Research undertaken by Burgess (1995) for the Countryside Commission on people's feelings of safety in woodlands has highlighted the role of the media in portraying negative stories of rare attacks or murders in woodland. Burgess (1995) talked about the paradox of people's widespread appreciation of woodlands but also their apparent fearfulness of using them. This study has also revealed how people remember, sometimes vividly, stories concerning attacks in woodlands or other green spaces; and while acknowledging that these were probably rare, they did make women, in particular, wary and uneasy about using woodlands alone. This perception of risk, although not necessarily based on actual risk, does have real consequences as it restricts people, mainly women, to only using them when in the company of others.

Those in urban areas, particularly, worried about the younger generation not having access to green space and woodlands either through lack of opportunity, parents' worries over children's safety or because youngsters were often occupied with many other activities such as using computers, attending clubs or watching television. Parents' concern for their children's safety was high, meaning that young people had very little opportunity to access woodlands without their parents, unless they were undertaking some sort of organised activity. Urban groups argued that a lack of connection to nature could lead to a lack of respect and understanding of these areas and therefore might lead to destruction and abuse of the environment. The woodland group in Stockbridge was trying to change this situation (Figure 12). They were in the process of creating a junior rangers group to encourage young people on the estate to get involved with their local woodland and interest them in using and becoming familiar with it.

| Figure 12 | Woodland Group's banner, Stockbridge, Knowsley. |

User groups: uses and constraints

In bringing together the responses from the urban and rural groups a number of comments can be made on the types of activities preferred by some of the different groups and also what constrained people in their use of woodlands. Table 5 outlines the differing needs of a number of user groups which could be addressed by specifically targeting information/areas/activities to them. Macnaghten *et al.* (1998) noted the significance of increasing numbers of lone parent families within contemporary society and highlighted that their need for secure and safe access to the outdoors was an important consideration for an organisation such as the Forestry Commission in expanding its social role. The increasing elderly population is also significant. These two groups, for example, could have their specific needs for safe, secure and quiet recreation addressed in direct ways by the Forestry Commission.

Table 5	Typology of user groups.
Groups	Type of resource/activity preferred
Families Lone parent families	Facilities, e.g. cafes, information centres, organised events. Safe space, presence of wardens/rangers. Somewhere for children to let off steam and be reasonably unconstrained. Inexpensive activities.
Young adults	A place to escape authority and parents, and be with friends. Space to 'hang out' and not be disturbed – this might involve what others view as anti-social behaviour such as drinking and rowdiness.
Middle aged	Social walks with friends, viewing nature and having contact with nature were seen as important. Escaping from the pressures of work.
Older generation	Footpaths which are easy to use and accessible. Quiet peaceful recreation. Safe and secure space.

A number of things constrained people's use of woodlands and these are presented in Box 2. Lack of transport was a greater issue for urban groups as more rural respondents had access to cars. Most of the other constraints cut across all of the groups in both urban and rural areas although the strength of their importance differed between these areas, for example there were more worries about anti-social behaviour in urban woodlands.

Box 2	Constraints to using woodlands.

- Lack of transport.
- Anti-social behaviour by others.
- Safety concerns both personal and for children – fears particularly for women and children related to getting lost, verbal harassment, 'flashers', having to be constantly on guard, physical attacks, child abduction and child injury.
- Obviously unmanaged woods, e.g. with litter, evidence of vandalism, drug use and debris caused greater concerns over safety.
- Time constraints for busy publics in contemporary life.
- Not knowing or being aware of possible places to go.
- Lack of easily accessible woodland in close proximity to where people lived.
- Concerns and worries about ownership and possibly being confronted by irate owners.

Social benefits

Woodlands are appreciated by respondents for a wide range of benefits, the majority of which do not appear to be related to their economic use or necessarily to whether people use them frequently or not. Organisations need to have greater awareness of the complex nature of these benefits and people's diverse values when they consider different types of management. Feelings of well-being seemed to be a particularly significant factor in people's descriptions of why they used woodlands. When publics talked about woodlands and trees it was almost never in isolation but as part of the wider landscape and also as part of their wider everyday life; so for trees and woodlands, for example, discussions related to concerns over development, education and safety. These linkages to wider issues need to be explored in more detail and be better understood.

Figure 13   Young child on adventure play equipment at Moors Valley Country Park.

