



Trees and their impact on the emotional well-being of local residents on two inner London social housing estates

Report to Peabody Trust, Trees for Cities and the Forestry Commission



'It seems amazing that a housing estate has a woodland' (Local Resident)

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Report summary

This project was undertaken with the overall aim of engaging residents in the use and enjoyment of Peabody Hill Wood, and included a workshop and a community woodland clearance and tree planting day. It was also to help establish the foundations for the Trust's proposals to improve the wood, which depends on a better knowledge of resident's views and values of the site.

The project focused on Peabody Hill Wood situated between Peabody Hill and Rosendale Estates in the inner London Borough of Lambeth. Peabody Trust, a Housing Association, owns the estates and woodland. This small 3.5 hectare woodland is an important resource for local people although there has been increasing concern over the past few years about the maintenance of the wood and people's worries about their own safety when using it. The research aimed to gain a better understanding of how local residents on the estates use the woodland and their positive and negative views of it. This would help to inform the Trust in its intention to redress some of the problems that the wood has faced in recent years. A questionnaire was sent to all residents of both estates, four focus groups and a workshop were undertaken. The community woodland clearance and tree planting day provided an opportunity to engage local residents in improving the woodland for their own and others benefit.

The key findings from the project were:

Positive views of the wood

1. Wildlife
2. Greenery in London
3. Trees
4. Colours in spring and autumn
5. Views from the top of the hill
6. 33% of respondents rated their appreciation of the wood as high

Negative views of the wood

1. Rubbish on site
2. Safety concerns
3. Overgrown vegetation
4. Lighting not working on the main footpaths
5. Bikes and dumped cars
6. 19% of respondents rated their appreciation of the wood as low

Who uses the wood and why

- 42% of respondents used the wood while 58% did not
- 25% of respondents used the wood several times a week
- The main use of the woodland was as a shortcut to get to shops, buses, doctors and schools, 60% of respondents used the wood in this way

- It is also used to a lesser extent for walking, enjoying nature and for leisure

Youth club views

- Children enjoyed playing outside more than inside because they could run around and there were more things to do outside
- Children chose to play most often in the park, wood and in the street
- They enjoyed being out in the fresh air and meeting friends
- Children said the wood was good for playing games in and hanging out
- The wood was also described as dangerous primarily to do with the possible threat from other people

Opportunities for improvements identified by residents

1. Benches and picnic tables
2. Play area for children
3. Nature trail
4. Interpretation
5. Improve visibility
6. Use the wood for educational purposes
7. Cut back undergrowth
8. Ensure street lights work
9. Remove rubbish
10. Leave undisturbed areas for wildlife

Other key issues

- Women were generally more concerned about safety than men
- The pensioners group spoke more about using CCTV surveillance
- Children enjoyed making bases (dens) in the wood
- More women than men felt that the wood was beneficial for children

Workshop and community woodland clearance day

The walk through the wood workshop was attended by thirteen people and the clearance day and tree planting by fifty two people including Trees for Cities staff. Those who did attend enjoyed the events and felt that they had either learnt something or made a useful contribution to improving the wood. A number of people had not been aware of the wood before the events took place.

General points

There was an inner conflict for many residents who filled in the questionnaires and discussed their concerns in the focus groups. While many valued the wood as an element of nature in their urban environment and as piece of wild space which provided the opportunity to view wildlife, they were also concerned about some of the abuses that took place in the wood. These included cars and bikes being dumped in the wood, the street lights regularly being broken and stories of attacks. All of these things outweighed the potential for residents to use the wood for their everyday enjoyment. Many had ideas of how the wood could be used and

possibly reclaimed by local people who wanted to use the space and enjoy the views of London from the top of the woodland. It was thought that the wood was beneficial for children and they should be allowed the opportunity to explore these sorts of spaces without undue safety worries.

To a certain extent there was a view from residents that Peabody Trust, who owned the wood, should deal with these problems and this may explain why few adult residents from the two estates came to the community woodland clearance day. However, this may also be to do with respondents feeling that they did not have the expertise to be involved with the wood's management and that professional people should do it. There also seemed to be a somewhat pessimistic view that any changes that happened would soon be reversed or would not be sustained in the long term.

Recommendations

Key issues for future consideration in the planned improvements for the wood include:

- Outreach work to encourage those who never use the wood to consider how it might be improved and become usable.
- Involve all sections of the community in making changes and improvements to the wood.
- Work towards engendering a sense of ownership and pride in the wood.
- Retain wildlife interest by leaving some areas relatively undisturbed.
- Improve feelings of safety and security through community involvement.
- Provide additional resources to enable the Trust's ground maintenance team to take a lead in the wood's future management.
- Consider establishing a 'Friends of Peabody Hill Wood' group.
- Sustain the partnership that has been created through this project work to provide a longer-term commitment to improving the wood.
- Work with local schools and play groups to encourage use of the woodland.
- Add a children's play area, a few benches and tables to provide residents with a greater opportunity to use and enjoy the wood.
- Provide interpretation for local residents of the history and wildlife of the site.

1. Introduction and background

The project was based in two social housing estates in Lambeth in Inner London, its aims were to:

- Investigate residents' attitudes towards trees and woodlands and explore the ways in which they are valued.
- Engage and involve residents in the use and enjoyment of trees and woodlands in their area and at the same time undertake improvements to their local woodland called Peabody Hill Wood.

To set this project in context this first section briefly highlights earlier studies that have explored the ways in which people value trees and woodlands and illustrates some of the concerns people sometimes express about using these spaces. This is undertaken in order to provide some information on the findings of other research and explore in the conclusions how this project's findings may or may not differ from other similar studies.

Previous studies have outlined the importance of trees and woodlands and the range of benefits and opportunities they can provide to local communities in terms of health and well-being, education, recreation, community involvement and enhanced social capital (O'Brien and Claridge, 2002; Ward Thompson et al. 2002; Tabbush and O'Brien, 2003). Emotional well-being is related to quality of life, well-being has a spiritual, psychological and cultural side as well as including ideas of happiness, optimism, self-esteem and self expression. It involves people in an evaluation of their own lives. A number of studies and seminars have also highlighted the concerns that people have about their own safety in woodlands and worries about the abuse of these spaces (Burgess, 1995; O'Brien and Tabbush, 2005). This also relates to wider issues over safety concerns in everyday life. Lifestyle choices, everyday commitments and a range of other factors also have an impact on the time people have to access woodlands, and their inclination to do so.

Woodlands and green spaces have been identified as contributing to people's health and psychological well-being. They provide areas where people can undertake a range of physical exercise which can not only help to keep people fit but also reduce mild to moderate depression. They are also areas that can help to reduce people's stress (Tabbush and O'Brien, 2003). Pretty et al. (2005) in their

report to the Countryside Recreation Network identified three levels of engaging with nature to improve health and well-being.

- 1) viewing nature through a window or in a painting.
- 2) being in the presence of nature that is nearby when a person is engaged in an activity such as walking or cycling to work.
- 3) active participation and involvement with nature such as camping, gardening or trekking.

In their study they found that self-esteem improved for people who took part in green exercise. They noted that 'the synergistic effects of green exercise generate many positive physical and mental health benefits regardless of the level of intensity, duration or type of green activity' (Pretty et al. 2005: 11).

Research which explored people's experiences of woodlands in the northwest and southeast of England highlighted the mental and emotional benefits people gained from using and viewing woodlands. Those on low incomes, the unemployed and families with young children felt that woodlands were an inexpensive place to visit and were important because of this. Respondents described the importance of having contact with nature particularly for those in urban areas and worried that today's children were not having the contact they themselves described having when they were young (O'Brien, 2004). A recent report by Green Alliance and Demos called 'A child's place' emphasised the importance of children having access to high quality natural environments (Green Alliance and Demos, 2004). It also highlighted a gap in equality of access between children in urban and rural areas and suggested that children's experiences of the environment are currently in decline, particularly for urban children in low income communities (Bingley and Milligan, 2004). Work in the United States of America on children's play compared urban environments which had vegetation as opposed to environments without vegetation, and concluded that the physical environment is an additional way of promoting healthy development in children (Faber Taylor et al. 1998). There was significantly more creative play in urban estates which had some vegetation, such as trees and grass, than in areas that were barren and concrete. Further research has outlined how childhood experiences of using trees and woodlands seems to have an impact on how people use woodlands as adults and how comfortable they feel in using them (Ward-Thompson et al. 2002; Bell et al. 2003; O'Brien, 2004). This raises issues of the need to create positive experiences particularly for young

people in deprived urban areas who often have less opportunity to have contact with the natural environment.

