

New woodland and local communities – understanding the benefits over time

Official title: TWF-16 Mapping the social benefits of woodland creation and expansion – proof of concept for setting up a longitudinal network

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Summary of key findings September 2025

- High levels tree planting = changes to local landscapes & access to woodlands
- Lack of understanding about how new planting / young woodlands impact local communities
- How might this change over time?



1. Identify and develop connections with woodland sites and communities to study over time.
2. Explore attitudes, motivations, actions, barriers and benefits linked to new woodland creation and expansion (new planting) for diverse communities.
3. Develop and test a proof-of-concept for longitudinal research to study how attitudes, motivations, actions, barriers and benefits for communities local to new planting change over time.



RQ1 What do local community members who have visited the site think about the intervention (new planting and expansion of woodland) and how it has come about?

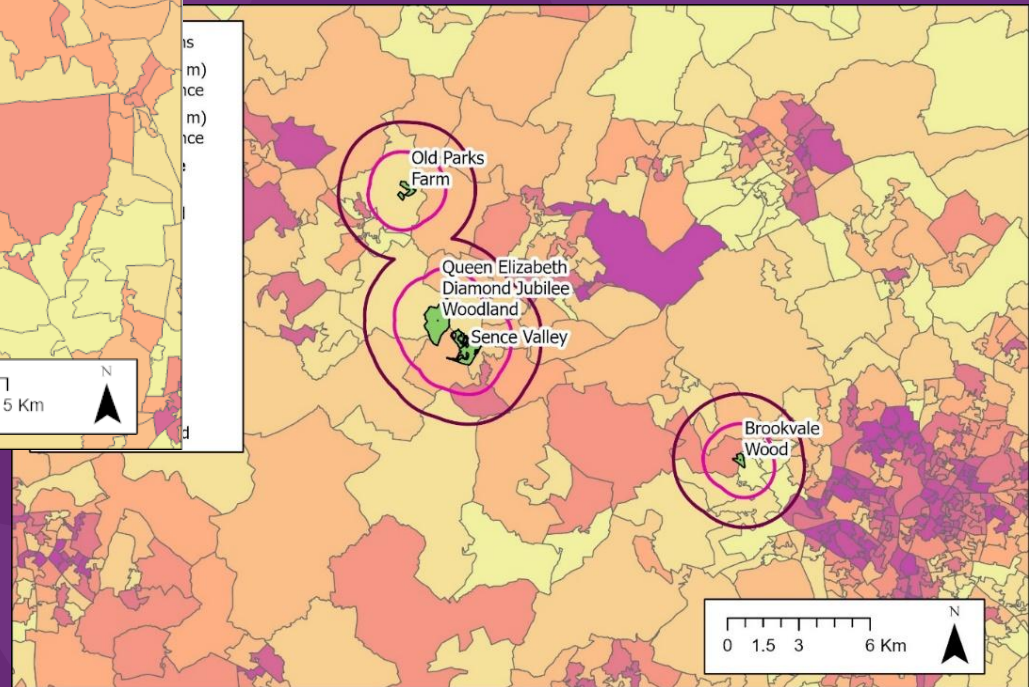
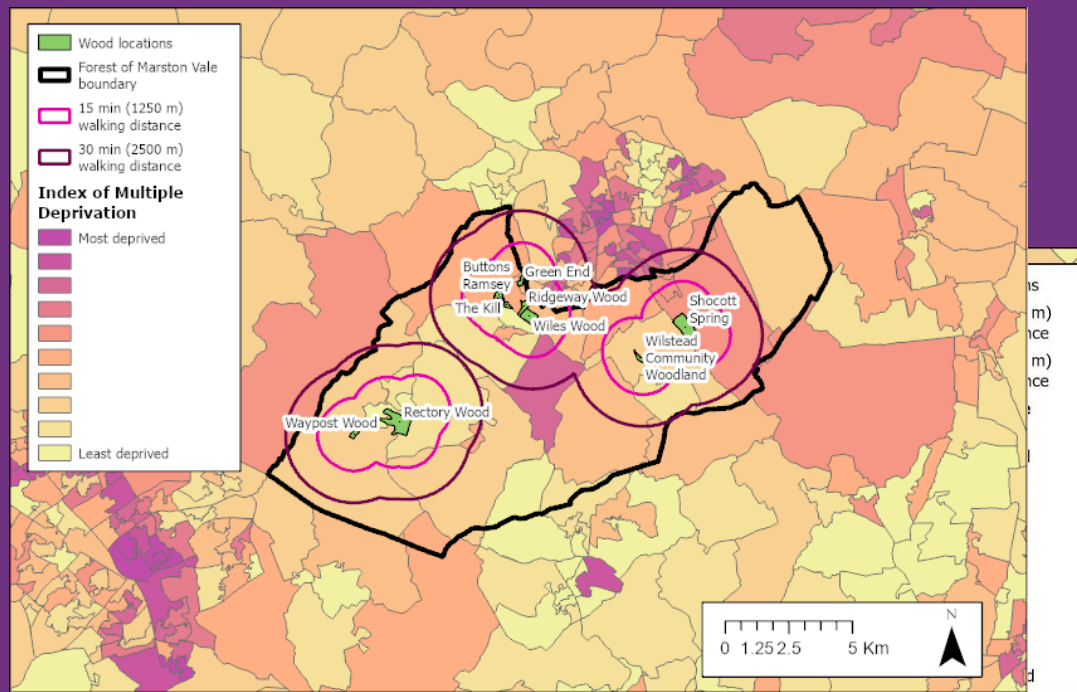
RQ2 What do local community members who have not visited the site (but are aware of the intervention) think about it and how it has come about?