The research emphasises the importance of outdoor locations that provide a setting for social interaction and for forming and strengthening social bonds. Respondents talked about enjoying quiet moments alone in woodlands but they also often spoke about the value of visiting places with friends, partners or family. Activities such as recreation and picnicking and settings such as woodlands that allow for different types of social interactions to take place are important (see Figure 13). More argues (2002: 61) that *'in the context of our current societal ills, they are activities that strengthen both individuals and families, and therefore, should be encouraged rather than discouraged as a matter of policy'*. This becomes particularly important in areas where certain groups are reluctant to visit woodlands alone because of worries about their safety: therefore they may only access these areas when in the company of others. This also relates to improving people's physical well-being as they will often exercise more regularly in the company of others such as families, friends or as part of a group because of the support and encouragement afforded by that company.

Woodlands and other natural environments are not only physical locations they are also associated with a variety of experiences and memories. The relationship between people and places is often a very personal one and is related to people's connection to, and previous experience of using, green spaces and woodlands. Hughes and Morrison-Saunders (2003: 201) in their study of the attitudes of visitors to a modified natural attraction in the United States suggested from their findings that *'an accumulation of experience in natural areas results in an increasing complexity of interaction on the part of the visitor and a greater likelihood of emotional attachment'*. This accords with a number of responses from the groups in this study in which strong emotional attachment to specific familiar areas was described with enthusiasm and seemed to increase with numerous visits over many years. This may also be related to safety worries in that people who were familiar with particular areas because they used them regularly felt less worried about their own personal safety in these places.

As Henwood and Pidgeon (1998 and 2001) found in their study of forestry and Welsh culture, trees and woodlands are often viewed as symbols of nature. This is related to the aesthetic appreciation of woodlands, concerns about destruction of the environment, changes at both a global and local level and worries about increased development and the loss of woodlands. The Great Storm of 1987 in England had a big impact, particularly on the Heathfield groups who described the scenes of devastation left in the wake of the storm. For the Southampton groups trees (especially oak) symbolised Britain. Oaks in particular were said to represent strength and reliability. Brief reference was made to folklore, literature and art through, for example, Robin Hood and Sherwood Forest stories as well as stories related to the New Forest. Beck (1992) talks about the 'risk society' in which there is a greater awareness among publics of environmental risks and possible damage to the environment and a decline of confidence and trust in institutions such as government bodies. The groups' perceptions of risks, concerning issues such as global warming and air pollution, often contributed to their feelings of uncertainty about what was happening to the environment; this may help to explain why some respondents viewed trees as a visible symbol of a healthy environment.

Participation

Participation can inform policy and practice by allowing different groups of stakeholders and publics to deliberate over issues of sustainable forest management. Participation needs to be a fair and transparent process so that different groups and individuals can see that their views and values have been considered and where appropriate incorporated into decision-making. The Forestry Commission and Forest Enterprise are involved in participatory work as advocated in the three country forestry strategies. It is often easier for organisations to involve and work with already established stakeholder groups such as ramblers or conservationists; involving those who are not part of a pre-existing group, particularly excluded members of society, can be more difficult.

The majority of respondents in this study had never had any involvement in decision-making or management connected with woodlands. While publics in this research suggested that they had little time to get involved, nevertheless they talked about the possible options that could be explored and used if needed. Their ideas for obtaining individual and community views included meetings with city councils and parish councils, questionnaires, voting systems and telephone responses. People generally said they would not get involved unless there was going to be significant change to the places they used. A few respondents could recall filling in questionnaires in relation to green space and how it was developed in their area, particularly a couple of the Southampton respondents. These respondents were pleased to note that some of their suggestions had been taken on board in the creation of new facilities, emphasising how important it is that people feel their concerns and ideas are being listened to and seriously considered. Other respondents were quite sceptical about whether their views would be listened to and suggested that this was a reason why they did not become involved. Therefore providing participants with an understanding of how their views are considered and possibly incorporated into organisations decision-making processes is important.

The woodland group in Stockbridge showed what could be achieved through community involvement, participation, encouragement, commitment and a determination to improve their local environment; although it takes time to build long-term relationships with different citizens and stakeholders. The group had evolved from cleaning out the rubbish dumped in Littlewood to a much broader view, encompassing education, local school involvement and the creation of a junior ranger group.

