

Countryside Recreation Network News



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**In this issue...**  
Accessible green space on your doorstep

# About the Countryside Recreation Network (CRN)

CRN is a membership organisation comprising representatives from government departments, agencies and other organisations with a role in outdoor recreation.

The Network's members meet quarterly to discuss outdoor recreation matters and share best practise, as well as working collaboratively on research and other projects.

To communicate with its wider subscriber-based audience, CRN publishes journals, hosts conferences and seminars, and issues e-newsletters. This is coordinated by the Network's management team and secretariat, the latter of which is staffed on a part-time basis.

## The Network's key aims are to:

1. Encourage cooperation between members in identifying and promoting the need for research related to outdoor recreation, to encourage joint ventures in undertaking research and to disseminate information about members' recreation programmes.
2. Promote information exchange relating to outdoor recreation and to foster general debate about relevant trends and issues.
3. Share information to develop best practice through training and professional development in provision for and management of outdoor recreation.

## Write for the CRN Journal

If your organisation is doing something innovative, inspiring or groundbreaking in the field of outdoor recreation, we'd love to chat to you about becoming an author for our journal.

To discuss writing for a future edition of the CRN journal please contact our secretariat.

Author guidance and the Network's editorial policy is available on our website at [www.countrysiderecreation.org.uk/publications](http://www.countrysiderecreation.org.uk/publications)

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# Countryside Recreation Network

## Welcome and Introduction

By guest editor James Ogilvie, Forestry Commission Scotland



**In 1800, only 3 percent of the world's population lived in urban areas. By 1900 that figure had risen to 14 percent. Today more than half of all people on earth live in an urban area and by 2050 the proportion is set to rise to 70 percent.**

Studies are showing the growing and compelling evidence for the health and wellbeing benefits of 're-creating' in greenspace. So it's clear that what we will all need more of in future is **accessible greenspace on our doorsteps**. But there's the rub: how can our personal need for greenspace - and bluespace - be reconciled with the relentless urbanisation of our planet? This edition of the Journal sets out to explore these issues and showcase some up to date examples of work happening on the ground both in the UK and abroad...

We start with a look at the big picture: what does the data tell us about correlations between visiting the natural environment, positive environmental attitudes and willingness to take action to protect the environment? Alison Darlow and Duncan Stewart explore this in their article Reconnecting People and Nature. Knowing one's audience is key, the aim being to ensure that everybody has opportunities to enjoy the countryside if they want to. Segmenting groups according to their needs is helpful, as Ally Kohler sets out in Knowing and Reaching our Audiences but a continuing challenge is getting to groups classed as 'hard-to-reach'. This issue is explored by Claire Overend in Walking in Your Community: an Outdoor Recreation NI initiative.

The most common greenspace on the doorstep of urban dwellers is a park. In his article Benefits of urban parks – what does the evidence say? Cecil C. Konijnendijk van den Bosch and others set out the current

evidence for health, wellbeing and biodiversity benefits in making the case for urban park provision. But although regular use of green space is good for mental health, simply increasing the amount of greenspace in urban areas may not impact on population mortality rates or socio-economic health inequalities, as Richard Mitchell and David Miller explore in Urban green space, mortality & morbidity. Amongst other conclusions they draw from research is that people who use green spaces as children are far more likely to do so as adults, a lesson for policymakers as well as parents, perhaps.

It's not all about accessible greenspace on your doorstep however: there is an important role for 'blue space' such as canals, rivers, water bodies and the coast. Chris Barnett summarises the work of the Canal & River Trust to encourage people from a wide range of backgrounds and interests to enjoy waterways in Accessible bluespace and greenspace on your doorstep: the Canal & River Trust.

Being a forester I have indulged quite shamelessly as guest editor to showcase some of the great work currently happening around trees woods and forests in Scotland and beyond. In VisitWoods: Unlocking woodland access, Gayle Wharton outlines the Woodland Trust's two million pound programme to promote access to woodland and engage people through 'crowd sourcing' online feedback. In Woods In and Around Towns (WIAT) Programme: delivering local woods for local people Bob Frost sets out FC Scotland's work bringing accessible woodland to people's doorsteps. One expression of this is the Commonwealth Community Woodland initiative, a new project designed to encourage people to head outdoors, get active and enjoy their local woods. As the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow draw closer, Hugh McNish describes this group of accessible woodlands - an enduring Games legacy - in his article Commonwealth Woods.

As urban pressures continue to increase, the challenge for all of us is to ensure that adequate, accessible, close-to-home greenspace can be provided for (and in many cases 'retro-fitted') into built developments, bringing the benefits of the natural environment to those who need them most. And we need to protect, value and nurture these vital places to ensure that they meet the needs of current - and future - generations of recreational users.

I hope you find this edition of the CRN Journal to be both stimulating and thought provoking: happy reading!

## In my back yard: the role that local green space plays in connecting people and nature

Alison Darlow, Natural England and Duncan Stewart, TNS



View of London from Primrose Hill, London, England, UK. Additional credit: Visit London. ©Britainonview/Paul Libera

**Debates around access to the natural environment often focus on those distant places or iconic but remote landscapes that are acknowledged for their important value to society, for example because of the unique qualities of their landscapes, geology or biodiversity. There is growing evidence however about the value of the very local, often informal areas of green space close to where people live, and the critical role that they play in our everyday lives in helping connect people and nature, enhance biodiversity and provide vital benefits to communities...**

### An increasingly urban nation

Between 1951 and 2009 the proportion of people living in areas defined as 'urban' increased by 59%. This movement of people from the countryside to the city, as well as new immigrants, has been particularly striking in recent years. The population of England and Wales grew by seven per cent between 2001 and 2011, an increase of around 3.7 million people<sup>[1]</sup>. Most of this growth took place in large urban areas, with a population increase in almost every English city. London saw the greatest net growth with its population increasing by almost a million (938,500).