RQ3 What impacts has the intervention had on local community members who visit/engage with the site?

RQ4 What impacts, if any, has the intervention had on local community members who have not visited (but are aware of the intervention)?

RQ5 How do we best capture the above change in attitudes, motivations, actions, barriers and benefits linked to woodland creation and expansion for diverse communities over time?

RQ6 What lessons can we take from the above to inform such interventions to help them improve provision of benefits and to maximise access/engagement with such sites and minimise negative impacts?





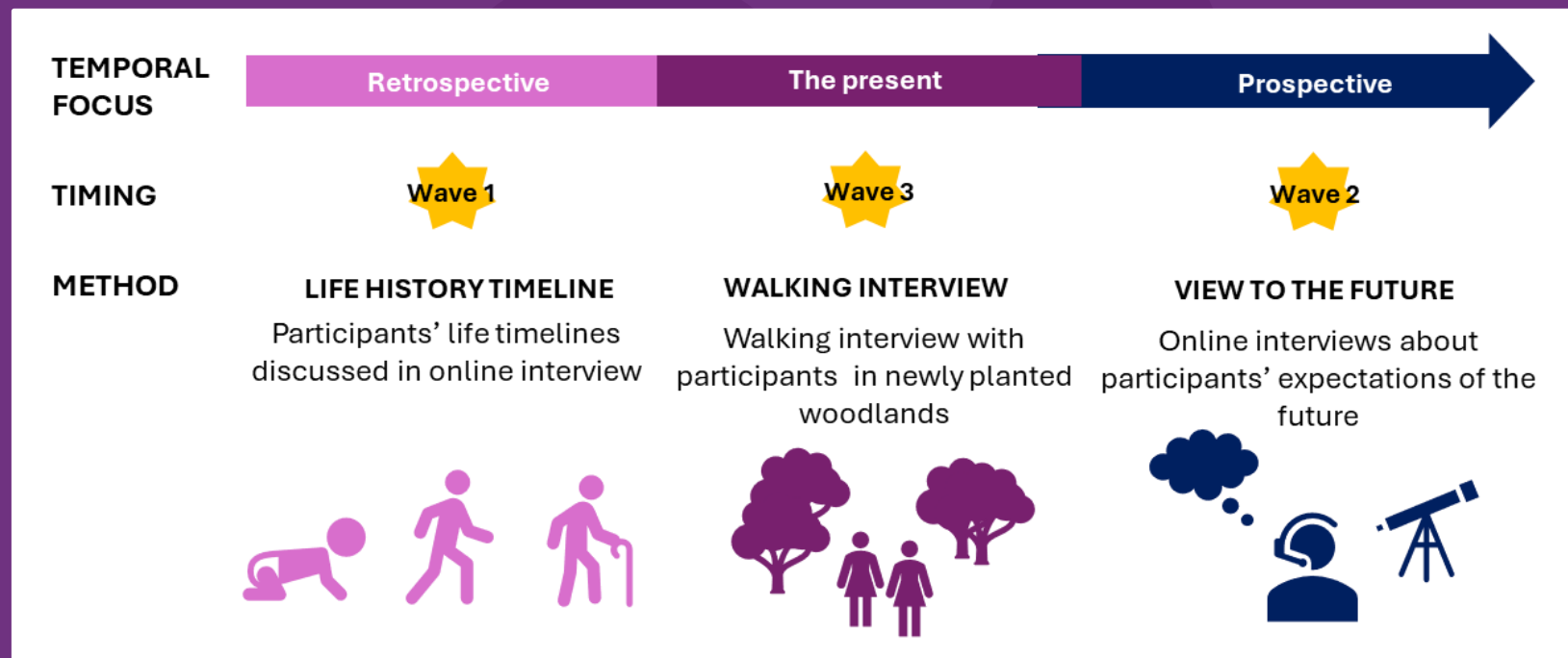
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Qualitative approach