Social research outlines the rise of new deliberative institutions such as citizens' juries, citizens' panels and in-depth discussion groups which are being used to bring publics into debates over environmental issues such as genetically modified organisms. Discussion groups have been used in research commissioned by the FC to explore the values and meanings people associate with trees and woodlands in both north and south Wales (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1998). Deliberative democracy is founded on the premise that citizens can debate and articulate their views and values through reasoned dialogue with others. Public participation is one approach in which deliberation among citizens can take place and values can be articulated. Agenda 21, which was adopted at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, places public participation and social equity as central considerations for a sustainable environment (Irwin, 2001).

Education and learning

The importance of education and learning, particularly for those who have little connection with nature, was emphasised. Respondents talked about the importance of the changing seasons and how they could teach their children about the seasons by looking at trees. The Stockbridge woodland group thought that education was particularly important for children on the estate to engender respect and interest in the environment. This group spoke with pride of some of the historical and environmental information they had learnt from being involved in the restoration of their local wood: Littlewood. Most of the respondents had lived on the estate for decades and had seen the decline of use and increasing vandalism in Littlewood and were now witnessing its revival brought about through their own concerted efforts. Not only were the residents improving their local environment, they were learning more about it, working together as a team, making improvements through collective action and actively encouraging the younger generation to view the woodland as an interesting and fun place to go.

Research results
Part 2

Organisational perspectives

Interviews were undertaken with professionals within the Forestry Commission (FC), Forest Enterprise (FE), The Mersey Forest, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council (KMBC) and Icarus, a Community Development Organisation. The respondents were able to give a background to the key environmental, forestry and community issues within their area of work and provide a background to the organisations they worked for and their role within them. Respondents were selected to reflect a range of views and perspectives. This part of the research was undertaken to provide a brief background to management and public use issues related to woodlands. As in the discussion groups all the interviews were transcribed verbatim for analysis. The issues raised in the interviews are briefly outlined below.

Governance

Partnerships, public involvement and public views

Partnerships between organisations were said to be very important and were thought to be increasing in variety and extent in recent years. Networks and relationships between organisations and communities were also being more widely established and were considered to be increasingly significant. These networks and relationships between citizens and organisations can help to illustrate and increase understanding of how diverse publics value, use and experience woodlands. Organisations such as The Mersey Forest and the Community Development Organisation, whose remit and focus were primarily community orientated, felt more at ease with the idea of public engagement and participation and saw it as essential to the core of their work. While FC, FE and KMBC all acknowledged the importance of engaging with the public there was greater uncertainty as to how this should happen and the impact it could have on current staff workloads. Table 6 provides a typology that outlines the varying attitudes to public involvement among the different organisations. Some concern was expressed over who to engage with and which voices should or could be heard, particularly in relation to the weight that should be given to people local to a site and other users from further afield. One of the difficulties is that there is no single agenda which organisations such as FC and FE can follow; rather they have to deal with the competing factions of industry, recreation and conservation.

> A lot of our work is becoming very much partnership oriented and examples are Community Forests as a partnership and the Capital Modernisation Fund is one. We have a partnership with the RSPB and National Park on protection of the ospreys [and] we have a European LIFE nature project with English Nature and the National Park, so yes that is becoming a big thing.
> **Forest Enterprise**

Table 6	Typology of organisations.
Organisations	General attitudes to public involvement in environmental decision-making
Forestry Commission, Forest Enterprise	Focus on sustainable forest management. Acknowledges the importance of public participation but concerned with the difficulties of how to enable this to happen effectively in a way the organisation can deal with.
Metropolitan Borough Council	Participation considered to be important. Concerns about the time and resources needed to allow this to happen effectively.
Community Development Organisation	Awareness and understanding of the benefits and difficulties of involving communities. Recognition and emphasis of the importance of developing trust over a sustained period of time.
Community Forest	Strongly advocates the importance of involving people. Realisation that people often do not know how to get involved so they need to be given the chance and opportunity for participation.

The Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF), mentioned in the previous quote (page 54), was set up to support capital investment in public services and is being used in the northwest to create woodlands in consultation with communities on derelict, neglected and underused land. The key focus here is partnerships with communities as well as between organisations so that communities can have input, right from the outset, into the type of resource that is to be developed near to them.

