

# Accessibility of woodlands and natural spaces

**Addressing crime and safety issues**



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## Addressing crime and safety issues

Report of a seminar organised by Forest Research supported by Lancashire Constabulary, CABE Space and English Nature

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Social Research Group  
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## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the partnership of organisations that helped to develop and finance this seminar, particularly Steve Haworth from Lancashire Constabulary, Deborah Fox of CABI Space and Judith Hanna of English Nature. We would also like to thank Peter Ranken from Forest Enterprise who kindly agreed to chair the event and all of the speakers whose presentations informed us and made us think. The workshop chairs and note takers also made a very valuable contribution to the success of the seminar, recording the key recommendations that delegates felt were of particular importance.

**Keywords:** accessible woodland, crime and safety, exclusionary behaviour, liability, rehabilitation, risk perception, urban woodlands, woodland design

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First published March 2005 by Forest Research, Alice Holt Lodge, Farnham, Surrey GU10 4LH

ISBN 0 85538 653 3

O'Brien, Elizabeth A.; Tabbush, Paul

*Accessibility of woodlands and natural spaces: addressing crime and safety issues*

48 pp.

Editing: Jenny Claridge

Design: Colourgraphic Arts/Jenny Claridge

Photographs supplied by Forest Research Photo Library, Forest Life Picture Library and Liz O'Brien

Printed by Colourgraphic Arts, Bordon, Hampshire GU35 9QE

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## Foreword

If wild lands are defined as areas in which human influence is negligible and cities as areas entirely constructed and managed by humans, then these two form environmental extremes between which exist a multiplicity of open living spaces. These vary to a large extent by the degree of management and residence imposed by humankind.

Perhaps in Britain few, if any, places can be considered truly wild, though there remain some places remote enough from major human influence to be considered close to wilderness. British environments are, almost invariably, managed ones. Rural areas are managed for aesthetic appeal, conservation, leisure, forest or agriculture while in urban areas management is geared more towards large-scale residency, leisure, commerce or industry. All have their place and purpose.

Human population density increases between these rural and urban extremes. Alongside that, undesirable issues, such as crime, nuisance and litigious behaviour (for which the common denominator is people), also increases. These undesirable issues have generally occurred and perhaps still do, in greater frequency where population densities are highest. However, the increased availability of mechanised transport has greatly increased people's ability to travel, individually and in groups, such as to extend their powers of criminality and nuisance over ever-increasing areas.

It is this concern with crime and nuisance which brings issues of access to woodlands and natural spaces to the forefront of the thinking of a wider audience of responsible landowners in both the public and private sectors. The varied list of delegates to this seminar gives some indication of organisations for which these matters have relevance. There are moral and legal issues at stake, but no one can discount the economic issues, which increasingly burden all relevant organisations or individuals.

At the same time, there is increasing recognition that deprivation of human populations from natural environments can have detrimental psychological, perhaps even physiological effects, depressing spirits and leading to increasingly manic, criminally dishonest and violent behaviour. Current research suggests that open spaces in urban areas need to retain some element of the natural to help offset such effects. These are the issues which have drawn together the varied organisations towards partnerships, hopefully made manifest and stimulated by this Accessibility seminar.

It is my great hope, which I know I share with Paul Tabbush and Liz O'Brien of Forest Research, that new understandings will be forged between organisations, and pathways found towards crime reduction in both rural and urban environments. A major part of the aim is to enable our fellow citizens to engage with British open spaces widely, freely, without hurt, crime or the fear of either. Making this happen is our shared vision of the future for which we hope this seminar will provide a trigger.

**Inspector Steve Haworth**  
**Lancashire Constabulary**



## Background

In 2004 Forest Research, with backing from Lancashire Constabulary, CABE Space and English Nature organised a one-day seminar to explore and debate the accessibility of woodlands and natural spaces<sup>1</sup> with particular reference to crime and safety issues. Seventy delegates attended the seminar and discussed and debated the issues outlined in this publication and described their experience and knowledge. A number of reasons led to the development of this event:

- Increased focus on the accessibility of woodlands and natural spaces with various studies being undertaken to map available space.
- Concerns about managing and dealing with anti-social behaviour to ensure that users are not deterred from enjoying the spaces available to them.
- Worries that people's perceptions of their own safety in woodlands is disproportionate to any actual risk.
- The need to advise and help landowners who may be concerned about issues of liability when providing public access.
- The need to ensure good design in woodlands and natural spaces to help reduce real and perceived dangers.

At an urban forestry conference in Missouri, Bouza, an executive in the New York Police Department outlined what he described as the unexpected link between trees and crime prevention through his experiences in that city. He described how a refocusing in the 1980s on community-oriented policing in New York brought together police and people to identify community problems and solutions. One solution was to improve the physical environment through tree planting. This led Bouza to ask himself 'Is this police work?' His conclusion was a resounding 'Yes' as he saw this approach as an investment in crime prevention. 'Trees are not going to produce miracles of safety in our violent society but their presence is important, they are a statement of caring. Their absence is a testament to neglect. The residents do get the message' (Bouza, 1989: 32).

<sup>1</sup> In this publication we use the terms natural space and green space. We do not specifically define either term as people's perceptions of both can differ quite widely; for example, they may speak about natural areas in cities if they are perceived as overgrown and unmanaged. Generally green space is vegetated areas in or surrounding urban locations and natural spaces are areas with less human influence, in the countryside or peri-urban fringe. Open spaces can refer to places which may include greenery or to streets, areas outside housing estates and outdoor shopping spaces.

In a report by OPENspace (2003) for the Countryside Agency, barriers to access were identified (not listed in order of importance) as:

- Negative feelings associated with previous experience
- Lack of confidence and negative perceptions of the environment
- Neglected or poorly maintained environment
- Lack of accessible transport
- Lack of appropriate interpretative information at sites, inadequate signage and lack of publicity
- Physical difficulty of access
- Lack of awareness of local initiatives and lack of perceived relevance
- Financial costs
- Lack of time
- Lack of appropriate activities to attract and provide a positive experience.

The above work concerns the diversity review on access to the countryside which focuses on how more people with disabilities, those from ethnic minorities, inner cities and young people can be encouraged to visit the countryside. The Countryside Agency is undertaking the diversity review for the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). This is due to the government's commitment, outlined in the Rural White Paper 2000, of addressing issues of equity in relation to countryside access (Defra, 2000).

The first three barriers outlined in the list above are related to crime and safety concerns; they highlight that negative feelings and perceptions can prevent people from accessing woodlands and natural/green spaces. People also tend to worry more about their safety in neglected and poorly maintained environments, as they are associated with a lack of care and control.

## Behaviour in natural and urban open spaces

Knopf and Andereck (2004) discuss what they call depreciative behaviour, that is behaviour that undermines or diminishes the value of the environment in some way. There is a challenge for resource managers to deal with this. Knopf and Andereck (2004) suggest that millions of dollars worth of damage has been done to parks and natural environments in the United States of America (USA) through this type of behaviour. The motives for depreciative behaviour have been explored and researched. Gramann and Vander Stoep (cited in Knopf and Andereck, 2004) developed six categories of what they termed normative violations in outdoor environments. In particular these are acts that do not meet what are considered to be acceptable standards of behaviour. These violations and underlying motives are outlined in Table 1.





<b>Table 1</b> Categories of violations in outdoor environments (from Gramann and Vander Stoep, 2004).	
Violations	Motives and reasons for behaviour
Unintentional violations	Inadvertent due to lack of awareness of the rules rather than malicious intent.
Uninformed violations	Some behaviour is due to a lack of awareness of the consequences of certain actions.
Releasor-cue violations	Behaviour that is precipitated by cues in the environment that could be eliminated.
Responsibility-denial violations	Perpetrator denies having a moral responsibility to conform.
Status-confirming violations	Desire to confirm status as a member of a group with deviant norms.
Wilful violations	Motivated by financial gain, ideological protest, malice, revenge or desire to create fear.

Table 1 indicates how these violations may be due to a lack of awareness, related to peer group pressure or a person wanting to actively damage something for a variety of reasons. From social science research that examines this subject area it has been suggested that managers can play an important role in reducing these types of behaviours. Strategies to intervene in depreciative behaviour can be indirect, for example by providing information or through education; or strategies can be direct in the form of rules or enforcement. Generally indirect forms of intervention are preferred, as managers want people to have a certain amount of freedom in using the natural environment. Also, indirect approaches have often been shown to be effective for all but the most deliberate depreciative behaviours. Knopf and Andereck (2004) suggest that work carried out over the past two decades provides managers with a number of insights into how to deal with problems of what they term depreciative behaviour. These include the need to:

- Focus on the causes of behaviour rather than the perpetrator.
- Remove environmental prompts; for example litter and vandalism at a site tend to trigger more littering and vandalism. Many of us will have witnessed spirals of decline where sites that have been neglected become dumping grounds for further rubbish, and because of the impact of this fewer people visit the site until it becomes virtually a no-go area. Conversely community projects have shown how the spiral can be reversed, and as a site is cleaned up and improved more people begin to use it.
- Provide clear information with any rules and guidelines outlined and reasons given of why these are important.
- Give people options or alternatives to meet their needs rather than say no, and use positive rather than negative messages.
- Undertake face to face communication; this is particularly effective but costly, so should be used at key sites where there are particularly severe problems.

Knopf and Andereck (2004: 311) argue that there should be less focus on blaming individuals and more focus on the systems which provide services to the individual. 'Perhaps the greatest insight from research is that natural resource managers can solve many of their challenges through soft and positive intervention strategies'. The Woodland Trust has published guides on some of the ways of tackling 'damage and misuse' and 'litter and fly-tipping' for managers who are involved in creating or managing woodlands.