Themes

Experiencing change and sensing variety in new woodlands



Themes

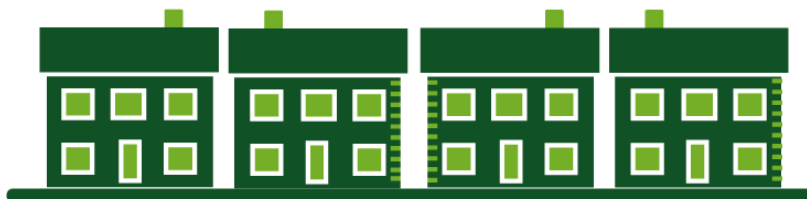
Stewardship of new planting



Themes

Protection from development

New woodlands enable learning



Themes

Sense of safety and protection

Finding hope and resilience in new woodlands



Unique wellbeing 'package' which can include

- Physical activity
- Mental stimulation
- Opportunities for learning about nature
- A cognitive break and time away from work
- Escape from hardships in life, a safe space
- Opportunities for reflection and healing
- Building and maintaining a connection with nature
- A sense of agency (stewardship)



Sense of stewardship links back to other aspects of a person's life

- Sense of place
- Sense of belonging
- Connection to nature
- Feelings of ownership and responsibility
- Altruistic concerns for others and for future generations
- Self-determination
- Their perceptions of 'naturalness'
- Hyper-locality

New woodlands are unique

- Evoke different emotions – light and energetic
- The rate of change
- Observing the growth of trees alongside one's own life – passing of time
- Provide a sense of hope
- Opportunity to act on environmental or local concerns through engagement e.g. tree planting
- Hyper-locality matters

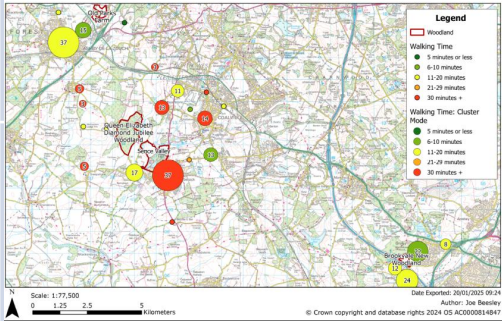
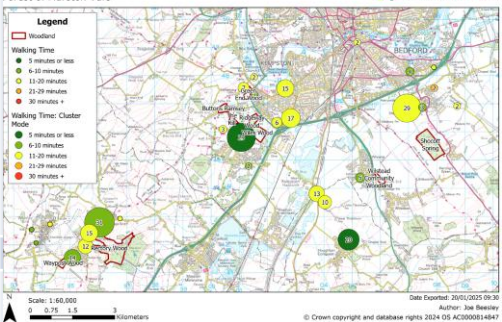
Quantitative approach

Two Waves using a questionnaire at 4NF sites and 9FMV sites

- Wave 1 – February 2024. Used CATI and F2F (at Sence Valley only). Developmental.
- Wave 2 - November 2024. F2F only. [All results presented are from Wave 2]
- To be eligible the person had to have a home postcode within 2.5km of the named woodland site.