Current estimates suggest that by 2021, some 4.5 million more people will live in England. The greatest rate of population growth is predicted in London where a 14 per cent increase is anticipated, equating to 1.1 million more people<sup>[2]</sup>. During this period the UK government also predicts that there will be increasing car usage, leading to more congestion on UK roads and longer journey times, particularly in urban areas<sup>[3]</sup>.

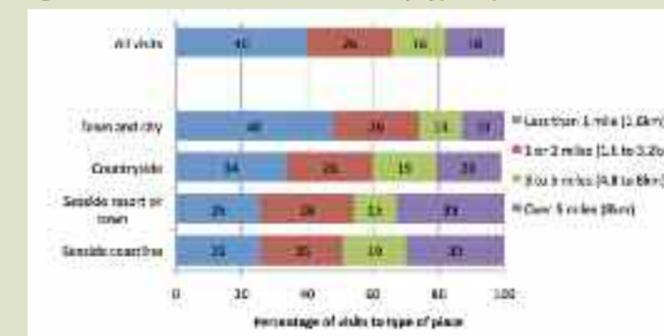
These trends will see an increasingly urbanised population with a more limited access to natural, green spaces and a potential loss of connection to the natural environment.

### How do we use local green spaces?

The Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment survey (MENE)<sup>[4]</sup> provides detailed evidence about the way that people use green space as part of their everyday lives. Between March 2012 and February 2013 adults living in England took some 2.85 billion visits to the natural environment<sup>[5]</sup>. Two thirds of these visits were taken within two miles of home (or in a small number of cases another 'start point', for example a workplace), and four out of ten visits were taken within one mile of home.

Some clear differences emerged between those visits taken to urban areas and those in the countryside. The proportion of visits taken close-to-home was highest when visits were taken to places in towns and cities, where almost half of visits (48%) were taken within one mile of home.

**Figure 1 – Distance to visit destination by type of place visited**



MENE also captures details about each visit to the natural environment, helping us to unpick the ways in which people engage with nearby green spaces. Most of the visits taken within a mile of home involved time spent in urban green spaces including town and city parks, paths, cycle ways and bridleways, woodland, playing fields, allotments and community gardens and other similar green urban areas. Many of the visits taken within a mile of home were short, routine visits that fitted in with the fabric of how we go about our day to day

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[4] The Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey was commissioned by Natural England, the Forestry Commission and Defra to provide baseline and trend data on how people use and enjoy the natural environment in England. The survey is undertaken by TNS and has been running continuously since March 2009. This article is based on the latest survey findings for the period March 2012 to February 2013. Full details of the survey methods, sampling, weighting procedures and other survey outputs are provided on the Natural England website (see <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/ourwork/research/mene.aspx>).

[5] Natural England (2013) Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: The national survey on people and the natural environment - Annual Report from the 2012-13 survey. Natural England Commissioned Reports NECR122. Online: URL

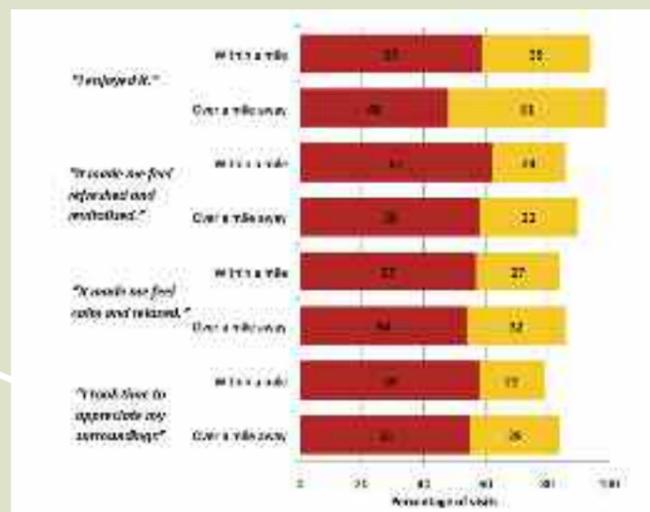
existence. The majority of these visits were on foot (93%) and relatively short in duration (81% lasting less than 2 hours). They centred on a fairly small number of activities, mainly walking, normally with a dog (63% of visits). Playing with children was also important for these types of visits, involving around one in ten visits. In contrast, visits taken to places more than a mile from home involved a wider variety of recreation activities.

#### How important are local green spaces to people?

The majority of visits to the natural environment are relatively close to home, and this is one measure of the value that people place on these spaces. Reflecting the high volumes of visits, MENE also recorded a widespread appreciation of the value of local green space: the majority of adults (92%) living in England agreed with the statement 'having open green spaces close to home is important to me, and around half (48%) strongly agreed. In addition the vast majority of those who took visits to places within a mile of home enjoyed the experience and agreed that the visits provided other benefits including relaxation and feeling refreshed and revitalised (figure 2). Levels of agreement were, however, generally lower than for visits taken to places further afield. These lower levels of agreement imply that local places are not as valued, but these fairly blunt measures mask a much more complex relationship between people and local places.

Cultural ecosystem services provides us with a framework for unpacking and understanding the full range of benefits that people receive from the natural environment, including those that are closer to home. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment distinguishes between the 'nearby' (close-to-home spaces, where everyday activities

**Figure 2 - Agreement with statements regarding visits taken to the natural environment by distance of destination from home or other start point**



take place) and the wider countryside/seaside. It's clear that in terms of preferences for 'close-to-home' and 'more distant' it's not a situation of 'either/or'.

Qualitative research undertaken by Research Box<sup>[6]</sup> highlighted that people enjoy different types of landscapes at different times and for different purposes – they are likely to have a 'portfolio of places' that they access for different types of experience. Close-to-home places provide 'quick hits' including activities such as visiting a park or walking the dog, whilst people look further afield for more varied experiences. Even relatively mundane places provide some 'stress busting' benefits and instil feelings of belonging and a sense of place.

#### Accessible to all?

Exploring patterns of use (and non use) amongst key groups in the population, reveals a host of issues in relation to the use of close-to-home green space. More in-depth analysis of MENE data, published earlier this year, explored how different groups in society use and enjoy the natural environment<sup>[7]</sup>. This analysis (based on 2009-2012 data) highlighted differences in levels of access and use of the natural environment, as well as the underlying barriers.