'Together' is a campaign being run in England and Wales by the Home Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The campaign aims to take a stand against anti-social behaviour and puts the needs of the local community first. The 'Together' website gives information on types of anti-social behaviour, practitioner training and support, and the range of interventions possible for tackling anti-social behaviour. Case studies are provided. For example, Liverpool City Council worked closely with Merseyside Police to remove dumped cars in a fast track car scheme. It was thought that if areas look less neglected then they would be less likely to attract anti-social behaviour (Home Office and ODPM, 2004). Stafford's report (2003) concurs with this idea suggesting that people's perceptions of safety and fear of crime are influenced by public spaces that appear unmanaged because of vandalism, graffiti and litter, as they provide evidence of a lack of social control. This often restricts people's movements as they tend to keep away from uncared for spaces. The British Crime Survey provides evidence that fear of crime is related to levels of crime and disorder in people's neighbourhoods (Home Office, 2004).

Defra have recently commissioned research to identify the reasons why people fly-tip, and the report, due later in 2005, will inform Defra's fly-tipping strategy. Research carried out for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation found that large items of household furniture were dumped in poorer areas as people could not afford the council charge to collect these items; and often they did not have access to private transport so could not take these items to council waste sites (Lucas *et al.*, 2004). Research carried out for the Youth Justice Board found that the motivations for young people to carry out vandalism and produce graffiti included issues such as peer pressure, status and a lack of suitable legitimate activities (Stafford, 2003).

In summary, people's behaviour is complex and can deliberately or inadvertently cause damage. Research is highlighting some of the ways in which land managers can deal with a variety of problems resulting from behaviour that damages the environment or restricts others people's use of it.

## Woodlands, trees and crime

The Human Environment Research Laboratory at the University of Illinois has conducted a number of research studies in Chicago that have explored crime and safety issues in relation to green space and trees. As part of this programme Kuo and Sullivan (2001a) carried out a study using police crime records to explore the links and relationships between vegetation and crime in inner city Chicago. The work describes how many park authorities and municipalities remove vegetation because of worries that it may conceal, and become a focus for, criminal activities. This is not a new idea: in the 13th century highways were cleared to reduce the number of highway robberies. Kuo and Sullivan (2001a) argue that fear of crime tends to be higher when vegetation blocks people's views. Previous studies have shown that outdoor spaces which include trees are used more by local communities than spaces without trees. This increases informal surveillance which can help to deter criminal activity: as criminals will avoid places in which they feel they may be spotted or where someone may intervene to stop them. Kuo and Sullivan's (2001a) research focused on inner city housing estates and found that the greener a building's surroundings the fewer the total number of crimes committed: this included both violent crime and property crime. The researchers proposed two possible mechanisms for this observation. The first is that greener spaces increased informal surveillance as residents spent more time outdoors in a pleasant environment. The second mechanism proposes that 'vegetation might inhibit crime through mitigating mental fatigue' (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001a: 347). A number of studies have indicated that woodlands and natural environments can aid in recovery from mental fatigue (Kaplan, 1995). Fatigue of this nature can lead to irritability and outbursts of anger that may potentially lead to violent behaviour.

While the above research was carried out in densely populated urban areas some of the findings are also relevant to less densely populated and more rural areas. In relation to reducing mental fatigue, people often talk about escaping from the stresses of everyday life when they talk about the benefits of woodlands and natural spaces (Kuo and Sullivan, 2001b). Health and well-being is an important focus for the government in Britain at present, and organisations such as the Forestry Commission can play an important role in providing and managing areas where people can go to revitalise themselves, improve their sense of well-being and reduce stress (Tabbush and O'Brien, 2003).

## Rehabilitation of offenders

There are examples from around the country and from a range of organisations of offenders and prisoners undertaking environmental conservation work as part of their rehabilitation. Some Forest Enterprise<sup>2</sup> managers are working with the probation service and HM Prisons are currently working with English Nature. These partnerships may help to play a role in delivering the Home Office target (by 2006) of reducing re-offending rates by 5 per cent (English Nature, 2004). The tasks offenders and prisoners undertake include building benches, clearing undergrowth and creating footpaths. This type of work provides opportunities for offenders and prisoners to learn new skills and work as part of a team; they may also be able to gain qualifications and therefore eventually improve their employment prospects. HM Prison Springhill and English Nature are looking at training prisoners in National Vocational Qualification Countryside Management (HM Prison Service, 2004). There are a number of benefits for:

- the prisoners who can gain training and education and transferable skills;
- biodiversity and wildlife improvement of natural areas;
- general management of woodlands and natural spaces;
- local people and visitors who can use these well-managed places.

English Nature has a number of National Nature Reserves and these often require labour intensive management. As an organisation they do not have the manpower capacity for this and so a partnership with the Prison Service may be of benefit for both organisations, as well as offenders and prisoners who can learn new skills that can help them reintegrate into society. Discussions are currently taking place with the Prison Service to develop this initiative on a national basis.

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

## Issues of landowner liability

Golden (2003) explored issues of occupier's liability and how far occupiers need to go to protect themselves from compensation claims. She describes how the concept of a 'compensation culture' has recently been dealt a blow by the House of Lords through a case in which a young person ignored a no swimming sign at a local council-run country park and broke his neck, and then sued the council for damages. The Law Lords found for the council and suggested that adults who took no notice of warning signs did not impose a duty on the occupier of the land to take other steps to protect them. In other words people using such areas should take heed and not disregard warning signs that owners have put up to warn and protect them from danger.

Is it the case that landowners perceive the threat to be greater than it is in reality? Work by the University of Brighton (Church, 2003) on owner's attitudes and perceptions of public access in woodlands in the southeast of England found that many owners were concerned about public liability and rising insurance premiums. They wanted more information on the implications of improved public access for insurance and liability.

Many landowners worry about trespassers on their land and what their responsibility is likely to be if a trespasser is injured. The Occupiers Liability Act 1984 (Golden, 2003) was created to give limited protection to trespassers where:

- An occupier is aware of danger or has reasonable grounds for believing it exists.
- An occupier knows or has reasonable grounds for believing a non-visitor is in or might come into the area.
- There is a risk against which the occupier could be reasonably expected to provide protection. For example an occupier cannot allow a savage dog to roam their premises without providing a warning.

The Visitor Safety in the Countryside Group (VSCG) was formed in 1997. The group includes British Waterways, the Countryside Management Association, English Heritage, Historic Scotland, the National Trust, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the Forestry Commission. The aim of the VSCG is to promote best practice in visitor safety and they have published guidelines which focus on awareness, partnership, responsibility and risk control (Maginnis, 2003). Some of the issues they raise are concerned with warning visitors of risk, not reducing people's sense of freedom and adventure, and providing adequate information, but also expecting visitors to exercise responsibility for themselves.

## Perceptions of risk

From the presentations given at this seminar (pages 15–29) it is clear that certain groups of people are concerned about their own safety when in woodlands and natural/green spaces. Although the incidence of crime in such spaces is generally very low, some people's fears have a very real impact on their behaviour and prevent them from using and enjoying the environment. Research by O'Brien (2004a), which explores people's experiences of woodlands and natural spaces through a series of discussion groups, found that a small number of women in the Liverpool and Southampton groups had been accosted by 'flashers' (men who expose themselves). This made them wary about who might be hiding in green places or wooded areas. Burgess (1995) described some of the coping strategies women use to deal with actual and perceived threat; they regulate their behaviour by not going out after dark, decide where it is appropriate to walk and avoid being alone in public spaces.



There are also widespread concerns about children's safety in green places. A telephone survey in 2003 by MORI of 1008 women in London, commissioned by the Greater London Authority, found that 67 per cent of women never allow their children to play in local parks or open spaces unsupervised (GLA, 2004). When asked what would encourage them to allow their children to play in these areas unsupervised, 46 per cent stated that more park attendants would help. The recent Green Alliance and Demos report (Thomas and Thompson, 2004: 4) which explores children's attitudes to the environment argues that: 'The worse a local environment looks the less able children are to play freely, and to develop the habitats and commitments that will enable them to address environmental problems in the future'. The report also highlighted that danger was an aspect of the spaces that children used and assessing danger was a priority for children when they thought about different environments.

The media also plays an important role as stories of attacks and murders can leave a lasting impression on people. The Health and Safety Executive report (Petts *et al.*, 2000) on the amplification of risk, explored issues to do with the media and how people receive, filter and compare information about risks from a range of sources including the media. They found that 'people preferred to draw on local resources – particularly direct personal experiences – to make their accounts of risks plausible to themselves and to others'. The report suggests that the media can only amplify perceptions of risk if they capture an existing public mood, and it also argues that if this happens the media is not alone in this function. The issue of media influence is complex and the way in which people understand and interpret information in relation to their lives needs to be better understood.

## How can design help?

The Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) and Secured By Design (SBD) schemes provide guidance on crime prevention. The goal of CPTED is to reduce opportunities for crime to occur. Gardner (2004) suggests that it is only recently through CPTED that a psychological as well as a physical approach has been taken to create a defensive environment: one in which through various means people can take better control of their immediate surroundings. This relatively new scheme brings together common security techniques focusing on what is termed defensible space, e.g. how people take control of their local territory, as well as the types of surveillance that can be encouraged: natural, formal and informal (Brunson *et al.*, 2001; Kuo, 2003). Appropriate design of the landscape can also provide symbolic barriers such as flowerbeds and small hedges.

A car park scheme was set up in 2002 in the Brecon Beacons National Park Area to reduce theft. The scheme was funded by the Forestry Commission, Brecon Beacons National Park Authority, Dyfed Powys Police and Powys County Council. Volunteers were trained and supported by Dyfed Powys Police; they were given fluorescent jackets and badges and portable phones which they used to keep in contact with local police. In one year car theft from forest car parks that introduced the scheme was reduced by 75 per cent (Countryside Recreation, 2003). Due to the success of the project it is hoped that further areas will undertake a similar approach. A leaflet produced by Sussex Police on tackling beauty spot and rural car crime outlines ways in which informal surveillance of car parks can be increased through the location of picnic tables, bus stops and the encouragement of ice cream vans.