Questionnaire included 30 questions, primarily closed. Sections related to:

- Respondent perspectives on the newly planted trees,
- 22 agreement statements about different aspects of the woodland,
- Details of site visits and activities & engagement with woodland activities besides recreational visits,
- Self-reported health and well-being questions,
- 17 attitudinal statements about the social and cultural values of young woodland and newly planted trees in the local area,
- Socio-demographic information.

			Total	N (visitors)	N (non-visitors)
NATIONAL FOREST SITES Woodland Questionnaire Respondents National Forest  					
		Brookvale New Woodland	66	66	0
		Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Woodland	70	65	5
		Sence Valley Park	80	63	17
		Old Parks Farm	83	54	29
		National Forest totals	299	248	51
FOREST OF MARSTON VALE SITES Woodland Questionnaire Respondents Forest of Marston Vale  					
C1		Rectory Wood	55	55	0
		Waypost Wood	29	21	8
C2		Wilstead Community Woodland	51	48	3
		Shocott Spring	49	43	6
C3		Ridgeway Wood	17	13	4
		The Kill	30	24	6
		Buttons Ramsey	26	21	5
		Green End Wood	13	9	4
		Wiles Wood	20	17	3
		Marston Vale totals	290	251	39
		Overall totals	589	499	90

Question	Category	N	Total	%
Age	18-24	20	589	3.4
	25-34	39	589	6.6
	35-44	60	589	10.2
	45-54	90	589	15.3
	55-64	152	589	25.8
	65+	226	589	38.4
	Prefer not to say	2	589	0.3
Gender	Female	305	589	51.8
	Male	280	589	47.5
	Non-binary	4	589	0.7
Ethnicity	White British / Irish / Welsh / Scottish	519	589	88.1
	Mixed or multiple ethnic groups	16	589	2.7
	Asian or Asian British	41	589	7.0
	Black, African, Caribbean, or Black British	8	589	1.4
	Any other ethnic group or background	5	589	0.8
Approximately how long have you lived in the local area?	Prefer not to say	2	589	0.3
	6 months or less	12	589	2.0
	More than 6 but less than 12 months	25	589	4.2
	1 to 2 years	26	589	4.4
	More than 2 but less than 5 years	107	589	18.2
	5 to 10 years	99	589	16.8
	More than 10 years	318	589	54.0
Do you have access to a garden (private or shared) or an allotment?	Yes	456	589	77.4
	No	133	589	22.6

		N	Total	%
Employment status	Student	14	589	2.4
	Unemployed	5	589	0.8
	Full time employed	273	589	46.3
	Part time employed	43	589	7.3
	Self employed	32	589	5.4
	Homemaker	25	589	4.2
	Retired	190	589	32.3
	Other	3	589	0.5

Comparing the visitor and non-visitor samples:

- Non-visitors - Lower percentage:
 - of white respondents (-7%)
 - of retired people (-8%)
 - had lived in the area for more than 10 years (-20%)
 - had access to a garden (-28%)