Population groups that are less likely to visit the natural environment are members of the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic population (who, on average, make 27 visits per person per year to the natural environment, compared to an average of 65 for the population as a whole), urban deprived populations (40 visits), people in lower socio-economic groups (50 visits), people aged 65 and over (55 visits) and people with a long term limiting illness or disability (56 visits).

Although they are less likely to visit the natural environment, Black and Asian Minority Ethnic populations, urban deprived populations and those in lower socio economic groups are more likely to make use of close-to-home green spaces. Key barriers to greater participation for these groups focus around a lack of time (being too busy at work and/or home), issues around costs (transport, entrance fees) and low levels of car ownership. This means that the range of places able to be accessed is more restricted, with more reliance on easily accessible green spaces to provide a natural 'fix'. This raises important questions around equity, quality, accessibility and the opportunities provided by these spaces as well as the relative priority placed upon them.

Natural England is championing Outdoors for All on behalf of Government and other partners, aiming to help improve the quality of everyone's experience of natural green places and to increase the number and diversity of people who enjoy the natural environment.

#### Connecting people and place?

People are more attached to places that - for them have that have the strongest meanings and associations<sup>[8]</sup>. These will include places where they have spent time playing as children, places in which they have lived, places that have a particular resonance, and places where they have taken their own children to play (which are often those green spaces that are easy to access from home).

MENE data shows there are high levels of correlation (not causality) between visiting the natural environment, positive environmental attitudes and willingness to take action to protect the environment. We know that people are more likely to express concern about the environmental well-being of an area if they have a high level of psychological attachment to it. Local 'owned' spaces therefore play a key role in connecting people and nature, and in engendering a sense of stewardship for the future.

Given current societal and economic trends, the demand for close-to-home green spaces is likely to increase as urban populations grow and pressures such as a lack of time mean that people seek convenient, easy to access ways of enjoying our natural environment. It is likely that the importance of these types of places is likely to increase in the future. The key challenge is how we protect, value and nurture them and ensure they meet the needs of the people that use them.

Father with 2 sons and dog in the grounds of Greenwich Park, part of the Greenwich World Heritage Site, London, England, UK  
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Image courtesy of Eleanor Bentall (RSPB-images.com)



## The role of accessible greenspace in defining and measuring children's connection to nature

Phil Burfield, Conservation Policy, RSPB

Evidence shows that the proportion of children playing out in natural spaces has dropped by as much as 75 per cent over the last thirty to forty years. This is despite the proven positive effects that contact with the natural world has on children's physical and mental health, personal and social development, and even academic achievements and life chances. If this decline in connection continues, the consequences for wildlife and people could be catastrophic, since children who do not value and respect nature when they are young are less likely to see the importance of protecting the natural environment when they're older. The RSPB has developed a new approach to measure how connected children are to nature, working with the Green Exercise Research Team at the University of Essex and funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

This work supports evolving thinking on the role of 'connection to nature' as a significant link and explanation between people's knowledge and experiences of nature, their health and wellbeing, and them adopting behaviours and taking action to save it.

The new measure has been used with eight- to 12-year olds across the UK to create the first ever baselines of children's connections to nature. It explores children's empathy for creatures, responsibility for nature, enjoyment of nature experiences, and sense of 'oneness' with nature. Baseline data will be measured again over coming years to monitor for changes. The approach is based on previous academic research into children's 'affective attitude towards nature'.<sup>[1]</sup> This proposed four significant factors which influenced the development of children's connection to nature – one of which is nature near to their home.

Following the initial baseline data launch, the RSPB will undertake further research into connection with nature, including closer analysis of the four factors in influencing it, such as the type, scale and frequency of contact with accessible greenspace.

The RSPB and University of Essex are also in the early stages of developing similar measures for adults and teenagers.

## Engaging Young People with Belfast's outdoors

Andrea Kilpatrick, Marketing and Communications Co-Ordinator, Belfast Activity Centre

Belfast Activity Centre (BAC) is a Belfast based Charity that uses the vehicle of outdoor adventure learning to support the personal and social development of young people particularly those from acutely disadvantaged communities and backgrounds. With over 21 years' experience, BAC works with over 20,000 young people each year and is continuing to grow and explore new programmes to help young people realise their full potential.

BAC strives to realise its vision for 'Changing Lives and Building Futures', through ongoing support within challenging but risk-controlled outdoor environments. There is an abundance of accessible green space 'on our doorsteps' within Northern Ireland that BAC recognises and utilises. It is continually developing and evolving new initiatives to engage young people in healthy outdoor environment experiences, through a wide range of outdoor activities and expedition programmes. These include the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and residential based learning opportunities, encouraging young people to make the most of their natural surroundings.

BAC delivers a wide range of community engagement programmes each year focusing on groups of young people within the community that would benefit from outdoor experiential learning and support. One such programme, Youth Build, is a core project that focuses on youth development across North Belfast, offering new experiences, support and guidance through outdoor adventure learning. The BAC Youth Build programme has developed a model of good practice that helps to address both social and community capacity building through a wide range of programmes that facilitate individuals in making better lifestyle choices including health and fitness; outdoor learning; personal development and experiential learning; employability and training; and areas that enhance young people's capacity to develop and participate in their community. Programmes include short and longer term activity based programmes and leadership courses to promote self confidence, encourage teambuilding, communication skills and develop active leadership skills that can be applied to everyday life and living. Award Programmes such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, International Award and the President's Award help to increase self esteem and empower young people to take increasingly greater responsibility for their lives and futures through a long term tried and tested programme of personal development.

Belfast Activity Centre aims to support youth into finding a path that will contribute to a healthy, happy and constructive future. This may be through a new found passion for the outdoors that increases confidence and social communication skills. Natural spaces frequented by BAC include: The Belfast Hills, The Mourne Mountains, Castlewellsan and Lagan Valley (Barnett's Demesne, Clement Wilson and Lady Dixons

Park). Activities carried out within these environments include mountain biking, hill walks, camping, caving, climbing, orienteering and kayaking.