There are many reasons why people do not access woodlands. In a report by OPENspace (2003) for the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs as part of the Countryside Agency Diversity Review barriers to access in the countryside were identified as:

- Negative feelings associated with previous experience
- Lack of confidence and negative perceptions of the environment
- A 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 list highlights a range of important issues that may impact differently on diverse groups and individuals and at different stages in their life. Perceptions of access and accessibility will be important, as Burgess (1995) put it 'what is perceived to be real is real in its effects'. The Environmental and Social Justice Research Review (2004) suggests that problems with the maintenance and use of green space in urban areas is linked to deprived communities. It argues that the best green spaces are found in affluent areas; while deprived neighbourhoods face many problems with the upkeep of green places. The review illustrates the need for access to good quality green space as vandalism, litter, dog mess, graffiti and safety issues are known to deter people from using these spaces particularly the elderly, children, women and ethnic minorities. The review goes onto outline how research to explore the costs to a community from a lack of green space has not yet been undertaken. This is an interesting idea and while this current project, focusing on Peabody Hill Wood, does not explicitly address costs the results of the work emphasise that people perceive a reduction in their quality of life when their local woodlands, green spaces and other public spaces are abused.

Finally, it needs to be taken into account that Housing Associations are currently not required by statute (or monitored in their regulation) to manage green spaces to a high quality. The regulatory framework that organisations like Peabody Trust work within is focused on the quality of residents' dwellings and services such as repairs. The accumulative disinvestment and decline in urban parks and green spaces as a whole, noted by the Urban Green Spaces Task Force (Dunnett, et al. 2002), is probably disproportionately higher in those spaces in and around social housing. Apart from notable exceptions, many social housing landscapes are very poor and do not offer the benefits to residents that they could (Frith and Harrison, 2005).

2. Study context

This project focused on two Peabody Trust estates: Peabody Hill and Rosendale in Tulse Hill, Lambeth, south London. Combined both estates are also referred to as West Dulwich by the Trust. The project involved a number of elements including:

- Research to understand the ways in which local residents value and use their local green spaces and how they view trees and their benefits to children and their families.
- A workshop to promote a positive perception of the woods with local residents and allow them to express their feelings about the wood.
- Tree planting and clearing of the main entrances of Peabody Hill Wood.
- A brief evaluation of the project activities to identify whether they made people feel more positive about Peabody Hill Wood.

2.1 The project partnership

This project was undertaken by a partnership between Trees for Cities, Peabody Trust and the Forestry Commission. The research was undertaken by Forest Research (the research agency of the Forestry Commission) and Trees for Cities. The tree planting, woodland clearing and the workshop were carried out by Trees for Cities with Forest Research and Peabody Trust staff in attendance.

Trees for Cities is an independent charity supporting city wide tree planting and greening initiatives in urban areas of greatest need. Trees for London (which is a project of Trees for Cities) aims to improve the quality of life for everyone that lives and works in London. It produced a tree manifesto for London in 2001 called 'London wouldn't be London without its trees'.

Peabody Trust is one of London's oldest and largest housing associations that manages over 17,000 dwellings spread across over 30 estates and other properties across 26 London boroughs. The majority of these stand in inner London boroughs, principally Southwark, Westminster, Islington, Hammersmith & Fulham, Wandsworth and Tower Hamlets. Most of the Trust's estates support only very limited areas of green space, relatively few trees, and a majority of the dwellings stand more than 300 metres from a public open green space. The vast majority of the Trust's residents do not have access to a private garden. It is unusual for the Trust to have woodland in its ownership.

A Best Value Review of Peabody Trust's grounds maintenance service in 2001 revealed that many of the Trust's residents valued their immediate trees and green spaces, and wanted to see more. Consequently, the structure and approach of the service was changed to take a more ecological approach, and to facilitate resident interest and action in their local environment. Although this work has now started the Trust has had to divert its resources towards the maintenance of its homes to meet the Government's Decent Homes target by 2010 rather than focus on any green spaces it owns. Nevertheless, this work contributes to the objectives set out in Peabody Trust's recent Open Space and Tree Strategies (Peabody Trust, 2004a and b). The Trust's Landscape Regeneration Manager is in somewhat of a unique position within a Housing Association with a specific role to improve green spaces and develop partnerships with other organisations that can help and make a contribution. This project is intended to help establish the necessary foundations for the further improvement of Peabody Hill Wood.

The Forestry Commission is the government department responsible for the protection of forests in Britain. Its mission is to protect and expand Britain's forests and woodlands and increase their value to society and the environment. The Forestry Commission's conservancy boundaries have recently been aligned with the English regions and a new conservancy for London was created in 2003 specifically to focus on the management and use of urban trees and woodlands in the capital.

The project genesis began in 2003 and partners subsequently met on a number of occasions to develop it. On the 20th July 2004 there was a site visit to Rosendale and Peabody Hill estates by representatives of the partners to gain a better impression of the site, visit the woodland and discuss what the project might entail.

2.2 Study area: Peabody Hill and Rosendale Estates

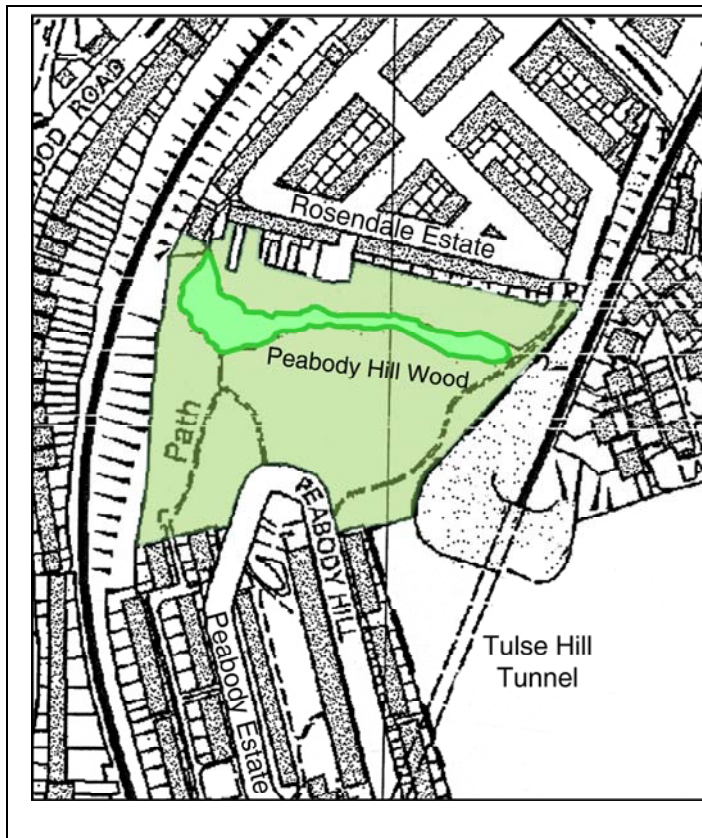
The estates are adjacent to each other (although separated, by no less than 125 metres, by the woodland) and are located in the London Borough of Lambeth and in the electoral ward of Thurlow Park. This particular ward has significant numbers who rent from Housing Associations such as Peabody Trust, and the Council. There are higher numbers of households without a car and a higher unemployment rate than the national average (Table 1). Levels of crime in Lambeth per 1000 of the population are higher than for England as a whole in all of the categories covered by the Census.

Table 1: Selected census data for Thurlow Park (National Statistics Online, 2004)

Census Categories	Thurlow Park %	Lambeth %	England %
Households that have no car or van	42.4	50.9	26.8
Owner occupied households	48.2	37.2	68.9
Renting from Housing Association or Registered Social Landlord	18.4	12.8	6.0
Unemployed	4.7	6.1	3.4

Figure 1 shows a map of the two estates, Peabody Hill Wood is a small woodland of approximately 3.5 hectares, it divides the two estates and it is situated on a steep slope. Two railway lines act as boundaries to the estates. There is also a strip of wood along the railway embankment and contact has been made by Peabody Trust with Network Rail’s environment manager to talk about addressing issues of mutual concern such as the flytipping and debris alongside the boundaries of both properties. The wood is entered through a grassy area, from Peabody Hill Estate at the top of the hill, by two paths that run on either side of the wood. The paths have a tarmac surface and have steps and streetlights. From Rosendale Estate the entrances are narrow and have gates, although these are never locked. The paths act as a through route between the two estates. If safety fears prevent people from using the wood the only other way to get from one estate to the other is via the main road which would be a reasonably long detour for those without access to a car. The shops, post office, bus stops and primary school nearest to Peabody Hill are on Rosendale Road and Norwood Road. The shortest route is directly through the woodland a distance of approximately 300 metres, via car that distance becomes approximately 1500 metres.

Figure 1: Map of study area



Observation of Peabody Hill Wood was made on 23rd November 2004. The wood is predominantly birch with some oak, ash, hawthorn, cherry-laurel and bramble (Yarham, et al. 1994). There are four main access points into the wood, two at the bottom of the hill and two at the top of the hill. There were a number of signs of abuse; one of the gated entrances had a large pile of rubbish dumped to one side of it within the wood (Photo 1). The tarmac paths were covered in graffiti (Photo 2). A number of the gardens of houses on the Rosendale estate back onto the woodland and near one of these was a white car that had been dumped, with its windscreen smashed and bonnet covered in graffiti (Photo 3). (The car was later removed). The remains of a fire of what looked like a pile of cardboard and linoleum marred a small grassy space within the wood. There are smaller paths that run across the wood connecting the two tarmac paths. An oak tree on one of the tarmac paths had a number of planks attached to it to make a sort of tree house (Photo 4). This was once created as a proper tree house and has since been reduced to its current state of dereliction. In the space of two hours only two people were observed walking through the wood on the main paths; both were young men.