## Seminar introduction and presentations



The seminar, which was organised by Forest Research with support from Lancashire Constabulary, CABI Space and English Nature, attracted a broad attendance, including planners, police, academics and environmental professionals. Improving the accessibility of woodlands and natural spaces is seen as a key issue for organisations such as the Forestry Commission; the delivery of social and public benefits from woodlands and greenspace is crucially dependent on the quantity and quality of access. In this context accessibility is not just about well-managed paths, it includes psychological and cultural issues.

The seminar set out to address five themes:

1. Access and risk perception
2. Access and exclusionary behaviour
3. Access and liability
4. Crime reduction and the rehabilitation of offenders
5. Location and design of accessible woodland.

The atmosphere was highly constructive, with a shared belief in the positive possibilities that could be achieved by working together. The morning session comprised a series of excellent talks, each exploring one of the themes with reference to research or personal experience. The afternoon workshops allowed delegates to discuss issues related to the five themes and recommend key issues which they thought should be addressed in the future.

The seminar presentations are given in the order in which they were presented on the day.





# Welcome from the chair

**Peter Ranken, Seminar Chair**  
**Head of Recreation and Development,**  
**Forest Enterprise England**



After welcoming and thanking delegates for attending the seminar Peter described how resource managers' overall objective was the need to get people to make better use of woodlands and natural spaces, recognising the wide range of benefits to quality of life that can be derived from them. However, the enjoyment of these benefits depends on the quality and quantity of access. This raises the question of whether access is freely and equitably open to all sections of society.

Peter then outlined the five main themes of the seminar to be addressed in the morning presentations and in the afternoon workshops.

## Access and risk perception

In her ground-breaking research, *Growing in confidence*, published by the Countryside Commission in 1995, Jacqui Burgess demonstrated that perceptions of risk can have profound effects on woodland access. The work described how these effects were experienced differently by people from different ethnic backgrounds and also that the sense of risk is experienced acutely by women. Jacqui said that while the actual risks, for example of attacks in woodlands, are small, 'what is perceived to be real is real in its effects'. This perception impacts on people's behaviour so that some women might only visit woodland when in the company of others.

## Access and exclusionary behaviour

Dealing with anti-social behaviour or just behaviour that tends to exclude other users can be a major preoccupation for managers. This might include rowdy young people drinking or shouting abuse, rubbish dumping, graffiti, fly-tipping or the use of car parking areas for anti-social behaviour. These types of behaviours can have a big impact on other users, deterring them from visiting areas where they perceive there may be trouble.

## Access and liability

For the forest owner, the implications of public access in terms of liability and risk can be a deterrent. A report on owners' attitudes to woodland access carried out by the University of Brighton for Forestry Commission England in 2003 reported that the main problems experienced were illegal vehicular access (usually '4x4s') and dumping, litter and vandalism. However the research found little evidence of serious incidents leading to insurance claims with respect to land, animals or equipment. There may be a problem of owner's perceptions of liability and risk, and therefore some scope to mitigate their fears through clear advice.



## Crime reduction and the rehabilitation of offenders

Crime is also a direct concern for many forest managers, dealing with incidences such as arson, car break-ins and theft. Forest design can be used to reduce perceptions of risk, and also to reduce actual levels of crime. Some forest managers are involved with probation services and voluntary organisations in the rehabilitation of offenders, and in some cases experience shows that this can instil a positive attitude towards forests, so reducing levels of crime.

## Location and design of accessible woodland

Well-used, well-managed woodlands near to where people live (see Figure 1), can provide inclusive access and tend to attract less anti-social behaviour than unmanaged woodlands. Are design guidelines needed to optimise available space and create liveable and quality environments?

**Figure 1**

Improving local urban woodlands through tree planting helps to provide benefits for the whole community.



# Space for people: a strategy to increase public access to woodland

Nick Collinson, Conservation Advisor, Woodland Trust



Nick helped to set out the background to the 'Woods for People' project which is an inventory of accessible woodland. This was developed by the Woodland Trust and Forestry Commission England and supported by Forestry Commission Wales and Northern Ireland Environment and Heritage Service (Woodland Trust, 2004). The aim of the project was to identify woodland with public access across the UK. A woodland access standard has been developed. The Woodland Trust has a strategy for increasing access to woods as they provide a wide range of benefits to people living nearby. However people use woodlands, they should be located nearby as a number of studies have shown that the distance people are prepared to travel on foot to a woodland or natural space is only a few hundred metres.

A range of organisations were contacted for the project and asked to confirm if they owned, managed or knew of the existence of woodland with public access. Accessible woodland was defined as any site that is permissively accessible to the general public for recreational purposes. The data set is provisional and is not complete but so far it shows differences between countries in the UK (Table 2) and within regions in England.

Access standards provide a useful tool for decision-making, as it is impossible to establish whether we have sufficient resource without some sort of standard. A standard also allows for communication to take place

with other sectors that use standards, e.g. English Nature's accessible natural greenspace standard.

The Woodland Access Standard (WAS<sup>t</sup>) was developed because there were no standards in policy planning guidance that were specific to woodland. Woodlands are an important habitat for a wide range of public benefits. Many studies have shown people's appreciation of woodland and conclude that there is a case for more to be created particularly in close proximity to large populations.

**Table 2** Publicly accessible woodland by country: based on 'Woods for people' project.

Country	% of all woodland > 2 ha accessible to the public
England	46
Northern Ireland	72
Scotland	61
Wales	53

The main aspirations of WAST include:

- That no person should live more than 500 metres from at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 2 hectares in size.
- There should also be at least one area of accessible woodland of no less than 20 hectares within 4 kilometres of people's homes.

The WAST is an aspirational benchmark intended as a tool to facilitate discussion and is focused on towns and cities, as this is where most people in the UK live. The standard is equally relevant to rural areas although an appropriate judgement will be required to produce standards suitable for rural localities. Through Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and census data we are able to look at areas with the highest density of population to ensure that the maximum number of people have access. The work highlights the fact that existing woodland is not enough to meet these standards and that new woodland creation is needed in specific areas. This work provides a rationale for expansion of woodland access and woodland creation. This provides a basis for local decision-makers and can guide the targeting of public money where need is greatest. However, while woodland access could be described as important in a physical sense, if there are other psychological or perceptual barriers that are preventing people making the most of access then these issues also need to be addressed.







# Urban trees and security

**Mark Johnston, Lecturer and Research Associate,  
Myerscough College**



Mark began by emphasising that there is no doubt that the potential conflict between trees and community safety is now a significant issue. Fears about crime and safety in relation to tree cover are also likely to increase significantly, particularly in urban areas. This issue now generates considerable concern among urban residents and it presents difficult challenges for those responsible for planning and management of urban environments.

So far, much of the interest and research surrounding this issue in Britain has focused on woodlands. However, there is another wider context in which this issue needs to be addressed urgently – urban green space. We need to consider the whole urban forest and not just urban and urban fringe woodlands. The green spaces of many town and city centres, housing estates and other residential areas could alter radically over the next decade unless concerns about crime and safety are responded to in a way that does not involve the drastic pruning or removal of trees and shrubs. Many local authority tree officers are reporting greater numbers of requests from individual residents and community groups for tree maintenance work in the belief that this will reduce the risk of crimes such as mugging, burglary or indecent exposure, or discourage a variety of forms of anti-social behaviour. While these potential problems often relate more to large shrubs, mature trees are also coming under pressure. Tree officers are also receiving requests to limit the planting of new trees to facilitate close circuit television (CCTV) surveillance.

In the face of this growing threat to urban trees, what are the prospects for the future? Unless we respond to this challenge, positively and vigorously, the prospects are bleak. We could face urban landscapes with very few trees and shrubs. If there are trees, these could resemble lollipops, with small compact crowns to cause minimum obstruction and tall thin trunks that nobody could hide behind.

As urban forest managers we should not just manage urban trees and woodland, we should also be advocates for a vision of a healthy and extensive urban forest. Urban forestry is more of a vision than a reality in most towns and cities in Britain. We must counter the negative perceptions and promote the benefits of urban trees.

The National Urban Forestry Unit (NUFU) and the Human Environment Research Laboratory (HERL) at the University of Illinois in the United States are two very good sources of information about the benefits of the urban forest. NUFU has published a booklet entitled *Trees matter* that gives an account of the many environmental, economic and social benefits of urban trees and woodlands. HERL has conducted and published extensive research into the social benefits of urban trees, particularly in densely populated residential districts. Its work on trees in relation to community health and safety issues should be an essential reference for all those involved in urban tree management. But we must not just be aware of this information ourselves; we need to make it known to the public and to politicians in order to make a real difference.

Lastly, we must get more information on the scale of this problem and the level of awareness of appropriate solutions. This year, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister commissioned Myerscough College and the Agricultural Development Advisory Service (ADAS) to conduct a major study of England's urban forests. The results of the research will help shape central and local government policy on urban trees for several years to come. As part of the research, a survey questionnaire has recently been sent to all English local authorities to ascertain their policies and practices in relation to urban tree management. Three questions relating specifically to trees and community safety have been included in the questionnaire. The officers are asked:

1. To give some indication of the significance of this issue in their local authority district, including both publicly and privately owned trees.
2. To specify how many requests for tree maintenance work on publicly owned trees they have received on this issue over the last financial year, and on how many occasions work was actually undertaken.
3. If they consider any national recognised guidelines on community safety when designing tree planting schemes.

The results of the survey are expected in 2005.