Despite an abundance of exceptional outdoor environment opportunities from which to learn within and explore, there is insufficient knowledge, resources and youth worker capacity to reach all of the communities in Belfast that would benefit from these outdoor experiential learning experiences. This is something that BAC acknowledges and in order to expand its reach and impact it continues to:

- apply for new grants to expand and develop into new areas;
- build partnerships to support projects;
- work with local councils; and
- team up with Government bodies including the Department of Social Development.

With continued support and hard work, BAC will continue to explore Northern Ireland's beautiful natural resources and use them to enhance young peoples' lives.

[www.belfastactivitycentre.com](http://www.belfastactivitycentre.com)



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## Knowing and Reaching our Audiences – some thoughts from Dartmoor National Park

Alison Kohler, Director of Conservation and Communities, Dartmoor National Park

*Those working in countryside management share similar objectives: helping people to enjoy and understand the countryside; supporting local businesses, and encouraging a greater understanding and awareness about what's special in our landscape. The common aim is to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to enjoy the countryside if they want to. In this article Alison Kohler explores the Dartmoor National Park Authority's engagement with visitors: but the principles are probably the same whether you manage a coastal area, country park or urban fringe...*

### What is the "offer"?

With its abundance of visible archaeological remains Dartmoor National Park offers wonderful landscapes and a real sense of history. It offers the ability to be close to nature: to explore 47,000 hectares of open access land and take in 360 degree views. It provides a haven for tranquillity, peace and quiet whilst also offering the opportunity for adventure, exercise and learning. And it offers additional health benefits that result from access to nature (we know that these benefits are becoming more widely researched and recognised).

### Who are our audiences?

Identifying audiences is a 'complex art'. In reality the National Park is trying to reach out to everybody but it is helpful here to identify four key groups in order to exemplify some of the Park Authority's initiatives and introduce some ideas for different ways of engaging with these audiences:

- existing visitors: people who already come and enjoy the area or live in the area (these are covered by the information provided for visitors when they arrive at the location);
- people living further afield who come to the area on holiday (again generally covered by tourism literature and websites);
- special interest groups (outdoor enthusiasts such as campers, walkers, cyclists, bird watchers, photographers, artists) who generally seek out information about the sites and locations they are interested in and/or use specialist magazines/literature; and
- people living in nearby towns and cities.

### How do we communicate with our audiences and what lessons can be learned?

Dartmoor National Park Authority uses tried and tested techniques (replicated widely across the country) to communicate and reach out to visitors. Rangers talk to the public and lead guided walks; visitor centres display a range of information and interpretation; publications help people to explore and understand the National Park; and events and activities are arranged. Pre-visit information about the Park is available on websites and through tourism publications and social media is being trialled. Dartmoor National Park also has an information van which is taken to local shows and city centre events to raise awareness. Existing visitors - holidaymakers and people with special interests - are therefore well catered for.

Dartmoor National Park Authority has also had some success in developing targeted approaches to reaching new or hard-to-reach audiences. For example Ranger Ralph Club (established in 2002) was targeted at families with young children, with the aim of engaging more fully with young people (aged 5 to 12) through their families and making the environment fun, whilst promoting conservation messages. Membership of the club was seen to be important so that the young people felt 'part of something'. For the cost of four stamps a year members received four newsletters and 12 free events all run by National Park Authority Rangers. Today the club has over 150 members and it continues to receive glowing reports from families. After consultation with the membership, an annual charge of £5 was introduced in 2012. Some interesting lessons were learnt from Ranger Ralph:

- be clear both about your audience and what you are trying to achieve;
- establish a means of regular communication so that you can maintain an interest;
- provide regular events and activities;
- develop a 'hook';
- children love Rangers!

Another success story is the Haytor Hoppa, a circular bus service providing a hop on/hop off route around the south east of the National Park, including one of the heavily visited and iconic tors at Haytor. The route was originally developed to pick up visitors from the market town of Bovey Tracey, providing access both to the Moor and into town from a number of villages on the circular route. The service had an easy-to-use, regular timetable and an affordable all day hop on/hop off price of £2. The bus route was linked to the National Park visitor centre at Haytor. Guided walks and several self guided linear walks were designed to coordinate with the bus route. With 40% occupancy in its first year the Haytor Hoppa is now in its 5th year and running at a successful 78% occupancy. One lesson from this initiative is the importance of having a clear and manageable target audience. Targeting the market town of Bovey Tracey and the villages en route meant that information could be distributed widely and thoroughly. Having both a recreational purpose and serving local communities also helped to make the route a success: feedback has shown that the two-hourly regular and consistent timetable helps with confidence to use the service.

### Future challenge: future opportunity

A continuing challenge is how to reach out to people living in nearby urban areas, including groups classed as hard-to-reach; those people without the confidence or knowledge about where to go and how to get there; and even those who habitually visit the same area or site and don't have the confidence or knowledge to try new areas. It is difficult to know how and where to provide information about the National Park within urban areas due to the great variety of neighbourhoods and social groupings. Perhaps there is scope for a new partnership approach to this challenge which focuses on the starting point (i.e. where potential visitors live) rather than the destination.

The countryside 'offer' in Devon is abundant and varied and for each destination there is probably a leaflet, visitor guide, website or some promotional material. Residents of Plymouth for example have many opportunities on their doorstep (the Tamar Valley AONB; Dartmoor National Park, South Hams AONB, several National Trust properties, Forestry Commission estates; the South West Coast Path; numerous beaches and coastal towns and of course the green space within Plymouth). If all of these "destinations" combined their efforts to provide one offer about the range of countryside recreation that is accessible from Plymouth, the emphasis moves from the destination of a visit to the starting point. This approach would require offering the population of Plymouth a whole range of countryside opportunities, from the green spaces on their doorstep to the more challenging terrain of the National Park.