> But if we are going to have any future to those Capital Modernisation Fund sites with the FC managing them then we have to manage them hand in hand with the community. Because those are the people on the ground they are the people that see it from day to day. They are the ones that can ring you up and say 'hey somebody's just gone and built a large bonfire in the middle of it…' If you do not involve the community you are never going to know about those issues, you will just end up dealing with it as part of your job which is crazy, it does not need to get to that stage. People will absolutely adopt land and be so passionate about it if they are given the chance, they just don't know how to. They don't know how to get in there.
> **Mersey Forest**

As might be expected from a community development organisation there was much greater awareness, experience and understanding of the benefits and difficulties of engaging with communities and of how communities can sometimes view the many initiatives that come and go, particularly in deprived areas such as Stockbridge.

> I think there is an issue around people's morale and something like this actually. I suspect most people in this area [Stockbridge], the vast majority of people in this area would want to do…[something]. They probably just blank out the woods or have done in the past but would actually want it to be an amenity. They would want it to be somewhere they would be happy for their kids to go through and play and so on. They are probably relatively demoralised by it's state, you either just don't think about it or if you go through there and it's just totally depressing isn't it to see it full of burnt out cars and rubbish. Something like this [activity day in Littlewood] can change people's perceptions and feelings about the woods and you need to build on that.
> **Community Development Organisation**

The following quote highlights some of the reasons why it can be difficult to interest communities and why it takes time to build trust. In terms of community development there needs to be a focus on helping communities in the long term rather than short term. To set programmes in motion and raise enthusiasm among local people or to get involved when a community decides they want to do something involves a heavy time commitment by programme organisers and initiators particularly in the early stages of a project's development. The quality of participation and community involvement is an important issue for consideration and can be influenced by existing power structures and relations within organisations, within existing community groups and the context of the particular area in which the project is initiated.

> There is clearly [at] pragmatic levels things that can happen, so regeneration initiatives [of] which Merseyside has seen 25 to 30 years of every initiative that has been anti poverty, social exclusion you know. You name it we have had it. There have been some benefits a lot less than perhaps people would anticipate, given what they would see as the resource going into the area. But at the same time that you have had special initiatives you have also had, if you like, a disinvestment by the public sector, by the state in terms of a whole range of, you know, the super structure of society in this area. Really these initiatives have just been about in many ways mediating the worst excesses of, you know, what's happened to this area in terms of the economy.
> Community Development Organisation

It can also be difficult for organisations to understand people's sometimes negative views of woodlands or the environment; it is easy to believe that everyone will automatically view them as an asset rather than a problem. This emphasises how the values of an individual and the organisation they work for can mean that they are unaware of how others may regard the environment.

> Yes, I was really shocked when we had this Halloween event… we use hay bales so people can sit around. And there were some older lads there and they wanted these hay bales… to make dens in the woods they said. And we didn't want them to have them so we were talking to them and suddenly they just said to me 'do you like these woods'? 'Yes of course I do' 'Why'? I was just so taken aback because to me I have always grown up and loved woods and you know you just don't question it do you and to them it is just a waste land… that's why it gets dumped on.
> Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council

People associate trees and woodlands with different sorts of meanings often beyond their usefulness. A tree or woodland may be a symbol of a community, a tradition, while a nation or people may attribute them with aesthetic importance. The aim of research such as this is to explore the reasons why people value woodlands in order to understand their role and importance in their lives. This can then help to provide information for organisations to consider a broader range of values and concerns. To illustrate this point one of the FE respondents had attended a parish council meeting and talked about cutting down a group of trees which were considered by the organisation to be of little value from a timber perspective and of no particular conservation or amenity value.

The FE respondent mentioned to the parish councillors in the area concerned that the trees were to be cut down. The councillors were disturbed by this and described how one of their members (who had since died) had planted the trees. Therefore they wanted to keep the trees in memory of their colleague. Such exchanges bring to the fore different ways of viewing trees. While FE focused on the timber and amenity value of the trees the councillors were talking about something very personal: their remembrance of a friend through the trees he had planted.

Change in organisational culture

Cultural change was thought to be occurring within the FC and FE, with the organisational agenda becoming increasingly focused on issues of public benefit and moving away from a focus on timber production; although these organisations can still underestimate the layers of meaning people associate with forests and trees. However this shift is significant, with the move away from productivist forestry to a much broader acknowledgement of the benefits that trees and woodlands can provide. Most interviewees emphasised that public benefit was the main focus of their work. There was acknowledgement of FC and FE's expertise in timber production and increasingly environmental issues but less was said to be known about the social benefits and values of woodlands.