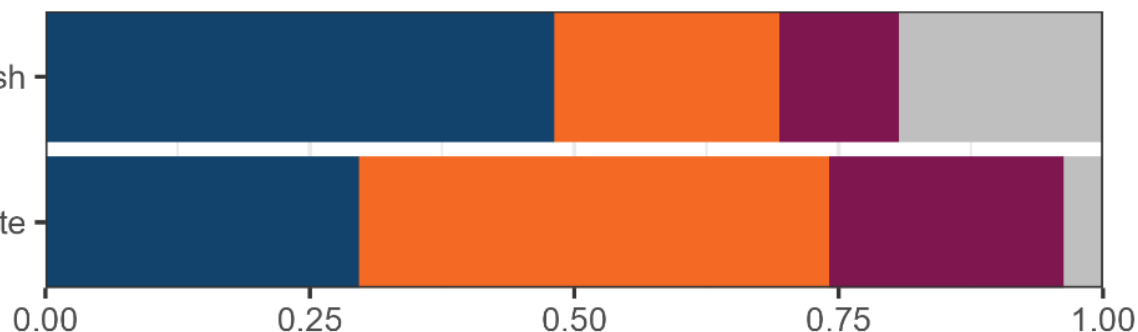
Visitors

- 499 completed visitor questionnaires
 - 248 National Forest sites;
 - 251 Forest of Marston Vale sites
- 47% visited the woodland several times per month
- 30% visited several times per week
- 64% of visitors stayed between 15-60 minutes
- 31% stayed for between 1-2 hours
- 98% of visitors thought the planting of trees at the sites was a good thing.

For physical health & exercise For mental health & wellbeing
To take a break, get fresh air Other