What might success look like? A campaign focussing on Countryside Days out from Plymouth - what to see, where to go, how to get there, where to find out more! This approach would allow people to make informed choices about where they would like to go and what they would like to do and each destination can focus their offer on the sites and activities closest to the city. This can be enhanced by details of public transport or other sustainable travel options – a truly integrated and comprehensive approach starting with the people where they live rather than the destination. As resources are becoming scarce, a co-ordinated approach is becoming even more important to the effective delivery of services. Perhaps now is a good time to start to develop this idea? Maybe it's already happening elsewhere? We would be pleased to hear of any good examples from elsewhere.



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## Working with excluded young people to help reduce antisocial behaviour

Laura Freer, Marketing & Communications Manager, Central District, Forestry Commission England

At its Sherwood Pines Forest Park, FC England is running sessions in bushcraft and traditional woodland skills for hard-to-engage groups. Students from Oakdale Learning Centre - which provides out of school provision for excluded young people of statutory school age in Nottinghamshire - have benefited from these activities in many different ways.

The students had struggled to cope with the formality of mainstream schooling and had been permanently excluded from these schools due to significant behavioural incidents. Their learning needs were varied and communication skills were frequently weak. The specialist teachers at Oakdale recognised that these students preferred kinaesthetic learning opportunities, in varied surroundings, where the rigour of instilling formal school rules is not necessary; and that they need a different type of structure, with space away from purely academic work.

Forestry Commission and Oakdale staff jointly developed a learning programme to take place over a number of afternoon sessions. Each session consisted of up to three different activities, including constructing fires and lighting Kelly Kettles, building shelters, felling small trees, carving green wood and undertaking assault course activity. As well as learning traditional woodland and bushcraft skills, the students also developed their team building and social skills with the aim of reducing antisocial behaviour and facilitating their early re-integration in to the mainstream education system.

Although formal school attendance for some of the students can be a significant problem, attendance for these greenspace sessions was good, and even during spells of bad weather and extreme cold the students were actively involved and engaged with the activities.

You can see more at

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oJ6JDViP2X0>

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London Blind Ramblers

## Access all Areas

**Ian Richardson, General Manager, Box Moor Trust**

Accessible greenspace on your doorstep can be hard to find if you're disabled. An innovative project initiated by Hemel Hempstead based Box Moor Trust, with Phil Chambers - who specialises in inclusive access to the countryside - set out to meet the challenge.

Box Moor Trust gained funding from the Chilterns AONB to identify the barriers to access and also to find good places for disabled people to visit with friends and family. Volunteers with mobility and sensory impairments were invited to visit Chiltern landscapes; wildlife reserves, National Trust and urban greenspaces to talk about their access needs. Lessons were learned and much enjoyment has been had by the group. Better countryside information and good transport links topped the list, along with a need for imaginative multi-sensory interpretation.

An understanding of other people's views increased everyone's confidence in working together. Members of the wider disabled community are also more likely to use facilities which have been evaluated by their peers. By establishing local knowledge networks - where service providers, disabled people and their advocates work in partnership to agree and develop realistic outdoor access for all opportunities, "Accessible Greenspace on your doorstep" will be a reality for many more people.

[www.boxmoortrust.org.uk](http://www.boxmoortrust.org.uk)

## Countryside Mobility scheme in the South West

**James Maben, Countryside Mobility SW Project Manager**

In south west England, the charity Living Options Devon (supported by the Big Lottery through Natural England's 'Access to Nature' grant scheme) is enabling people with limited mobility to experience adventure and explore outdoors, regardless of how far they can walk, through the use of 'Tramper' all-terrain mobility scooters and wheelchair accessible 'Wheelyboats'. Based on the principle of urban Shopmobility schemes, Tramper all-terrain mobility scooters and wheelchair accessible Wheelyboats are now available at more than 30 countryside locations across Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Somerset, with more to follow.

The Countryside Mobility scheme is proving popular with people of all ages who want to get out and enjoy the countryside, but were previously unable to do so. For Rebecca the scheme has been life-changing. "At the age of 35 I did not expect to suddenly find myself needing a wheelchair and my life became extremely restricted. On holiday in Devon my husband and I came across the Tramper scheme purely by chance. It's impossible describing the feeling of suddenly having the ability and freedom to go into the countryside again. Both Tramper trips were without doubt one of the best days of my life... to suddenly have independence again to explore and enjoy the countryside was truly amazing"

The Trampers can go up and down slopes, over bumps and tree roots, through shallow puddles, mud and soft ground and are for use by anyone aged 14 or over who has a permanent or temporary condition that affects their ability to walk. With a top speed of four miles an hour they can keep pace with the briskest walking companion. Wheelyboats can take up to 5 wheelchair passengers and are popular with anglers and groups wishing to get closer to nature out on the water.

The scheme is for everyone who wants to enjoy the countryside but

can't manage much walking. People don't have to be registered as a disabled person, or have a Blue Badge. Many people have found that the equipment has given them back their freedom, enabling them to enjoy time outdoors alone, with their partner or on a family outing. To use the Trampers, people simply choose their site and on arrival join as members of Countryside Mobility (£10.00 per year or £2.50 for 4 weeks). Brief training is provided, after which participants are given a membership card that enables them to use a Tramper at any partner site without the need for further training.

Prior to a Tramper being placed at a site, an access audit is completed by Countryside Mobility staff to ensure that the site is suitable and safe for use by Trampers. Each site provides maps and route advice for Tramper users and has a breakdown/recovery system in place if a user has a problem. Thanks to the Countryside Mobility scheme, there is now a network of accessible countryside locations across the region that people can visit independently, knowing they will receive the same high quality experience. Physical improvements are happening at sites as a result of access audits and staff training provided through the scheme. This helps a wider range of disabled people, as countryside managers through contact with more disabled visitors, become more 'disability aware'.

The scheme is being developed through a partnership between organisations that manage countryside sites across the region including: Cornwall AONB Service, Devon County Council, Exmoor National Park Authority, Gloucestershire County Council, Dorset County Council, The Forestry Commission, Tamar Valley AONB Service, Royal Horticultural Society, South West Lakes Trust, The Wheelyboat Trust, The RSPB and the National Trust and many others.