There are a number of other green spaces nearby the largest of which is Brockwell Park at 45 hectares and this can only be accessed by crossing a busy main road. The Rosendale allotment gardens are located close to the back of Peabody Hill Estate. Herne Hill sports stadium has running and cycling facilities and there are a number of other sports grounds nearby some of which are connected to Dulwich College which are private. Dulwich Park and Belair Park are also nearby within an approximate walk of twenty minutes.

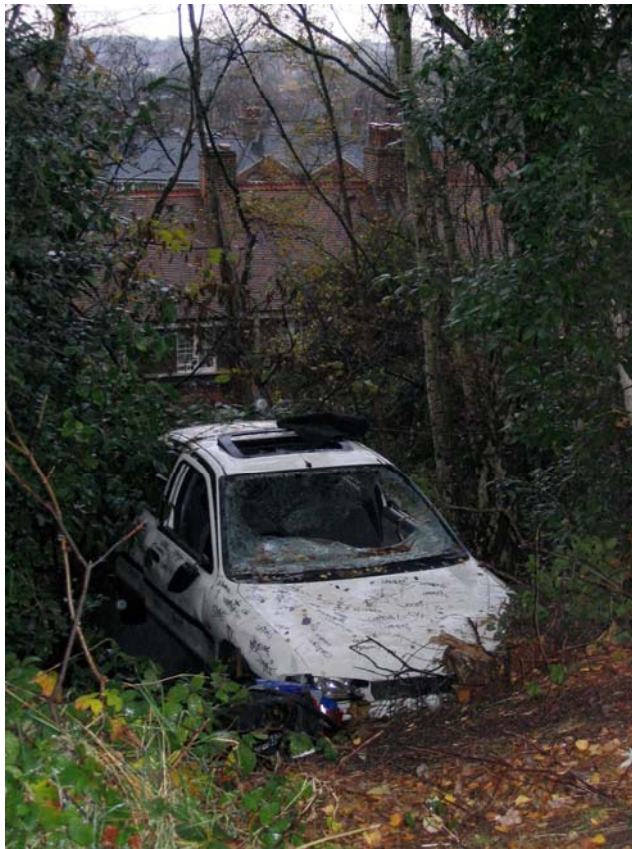
Photograph 1: Rubbish dumped at entrance to Peabody Hill Wood from Rosendale Estate



Photograph 2: Graffiti on tarmac path through the wood



Photograph 3: Car dumped in wood in November 2004 (this has since been removed)



Photograph 4: Remains of the tree house



Photograph 5: Grassed area and Peabody Hill Wood



3. Methodology

The overall aim of the project was to engage and involve residents in the use and enjoyment of trees and woodlands in their area and gain a better understanding of their views of the woodland. The objectives are outlined in Table 2 along with expected outputs of the project. A qualitative and quantitative methodology was used to address the overall aim.

Table 2: Objectives and outputs of the project

Objectives	Outputs
To ascertain the ways in which people value green space, trees and woodlands in their area before the start of the project	Information on people's views, opinions and experiences obtained through focus groups with existing community groups
To identify levels of usage of local woodlands and barriers to access and the means to overcome them	Questionnaire data obtained from the two estates identifying usage and barriers to use
To identify attitudes towards trees in immediate neighbourhood (estate, park, street)	Information on attitudes from focus groups and questionnaire
Engage residents in a walk through the wood to gain their views of Peabody Hill Wood and how it might be improved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop (16/01/05) organised by TFC to raise awareness of the value of trees and gain input from residents on their views of Peabody Hill Wood. • Numbers who attend workshop. • Type of people who attend - age, gender etc.
To enhance the landscape, through community involvement, on two inner London estates by woodland maintenance and tree planting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Day spent clearing undergrowth, rubbish and tree planting (19/02/05) • Number and type of people who attended
Evaluation of the project in terms of whether residents enjoyed the activities and gained a more positive attitude towards the wood	<p>Observations made of community involvement. Participation and evaluation forms used to determine:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who got involved - age, gender • How enjoyable people found the activities • Whether, for example, the workshop changed attendees attitudes towards the wood

3.1 Methods

Trees for Cities designed a questionnaire that they sent to all of the residents of both estates. This was undertaken in order to gain information about levels of usage of Peabody Hill Wood, attitudes towards the wood and responses concerning how the wood might be improved. There was also a short section for a child/children within the household to complete in order to find out if they used the wood and if so who with, and also what they thought about the wood. Residents were given 10 days to respond and send the questionnaire back using a pre-paid envelope. Forest Research analysed the results of the questionnaire.

In total 600 questionnaires were sent out and 63 completed questionnaires were returned, a response rate of just over 10 per cent. Response rates are generally low for postal questionnaires and a response rate of 10 - 20 per cent is acceptable. Both closed and open questions were used in the questionnaire. Closed questions were analysed quantitatively using an Excel spreadsheet. Open questions in which respondents had written details of why they felt positive or negative about Peabody Hill Wood were analysed using a qualitative software package (QSR NVivo).

Forest Research undertook focus groups with established community groups on the two estates (Table 3). Existing community groups were used, as they were easier to gain access to in the time available to the project. They also included long term residents who were able to describe changes that had taken place within the woodland over a number of years. All of the sessions apart from one in the Youth Club were recorded on mini-disc and extensive notes were taken from listening to the recordings for analysis. All of the focus groups contained residents from both the Rosendale and Peabody Hill estates.

Table 3: Focus groups

Group	Date	Location	Approx age range	Numbers involved
Pensioners group	23/11/04	Peabody Hill Community Hall	60+	11 in total (10 female, 1 male)
Hall users group	8/12/04	Peabody Hill Community Hall	35-55	8 in total (2 male, 5 female and 1 young person (12-14 age range). The group also included the Peabody Neighbourhood Manager and a Community Regeneration Area Manager)
Youth club	9/12/04	Peabody Hill Community Hall	6-12	20 in total
Tenants Association	16/12/04	Rosendale Hall	40-55	8 in total (1 male, 7 female including a Local Councillor)

4. Research findings

4.1 Focus groups

For the pensioners group the main concerns were ones of safety and rubbish dumping along with other types of anti-social behaviour. They talked about bikes and cars being burnt out in the wood and of muggings that had taken place.

We probably would use it [Peabody Hill Wood] if it weren't so overgrown. It's ridiculous, no way would I walk down there on my own even in daylight. (Pensioners group)

It's not safe, when it becomes overgrown it becomes dangerous. The only visitors we know about there [to Peabody Hill Wood] are the firemen and the drug police or whatever they're called. (Pensioners group)

There was a growing sense among this group of decline and abandonment of the area and a feeling that residents were not receiving as much support as they had done in the past in terms of maintenance of the estates or the wood. A couple of the pensioners group who had moved to the Peabody Hill estate when it had just been built in the mid-seventies described it as 'lovely, like Butlin's it was'. They contrasted this with the estate as it is today with increased levels of graffiti and litter. There was a sense of an underlying battle being waged between those who carried out anti-social behaviour and those who wished to see it stopped or reduce. The group described how a company had come to the estate to clean graffiti off the buildings and how it had looked nice for a while before becoming once more covered in graffiti. This gave the group a somewhat fatalistic outlook concerning improvements: would they last?

But with all the good intentions it's what happens to it after. (Pensioner Group)

The group discussion kept moving away from talking about Peabody Hill Wood to discussions about the grassy areas on the estate, general maintenance and trees that dropped their leaves and whose roots, in some places, caused the pavements to rise. These were of more concern because they had a greater impact on people's everyday lives and were of more immediate relevance to them. Somewhat surprisingly the pensioner group were not sure who owned the wood and debated who this might be:

I couldn't tell you [who owns it] I suppose it's to do with Peabody [Trust].

I think it's all to do with them.

Yeah but surely it could belong to the railway, because the railways at the bottom there.

I know years ago there were allotments there and I was always under the impression that the land belonged to Dulwich College. (Pensioner Group)

Possible improvements suggested by the group were to cut back the undergrowth within the wood, ensure that the streetlights in the wood worked and were repaired, put up CCTV cameras to deter abuse and remove rubbish. While problems were spoken about and discussed at some length there were a number of reasons why people valued having the trees and wood.