White British / Irish / Welsh / Scottish

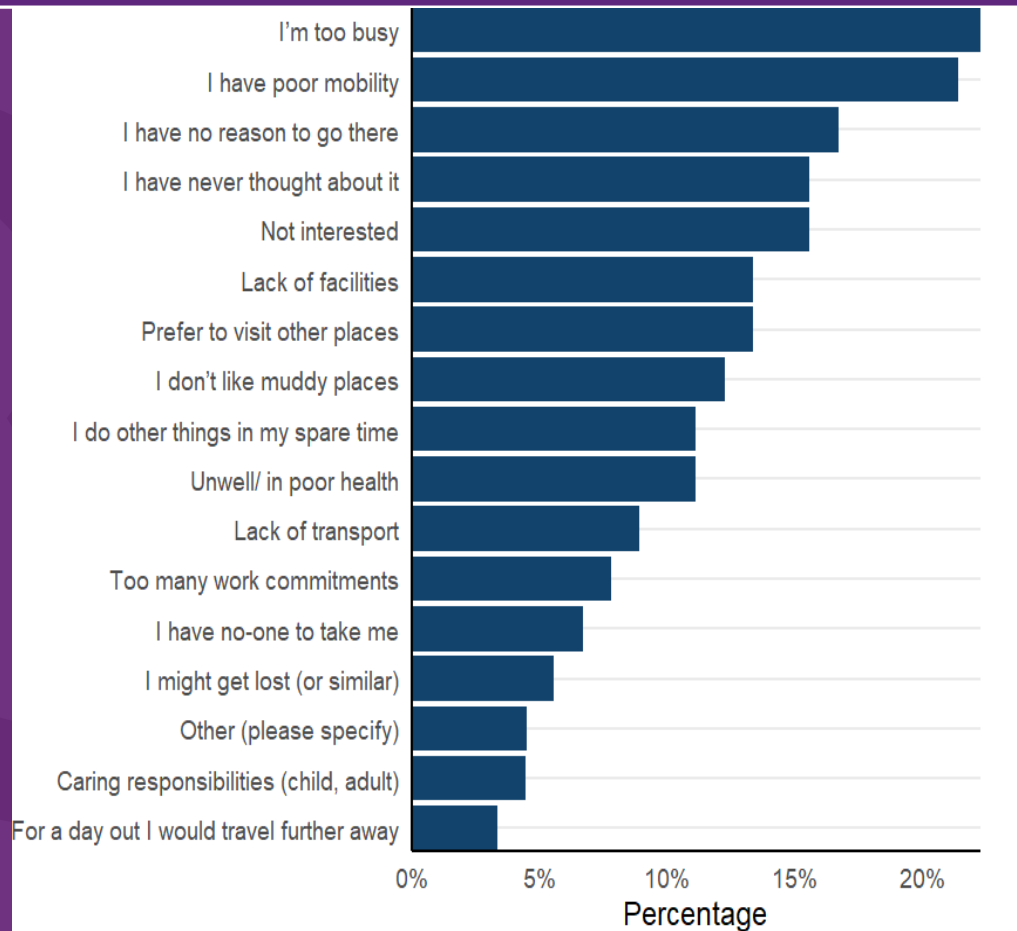
Not White



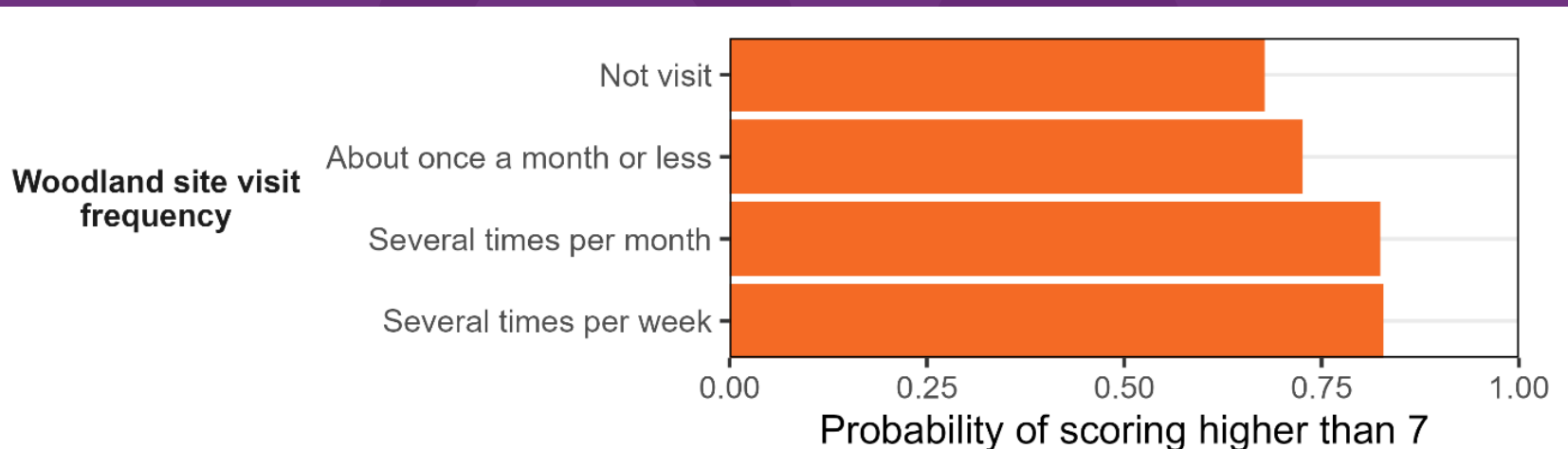
Probability of reason to visit Woodlands

Activity	N	%
Dog-walking	210	42
Walking (without a dog)	173	35
Running or jogging	45	9
Wildlife watching	19	4
Cycling	14	3
Playing with children	14	3
Picnicking / eating outside	12	2
Climbing trees	4	1
Woodland crafts	3	1
Organised activity e.g. ranger event	2	0.4
Other	2	0.4