[www.countrysidemobility.org](http://www.countrysidemobility.org)



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## Walking In Your Community – an Outdoor Recreation NI Initiative

Claire Overend, Participation Officer, Venture Outdoors

***If you are reading this journal you are likely to be working in, or take a great interest in, outdoor recreation. And as such, we expect that you have the knowhow and wherewithal to get outdoors without too much difficulty. However, this article asks you to take a step back and consider the issue of accessing outdoor recreation from the point of view of many people living in deprived communities, where real barriers exist to such access. With this in mind, one Northern Ireland initiative that has built upon an understanding of these groups and the barriers they face is currently enjoying significant success. What's its secret? A model of training and supporting walk leaders who offer free accessible sessions to their local community participants. The result is called Walking in Your Community.***

Walking In Your Community (WIYC) is a new initiative of Outdoor Recreation NI (ORNI). It was established in response to feedback from participants in ORNI's three year project, Venture Outdoors – Creating Healthy Communities, which commenced in 2009 and was itself introduced in response to the findings of an extensive research study in 2008.

### Barriers to Participation Research

The initial research study found that three societal groups in particular were under-represented in outdoor recreation participation, namely people;

- with a disability
- from ethnic minority communities
- from socially and economically deprived areas

The main barriers for people from these underrepresented groups were identified as:

- Difficulties with public transport
- Attitudinal problems
- Language barriers
- Lack of access to appropriate information
- Lack of awareness
- Dependence on others
- Lack of time/ or motivation
- Poorly maintained paths

In the light of these research findings, and with funding from The Big Lottery Fund and Ulster Garden Villages, Outdoor Recreation NI delivered a three year project, called Venture Outdoors – Creating Healthy Communities which was designed to overcome these barriers and provide more outdoor recreation experiences for underrepresented groups.

### Venture Outdoors

The Venture Outdoors project did this by offering several outdoor activity taster sessions free of charge to forty under-represented community groups across Northern Ireland. Activities included archery, orienteering, cycling and walking.

Throughout the taster programme, all community groups took part in regular review and feedback sessions with Venture Outdoor staff in order to ascertain participation levels and learning outcomes. Feedback from the forty community groups who took part in the activity taster sessions showed that:

- There was a 9% increase in the number of people walking daily and a 15% increase in the number of people who went walking weekly;
- Participants had increased confidence and were inspired to participate in more outdoor activities;
- Walking was the activity easiest for participants to continue undertaking;
- Financial constraints and lack of appropriate transportation were the two main barriers to on-going participation in outdoor recreation;
- Participants expressed an interest in further leadership training to enable them to take their own walking groups.

Walking was identified as the most popular outdoor activity provided throughout the scheme. Participants expressed a strong interest in incorporating walking into their daily routines given that it is free of charge, requires little equipment cost, is easily accessible and (in most cases) does not require transport to the venue. These findings indicated a need for a project to focus on walking and leadership training.

### Walking In Your Community

Recognising the importance of a walking based initiative, the project, Walking In Your Community (WIYC) was initiated by ORNI in mid 2012. With funding secured from The Big Lottery Fund, Ulster Garden Villages and the Department of Social Development and Sport NI, a consultant was commissioned to examine how a scheme should be devised. The result was Walking In Your Community, an initiative designed to encourage people throughout Northern Ireland to get walking in their local area. The scheme offers introductory Community Walk Leader training and additional support to help leaders deliver successful walking programmes for local communities.

Community Walk Leaders attend a one day training course. These courses cover the basic walking skills and techniques required to lead walks including:

- Setting up a walking group
- Group management
- Understanding maps
- Route planning

- Dealing with an emergency
- Practical workshops

After completing the course, trainees are offered continued guidance and support such as:

- Further training opportunities (e.g. First Aid and Further Navigation)
- Free insurance
- Dedicated section of WIYC website
- E-newsletters
- Networking and support events

The pilot sessions which took place in early 2013 enabled Outdoor Recreation NI to evaluate the content and delivery of the scheme. Positive feedback regarding the level of skills taught, practical walking sessions and map reading was received, alongside issues for improvement such as reducing paperwork. After amendments were finalised, Community Walk Leader Tutors were trained to deliver the CWL course. All tutors are Mountain Leader or Walking Group Leader qualified. To date, 50 leaders have completed the CWL training with a further six courses organised for 2013. Additional courses such as First Aid and 'Creating Inspiring Walks' have also been delivered and preparations are underway to hold the first CWL support event that will provide opportunities for Community Walk Leaders to network and share ideas with other Leaders.



### Belfast Hills Partnership Case Study

Freddie Harris - Volunteer Officer at the Belfast Hills Partnership - shares a common interest in promoting healthy activity through walking whilst following the 'leave no trace' ethos. He decided to get involved with the Walking In Your Community scheme to provide his volunteers with the knowledge and skills needed to take groups out into the Hills. Initially wanting to offer volunteers their own training scheme to teach safer ways to walk in the hills, Freddie decided to team up with Walking In Your Community after discovering that it met all of his requirements. Following feedback from the training group, Freddie's view was that the course

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provided his Community Walk Leaders with the confidence needed to take groups out onto Divis and the Belfast Hills. Recently, Freddie's volunteers have completed their mandatory first aid course and are now ready to lead walks, enabling new people to explore the Belfast Hills who previously never had the opportunity to do so.

#### Walking In Your Community Website

Once they have successfully completed the Community Walk Leader course, CWLs can access their own online area. This enables them to register their walking group, download materials such as booking forms and access a group forum to post comments and connect with other leaders throughout Northern Ireland. The website also features ORNI's sister website WalkNI.com - a guide to walking in Northern Ireland - with downloadable maps, parking information and details of public transport to starting points (very useful for keeping costs down for groups from deprived communities).

#### What next?

The main future objective is to support Community Walk Leaders undertaking their training and taking groups out into their local community using local spaces in a safe and respectful way. The WIYC scheme will introduce reward systems to encourage higher participation levels but key to the success of Walking In Your Community will be ensuring that there is continued support for all those involved.