> I think there's been a bit of a culture shift and I think some people who have been around for a while who cut their teeth on commercial activity and see that as the be-all and end-all have more of a struggle with it. But I think one of the lessons of consulting with people is that you do find that if you are taking into account people's views and taking them with you it's easier in the long run. They might not agree with what you are doing but they might understand why you're doing it.
> Forest Enterprise

There was said to be growing awareness that the business of FC and FE is not commercial, in other words *'it delivers public good'*.

> It's not about trees, only about the value they provide for society. What's important is how people value trees and woodlands.
> Forestry Commission

A number of respondents suggested that more research and understanding was needed of what exactly were the public benefits of woodland creation and management. One respondent also introduced a note of caution about this new focus on public benefits and public participation, suggesting that it could be related to an identity crisis for the organisation.

> I think it's a crisis in the profession of foresters, suddenly we are branching out into all these other areas and we haven't been trained [so] we need to ask everyone what they think because we don't know ourselves.
> Forestry Commission

Managers thought that staff within FC and FE were finding it difficult to cope with the increasing pressures and new agendas such as public participation, social inclusion and greater access which were being added to existing workloads. Some felt that they were only managing to cope with current work and were not able to develop the areas they wanted such as providing greater recreational opportunities. A couple of respondents described how FC was a victim of its past history and practice in that woodlands are *'in the right place for spruce but not necessarily the right place for being socially inclusive'*. The strengths of both FC and FE were felt to be that they could get work done on a large landscape scale and had an increasingly positive message to get across to the public, especially in relation to social and environmental benefits. It was suggested that FC and FE were developing capacity in the area of social benefits and needed to show that public benefit was being provided by their work.

Organisational discourses were framed around the concept of sustainability and related issues of biodiversity and public benefit that are currently driving forestry and the wider environmental agenda. Public discourses were related to personal experiences and memories and focused on woodlands and trees as an escape from the stresses of everyday life and as contact with the natural world (Figure 14). The discourse of sustainability was generally shared by respondents in all of the organisations although this could have the unintentional effect of distancing organisations from people as sustainability was not a term that was used or raised by publics in the discussion groups. In trying to increase public participation there needs to be greater awareness of the ways in which different groups talk about trees and woodlands as part of their everyday lives.

Education

Organisations often have particular ways of viewing the public based on the cultural paradigm of the particular organisation and the individual employee's own values and ways of viewing the world. Recognising that the public may have a totally different viewpoint can be difficult to take on board for some members of staff. Sometimes there can still be a tendency to believe that if only the public was given more information they would understand what the organisation was doing and therefore accept it without complaint. There is still a tendency to see the public as homogeneous rather than diverse and complex. There were worries that publics had little understanding or knowledge of what was involved in forest management.

While the respondent quoted below recognises this tendency, he realises that he can also learn from others and the whole process of his work is one of continuous learning. It raises issues about the different types of knowledge of experts, agencies and citizens and the legitimacy of those knowledges in different situations.

> I think even now we still like to feel professionally that we are very good and competent, so often there is a danger of thinking you are right all the time. But perhaps it's just the way that you manage that you don't have to tell people you're right. If they come up with things that you agree with and know are correct you can just absorb them into the process. I still learn every day but I think there is quite a high degree of specialist skill in the job that's why when people come along and say are you consulting correctly it's quite an interesting thing to talk about.
> **Forest Enterprise**

Organisations spoke about educating the public. This idea seemed to be focused on trying to get people to understand more about management and what the particular organisation was trying to do. As mentioned in the Summary of key issues from the public groups (page 50), this view is still based on a 'deficit interpretation' of publics in which they are seen as mainly uninformed and with the need to be given appropriate environmental information that they can then assimilate without much further comment. As Irwin (2001) pointed out people have their own views and judgements which they bring to bear to interpret any information disseminated by organisations. As has been emphasised in the public discussion groups, education was seen as very important by public respondents to interest and familiarise people with the environment but also to enhance people's enjoyment of trips made to woodland (Figures 15 and 16).