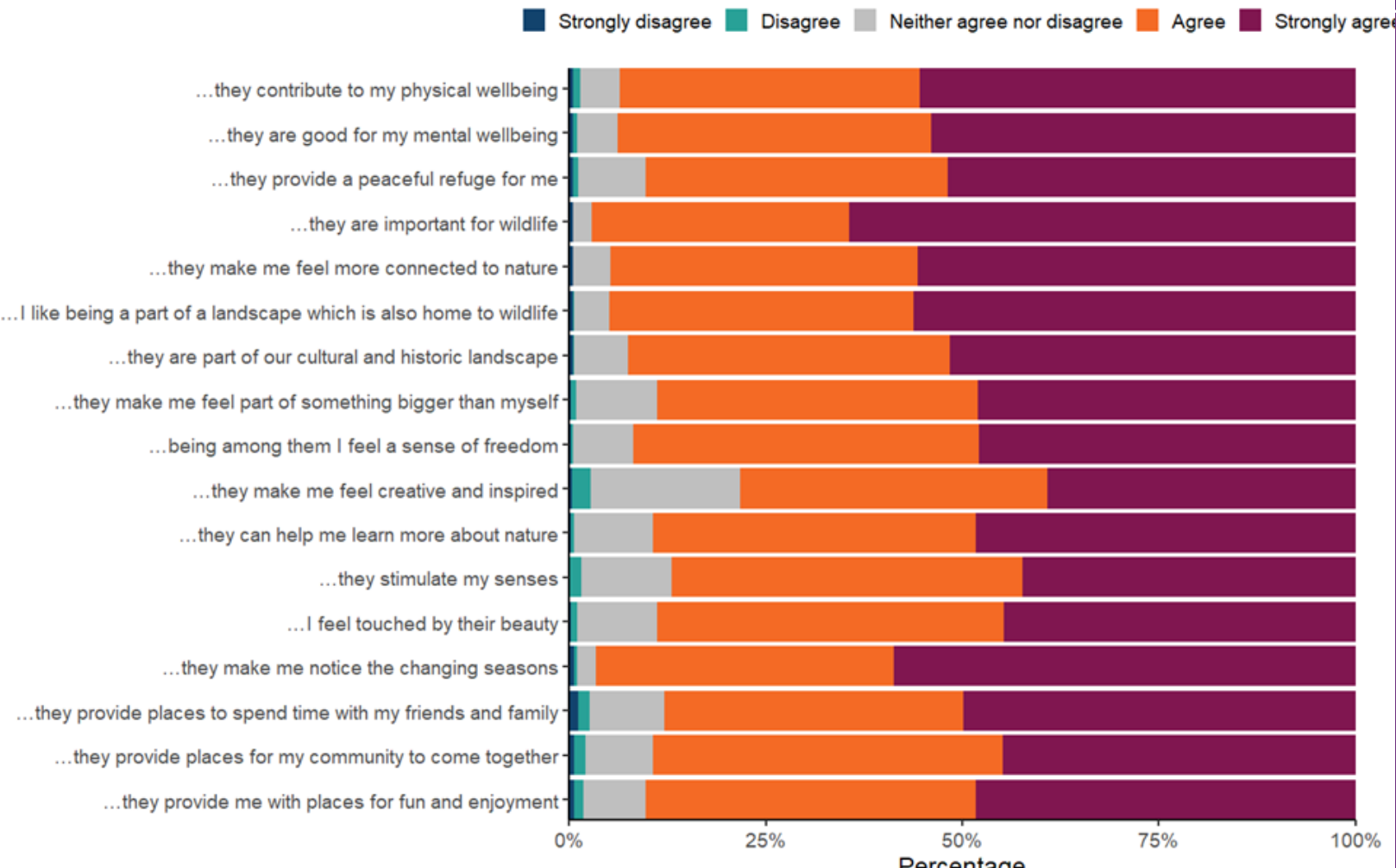
- 90 non-visitor respondents.
 - 51 National Forest/39 Forest of Marston Vale
- Non-visitors were asked for their reasons for not visiting their local woodland.
 - Most frequently mentioned: “I’m too busy” and “I have poor mobility”.
 - Males & retirees more likely to say that poor mobility was the reason.