I think it's nice to see trees, you do need trees. Yeah because of the oxygen in the air, you've got to have your trees haven't you? Oh it's nice especially when the autumn started every tree was red and orange and gold, it was beautiful. The only time I curse is when they go down my drain and block it up. (Pensioner Group)

For the hall users group and the tenants association the start of the discussions concerned problems such as rubbish dumping, the lights not working and muggings in the wood. Those causing the problems were thought to be both young people from the estates as well as other people who came from elsewhere. There was also a leak along one of the paths, which was said to have been there for six years, that made it green and slippery in the summer and icy and dangerous in the winter. In terms of improvements better and clearer paths were considered important as well as adding facilities such as picnic tables and benches in the grassy area at the top of the hill. Interpretation was also considered important to inform people, provide some history of the site and help people to identify birds, for example. The groups did appreciate having the woodland near to them and spoke about some of the wildlife that had been observed (Quotes below and Table 4).

I think it's a wicked waste, because when you think of estates how many have got that much - it sounds silly now - but beauty. It's beautiful over there, I love it, I mean it's lovely over there. (Hall users group)

It seems amazing that a housing estate has a woodland rather than just a football cage and a car park. (Hall users group)

I like the foxes, the wildlife is lovely. I mean the birds up there, it's fantastic. (Tenants association)

I lived up here when mine [children] were little, I'd sit there watching them have their little push along toys up and down. Cause' I didn't have a garden up here. It's better than being stuck indoors. (Hall users group)

Wildlife that residents described seeing in the wood included kestrels, woodpeckers, foxes, wagtails, robins, crows and wood-pigeons. There were concerns expressed that any improvement work that might be undertaken should minimise the impact on wildlife. It was suggested that a balance needed to be struck between clearing undergrowth and improving sight lines, and allowing quiet corners to be left undisturbed for wildlife.

Table 4: Uses of the wood and why it is valued (Hall users group and tenants association)

Uses of Peabody Hill Wood	What people value about the wood
Pre-school group sometimes use it for nature trails Young people build bases [dens] Play in the trees Through route between estates - to shops, schools, herne hill station, buses Walk the dog Enjoy the views	No other estate has woodland The views over London Wildlife Some terrific trees - plum, blossom Trees important for oxygen

The groups said that no one maintained the wood, which was one of the main problems e.g. that the leak does not get fixed, graffiti is not removed, vegetation becomes overgrown and dumped rubbish is not cleared. Without maintenance of the woodland it was increasingly being seen as more of a liability than an asset. There were feelings of helplessness expressed by the group. If they did try and do something they said they would probably get their car wrecked by those who were causing the trouble. It was felt that professional people were needed to manage the area and that a higher profile might enable money to be found from environmental regeneration budgets that could be used to do something positive.

At present Peabody Trust's Ground Maintenance team maintain the two main tarmac paths and the vegetation along each side for about one and a half metres, they also regularly mow the grassy area at the top of the hill. While they would like to be able to carry out more specialised management work over the whole wood they currently lack the funds to do so.

A graffiti wall (for example at the community centre) was suggested as one way in which youngsters could legitimately write or draw what they wanted and it might stop the spread of graffiti where it was not wanted. Someone described how a number of schools took this approach and called them 'talking walls'.

Older children such as teenagers were thought to be a particular problem (Table 5). An adult and a number of young people built a tree house, this lasted for six to twelve months before it was destroyed. A playground had been installed a number of years ago but the groups said that it had been wrecked within about eighteen months. One person thought that this type of destructive activity was related to issues of territory and suggested that it highlighted the lack of positive youth activities in the area.

All the little kids played on it [playground] during the day but at night the older ones came and broke it, so in the end it was taken down. (Hall users group).

A couple of the little kids they come up here in the summer and they try to find somewhere where they [the older children] won't find their base. But somehow they work their way around and they find out where it is and destroy it. (Young person, Hall users group)

It was suggested that a play area was needed for children and they should be encouraged to build it in order to take pride in the area and not destroy it in the future. Making bases (the children's word for making dens) was something that a number of the young people were involved with and most of the residents in the groups were aware of. These bases allow somewhere for the young people to be together away from the prying eyes of adults.

The kids come up and play that's what most of the kids use it for. In the summer we come up and build our bases where we like to hang out and we bring all our mates up here to chat.

Researcher: What sort of bases are you building?

Like somewhere to sit down and chat to your friends. What we mostly do is go down to the dump and try to find any wood or plastic coating for when it rains. And we put the plastic coating over the trees and then we build the base around the plastic curtain. And then we find, if we can, more plastic and we all join in and carry the chairs up and put it down there. (Young person, Hall users group)

Table 5: Problems and opportunities identified by all groups

Problems	Opportunities
Dumping of bikes and cars	Adventure play area for children - something suitable for the older children and something separate for the younger children. Tree surgery and cutting back vegetation to clear sight lines. Nature trail Benches and picnic tables Interpretation Use for education
Fly tipping	
Overgrown vegetation	
Water leak on path	
Lack of maintenance and care	
Tree house destroyed	
Safety concerns	
Muggings and attacks	

The quote below illustrates the opportunities for play that the trees and wood afford.

There are trees to climb up here. You know you've got the slope and the trees a bit further down. We still play on them and then we fall down and hurt ourselves on thorns and god knows what. We still have fun playing in the trees and we still swing from branch to branch. (Young person, Hall users group)

It was also felt that having green spaces and woods to go to that were nearby were particularly important, as opposed to having access to the countryside on an infrequent basis e.g. at holiday time. There was general agreement that the wood should be for the benefit of everyone.

If you're a parent on a bit of a budget even the bus fare can be a bit of a stretch, if you can get the kids out into the fresh air into the wood and have a picnic. (Hall users group)

4.1.1 Youth club

The youth club session was an interactive one. A series of questions was written out on flip chart paper and the children were asked to respond by placing sticky dots next to a range of answers. They were also encouraged to write on post-it notes why they liked or disliked the wood and to stick this onto the flipchart paper. The tables and boxes below indicate how the children responded to the specific questions. Not all of the children answered the questions. The numbers given (in the Tables) indicate how many children placed a sticky dot next to the answer. For some of the questions, which involved a yes or no answer, the children

where asked to elaborate by giving reasons why they had given a particular answer.

Table 6: Which do you like doing more?

Playing outside 11 children	Playing inside 2 children
Reasons given <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fresh air • Don't get lost • More things to do • Like playing football • Run around 	Reasons given <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help mum • Warmer • Television • Play station 2 • Food

Playing outside seemed to be particularly important for this group, the average age of the children was approximately eight (Table 6). They wanted spaces to play and thought that there were not enough parks or woods near to where they lived. Playing outside allowed more opportunity for freedom and running around.

Table 7: What spaces do you play in most often? (children were allowed to choose up to two options)

Answers to choose from	Numbers
A garden	1
Park	6
Wood	6
Football pitch	4
Playground	0
In the street	5
Countryside	0
Basketball court	1

Not many of the children had gardens to play in which meant that they had to find other areas in which to be outside (Table 7). The park and the wood were the places children described going to most often although the streets were also important and perceived as less dangerous than the wood or park.

Table 8: What do you enjoy most about playing outside?

Answers to choose from	Numbers
I like being out in the fresh air	6
I get lots of exercise and run around	1
I can meet my friends	5
I can see trees and flowers	1
I can be noisy	2
I can play games with other children	1

Being out in the fresh air and meeting friends were what these children enjoyed most about playing outside (Table 8). Being outside provides feelings of freedom and escape and it is also somewhere where it is often more acceptable to be noisy than within one's own home.

Table 9: How often do you use Peabody Hill Wood?

A lot 4 Children	Not a lot 8 Children
	Reasons given <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dangerous • Mum says no • At school • Too dark • Muddy in winter • Too quiet • Fires • Rapist

Table 9 highlights some of the reasons why the children do not use the woodland a lot. For the two questions on the next page the children were asked to write what they liked or disliked about the wood on post-it notes and stick this on to the flipchart paper (Box 1 and 2). It was clear that what the children liked was the opportunity to play with friends, have fun and run around. Making bases was also something this age group sometimes got involved in (Box 1).

Box 1: What do you like about Peabody Hill Wood?

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fun to play games• Friends and games• Because you get to run down the hill with your friends• It's fun to play about in• Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Good places to hide• Because you can play and run about• Good for making bases• Hanging out in summer• You make a base and travel and play with friends
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The things that the children disliked about the wood appeared to be things such as 'there's nothing to do' but more seriously they were specific about identifying the threats of muggers, murderers and rapists. It was not clear whether these fears were passed onto the children from their parents or from friends or older brothers and sisters or school (Box 2).

Box 2: What do you dislike about Peabody Hill Wood?

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nothing to do• It's cold, dangerous, rapists and paedophiles• There's muggers, rapists, bonfires and murders• You can get killed	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Too many teenagers smoking• Because it's dangerous and boring and there's hills you can hurt yourself on• Dangerous - too many prickles they hurt
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When talking specifically about Peabody Hill Wood it was clear that for this age group the wood was used, although not extensively due to it being perceived as dangerous. However there were more responses related to why the children liked the wood rather than disliked it. Older teenagers were also perceived as a possible threat because the wood was one of the places where they met their friends to smoke and chat.