# Woodlands, natural spaces and the media

**Deborah Fox, Head of Standards and Best Practice,  
CABE Space**



Undertaking an MA in medieval history in the 1990s stimulated Deborah's interest in how woodlands and natural spaces are expressed in the media. She discovered a myriad of descriptive landscapes: from medieval to modern, from oral tradition to fairy tales. Many of these landscapes were as imagined as the stories which took place within them, mostly to inspire morality. With some notable exceptions, such as Simon Schama's well-loved text *Landscape and memory*, imagined landscapes have prevailed in literature. Is it then surprising that the media today fuels the emotions that have been elicited by stories around ancient fires and books at bedtime?

Deborah asked the audience to 'come off the path and into the woods', and to find out more about a number of themes:

- Perception of safety can be strongly affected by messages in the media.
- The media present conflicting messages.
- The outcome is already affecting, and will continue to affect, the real landscape.

The part of the presentation first featured Red Riding Hood, from the fairy tale that has evolved from Perrault's tale in the late 17th century, to the reworking as *Little red cap* by the Brothers Grimm in the early 1800s. Many of us will relate to this image and the audience were asked to think of other images they saw as a child in books, television programmes and stories read in newspapers, that may have served to reinforce their own perception of natural space. This is not to suggest that we might be afraid of walking in a park at night for fear of being set upon by a wolf in a hat and jacket! But the imagery that surrounds us and the headlines we read are factors in perceptions of crime and safety.

The Welsh National Opera staged *Hansel and Gretel* at Saddlers Wells during 2004. This shows a symbolic portrayal of the wooded landscape, a key feature of this Grimm's fairy tale, with a small number of tree characters in the banquet scene. This is a critical departure from the dark, closed expanse of wood or forest inspiring fear in literature, and attaches fear to individual trees. Given current issues such as adoption of council policies to remove branches to a six-foot height to reduce concealment, and entrenched negative perceptions of street trees in many communities, this stimulates an interesting debate.

Deborah paused to reflect on the types of media that have and do portray imagery of woodlands and natural spaces. A timeline can be followed through oral tradition to literature and back to oral tradition. Film and television (and arguably another form of oral interpretation – email) have become today's main source of many people's learning and experience. The newspaper, pamphlet and biographical accounts of highwaymen in the closing decades of the seventeenth century portrayed not only a picture of unprecedented callousness, but fuelled the highwaymen's (and women's) image by detailing the outcomes of the attacks. In the *Making it safe* report from the conference organised by the London Parks and Gardens Forum, it is clear that reported crime

statistics show that parks are not dangerous places to be and are far from being crime hotspots. Yet recent surveys indicate that four out of ten women living in London feel unsafe using open spaces during the day, and 67 per cent of women who have children said they never allow them to go to the park unsupervised.

The report cites the reasons for this as:

- Press coverage of crime in parks
- Rumour
- Personal experience or perception.

However, while the likelihood of danger to women and children is small, for those who have been attacked the consequences can be serious.

Apparent threats have a deeper impact due to the emotional significance of these places as a retreat from the pressures of daily life – and the sense of isolation they may provide as a desirable feature in the first instance. Another striking issue in this context is that we all want to promote ecology and nature, but we also want good views across the space to reassure and reduce risk, which implies separation between tree canopies and undergrowth. Clearly a dichotomy.

The media can be used positively to provoke debate, and CABI Space's challenge of the risk aversion culture earlier this year is a case in point. Imagine an environment where all tree branches are above 2 metres high; there is no undergrowth (and so no shelter for wildlife) for fear of dangers lurking, so any risk is removed. Many of the audience would be familiar with the premise that children want to take undertake activities in outdoor environments, such as tree climbing, and these may include certain risks. A space denuded of all risk will be a soulless place indeed as this would reduce opportunities for young people to gain an understanding of limits and boundaries, which they need to learn as part of their growth and development. This takes us back to the reduction in scale of negative perception associated with woodlands and natural spaces, from the landscape itself, right down to the micro-level and the individual components that are essential in making a good space.

Here is a quote from a young person in CABI Space's new guide: *What would you do with this space? A good practice guide to involving children and young people in the design and care of urban spaces:*

I like an unorganised area with lots of good climbing trees and activities. I like things with no strict paths and streams and ponds. I like secret places with a bit of exciting history.

**Catherine, age 12**

In a move to stop the trend of risk aversion and litigation culture in its tracks, CABI Space has launched a radical new 10-point Manifesto, calling on ordinary people, local and national politicians, local authorities and businesses to work together to reclaim Britain's city parks, squares and open spaces for the people. Individuals and organisations are urged to sign up to this at [www.itsyourspace.org.uk](http://www.itsyourspace.org.uk).

Outside the news press, the media continues to perpetuate natural space as a place for magical occurrence and mystery. None more so than in the *Lord of the rings* film trilogy where the rich landscapes that Tolkien painted between the 1930s and 1950s are brought to life for a new generation. The point of raising this issue is to highlight the difference between previous generations and young people's experiences of urban environments today. Perhaps fuelled by this recent exuberant expression of the wooded landscape in the film trilogy, the 'forest' remains a place of great deeds, with imagination stimulated by film and television, as well as computer games. But we have to look at the *actual* landscape children now experience and it is alarming that their terminology and language about natural spaces is far removed from even the semi-natural woodland that was at the heart of Tolkien's childhood in Warwickshire.



The Green Alliance paints a more stark picture and at its recent launch of *A child's place* (Thomas and Thompson, 2004) a quote was given where young people point to two trees and ask: is that a forest? The point is, if two trees can be considered a woodland or forest, and the media runs headlines using more familiar typologies in relation to murder, attack or sexual assault – or even environmental crime such as vandalism – then young people will begin to attach fear of attack to every piece of natural space around them. The Green Alliance's film attached to *A child's place* does much to reinforce this by the expressions on the faces of young people describing their local outdoor environments as a source of fear of abduction, drug pushers and gangs.

While we can rely on film and childhood books to paint a picture of woodlands and natural spaces, it isn't too long before children recognise that what they actually see isn't quite as good as the imagined landscape and they may begin to refer to more negative portrayals in the media. Can we rely solely on the imagery presented by the media? We should be creating inspiring landscapes, whether they are new community forests or a local 'pocket park'.

Let's return to the media and look at its mixed messages. The *Independent* newspaper ran a feature in April 2004 stating that living in or near woodland is becoming an increasingly rare privilege. There doesn't seem to be any doubt in publicity generated by estate agents that proximity to green space is a housebuyer's dream, which does fly in the face of the statistics on fear of personal safety, albeit unsubstantiated. Here the media can raise the debate that organisations, such as CABI Space and those represented here, must build on with facts and evidence about the importance of trees and woodlands to assist the process of levering budgets into green space, be it for the benefit of health or economic regeneration. In conclusion it is imperative that we look to young people to steer our thinking in the future. There is much evidence that children are exposed to and affected by what their parents see and hear in the media. Therefore our negative perception will affect their view of natural green space.

# Whose space? Is one person's use another person's abuse?

**Simon Bell, OPENspace, Edinburgh College  
of Art/Heriot-Watt University**



In talking to forest managers a clear idea is given of the negative aspects of what goes on in woodlands but when talking to woodland users the issue becomes much more complicated. Simon outlined how people's fears are based on their previous experience and described the contested nature of the use and abuse of woodlands. For example, a lot of people who visit woodlands take their dog; dogs provide a feeling of security and add legitimacy to people walking by themselves. On the other hand, dogs may be seen as an abuse; dog mess is a troublesome issue and can reduce people's positive experience of using woodlands. This example illustrates the complexity of perceptions of use and abuse.

People use urban woods to escape both from home and from work: concepts of adventure and mystery attract people to woodlands but also bring fear. Teenage males often make other people anxious and the key groups affected are generally children, women, ethnic minorities and other teenagers. Proximity to woodlands is key to their use and walking is the most popular activity undertaken in woodlands.

Research undertaken by OPENspace examined local use and social inclusion in woodlands in Central Scotland. The research found that people classed the abuse of woodlands as vandalism; either of facilities or trees, fire, dumping of rubbish and cars as well as what might be considered anti-social behaviour that degraded the resource and deterred other visitors from making the most of opportunities for access. Simon then focused on a section of this study that looked at children and teenagers and how they made use of woodlands. Through a series of focus groups the research explored the differences in attitudes of different age groups of children. Children and young people were seen by forest managers as a source of litter and were thought to be responsible for many of the burnt-out cars found in woodlands. Age groups involved in the study ranged from pre-school through to late teenagers. The activities being undertaken ranged from supervised play for younger children to tree climbing, building dens, using swings through to teenage drinking, having parties, using drugs and building campfires. At the age of about fifteen both sexes lost interest in visiting woodlands for positive activities, sometimes describing them as boring or too quiet. Older teenagers start to visit again to carry out activities seen by others as anti-social, such as drinking and taking drugs. Woodlands provide somewhere away from prying eyes and parental or police authority. School children in general were not very worried about going into woodlands alone, although some young children were concerned about the behaviour of older children.

A pattern emerged from the research suggesting that for young children woodlands were about adventure and mystery. Older teenagers often choose woodlands that are quiet and unmanaged to carry out their activities. Is abuse by teenagers, as perceived by others, also their legitimate use? This depends on who you are and your viewpoint. For example, a group of teenagers drinking and listening to music might be seen by other users as anti-social behaviour and yet this might have little impact on the woodland itself. Woods are resilient places and

can accommodate a range of teenage activities. What this research emphasises is the complexity of issues surrounding ideas of use and abuse, and the ways in which children use woodlands changes as they develop.

The research (Bell *et al.*, 2003: 97) raised three areas of tension that stood out as particularly important:

- Tensions between parents and children in terms of protection versus the need to play freely.
- Tensions between different age groups of children/teenagers over their desires to use woodlands for play and social activities.
- Tensions between adults and children/teenagers over the kinds of activities that fall into the categories of use and abuse.

Simon highlighted the importance of childhood experiences of woodlands and natural spaces and described how children who used these spaces were more likely to become adults who enjoyed woodlands. What will be the future consequences of today's restrictions of children's free play?