In summary, there is still something of a mismatch between what organisations and publics viewed as the educational needs of people. This is an important issue because the realisation of this could have an impact on the way in which organisations provide information and the type of information they provide. As Macnaghten *et al.* (1998:19) found in their study, this research has discovered that *'…what seemed to be implied [by organisations] was the imparting of expert-derived information to a less informed public through communications media and more formalised educational programmes [and this] is what educationalists call a 'deficit' model of education'*.

Figure 15	Children involved in an activity day in Littlewood, Stockbridge.

Figure 16	Young girls showing interest in the environment.

Management

The timber production work of FE was seen as a lower priority in much of England than it is in Scotland, for example, and this allowed managers to meet other objectives such as biodiversity and public access. One respondent in FE recognised that public perceptions of timber production would be affected by the types of management activities they had seen in the past and their knowledge of management. The quote below highlights this dilemma but it still does not address the sometimes ethical and moral concerns that people may have regarding how land, particularly public land, is managed.

> You need people on the ground to meet people, to be around, so when they are around they can bump into a forester. People say we haven't seen anyone for five years and the first thing they see is massive harvesting equipment moving in and signs going up and roads being wrecked, you can understand it. 'I've been walking here for five years and look at it, you didn't ask me, you didn't tell me this was going on'. We should prepare people for this but you can't prepare people for something they don't have a mental picture of. You can't say we are going to be harvesting in here and it's going to be a bit of a mess with machines around. You don't equate that to three-foot deep ruts and what looks like a tip. Twelve months later it probably looks okay and 'mother nature' will have tidied it all up and we will have done our track reinstatement's and everything else.
> Forest Enterprise

Managers talked about FC and FE's background in rural land management and noted that there was a lack of experience of working with urban communities. It was thought that working with urban communities was becoming increasingly important and the people that organisations had often failed to reach were the more deprived communities, particularly those who did not have access to cars.

> FC's background is rural, so it's quite a big learning curve working for urban communities.
> Forestry Commission

> We are making it so easy for car users that maybe we are undermining public transport.
> Forestry Commission

One manager suggested setting up a system where people could get a bus to the forest, be met by a ranger and given a day out. Although this would need to be actively promoted as he suggested *'the idea that people can go by bus is not in anyone's mind'*.

Worries were continually expressed about resources and funding for both staff and management of new and existing woodlands. FC and FE respondents suggested that the change in focus to sustainable forest management was increasing workloads, as other existing work was not being reduced. It was argued that the new social agenda should be concerned with bringing woodlands close to where people lived but the resources needed to make this happen were at present limited.

> …we want to do visitor centres but we don't have the money and there would be planning issues and we want to develop recreation in some key woods which are close to communities but we haven't the people or the money or the resource. So all we are doing really is maintenance…
> Forest Enterprise

It was also suggested that there could be difficulties for new staff with increasingly demanding roles and little *'slack for letting people in gently'*; jobs within the organisations were generally considered to be more stressful than they once were.

The main issues in this section were concerned with partnerships, public involvement and different ways of viewing woodland use and management. Progress is being made by the organisations to adapt to a broader agenda which locates woodlands as part of the wider environment and as contributors to a broad set of government priorities such as health, building safer communities, social inclusion, urban regeneration and education.

Summary of key issues from organisation respondents

Public participation

As far as the involvement of people is concerned, whom, how and when to involve them are not easy issues for managers to deal with. This was highlighted by the Community Development Organisation who described the need to build trust over time with communities. There are risks associated with not involving people such as increasingly acrimonious conflict over management decisions. Managers can no longer view the public as homogeneous but should realise that publics are diverse and plural.

Partnerships

Effective partnerships can allow for extra work to be undertaken and new areas, initiatives and directions to be opened up. Examples of this include the Forest School partnerships, and health and well-being partnerships with Primary Care Trusts. Partnerships can also be established with woodland user groups such as walkers, cyclists and 'friends of' wood/woodland. In the New Forest people are being recruited and trained as volunteers to provide information to the public, lead guided walks and carry out conservation work. This partnership between the local people who volunteer and the Forestry Commission can provide a range of benefits that accrue to the FC, to visitors to the forest and also to the individual volunteer.

Learning

We should move away from a view of the public as a group that needs to be educated through a one-way, top-down approach, e.g. by professionals and educators. There are different types of knowledge: that of experts, professionals as well as local people. The Forestry Commission needs to be open to learning from publics as well as a variety of organisations and there should be a greater exchange of knowledge between these different groups.