4.2 Questionnaire

The questionnaire combined both open and closed questions. Some of the closed questions gave respondents the opportunity to circle a range of contrasting options. For example would respondents describe Peabody Hill Wood as safe or dangerous, as welcoming or unwelcoming? A range of information came from the open questions in which people were asked to give reasons for using or not using the wood. There was also information concerning the positive and negative impacts of the wood.

4.2.1 Open question responses

Responses to the questions of why residents used Peabody Hill Wood outlined that dog walking seemed to be the primary reason to use the woodland. It was also used frequently as a shortcut between the two estates. Reasons for non-use were primarily focused on the problems of:

- Lighting
- Rubbish
- Lack of maintenance and care of the wood
- Safety concerns.

Residents were also asked about what made them feel positive or negative about the wood. The negative aspects were similar to those outlined above; but respondents also spoke of unruly young people causing trouble by lighting fires and how a lot of the vegetation was overgrown causing people to feel unsafe.

There were more negative responses than positive responses, and although there were some significant problems many people also felt lucky to have a resource such as the wood nearby (Box 3 and 4). There was a greater range of responses concerning why people felt positive about the wood. Negative responses primarily corresponded with the bulleted list outlined above. Verbatim responses are given in quote marks to highlight respondent's answers in their own words.

Box 3: What makes you feel positive about Peabody Hill Wood

Natural environment	'They are lovely to look at and make area feel friendly and peaceful'.
Relaxing	
Not just a concrete jungle	'A little bit of the country in London'.
Woods are lovely	'The greenery adds a sense of living environment'.
Great wildlife	
Nice to have green round the estates	'I love the fact that we have lots of trees on/near the estate. I think it's unique'.
Open country	'It's great to explore the woods as there's always something new to see'.
Love to hear the birds	
Pick blackberries in autumn	'Love the woods, use them often'.
Blossom different colours	

Box 4: What makes you feel negative about Peabody Hill Wood

Overgrown trees/bushes	Not well kept
Children setting off fires	Unsafe/attacks/dangerous
Children making camps using my back fence.	Neglected
Too many big trees close to rear gardens	Dumping of car
Poor lighting	Graffiti on pathway
Path slippery	Trees block out sunshine in my garden
	Litter
	Dropping leaves

One respondent described being mugged at knifepoint on one of the paths alongside the wood and is adamant that the woods are unsafe and are used for drug taking, lighting fires and sexual activity. This female described the trees on the actual estates as great but suggested that the wood was totally different and was a haven for crime.

When it came to the changes that would make residents use the woodland more often the key issues were to improve the lighting, remove rubbish, cut back overgrown vegetation, improve the paths and use security cameras. A play area, nature trail and benches were also suggested as improvements that would attract more people into the wood.

When residents were asked whether they thought woodlands were beneficial for children and the reason for this their answers were primarily related to the importance of young people having natural areas and contact with nature. Opportunities for learning and education were also thought to be important for young people.

It enables them to appreciate their environment and enables them to learn and like their environment without having to go to the countryside. (Resident - White Male)

It is untouched and has such a range of wildlife and flowers. I bet every child who lives here got an 'A' for their summer nature report. (Resident - White Female)

Natural areas are vital to the lives of all people; children especially need to experience this from an early age. (Resident - Caribbean Male)

Anything that makes the children more aware of nature and gives them the space to enjoy themselves must be beneficial. (Resident - White Male)

There was a feeling that children should have exposure to nature and some freedom to explore and use their imagination. This related to the question of whether adults had visited woods as children and the reasons for this. Having the opportunity to play, have fun and picnics were reasons given as well as being able to make dens, camps and swings. No one mentioned that they used woodlands as a child for learning, although this was a reason they gave as adults of the importance of woodlands for children. This probably relates to the concept of informal learning in which children who have the opportunity to use woodlands and green spaces are thought to learn a range of skills and gain confidence while playing in these spaces.

There was an opportunity within the questionnaire for children to state whether they used the wood and what they thought about it. There were 19 responses, although these were quite patchy, as not all the questions were answered or the age of the child given. Of the responses obtained more children said they used the wood than did not, and this was mainly as a shortcut or with friends. Words like boring and dangerous were used to describe the wood as well as fun. More children said they liked the wood than those who did not.

There was strong feeling expressed from those who responded to the open questions which consisted of statements about the problems within the wood, but also included explanations of why the wood and trees are important; and sometimes how they used to enjoy the wood in the past until increasing problems kept them away from it.

4.2.2 Closed questions responses

Table 10 shows the demographic information provided by the respondents to the questionnaire. These are shown in actual numbers and as percentages. Not all of the numbers add up to 63 (the total number of questionnaires returned) as people who filled in the survey did not always respond to every question. Respondents may have only answered questions that interested them or that they felt were relevant to them.

Table 10: Demographic information

Sex

	Male	Female	Total
Number	17	33	50
Percentage	34	66	100

Age range

	Under 12	12-18	19-59	60+	Total
Number	1	1	35	20	57
Percentage	2	2	61	35	100

Ethnic background

	Asian	Black	White	Caribbean	Bangladeshi	Other	Total
Number	0	4	44	2	0	1	51
Percentage	0	8	86	4	0	2	100

Employment

	School	Unemployed	Employed	Self-employed	Retired	Unpaid	Not working	Looking after family	Total
Number	2	1	22	1	20	2	3	4	55
Percentage	4	2	40	2	36	4	5	7	100

Table 10 highlights that more women than men answered the questionnaire. The main age range of respondents was in the 19-59 age group. This is really too large of a range and should have been further divided in the questionnaire. The predominant ethnic background was white with a small number of Black and Caribbean respondents. Most of the respondents were either employed or retired, with a small number not working or looking after family.

Figure 1 shows that there was only a small number (18) of positive responses to the wood while the number of negative responses were high (Figure 2). Respondents could choose more than one characteristic which is why the number of negative responses totalled 126 which is greater than the 63 people who sent back questionnaires.

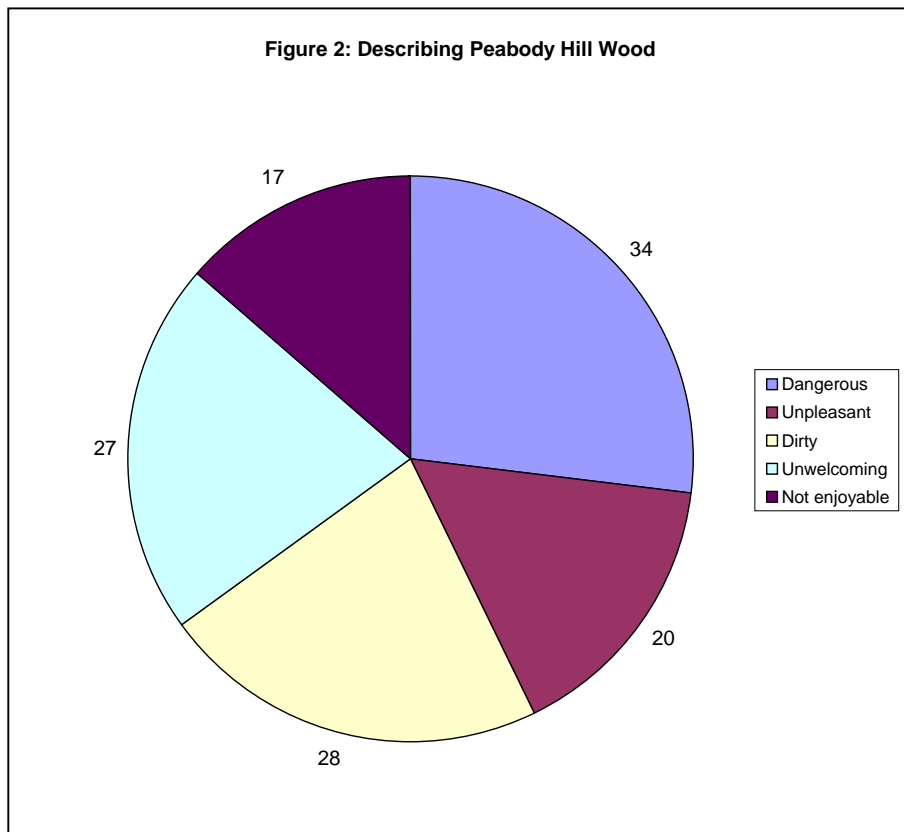
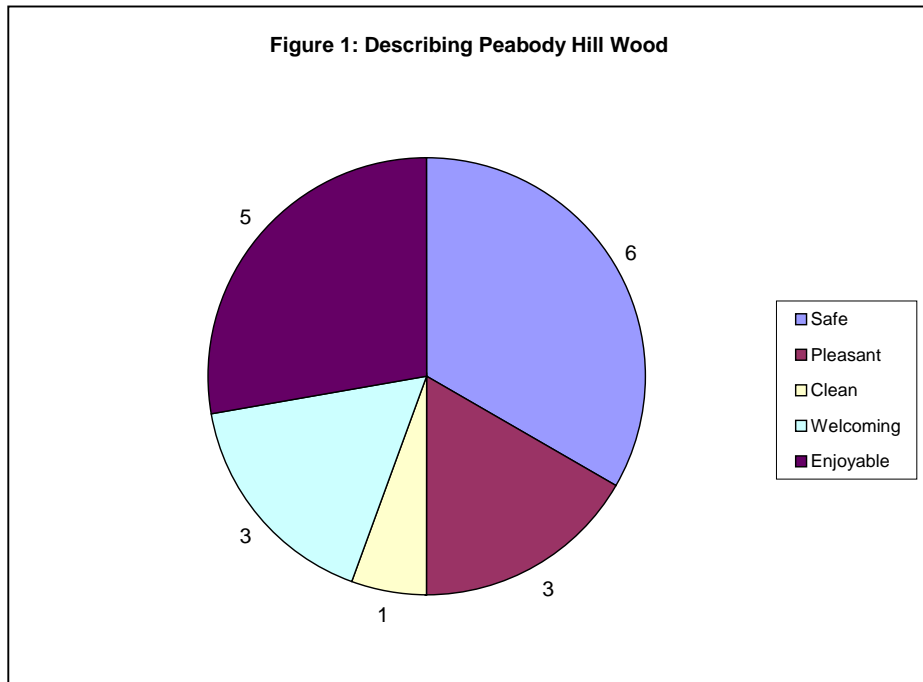