Finally, a greater management presence can make a big difference to people's feelings of safety, as the signs of abuse are less likely to be present. The visible appearance of woods that are unmanaged or only occasionally maintained seems to be linked to higher levels of abuse. However, management does not necessarily have to be carried out by formal owners or authorities, as local people's sense of ownership is also important.

# Crime prevention through environmental design

**Bill Case, Architectural Liaison Officer,  
Humberside Police**



As an Architectural Liaison Officer – a specialist crime prevention officer trained at the Home Office Crime Reduction College – Bill deals with crime, risk, designing-out crime and issues of defensible space. Secured by Design (SBD) is a UK Police initiative which aims to design-out crime with the use of effective crime prevention and security standards. The initiative supports one of the government's main planning objectives: to create secure quality places where people want to live and work. Bill began by explaining the SBD principles and these include:

- Access and movement – defined safe routes are needed.
- Surveillance – this may not be solely CCTV. There is also natural surveillance where the public look out for each other, e.g. Neighbourhood Watch.
- Creation of 'defensible' space – this could be through landscaping or erecting fences in appropriate places.
- Improved physical protection – on properties such as doors and windows.
- Appropriate community ownership and use.
- Good management and management policies.
- Adoption of police award schemes such as 'secured by design' or 'secure car parks'.

Problem areas identified by the initiative include potential gathering places, for example where youths or vehicles are brought together. The public open space in residential estates, open car parks including public toilets, cemeteries and places of worship as well as unoccupied caravan sites, e.g. in coastal areas, are all potential problem areas. Possible strategies to deal with problems have been identified and these include:

- Use of operational police and warden patrols.
- Introduction of alcohol exclusion zones.
- Increased professional training and raising awareness.
- Targeting hot spots where problems occur and where potential offenders congregate.
- Appropriate use of portable/new technology, produced by the Police Scientific Development Branch.

There is also a range of landscaping options. For example, a hedge provides a very good barrier, better than a fence. Aggressive planting of thorny shrubs can be used to control access to some areas. Encouraging mixed use of an area, e.g. dog walking, provision of seating, also enables a wider range of people to use an area. Gravel surfaces can be used in sensitive areas providing an acoustic signal that someone is approaching.

The following website provides more information about SBD and provides a search facility for finding Architectural Liaison Officers around the country: [www.securedbydesign.com](http://www.securedbydesign.com)





## Can access be managed safely?

**Chris Probert, Forestry Commission**



Chris began by outlining landowners' current concerns related to public access; these include:

- If I allow access to my land people might have accidents.
- If someone has an accident they might take me to court.
- Does my insurance cover me if this happens?
- How do I manage the safety of visitors?
- Can and where might I get help?

After highlighting the above concerns, Chris went on to consider the extent to which they were valid. He suggested that statistics were not easy to obtain in this area. Research for the Countryside and Rights of Way Act safety study outlined that in 1998 there were 1.26 billion countryside visits (TNS Travel and Tourism, 2004). Indications from research based on the DTI (Department of Trade and Industry) Leisure Accident Survey System are that there is a 1 in 17 000 chance of having an accident. Chris emphasised that this was for the countryside and not specifically for woodlands. Coupled with these data, Health and Safety Executive figures for 1991–2000 show that there were just 27 incidents in England and Wales involving walkers and livestock. The Association of British Insurers has commented that claims relating to the countryside are a very minor aspect of their work. Also, the National Farmers Union Mutual do not in general have a serious claims history in respect of members of the public on farmland.

Recent statistics outline that visitor numbers to woodlands in Great Britain were 355 million in 1998 of which about 40 per cent were to Forestry Commission woodlands (Forestry Commission, 2003). Recorded accidents for the Forestry Commission estate in 2002–2003 to members of the public were 106 and in the context of total visitor numbers this is very low, coming out at 1 reportable accident per 416 000 visits (this figure is based on historic research that puts the number of visits to the FC estate at 50 million per year). There are no comparable figures for other (e.g. private) woodlands at present.

## Access – what are the risks?

As far as access is concerned the risks include:

- Abandoned infrastructure
- Falling in quarries
- Forestry operations
- Mineshafts
- Pest control and farm machinery
- Swimming in quarry lakes
- Shooting
- Unexploded ordnance
- Walking with dogs in proximity to suckler cows and calves.

In the context of woodland access it appears that there are actually very few formally recorded accidents relative to visits. However, there is still a risk which needs to be managed. If things do go wrong there is a potential for serious and expensive repercussions. If access is not allowed there is still a duty of care owed to trespassers, and insurance is there to protect the landowner. Bearing all these things in mind access can be managed safely.

There is a legal framework within which access takes place:

- Health and Safety at Work Act 1974
- Occupiers Liability Act 1957
- Occupiers Liability Act 1984
- Mines and Quarries Act 1954
- Unfair Contract Terms Act 1977
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

There are some key issues to bear in mind. For example, the Health and Safety at Work Act places a duty on employers and the self-employed to conduct their undertakings in such a way as to ensure that 'persons not in their employment are not exposed to risks'. The Occupiers Liability Act outlines that there is a need to take such care 'as is reasonable to see that a visitor will be reasonably safe in using premises for purposes for which he is permitted by the occupier to be there'. There is a two-part test:

1. Is a duty of care owed to the injured party?
2. Has the duty been breached? We also need to remember that visitors should behave responsibly and not put themselves at risk – they have a choice.



Chris then outlined how woodland owners might deal with the above. The first step would be to evaluate the site, carrying out a risk assessment, identifying any potential hazards and looking at the trees as well as the ground. The next step is to devise an access management plan and carry out inspection and monitoring, keeping a record of any work carried out. This needs to be done as, no matter how good your land (and access) management, the unexpected or unfortunate may still occur. However, this will be greatly reduced if you have a management system in place, as taking reasonable precautions to reduce the chance of accidents will pay off both in terms of reducing risk and demonstrating a reasonable response to duty of care.

In terms of insurance, permitting access is generally acceptable to insurers with no additional premiums. Insurers will expect owners to fulfil their duty of care. Insurers will also want to know if more than just access is provided, e.g. picnic facilities, or if a charge is made for use of facilities. However provision of simple access should not have any adverse effect on insurance costs.

In summary, managing safe access improves quality and helps to increase user enjoyment. We need to encourage positive attitudes and provide support in the form of advice. We need to remind people that accidents to visitors do happen but the perception that they happen all the time is wrong. We should also reassure owners that if they devise and follow simple systems then they are doing all they reasonably can to manage access safely and reduce the chances of accidents occurring. Those who provide access need to learn lessons when any mistakes do happen and we should encourage woodland users to accept responsibility for themselves.

## Engaging with communities: problems and opportunities in urban woodland

Steve Metcalfe, Education Officer, English Nature



Castle Eden Dene is a National Nature Reserve (NNR) situated in East Durham. Most of the site is heavily wooded, but nearer to the coast woodland gives way to species-rich grassland. A number of the Durham beaches are black due to coal waste that was dumped there when coal was an important industry in that area. Steve raised the question of whether this waste dumping was institutional vandalism and highlighted how we tend to complain about children dropping rubbish but not about bigger issues such as this. Once inside the nature reserve people can quickly feel that they are far away from the urban setting. He described how the barriers to access at the NNR could be both physical (part of the site is very steep) or intellectual, such as fear of crime.

Research was carried out to explore what the area meant to those who used the reserve and those who did not. The results highlighted that wildlife was high on the list of why people visited the site. They also enjoyed the beauty of the NNR and welcomed the opportunity to undertake exercise and to relax. What people disliked were anti-social activities and some had difficulty with access because the site is steep. People's suggestions for improvements included providing better access to the site, reducing fly-tipping and improving site quality.

Enjoyment of wildlife by people leads to greater understanding and therefore greater protection of an area. There is a lot of community involvement at Castle Eden Dene and education is seen as particularly important in terms of the site's management objectives. Local children visit regularly as this is the only English Nature NNR with a classroom. They learn about a variety of things such as map-reading, why birds migrate, what lives in ponds and how plants respond to light. The teaching sessions, as well as taking place in the classroom, also involve getting out into the reserve. Wildlife events are run and a newsletter for Friends of the NNR is produced to keep people informed and generate interest.

The key themes of the research outlined above were concerned with access, anti-social behaviour and the management of the reserve. Steve suggested that one agency cannot tackle the problems on its own and a partnership approach was needed in order to share knowledge and ideas. How agencies such as English Nature tackle competing demands on busy spaces as well as protecting nature is an important issue.



# Solving youth disaffection while helping the rural economy

**Nigel Lowthrop, Director, Hill Holt Wood**



Nigel provided us with a vivid portrait of work he is undertaking at Hill Holt Wood, a small 14 hectare woodland in Lincolnshire. Nigel and his wife have developed the woodland into a social enterprise that currently employs 15 people. The enterprise primarily provides vocational training for young people excluded from school or unemployed (O'Brien, 2004b). Nigel outlined a number of key rural issues for land managers which include:

- Changes in land management
- Need for income
- Move from grant dependency – to provide a service
- Access – landowners may see access as bringing problems
- Urban/rural divide – there is a lack of understanding of the countryside.

Nigel suggested that there needs to be a change in approach to deal with the above issues and this will involve lateral thinking, real diversification and partnerships: 'putting what you have available into the pot to achieve agreed outcomes with others'.