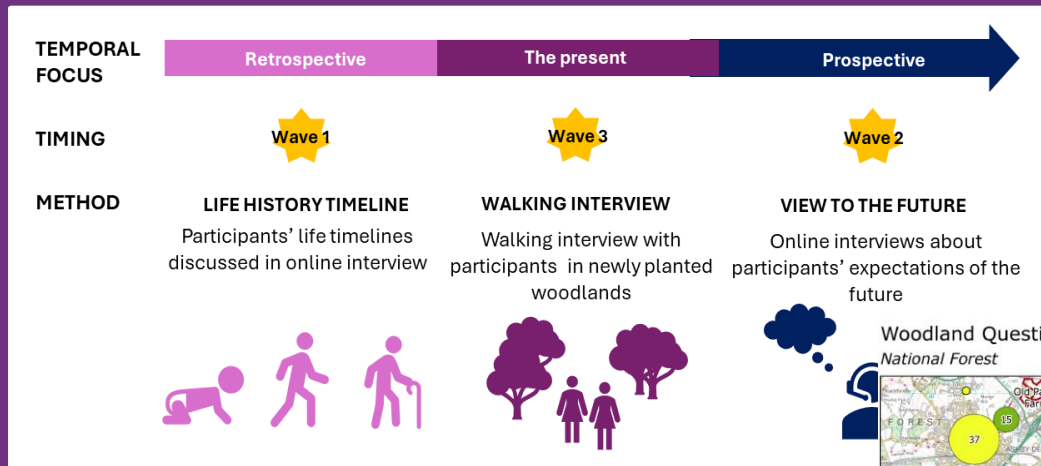
Social & cultural values wrt newly planted trees locally



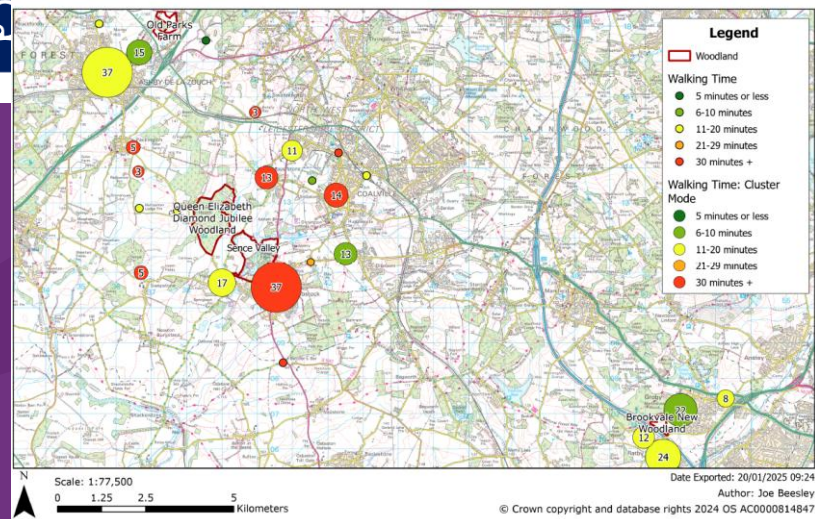
“ I value young and newly planted trees in my local area because... ”

- Creation of the new woodlands is a good thing
- New woodlands can be associated with pride in place, even if you don't visit them
- Multiple things contribute to sense of stewardship
- New woodlands can help create sense of community and feelings of protection from 'over-development'
- The more frequently people visit the woodlands the more they value them
- Improvement to local landscapes

- People who visit their local new woodlands more frequently have better mental wellbeing
 - Unique sensory experiences and learning opportunities
 - Observing change at a faster rate
 - Opportunities to develop connections to trees
- Does new woodland encourage more active engagement than mature woodland?



Woodland Questionnaire Respondents
National Forest



People enjoy variety in woodland, maximise opportunities for visitors to notice this variety, especially re different sensory experiences.

Many participants expressed an appreciation for a 'natural look and feel' but perceptions of naturalness vary.

People may react strongly to management which disrupts their connection to a woodland, especially woodland they have seen grow from new planting.

There are a variety of motivations for visiting new woodlands and that different people want different things from places (e.g. isolation vs facilities).

Engaging people in designing and creating woodlands, through volunteering and outreach, can support protective behaviours and how much the woodland is valued.

Many people care about providing space for wildlife, emphasizing such provision in site design and in communication by site managers will improve how much the community values the site.

Non-visitors will likely have an opinion about woodland sites too and should be consulted about sites where possible.

Newer arrivals to an area are more concerned about negative attributes.

Design open spaces into woodlands to improve perceptions of safety

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<https://www.forestryresearch.gov.uk/research/mapping-the-social-benefits-of-woodland-creation-and-expansion/>