Figure 3 shows that 43% of respondents never visit the wood while 25% use it several times a week probably as a short cut between their houses and the local shops or school.

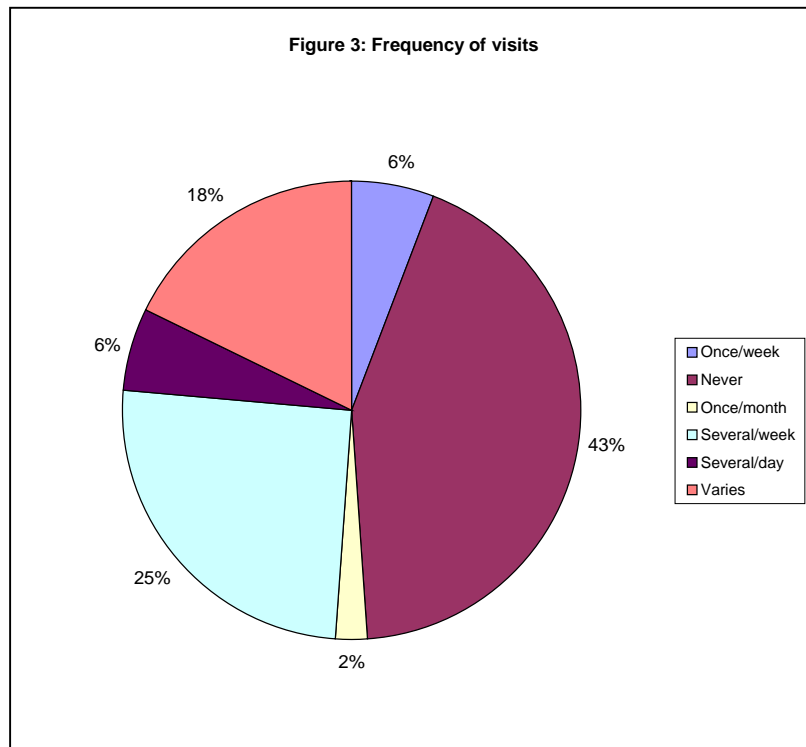


Figure 4 shows that the majority of people using the wood were using it as a shortcut, with smaller percentages using it for walking, nature and leisure.

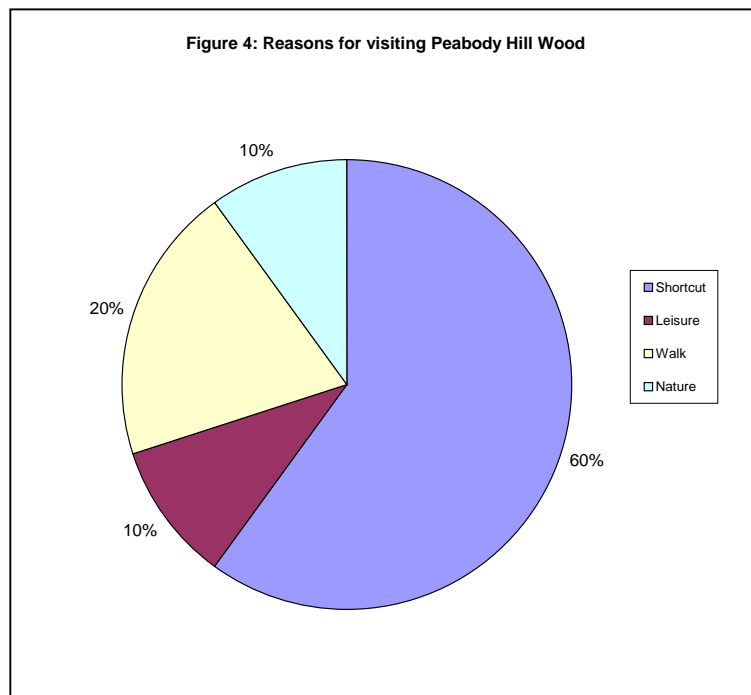
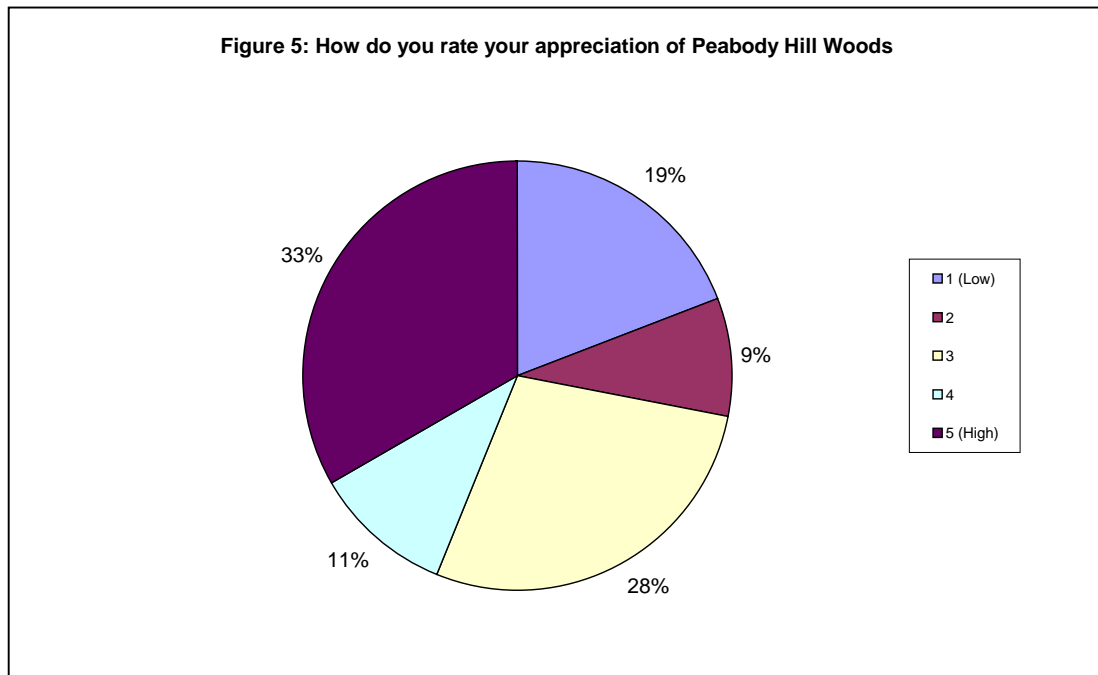


Figure 5 shows that 33% of respondents rated the woodland highly while for 19% the rating was low.



Twenty women specifically stated that the woodland was beneficial for children while only eight men did. In the focus groups and open ended questions respondents were able to give more detail and suggested that the children needed somewhere to let off steam and run around. Twenty women, but only three men, specifically stated that the wood was dangerous.

5. Project activities and impacts

As part of the project Trees for Cities organised a one-day workshop held at Rosendale Hall in January 2005 and a one-day community woodland clearance and tree planting session in February 2005.

5.1 Workshop

The workshop was held on the 16th January 2005. A facilitator ran the sessions from 11.00am-12.00 and from 2.00pm-3.00. Flyers were sent out to people on both estates. The aims of the workshop were to:

- Allow respondents to express their feelings about the wood
- Promote a positive perception of the wood.

In order to do this respondents were taken on a site visit through the wood to enable them to comment and point out things of particular interest to them. The facilitator identified some of the different tree types on site and highlighted other points of interest and talked about how trees can be used to screen things, such as the railway line. After the walk the workshop continued in Rosendale Hall when the facilitator showed some slides of a range of trees and time was spent asking residents about what might improve the woodland.