Youth disaffection is a problem for our society and can lead to exclusion of young people from school. The concept of disaffection is a complex one and can refer to young people living at the margins of society who are unable or unwilling to take part in mainstream education, employment or training due to their attitudes, behaviour and experiences (Steer, 2000). The Hill Holt Wood (HHW) idea is to solve community issues and gain income using the fabric of the woodland. HHW first took young people through the Environment Task Force scheme which gained them a good reputation for providing training and working effectively with young people. They started to take excluded youngsters in 2001 and now also take Entry to Employment (e2e) trainees. This scheme is funded by the Learning and Skills Council, a new organisation responsible for the planning and funding of education and training for over 16 year olds in England. HHW has now become a community controlled not-for-profit organisation and Nigel suggested that everyone should consider community control as it can bring big improvements in terms of community interest and engagement and utilisation of a wide range of knowledge and expertise. HHW now have 15 staff, a small number of whom live on site, and this has an impact on the types of people who access the woodland. For example women visit with their children, as they feel safer in woodland which is lived in. Members of the local community visit the site as well as the young people who come for training, many of whom are often from the more urban and deprived areas in Lincolnshire or further afield.

For the future Nigel wants to increase turnover of the enterprise and move into tourism, possibly emphasising the heritage aspects of HHW: there are the buried remains of a roman villa in the field adjacent to the wood. He would also like to develop further training opportunities for young people. The HHW concept could work anywhere but would need to be flexible and specific to the local community in which it was situated. This approach seeks to integrate the management of people and land for long-term sustainability.



## Seminar workshops



The five afternoon workshops provided an opportunity for delegates to discuss the morning presentations and issues related to the five themes outlined below which were used as workshop titles. The main aim of the workshops was for delegates to recommend, after their discussions, the key issues that needed to be addressed in the future to enable progress to be made concerning the themes.

The workshops covered:

1. Access and risk perception
2. Access and exclusionary behaviour
3. Access and liability
4. Crime reduction and the rehabilitation of offenders
5. Location and design of accessible woodland



# Access and risk perception

**Chair:** Judith Hanna, English Nature

**Note taker:** Suzanne Martin, Forest Research



## Introduction

Judith started the workshop by suggesting that the group focus on the following specific aims:

- Explore the consensus about how the balance between risk and access in relation to green spaces should be drawn.
- Look at how this could be communicated to wider society, as part of the ongoing policy debate about risk, safety and freedom.
- Consider the implications for managing access to green space.

## Re-balancing risk perception?

On the one hand:

- News headlines pick up on shocking incidents – ‘body found in woodland’, ‘jogger stabbed in park’ – but these are very rare. Like lightning, such serious crimes are unlikely to strike in the same place twice.
- Statistics show very few reported ‘incidents’ of crime or injury in parks and green areas. Places such as busy railway stations and shopping centres have most incidents, simply because there are more people around to commit, or be targeted, by anti-social behaviour. Yet they are where people tend to feel safest – ‘natural surveillance’ is in operation.
- People tend to avoid places where they feel unsafe, suggesting that absence of reported incidents can be because a place feels so dangerous that women, young children, older people, ethnic minorities simply will not go near it. If risk perception does not match the statistics, it may be the statistics that are deceptive and not people being irrational.

On the other hand:

- How does the predictable loss of life expectancy due to not getting out for exercise balance against the risks children and others may encounter in the natural outdoors?
- If children don’t get opportunities to make judgements and learn physical skills such as climbing trees, balancing on rocks and stepping stones, does this leave them unprepared for life in the real world? What risks does this leave them exposed to, e.g. less prepared for a school outing tackling Scottish hills without waterproofs, compass or map?

A diagram of a risk pyramid (Figure 2) highlighted 'iceberg reporting': the serious risks at the tip of the iceberg are the risks that get reported while the broad base of feeling unsafe and minor anti-social behaviour goes unreported and can be hard to assess. How much of the iceberg do we see? Do we actually know anything about the near misses, or the risks that are not so serious but are nevertheless important? A disproportionate view is given of the outcomes of risk if people are only aware of the tip of the iceberg, i.e. 'iceberg reporting'. The group considered that 'iceberg reporting' was a problem, particularly within the media.

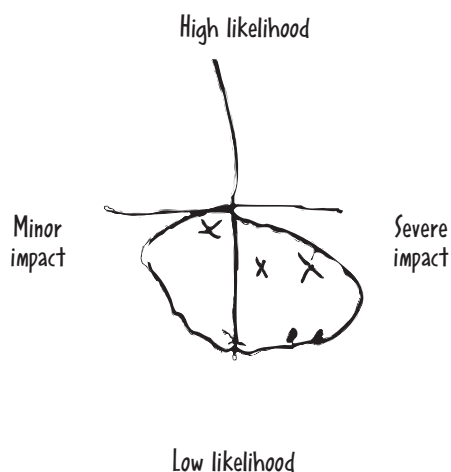
**Figure 2** Risk pyramid.



## How risky do we think green spaces are?

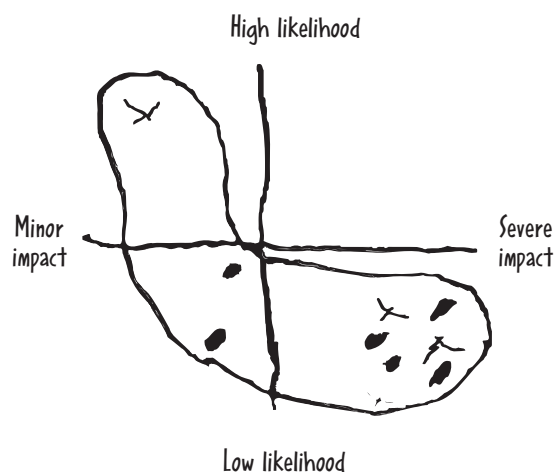
To see how we can put the riskiness of green spaces into wider social perspective, we can compare it with road accidents, rail accidents, accidents in natural areas and nuclear power accidents (Figures 3, 4, 5, 6). A flipchart grid was provided for each: participants were asked to put one dot on each according to (1) likelihood of risk (high or low) and (2) outcomes if any accident happened (minor or severe). Comparing the distribution of the dots showed that natural areas were clearly seen as least dangerous: participants thought that there was a relatively low likelihood of accidents and if they did happen they would probably be minor. But would the workshop participants with their particular interest in woodlands and natural areas perceive the risks of accidents occurring as low and would this be different for the wider public? The exercise is one that can be used in working with communities, to help them think about relative risks and priorities.

**Figure 3** Rail accidents.



The likelihood of rail accidents was thought to be low but if one happened there could be a severe impact.

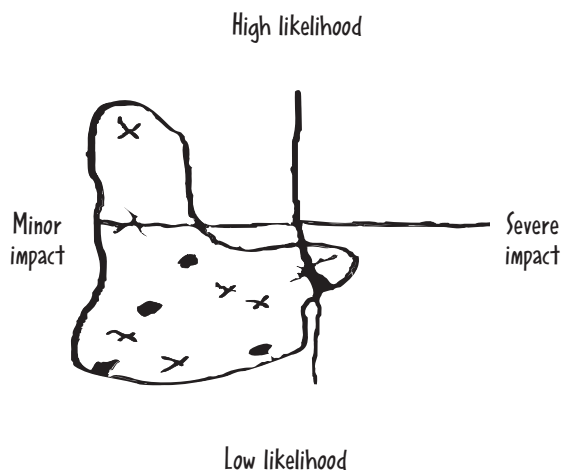
**Figure 4** Nuclear power accidents.



The likelihood of nuclear power accidents is low but if one occurred it could have a severe impact.

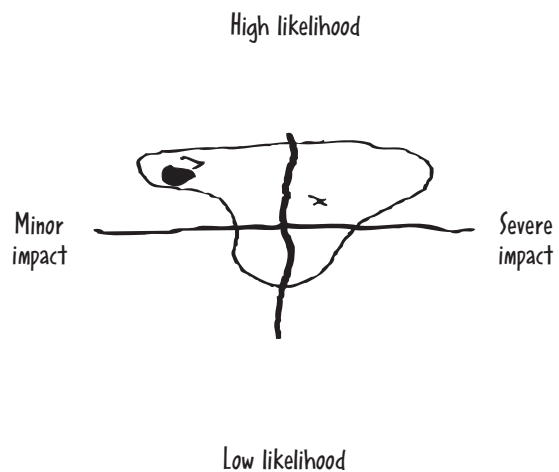


**Figure 5** Natural area accidents.



There is thought to be a low likelihood of natural accidents. If they did occur they would be minor such as tripping over tree roots.

**Figure 6** Road accidents.



High likelihood of road accidents. It is thought because there are a lot, some could be minor and others severe.

## Whose risks? Do risk and safety mean different things in practice to different people?

This was explored by a second exercise: the group split into pairs, each with a card for a specific demographic, for example: mother with a young child, wheelchair user, Asian woman. Participants were asked to imagine themselves in the position of the person on the card and think about:

- How that person might feel about going out into natural areas. What might make them feel safe or unsafe? What would they look for to make them feel welcome and secure?
- Implications for land managers: what should we do to make them feel safe and happy to use the space?

Discussion brought out a rich variety of issues and good practice suggestions, including:

- For a blind person, the first crucial need was a sighted companion or guide to introduce them to the site, taking them around, explaining how to negotiate it and what the features were, until they knew the layout well enough to be confident on their own. Any change to the layout would also need to be explained, or it could put them at real risk of a fall or losing their way.
- For a retired woman, risks of not having access to natural areas might relate to isolation and health. Benefits of access could include social interaction with others, opportunities for exercise and pleasant memories. Recommendations for management might include the introduction of led walks or other social activities to encourage women who may be concerned with using woodlands and natural areas alone, applying 'secured by design' landscaping principles and locating seats where there are good sightlines.
- For a child under 10 years old, not having access to woodlands and natural spaces could mean a loss of freedom, lack of opportunities for running about and exploring, and loss of contact with nature. Benefits of access might include creative play opportunities and becoming familiar with and learning about the environment. Management might focus on organising family events and activities, creating areas that accommodate the needs of families with young children, and working with them to understand their needs.

- For some ethnic minorities, risks of heart disease and diabetes are high so opportunities for exercise are important for health. Signs and information in community languages, activities organised with ethnic community groups, and projects like 'cultural gardens' which show plant relationships to other parts of the world, can help draw them into local woodlands and natural areas.