Management

Developing a greater awareness of urban issues and how trees and woodlands might contribute to people's quality of life is important. This could be achieved partly through partnerships with organisations that have a greater knowledge and understanding of urban issues. In providing public goods for public money the Forestry Commission needs a greater understanding of how, why and who benefits from woodlands and how this is affected by the social, political and environmental context in which people live (Figures 17 and 18). Studies such as this can help to provide insights by focusing on specific groups of people in particular areas.

Figure 17 Walk in the woods: benefiting both physical and mental well-being.

Figure 18 Outdoor activities and hobbies can add interest to a woodland visit.

Conclusions

What emerged from this research was the significant relationship between people's views of woodlands and trees and wider issues of concern over development, loss of green space, time and opportunity to access woodlands and past memories and experiences. Respondents' ways of viewing and interpreting the world around them provides the framework in which people assess their use of woodlands and wider environmental issues. Publics' values for woodlands and trees are a key element of SFM and without a greater awareness of these values organisations will continue to experience conflict over management of the environment. Conflicts relate to differences in values and to what Cheng et al. (2003) spoke of as the social, cultural and political processes that define what is appropriate or inappropriate behaviour in a particular area. Xu and Bengston (1997: 55) argue *'The paradox is that these social values for which our ability to define and measure is poorest, are the very ones that appear to be of increasing importance in our society'*. It is these values that can help to explain why publics care greatly about environmental issues and is one of the reasons why we need to explore new ways of trying to understand the social and cultural values of woodlands and trees. Deliberative approaches such as in-depth discussion groups and interviews provide a framework in which contemporary values can be explored and better understood, enabling organisations to be more responsive to citizens' diverse needs.

The urban groups in this study tended to prefer managed countryside and they considered cost to be significant especially for families who thought that visiting woodlands was a relatively inexpensive day out. All groups saw education as important although urban and rural groups expressed this differently. Urban groups wanted children specifically to learn about and have contact with nature so that they would have respect for it. In rural areas education was seen as an important element of learning and appreciating nature for all age groups (Westley, 2003). All groups distinguished between short trips (often regularly made) to local spaces and areas that they went to as part of a day trip. These day trips were often to places that either had facilities or organised events that could be taken advantage of such as cafés and children's play areas, or they were to quieter places to get away from the hectic pace of life and be somewhere perceived as natural. The woodland group in Stockbridge who are working on improving their local environment provide a powerful narrative of how residents can increase their sense of ownership by changing their local environment. The group were also providing an outlet for the community, somewhere to go for enjoyment and for children to have contact with green space.

Knowledge of ownership of the green spaces people used was limited. In urban areas it was often assumed that green spaces were public spaces so little thought was given to ownership. In rural areas concerns were articulated when previously accessible private land was sold to an owner who then restricted access. Some concerns were expressed over past negative experiences on farmland causing people to worry about where they could and could not go. While the majority of respondents professed to having heard of the Forestry Commission, it was only mentioned infrequently as managing particular areas of woodland, possibly due to this general uncertainty about who owned the land people used.

While all the groups spoke of the importance of woodlands and their enjoyment in using them it is difficult to identify what specifically attracts people to a woodland rather than other green space. Proximity plays a part, therefore if the nearest green space is a woodland then that is the most likely space to be used on a regular basis. The activity to be undertaken is also influential, thus if a family in Southampton want to have a picnic and to play ball games for the day they may choose a local park or the New Forest which has many open areas within the forest. As Macnaghten *et al.* (1998: 45) found in their study of the recreational uses of woodlands, what seemed to come first in people's decision-making process *'tended to be the personal or social wish to walk, play, picnic … in a social setting';* the setting was often secondary to this desire.

There were fewer differences in this research across the urban rural continuum and more commonalties between similar groups in both urban and rural areas such as retired people, women and young people. As in Henwood and Pidgeon's (2001) study the importance of childhood memories of using woodlands and the symbolic importance of trees and woodlands were emphasised. The supposedly simple decision of the places people choose to go to in their spare time links into a much broader set of issues about the cultural context of the society people live in and their personal experiences and memories.

> The range of values described by publics in this research emphasises that woodlands are much more than a place to go to carry out recreational activities.

Better understanding of this range of values provides organisations with a clearer view of the connections people make between the woodlands they view and use and wider topics of concern in everyday life.

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