Table 11: Workshop attendance

Session	Numbers attending	Approx age	Ethnicity	Sex
Morning session 11-12am	8	40s-60s	White	2 males 6 females
Afternoon session 2-3pm	5 (one person did not attend the walk but gave feedback in the community hall)	40s-60s plus approx 12 year old	White	1 man 1 young female 3 females

Photograph 6: Walk through the wood workshop



5.1.1 Evaluation of the workshop by respondents

A participation and evaluation sheet was given to those who attended. Forest Research acted as observers for the day and recorded on mini-disc some of the comments made by residents during the woodland walks. The facilitator also noted down comments from residents.

Similar to the responses from the focus groups and answers to the questionnaire: the problems were identified as safety issues, rubbish, dog mess and overgrown vegetation. Someone observed that the rubbish needed to be cleared up and suggested that residents needed to be encouraged to be more proud of their area which they thought might lead to less rubbish tipping. One woman described her safety concerns and that many years ago she had seen a pervert who exposed himself in the wood; she had her little girl with her at the time.

Those who attended also spoke about positive aspects of the wood such as the wildlife they had seen including woodpeckers, foxes, a range of other birds and squirrels. The view from the top of the hill was enjoyed and two sets of attendees spoke of watching fireworks in London on New Years Eve from the top of the hill.

You want to leave some gaps in the trees because you get amazing views from up here.
(Male resident, Morning Session)

One person in the morning session did not live on either of the estates but did live nearby. She had an allotment in the area and had not heard about Peabody Hill Wood before. She suggested that a greater cross section of people should be asked

about the wood, particularly teenagers. Another person had recently moved with her family from Brixton.

It's really nice [the wood] we lived in the middle of Brixton before and there were drug dealers at the end of the road and very dirty streets. We never let the children go out by themselves but now they can go out. I feel generally it's a lot safer and I've told the children what to do if they see someone suspicious. (Female, Afternoon Session)

Now they had moved to Peabody Hill estate her daughter regularly used the wood to explore and said she had made a base with friends. Her daughter also provided a positive response about the workshop.

It was interesting I learned about loads of types of trees. (Young female, Afternoon Session)

Table 12: Was the workshop interesting?

Possible answers	Numbers
All the time	7
Most of the time	4
Only sometimes	1
Never	0

Table 13: Was it a worthwhile learning experience?

Possible answers	Numbers
All the time	7
Most of the time	4
Only sometimes	1
Never	0

Somebody suggested that it would be interesting to learn about the history of the site for a future workshop. While another said that it was good to hear about Peabody Hill Estate in the 1970s from local residents.

Table 14: Could I express my ideas, concerns, thoughts?

Possible answers	Numbers
All the time	9
Most of the time	1
Only sometimes	0
Never	0

The workshop allowed people to describe what they thought of the wood and how they would like to see it improved.

Table 15: I would like to do a similar workshop again

Possible answers	Numbers
Definitely	7
I'm not sure	4
No	1

Table 16: How often do you use the woods at the moment?

Possible answers	Numbers
More than once a week	1
Once a week	1
Several times a month	1
Several times a year	2
Never	6

Six of the participants never used the wood because of safety concerns and also as one person said 'I have no reason to'. It was the young female who used the wood more than once a week to play in with friends.

Table 17: After this workshop do you think you will use the woods:

Possible answers	Numbers
More	5
Less	0
Same amount	2
If it is improved	2
Don't know	2

Table 18: Has the workshop changed your attitude towards the woods?

Possible answers	Numbers
Yes - more positive	10
Yes - more negative	0
No	1

In summary most respondents found the workshop interesting, they felt they learnt something and importantly felt more positive about the wood at the end of the session. Because of this some of them may be encouraged to use the wood more in the future. This may be due to finding out more about Peabody Hill Wood, or because they had been told that a clean up and planting day was arranged for February. Responses also suggest that those who currently do not use the wood might if it was improved in terms of rubbish removal and addressing safety issues.

In terms of desired improvements the need for seating was raised and the importance of clearing up rubbish and clearing some undergrowth to enable people to feel safer. Another suggestion was for a special dog walk to minimise fouling in the wider area. Climbing frames for children were also mentioned as an opportunity for encouraging younger people to use the woodland.

5.2 Community woodland clearance and tree planting day

On 19th February Trees for Cities organised a one day event which consisted of clearing up some of the rubbish from the woodland, clearing back brambles from the main paths and planting five oak trees. Invitations were delivered to houses on both estates to encourage residents to attend. Two small marquees were erected on the grassy area at the top of the hill near Peabody Hill Estate, one from which to serve drinks and organic food and the other which housed two musicians who provided music for the day. A face painter painted children's faces and Trees for Cities staff organised those who turned up to volunteer. The main problems that needed addressing were to clear up litter lying throughout the wood and some specific dumped fly-tipping, particularly a large pile on an open grassy area. The small number of trees planted was undertaken as a symbolic gesture to do something positive, not only to clean rubbish from the wood. A facilitator was on hand to undertake walks through the wood with those who were interested in learning more about trees.

5.2.1 Evaluation of the community woodland clearance day

The weather was sunny but very cold with an easterly wind. Fifty two people attended the day including Trees for Cities Staff, a facilitator, member of Forest Research staff and member of Peabody Trust staff. The number of adults attending from the estates was fairly small at seven. More children attended than adults, (28 under the age of 18) some came to have their faces painted while others wanted to get involved and do something useful. What was disappointing was the small number of adults who came from the estates to get involved. There were some people who came from other areas. One man lived in Brixton and had a friend on the estate. He described how London was a great city for green space. Two women from Nottingham came with their aunt who lived on one of the estates. They enthusiastically got involved in clearing bramble and said they had never done anything like this before. They left towards the end of the day saying that they felt satisfied with the contribution they had made. Two women who had attended the workshop in January came along to help out until they became too cold to carry on and had to go home to get warmed up. At the workshop they had said that they would be prepared to get involved in some activity to do with the woodland.

Table 19: Sex and age of those who attend

Sex and age range	Numbers
Total	52
Male	22
Female	28
Under 12	25
12-18	3
19-59	19
60+	5

Table 20: Ethnic background of attendees

Ethnic background	Numbers
White	27
Black Caribbean	5
Black African	2
Indian subcontinent	1
Mixed race/dual heritage	2

Two local councillors, John and Clare Whelan, came along for part of the event and there was a visit from the Mayor of Lambeth, Cllr. Irene Kimm. The Mayor posed for photographs, planting the first oak tree along with some of the volunteers.

One young girl who was shovelling in earth, when one of the trees was being planted, said that when (in the future) she told her children that she had planted a tree no one would believe her.

The lack of involvement of adults from the two estates may be due to negative attitudes towards the wood. Or residents may feel that Peabody Trust should undertake the work as part of its wider landscape maintenance across both estates. The Trust focuses primarily on the estate buildings and the grassed areas around the estate rather than the wood. It recognises that improvements to the woodland are required but the necessary resources are currently unavailable. However, the weather was cold, and nothing like this had been held on the estates before. A follow up work day later in 2005 would be required to maintain the interest in the woodland, and the momentum in the belief that improvements to it would actually result in positive change. Some sustained support of the local community in terms of improving the woodland may be needed and once residents feel that momentum is being created they may feel more able to support the work and be keener to get involved and use the wood on a more regular basis.

Photographs 7: Shots from the community woodland clearance and tree planting day



5.3 Woodland management training

Trees for Cities have been training four people in woodland management at Peabody Hill Wood. An evaluation of the impact of the training on residents or trainees has not been part of this research project, nevertheless it is mentioned here as it highlights other activities being carried out at Peabody Hill Wood. The training was funded by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM). The training consists of a six-week course commencing on 31st January 2005 and the work at Peabody Hill Wood has consisted of trainees learning how to use a brushcutter and strimmer as well as learning how to use a chainsaw and undertake some tree felling. The trainees are all long-term unemployed people and will be tested on what they have learnt at National Proficiency Test Council level. The work of the trainees will provide some improvements to Peabody Hill Wood for local residents in terms of clearing some of the vegetation within the wood and allowing for greater visibility. The training also provides further evidence to residents that work is being undertaken in the wood and that it is being cared for more than it has been in the past.

6. Conclusions

This project was undertaken to evaluate the existing and potential engagement and involvement of residents in the use and enjoyment of Peabody Hill Wood. This was achieved through focus groups, a questionnaire, workshop and community woodland clearance and tree planting day.

A number of key issues emerged:

- Social issues - resident's negative perceptions of the woodland and of who was causing the problem, along with a general feeling that the whole area is being neglected.
- Physical issues - the wood is on a steep hill, the main footpaths have steps, there is water running down one path from a leak or underground spring, mounds of rubbish can be found in the wood, and overgrown vegetation.
- Psychological issues - concerns about personal safety and anti-social behaviour.