## Key recommendations and issues

Many of the risks the workshop participants identified were social rather than environmental and it was thought that managers would need to recognise this in order to address crime and safety concerns.

The importance of person to person contact stood out as the key social issue. Being able to see others is reassuring, particularly for people in spaces that they are not familiar with. This contact might be through:

- Community wardens, park keepers and other identifiable staff or volunteers.
- Community and group activities, including youth and ethnic minority groups.
- Community liaison schemes, such as 'friends of' groups.
- Interaction with, or just being able to see, other people like themselves also using the space.

It was recommended that different publics need to be contacted and their specific needs understood.

Communities should be involved in deciding how to manage the contradictions, such as where to place provision for different user groups and activities. Those who become involved in decisions about particular spaces should be more likely to visit them regularly, and to bring their families, neighbours and others. The more that spaces are used by responsible citizens, the safer they become.



# Access and exclusionary behaviour

**Chair: Antony Wallis, Forest Enterprise**

**Note taker: Helen Townsend, Forestry Commission**



## Introduction

Antony began the workshop by talking about the Valleys Forest which is part of the Forest District he manages. The Valleys Forest is the largest urban forest in Europe with a resident population of nearly one million, and an increasing role to play in terms of provision of recreation, education and tourism. The forest faces many negative issues and challenges and the workshop began with a brainstorming session to look at some of the main exclusionary behaviour activities that take place in many woodlands and natural spaces, including:

Arson/fires/BBQs	Drugs/glue use/abuse
Litter	Fear and perception of crime
Off-roading (4 x 4 vehicles)	Cult behaviour – witchcraft
Sexual activity and detritus – open space sex/public decency issues	Raves
Information networks – ‘dogging’ (sexual activity in woods/car parks)	Vandalism – graffiti/infrastructure/environmental damage
Fly-tipping – asbestos, gas canisters, tyres, fridges, industrial waste	Dog fouling/dangerous dogs
Garden waste tipping	Car dumping/joyriding
Air rifles/shooting/firearms/missiles	Unlawful construction
Alcohol use/abuse	Noise
	Gangs

Of this extensive list of activities, some are illegal while others are anti-social in that they reduce or prevent other people enjoying woodlands and natural spaces. There is a range of management tools available to deal with some of these activities and these were identified by the group as:

Signage	Diversionary activities/rewarding
Byelaws: fires	Community
Publicity campaigns	involvement/engagement/empowerment
Awareness raising	Partnerships: police/fire service
Staff – physical presence	Site security/boundaries/car parks
Enforcement	Design, species selection, management
Education – schools/next generation	

An example of a publicity campaign targeted at reducing negative incidences is being undertaken by Forestry Commission Wales (FCW). Coed Y Cymoedd Forest District deals with over 200 fire incidents each year, of which 99 per cent are started deliberately. This area has more forest fires than the rest of Great Britain put together. FCW has identified certain initiatives, listed below, where it feels it can have a positive impact on trying to reduce these incidences.

- Educational visits and 'Crucial Crew' (a presentation by FC staff on the dangers of fires and the impacts on wildlife and the environment) are part of an initiative organised by local authorities, emergency services and utilities to encourage responsible and safe attitudes to possible dangers. These target 3000 young people in year 6 junior school every year.
- Supporting other agencies such as the South Wales Fire and Rescue Service through their 'Fire tan' website and education programme.
- Better forest security.
- Anti-arson campaign in targeted areas.

The 'anti-arson' campaign was developed recently by FCW as it recognised that focusing on education was a long-term issue but in the short term it was felt that the behaviour of those causing arson problems was unlikely to change. FCW wanted to appeal to the community at large to take action to look after their woodland. One of the first issues to deal with was that many people did not see arson in the forest as a crime. The approach taken was to link Crimestoppers to FCW problems with fire to demonstrate that arson is a serious crime. The planned campaign involved comprehensive publicity building up to and during the fire season from February to June. This included press articles, posters, flyers, leaflets, stickers and business cards. Public houses were also involved by using beer mats with information on the campaign. Initially a pilot was run in three areas, where all houses received a leaflet. Community groups were contacted and given 'goody bags' containing pens, notepads, stickers and business cards.

Interestingly, the campaign was not officially launched as the approach was considered to be ineffective (just another 'initiative' syndrome). Instead there was a slow build up in the chosen areas. A voluntary code was also set up with shopkeepers not to sell matches, lighters and firelighters to under 16s. This whole campaign is part of a bigger initiative developed by Coed Y Cymoedd Forest District called 'Safe Forest'.

The group suggested that research was needed on issues such as fly-tipping. In the Introduction to this publication it was highlighted that Defra are undertaking research in this area which should be reported in 2005. The scale and costs of damage and abuse were thought to be important and we need to know what these are in order to provide an evidence base with which to influence policy. Case studies and demonstrations are needed that look at what works and what does not work. High profile partnerships were felt to be particularly important, as well as education and awareness/ publicity campaigns that give people information, and contact numbers for reporting anti-social behaviour. Through good practice and communication, ideas and information can be shared giving guidance and advice; this could be through forums or networks which could keep people up to date with the latest developments.

## Key recommendations and issues

Policies that can be introduced to reduce problems were identified as:

- Address perverse incentives such as the Landfill Tax which has encouraged illegal dumping.
- Improve the evidence-base, e.g. on the distribution of the problem of fly-tipping.
- Publish case studies to illustrate what works well and what does not; provide practical demonstrations.
- Promote high-profile partnerships between organisations such as Crimestoppers and Neighbourhood Watch.
- Encourage safety patrols and community policing.





# Access and liability

**Chairs:** Chris Probert, Forestry Commission and Karen

**Jones, Country Land and Business Association**

**Note taker:** Jenny Claridge, Forest Research



## Introduction

Chris opened the workshop by raising issues given in his presentation: Can access be managed safely? (page 25), and in particular a view that a lack of information about risk and liability available to woodland owners presents a barrier to the provision of accessible woodland.

A National Trust representative explained how there is high visitor pressure on National Trust sites and the organisation has to cover itself by carrying out inspection regimes, checking out their access network and assessing the safety of trees on a site. Guidance is needed for organisations to highlight any legal liabilities, outline the levels of inspection needed and how these should be managed as well as the overall site. Many organisations such as the Forestry Commission and the National Trust use volunteers to carry out conservation work and responsibility for these people also needs to be clear.

The incident previously described in the Introduction concerning a young person who broke his neck after ignoring a 'no swimming' sign emphasises that if you act irresponsibly and take no notice of warning signs then liability will not be with the owner. The situation becomes more difficult when children are involved because they are less aware of warning signs and of possible dangers. Therefore an owner will be expected to take greater care where children are concerned. For very young children, parents or adult carers are expected to be responsible for them but there is the question of how far parental responsibility should extend.

One of the workshop participants was concerned that claims were becoming more prevalent and that people's mentality seemed to be 'I've had an accident and therefore I can claim something'. Chris suggested that although there is a lot of paperwork regarding claims, this paperwork does need to be at an organisation's fingertips so that inspectors can see that details are collected and that there is a system in place for recording and keeping data on any incidents or accidents.

The group talked about urban forestry and thought that there is less incentive to have street trees nowadays because of worries about claims, as Mark Johnston outlined in his presentation (page 17). It was suggested that the pendulum has swung too far and there needs to be acceptance of 'some risk' rather than trying to reduce all risk. Otherwise there may be a loss of naturalness if we try to sanitise the environment, and children's play areas, for example, will become over-safe and not interesting or challenging. Therefore, rather than trying to remove all risk, play areas should be well designed, interesting, and an assessment should be undertaken to reduce and understand any potential risk.

Risk needs to be managed across a range of transport such as bicycles/BMX routes/horse riding. Local community groups manage a number of cycle routes and they might, for example, run specified trail building courses. A grading system could be used to provide clear labelling of the severity or difficulty of the ride, e.g. the 'black route'. On Forestry Commission land general cycling is covered by Forestry Commission insurance although for any serious downhill cycling that takes place on Commission land extra insurance is usually covered by a local club.

## Key recommendations and issues

A clear need was identified to research the impact of access on liability claims, and to present clearly the actual legal liabilities of owners. For example, are more liability claims made with greater access? Specifically, we need:

- Guidance on legal liabilities – 'making fact from fiction'.
- Guidance/research on practical measures to deal with liability.
- Research on insurance questions:
  - Is public liability insurance getting harder to obtain?
  - If so, why?
- Research to reveal and correct misconceptions about claims and the amount of claims.
- Guidance from research on public events in woodlands in terms of:
  - Liability
  - Regulations
  - Insurance
  - Management.
- Guidance on the implications of bicycle/vehicular access.

# Crime reduction and the rehabilitation of offenders

**Chair: Steve Haworth, Lancashire Constabulary**

**Note taker: Liz O'Brien, Forest Research**



## Introduction

Steve began the workshop by outlining the importance of crime reduction and the need to rehabilitate offenders. He talked about the importance of changing offender behaviour and emphasised that the public have a role to play in terms of surveillance which can lead to crime reduction. Members of the group highlighted the need to acknowledge the importance of people's perceptions: for example people's fears. It was suggested that land managers have a feeling that the actual incidences of crime are low, but it was thought that more evidence was needed to support this claim. We need actual figures and statistics for woodlands and natural and green spaces rather than information on general violent crime and property crime for all areas.

Not all crime is reported and not all anti-social behaviour is classed as crime. There needs to be prevention through anticipating problems and behaviours and working to reduce them or channel them into different areas. There are also the consequences of crime and the need, for example, to replace damaged equipment or repair damage.