Whilst the project continues to grow, the bigger picture is to:

- Maintain existing relationships and create new relationships with community groups;
- Create additional links to large organisations such as sport organisations and businesses;
- Promote active travel, e.g. walking to work; and
- Expand the scheme across Northern Ireland.

To date, Walking In Your Community has received a high level of participant interest. With continued growth, the project hopes to help as many community groups as possible to break down the barriers to participation. Walking In Your Community will strive to develop the scheme; extending it past the initial three years and working towards being recognised country wide.

For more information on Walking In Your Community, please see [www.WalkingInYourCommunity.com](http://www.WalkingInYourCommunity.com) or email [info@WalkingInYourCommunity.com](mailto:info@WalkingInYourCommunity.com)



## Shadow Rangers and Ranger in a box

Louise Fleetwood, Community Support Officer, Forestry Commission Central District Office



#### Shadow Rangers

FC England is working in partnership with Nottinghamshire County Council and Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust to provide up to 12 voluntary apprenticeships (Shadow Rangers) each year. Regional placements include specialisms in recreation, community engagement and bushcraft skills.

Each six-month placement enables volunteer apprentices to gain a wealth of skills in practical site management, working with groups and planning and undertaking countryside events and environmental education.

Applicants range from students needing more experience in the sector to career changers, from landscape gardeners and graphic designers to architects and ex-military. They work alongside FC Rangers to gain insights in planning and preparation, site safety, volunteer engagement, working with varied audiences and project management. Formal and informal training opportunities ensure that apprentices are given training in first aid, risk assessment and other recreational courses such as hedgerow management, willow weaving, and bushcraft skills.

The scheme has been running since 2004 and over the last two years three quarters of the Shadow Rangers have gone on to either find work in the field or on to further study.

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

#### Ranger in a box

In Central England, the Forestry Commission has developed powerful low cost educational resources for schools, groups and organisations to promote outdoor learning suited to all. Launched in April 2013, a complement of 10 portable rucksacks and boxes includes educational programmes on minibeasts, 'meet a tree', shelter building, forests for the future, and woodland art. Activity bags contain equipment, games and resources for a group of up to 35 children and are most suitable for children aged 4-11. Safety information and risk assessments are provided to keep groups safe in the wood. The Learning Team also run practical and hands-on teacher-training days for those who need a little confidence boosting to bring a group outdoors.

These resources allow flexible delivery to suit age, ability and interest of the group. Unconstrained by timings and allocation of setting and resources, they are an innovative way for teachers to deliver at their own pace. Since each activity comprises clear, easy-to-understand messages, teachers don't have to be experts in these fields. They find the resources extremely useful and a low-cost alternative to providing school trips and outdoor learning for their students. At the moment Ranger in a Box resources are available at Forest Centres in Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire, Midlands and Cheshire. 'Family backpacks' and downloadable resources are under development.

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## Notes from a visit to Japan

Sheila Talbot, Natural England

I toured Japan recently, lecturing on the benefits that walking routes bring to rural communities. My lectures were based on my voluntary involvement with the Walkers are Welcome Network and my Natural England role on National Trails.

The Japanese view us as world leaders in walking and are keen to learn from us. Countryside footpaths are a new concept in Japan: they don't have a public rights of way network (or even the word 'footpath' in their dictionary!). Their laws are very much in favour of the landowner. Most country walks seem to involve visits to shrines and temples, where the routes are way-marked.

Japan's countryside is beautiful and fascinating, but very different to ours. Forested mountains cover 70% of the land surface; the rest is densely populated or intensively farmed. I didn't see grazing animals or pastureland because meat and dairy products are rarely on the menu, hence no need for fences and gates, just a few electric fences to keep monkeys from fruit crops. Walking across fields is impossible, they are either wet paddy fields or intensively cultivated, like allotments.

I visited the area affected by the tsunami in 2011. The Government's recovery package includes creating a new National Park and a long distance coastal walk, the Tohoku Trail. It reminded me of the

Pembrokeshire Coast Path National Trail and both trails are now interested in forming a friendship.

I discussed the Walkers are Welcome concept with academics, government officials and local volunteers, explaining the difference it has made to Winchcombe where I live. Now Japan may become the second country in the world to set up a Walkers are Welcome Network.

My visit made me realise how incredibly lucky we are in this country and how we should work hard to protect our rights and to maintain the access routes we have.

Link to the Japanese Government's document about the new National Park and the Tohoku Trail

[http://www.env.go.jp/en/focus/docs/files/20120701-42\\_01.pdf](http://www.env.go.jp/en/focus/docs/files/20120701-42_01.pdf)

Other useful links:

[www.nationaltrail.co.uk](http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk)

[www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk](http://www.walkersarewelcome.org.uk)

## Benefits of urban parks – what does the evidence say?

Cecil C. Konijnendijk van den Bosch, Matilda van den Bosch, Anders Busse Nielsen and Sreetheran Maruthaveeran

**Western society's most common accessible greenspace is an urban park. This paper summarises the results of a systematic review of the scientific literature that set out to answer the key question "what is the current scientific evidence for different benefits of urban parks?" The review confirmed that sound scientific evidence does exist to support several benefits. As well as supporting what many commentators have claimed to be the case for some time, this study is of great importance to policymakers and those arguing for maintaining or increasing resource allocation to urban parks. As a way of reducing environmental injustice, urban planners should focus resources close to deprived communities and ethnic minorities where urban parks are currently scarce and/or poorly maintained...**

### Introduction

Most of us living in cities and towns appreciate the presence of well-functioning urban parks. In many cases, parks have become essential contributors to the attractiveness and vitality of cities. However, current political and economic realities do not make it easy for urban parks authorities to argue for resources to establish new parks, or even improve and maintain existing ones. Thus for urban parks to flourish it is vital to assess and communicate the evidence for the many benefits that such places provide to urban societies.