There is potential for improving Peabody Hill Wood so that it meets the needs of local residents to a greater extent than it does at present and this project has started that process. It is clear that many people value the woodland in a range of ways as a piece of nature within the urban landscape which provides a wilder and more natural feel than nearby parks such as Brockwell Park. Some of the responses in the questionnaires and focus groups were very positive. However counter to this are strong concerns about personal safety, overgrown vegetation, unruly young people, fires and rubbish dumping, as well as a general lack of maintenance.

Many people use the wood as a short cut to shops, schools etc. because it is convenient; if the wood was improved there is the potential for this group of users to be able to enjoy the experience of walking through the wood rather than just as a way to get from A to B.

The concerns about unruly teenagers demonstrates an ambiguity within society concerning the role of adolescents in woodlands and other public spaces. Skelton (2000) illustrates this by outlining the differing views society has of 14-16 year olds. 1) They are still in school and are therefore classed as children in compulsory education, 2) they are teenagers with a reputation for being moody, difficult and potential trouble-makers and 3) as young people they are celebrated as the future. These differing views all play a role in how adults perceive young people and their

role in society and their conformity or otherwise to rules and regulations of what is considered appropriate behaviour in public places. Older teenagers were not part of this study and they would be a useful group to speak to in any future work concerning the wood. The wood is used by a number of younger children and this number could be increased if parents thought the wood was a safer place. The children were being creative in using the wood as somewhere to have their own base so that they could meet and be with friends.

In terms of safety issues a number of residents suggested the need for CCTV cameras to be installed in the wood. Peabody Trust would be unwilling to do this as the costs would be prohibitive and they do not believe that there would be benefits from this type of approach. A recent CABI Space Policy Note suggests that investing 'in the creation and care of high quality public space is more effective in tackling anti-social behaviour than the blanket use of tough security measures' (CABI Space, 2004). They argue that introducing security cameras such as CCTV and gating areas - sometimes known as target hardening - creates oppressive, fortified and ugly environments. From their research of park managers, local authorities and community groups they found that investing in maintenance, good quality design and on site staff showed a real impact in tackling anti-social behaviour. The Policy Note cites the 'broken window theory' which posits that people's behaviour adapts to the environment that surrounds them. For example if a broken window is left, others are likely to be broken and the building will look, and become, increasingly vandalised whereas if the window is repaired quickly showing care and maintenance, further damage is less likely to happen. It is suggested that long term savings can result from this type of approach.

There are tensions between different groups especially those who use the wood and those who are thought to abuse the wood. There were those who felt that although Peabody Hill Wood was valuable as a wildlife habitat and for aesthetic reasons there were too many problems in the wood for them to feel that it was a useable resource. There are too many concerns about safety issues within the wood for this to be ignored. There is a sense among some residents that there are a number of problems that need to be addressed and that any work that might be undertaken would not last before any of the good work was undone. Others take a more positive outlook and although they highlight some of the problems they also see many reasons why the wood is important. Those who currently do not use the wood very often might do so if some of these issues of concern were addressed.

There are also some tensions between the two estates. Rosendale is a Conservation Area and people request to live there; resident turnover is low, which has allowed a greater sense of community to develop. Peabody Hill Estate is deemed less attractive, and is more isolated from facilities. Lambeth Council has nominated a number of problem families to homes on the estate; resident turnover is much higher. Peabody Trust has been aware of some criminal activity taking place on this estate, and is working with residents and the authorities to tackle anti-social behaviour that exists on and near the estate. However, residents in the focus groups who came from each estate felt that relationships between the estates were improving.

As noted in the introduction a number of studies have emphasised the importance of children having access to a range of green spaces including spaces that are close to them. Many people had fond memories of using woodlands when they were young and this seems to relate to some of the positive attitudes they now have towards woodlands as adults. The adults who thought that woodlands were beneficial to children spoke about the importance of children using their imagination, having fun and gaining an understanding and experience of nature. The Green Alliance and Demos report (2004) highlights the importance of secret or special places much like bases that children in the youth club described making; places where they could be with friends and somewhere they could imbue with their own meaning. The report also suggested that 'public policy must find ways to extend the benefits of access to the outdoor environment more equitably' (2004: 11).

Peabody Trust intends to bring about lasting improvements to the wood; it recognises that additional resources are required to focus upon this. The results of the project have already shaped future management proposals, and have helped to underpin bids for additional external resources. In particular, Peabody Hill Wood is one of six flagship sites chosen for a full Heritage Lottery Fund bid in 2005, under the multi-partner Capital Woodlands project. There is potential for making a number of improvements to the wood if the lottery bid is successful. This project has made a start in trying to improve the woodland and gain a better understanding of how residents use it and why it is important to them. From this work there is a clearer understanding of possible approaches that could be taken to improve Peabody Hill Wood.

The health and well-being of the population is of concern to the government as obesity rates rise and more people are physically inactive. The government has a target of encouraging seventy percent of the population to be physically active by 2020 (Strategy Unit, 2004). At present only approximately, thirty percent of the population are physically active. A Health Concordat has recently been signed by Forestry Commission England, Sport England, Countryside Agency, English Nature, Association of National Park Authorities which lists a range of actions the agencies will undertake in 2005 to promote the use of the countryside for health. Nearby woodlands and green spaces close to where people live can also play a significant role in increasing people's physical activity rates as long as people feel comfortable using these areas and they are perceived as safe. Peabody Hill Wood offers an ideal opportunity in this regard for both children and adults.

What has clearly been revealed by this project was that talking to local residents and allowing them to voice their concerns and ideas for how the woodland might be improved was a positive process in itself and could lead to further interest in the wood. Seeking people's views and enabling them to contribute to how their local area is changed for the better provides people with an opportunity to take stock of how both they and others perceive their local spaces. It appears that residents would like to see a long term commitment to improve the wood so that any good work was not quickly undone - as was the case with the removal of graffiti on the estate buildings. There is a certain amount of cynicism that any improvements will be reversed and therefore what is the point of getting involved.

Professor Jacquelin Burgess (1995) in her study of woodlands and safety issues suggested that we should 'never underestimate how high the economic, social and cultural barriers are to getting out to the woods, nor how much joy and pleasure will be experienced among those disadvantaged groups who are able to participate in supportive events'.

7. Recommendations

The long-term commitment to improvements and long-term management of the wood should provide residents with a more positive basis on which to get involved and take more interest in Peabody Hill Wood. Peabody Hill Wood is one of six flagship woodland sites in London that are being put forward for the Capital Woodlands Heritage Lottery Fund bid. This commitment might be achievable if the bid is successful and funds can be used to improve the woodland. Even a very nearby resource for local people can be seen not as an asset but as a liability; an issue of concern if people perceive it to be uncared for and abused. In order to address some of the issues raised by residents the following should be considered for future implementation. The wood is reasonably well used by a number of children from the estates and this interest in using the wood should be encouraged and extended to include a greater range of children. A pre-requisite is that parents' worries about safety would have to be addressed. Another opportunity to improve the wood might be to approach the local youth offending team and encourage them to carry out tasks in the wood. This might be a particularly useful approach if some of the young offenders are local to the area by engendering a sense of ownership of the wood.

Key points for future consideration in the planned improvements include:

- Outreach work to encourage those who never use the wood to consider how it might be improved and become usable - a certain level of commitment and enthusiasm would need to be generated to increase usage. Many local residents feel the wood is important but are too discouraged by the current levels of abuse to feel that improvements can be sustained.
- Involve all sections of the community in making changes and improvements to Peabody Hill Wood, particularly in reducing current levels of abuse. This would need to include the harder to reach older teenage groups who were seen by some residents as part of the problem.
- The wood is already an important through route between the estates to shops, schools and buses. If the wood was cared for and made safer residents would be more likely to linger and enjoy the experience rather than seeing it only as a way to get from A to B.
- Work towards engendering a sense of ownership and pride in the wood through further events and activities particularly involving children.

- Retain wildlife interest by leaving some areas relatively undisturbed within the wood - this was something of value to residents and the wood's location on a steep hill would allow this without unduly restricting people's use.
- Improve feelings of safety and security through community involvement and generating informal surveillance by local residents once the wood is used on a more regular basis, rather than by installing equipment such as CCTV.
- Work with local schools and play groups to encourage use of the woodland resource as part of their curriculum studies and to enthuse children about using the wood.
- Consider developing a specific group for young people such as a junior rangers group to encourage youngsters to take an interest in the woodland.
- Provide additional resources to enable the Trust's ground maintenance team to take a lead in the wood's future management, which could include clearing overgrown vegetation and removing fly tipping.
- Strengthen links between the Trust's grounds maintenance team and residents in the wood's management, possibly through regular meetings.
- Consider whether the creation of a 'Friends of Peabody Hill Wood' could be established to increase interest and encourage more people to use the wood.
- Sustain the partnership that has been created through this project work to provide a longer-term commitment to improving the wood.
- Add a children's play area, a few benches and possibly a couple of tables which would provide a greater opportunity for a range of residents of all ages to use and enjoy the wood.
- Provide interpretation for local residents of the history of the site and how the wood has developed as well as highlighting wildlife and trees that can be found in the wood.

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