An example was given of woodland creation on brownfield and derelict land in northwest England. The project called Newlands (New Economic Environments through Woodland) has been developed by the Forestry Commission and the Northwest Development Agency in partnership with the Mersey Forest, Red Rose Forest and Pennine Edge Forest. Local communities have been involved in the design, layout, planting, management and maintenance of these areas and can therefore create designs that they feel comfortable with. Management of open spaces in the longer term needs to be secured, as small patches of woodland can become no-go areas. Designs need to invite people to want to use these spaces. It is easier to design new areas but harder with established woodland for example. Guidance is needed on zoning and how that can help to improve management to reduce incidences and fears. There is sometimes a perception by people that woodland is not managed even if it actually is in practice. Woodlands have the advantage that in many instances they are robust and can take rough treatment.

The role of environmental design in planning out crime has been recognised in Britain for a number of years and was first given government recognition after consultation with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) by the Department of Environment (now part of Defra) circular 5/1994. It stated that:

- The planning system is one but only one important factor in successful crime prevention.
- Crime prevention is capable of being a material consideration in planning.
- Desolate, sterile and featureless surroundings can engender feelings of hostility, anonymity and alienation.

Local strategic partnerships were thought to be increasingly important and government offices can bring people together to influence central government. The group argued that agencies and departments need to look beyond their own specialisms to think more broadly about education, planning, crime and the environment. It was suggested that more research specifically for woodlands, green and natural spaces is needed to look at:

- When offences are committed.
- By whom they are committed.
- How to counter perceptions of crime.

Research in the USA has outlined how spaces with trees can reduce crime; do we need to carry out this type of research in Britain? We need to keep records of incidences. If we tackle issues are we just displacing crime, i.e. moving it on to somewhere else? We might not actually reduce crime but be able to reduce the fear of crime.

With the increasing evidence that sustainable environmental improvements can enable communities to move towards crime and nuisance reduction, the workshop made five recommendations. These were thought most appropriate and important to enable relevant partner agencies to progress towards reductions in crime and recidivism in both urban and rural areas.

## Key recommendations and issues

- *Planning*
  - New: which recognises the importance of green space as part of infrastructure and incorporates it into new developments.
  - Zoning: to provide greater protection, an environment can be divided into small defined zones that can become focal points for applying CPTED.
  - Planning gain: where there is planning gain local authorities may be in a position to require provision for green space as a condition exacted from developers.

Where possible planning should be used to aid in the reduction of crime, and links made between architectural liaison officers and planning officers.

- *Recording incidences*

If a serious incident occurs the land manager should alert the police and ask for a reference number for the incident, as this then becomes a performance measure for the police. It would also enable organisations and the police to get more detail on what is actually happening. It was suggested that incidences are more likely to be addressed if they are recorded.
- *Recidivism reduction through environmental work*

Criminal activity can be reduced through youth offending teams, police and the probation services by enabling prisoners and offenders to learn new skills, gain qualifications and work as part of a team. Examples of existing successful partnerships include the Forestry Commission working with the probation service and English Nature working with the prison service. The presentation given by Nigel Lowthrop on Hill Holt Wood outlined a community woodland approach to this problem through the education and vocational training of



excluded young people.

- *Research into the physiological and psychological effects of woodlands and green space*

Much of the research in this area, related to crime, is based on studies undertaken in America on large social housing estates. Do these studies need to be replicated in this country or do they need to be adapted to specific circumstances in the UK that may be different from America? What effect does working in woodlands and natural environments have on offenders when it is part of their rehabilitation? How widespread is this practice and which organisations are working together? What are the re-offending rates after rehabilitation of this nature and do we need to compare these rates with other types of rehabilitation? Or is this part of a wider issue concerning whether the offender obtains gainful employment and is often therefore less likely to re-offend?

- *Leadership in partnership*

Many different approaches are being taken across the country to deal with the issues raised by this seminar, involving partnerships between a range of organisations. These demand effective leadership often by one particular organisation that can co-ordinate efforts and act as a collective voice.

# Location and design of accessible woodland

**Chair: Marcus Sangster, Forestry Commission**

**Note taker: Paul Tabbush, Forest Research**



## Introduction

The presentation by Nigel Lowthrop stimulated discussion on the nature of a successful woodland: Hill Holt Wood was considered to be a new type of construct, a lived-in woodland where risk perception was low, and where a variety of spaces within the woodland contributed to its positive use by communities. Woodland spaces are often confused from the user's point of view: who is allowed to be there and what are they allowed to do? In other words, inaccessibility is often a mental perception rather than a physical reality. Design should address this directly, making the status of the spaces clear, and this should be considered alongside other issues such as aesthetics and physical accessibility.

There was a feeling in the group that there is a large amount of woodland close to where people live, but it is mostly inaccessible for a variety of reasons. These could be to do with perception, for example, fear of personal or carpark crime, fear of getting lost. Lack of knowledge about who owns woodlands, which ones are open to access, what facilities (if any) are provided and what people can do (e.g. walking, cycling) were thought to be the biggest barriers. The current Woodland Grant Scheme does not specifically address all these issues or the quality of access; standards and guidelines are needed to accompany incentive schemes.

In terms of demand, the community does not have a single voice, and examples were given such as a Walsall poll in which the top desire was for a greener, leafier borough, although it was suggested that trees should not be planted on existing open spaces. Tree planting was only popular with some sections of the community.

The group considered the benefits of allowing woodland to develop by natural colonisation to produce an organic, naturalistic landscape. It takes time for woodland to develop in this way. Also, the 'scrub' produced is not wanted on species-rich meadowland, and there may be barriers within the provisions of the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (scrub does not qualify as 'good agricultural condition').

Planning officers felt that there were barriers to woodland creation in the planning system and new policies were needed to support it. One way would be to ensure the existence of a mechanism within the Community Strategy or Local Strategic Partnership. For example, the London Plan ensures that communities have a say in how space is developed. A landscape approach to planning green space is desirable, to deal with the need for green corridors and routes, for example. Delivery of 'an experience of nature' needs scale, e.g. safe green walking routes. It is particularly important to encourage children to access green space; in parts of Scandinavia, schools are required to take children outdoors.

Imaginative design needs to be recognised in grant schemes that support tree planting, and case studies might help this, for example applying police design standards such as SBD or CPTED in exemplar woodlands. There is also a need for a change of attitude to woodland planning to ensure that, in addition to woodland creation, maintenance is planned and budgeted for.

## Key recommendations and issues

### *Planning system*

- Ensure a mechanism to encourage accessible green space in local spatial development strategies; this would need representation on local strategic partnerships.
- Campaign for the single farm payment to accept 'scrub' (regenerating woods).
- Produce standards and guidelines of design for access.
- Establish demonstrations to illustrate good design, to reinforce these guidelines.
- Locate woods to encourage children to access them, e.g. in close proximity to where they live.
- Zone diverse access where possible as communities are diverse.

### *Research*

- Case studies are needed at various scales to assess 'secure by design' guidelines.
- Examine the interplay between aesthetics, affordability and design of paths, roads, cycle tracks, access points.
- Design should leave room for challenge – how can this be achieved?
- How can perceptions be changed (e.g. through design, interpretation) so that the status of places becomes less confused?
- Research the demand for access.



## Seminar summary



The Introduction to this publication explains that a range of research has been carried out looking at people's behaviour in woodlands and natural spaces and their perceptions of risk in outdoor environments. This literature base provides us with starting points for looking in more detail at some specific issues or for applying research carried out in other countries to Britain in order to assess similarities and differences.

The presentations given at this seminar provide a range of useful information and ideas for dealing with specific issues. They have also raised concerns that will need to be addressed in the near future.

From the workshops there seems to be a consensus on key issues for tackling some of the crime and safety problems (Figure 7) discussed at this event, and these were concerned with planning, research, communication, and partnerships.

- Research is needed to understand in more detail people's behaviours and where improvements could be made or where design might help to reduce fear. Research is also needed to inform policymaking and provide an evidence base for future action.
- Communication was viewed as a key issue in providing positive stories, trying to reduce fears and in disseminating research findings.
- Planning that was responsive and recognised the importance of green places as an integral part of infrastructure, particularly in an urban context, was considered essential.
- Partnerships are also needed which bring together the key skills of a range of organisations and individuals/communities interested in this whole subject area.

There is a growing body of literature on research and practice concerning the topics outlined in this seminar. We can learn from these if they are effectively summarised, and develop new projects, partnerships and research to take forward and broaden our knowledge. This type of seminar allows delegates to describe their experiences and benefit from the experiences of others. It also helps us to discover the gaps in our understanding and explore with others how these might be addressed.



Education, community involvement, partnerships and appropriate design can all be used to win back local spaces. Can we develop pleasant environments that people take ownership of and want to spend time in? If so, the potential benefits in terms of physical and psychological well-being, reduced anti-social behaviour and increased quality of life are great.

**Figure 7**

Communication and planning are key issues in helping to develop accessible outdoor environments that people want to spend time in.



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		<b>Chris Wood</b>	National Trust/ RSPB

## Further reading and information

The Social Research Group is part of the Environmental and Human Sciences Division of Forest Research. Other titles of interest produced by the Group include:

- **Trees are company: social science research into woodlands and the natural environment**  
edited by Liz O'Brien and Jenny Claridge
- **Health and well-being: trees woodlands and natural spaces**  
by Paul Tabbush and Liz O'Brien
- **A sort of magical place. People's experiences of woodlands in northwest and southeast England**  
by Liz O'Brien
- **Involving people in forestry. A toolbox for public involvement in forest and woodland planning**  
by Max Hislop, Mark Twery and Heini Vihemäki
- **'Proving It!' Evidence gathering for forest managers**  
by Suzanne Martin and Liz O'Brien  
Forestry Commission Information Note 64
- **Social science in forestry. Public participation and partnership: a review of Forestry Commission practice and governance in a changing political and economic context**  
by Sue Welldon in collaboration with Paul Tabbush

For further information on the above titles:

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