Most will agree that urban parks are essential for liveable and sustainable cities and towns. But what do we really know about the benefits of urban parks, and in particular, how strong is the scientific evidence for individual benefits? A recent report (Konijnendijk et al.,

2013) commissioned by the International Federation of Parks and Recreation Administration (Ifpra, [www.ifpra.org](http://www.ifpra.org)) reviewed the current scientific evidence of a series of urban park benefits. The work was carried out by a research team of four, representing three different institutions, three different disciplines, and four different nationalities.

### Review approach

The review started by defining urban parks as delineated open space areas, mostly dominated by vegetation and water, and generally reserved for public use. Urban parks are mostly larger, but can also have the shape of smaller 'pocket parks'. Moreover, urban parks are usually locally defined (by authorities) as, simply, 'parks'. It was then decided to document the current scientific evidence for urban park benefits. According to the researchers' experience, the vast majority of scientific work documenting urban park benefits has appeared during the past decade or so. Therefore - and given the limited resources for the study - only articles published from January 2000 were included. 'Benefit' was defined as anything that promotes wellbeing or other positive outcomes. Thus in the case of urban park benefits, 'benefits' comprised those services provided by the park that promote ecological resilience, or human or societal wellbeing, either directly or indirectly.

Based on their experience and initial literature review the authors then selected a set of park benefits considered to have the highest impacts to society. Subsequently a systematic review was carried out of peer-reviewed research work published in English and included in



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the databases Web of Science and/or Scopus between 1 January 2000 and 1 April 2012. A systematic review attempts to collate all empirical evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria to answer a specific research question. It uses explicit, systematic methods that are selected in order to minimise bias, thus providing reliable findings from which conclusions can be drawn and decisions made. The central research question for the systematic review was: what is the current scientific evidence for different benefits of urban parks?

#### Urban parks contribute to human health and wellbeing

An overview of the review's findings, listed eight benefit categories selected for this review, from those with the strongest evidence base to those with the weakest. In all, 201 articles were found to document one (or several) of the eight benefits of urban parks. In addition, by summarising the recent, thorough review by Bowler et al. (2010) on the cooling effect of urban parks, 24 other articles were included indirectly.

The review confirmed that sound scientific evidence exists for a number of urban park benefits. Parks have been found to positively impact human health and wellbeing either directly - for example by making us more physically active - or indirectly, for example by their high biodiversity that can enhance recreational experiences and learning. Evidence was found to be moderate to strong for the positive impacts of parks on 1) biodiversity (as measured through species richness); 2) property prices; 3) physical activity and reduced obesity; and 4) local cooling. These benefits thus provide the strongest

scientifically supported arguments for making a case for more and better urban parks. For other health-related benefits (such as contributions to stress reduction and improved self-reported health and mental health, and indirect health effects through reduced noise and cooling, and increased longevity) the evidence base was assessed as moderate.

Why are these findings important? Concerns for public health have risen significantly in the light of global urbanisation and an epidemic of non-communicable diseases, where people's living environment and lifestyles have become of increasing significance to their health. Not only can urban parks contribute to healthier behaviours (e.g. higher and more frequent physical activity), they can also be used as a planning tool to reduce environmental injustice, since they are seen as especially important in deprived communities and for ethnic minorities. Consequently urban planners should focus on high quality parks in such areas, where parks are currently scarce and/or often poorly maintained.

#### Urban parks are biodiversity hotspots

Scientific evidence from the review also confirms that urban parks are 'hotspots' of biodiversity. Therefore, as well as attracting leisure seekers and tourists interested in nature, such parks offer potential as sites for nature education and interpretation. Biodiversity is also crucial for ecosystem functionality and thus for the ecosystem services provided by the park. Findings show that the most decisive factor for overall species richness and composition in urban parks is the

diversity of habitats and the heterogeneity of microhabitats. Given that the promotion of biodiversity in urban parks is related to habitat design and management, this review provides an interesting case for developing innovative ways to conserve and promote biodiversity in urban areas. This is especially important since habitat qualities are largely within the control of park designers and managers. As our knowledge is still sketchy on some of the impacts and mechanisms at work, future research should adopt multi-species group approaches and coordinate study sites between individual species groups.

#### Not all benefits are well documented

Although the regulating ecosystem services of urban green space have been promoted during recent years, with the exception of aspects of cooling, these services are not (yet) very well documented specifically for urban parks. The evidence base for contributions of parks to reducing air pollution and regulating water, is weak to moderate. The same can be said for the cultural services of contributing to tourism and social cohesion, where only very limited sound scientific work has considered the role of urban parks specifically. Parks can be major tourist attractions – thinking of for example Central Park and the High Line in New York – so it is surprising that the tourist impacts of parks have hardly been studied. This suggests a need for more research as well as strategic partnerships between city authorities, tourist agencies and chambers of commerce. Funding for studying social cohesion may be more difficult to find, but governments at different levels have stressed the importance of enhancing social cohesion in the context of societies becoming both more globalised and more individualised.

#### Next steps

The Ifpra systematic review of urban park benefits provides interesting insights into the scientific evidence for urban park benefits. As resources for the review were limited, the researchers had to make some choices regarding e.g. time interval and selection of benefits. However, it is believed that the study provides an accurate picture of an important part of the state of evidence and thus can be used by those arguing for urban parks in political arenas. Further work could consider a longer time interval or expansion of the research studied, since not all relevant work has been published in journals listed in leading scientific databases. However, a lot could also be gained from taking the findings of the review further, going deeper into the 'why?' and 'how' questions, i.e. studying the mechanisms at work in generating urban park benefits. Research questions to guide such work could include: Where should we situate our parks? How can we assess the benefits of parks in monetary and other values? What type of parks and park elements promote which benefits (and why is this so)?

The full report (Konijnendijk et al., 2013) can be downloaded from the Ifpra website, <http://www.ifpra.org/images/park-benefits.pdf>.



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## The Steel Valley Project: 25 years of place making, place keeping

Matthew North, Project Manager, The Steel Valley Project

Stocksbridge is a town nine miles from Sheffield City Centre; dominated by the steelworks established in 1842. April 1988 saw the launch of the Stocksbridge Steel Valley Project, a major landscape project developed by British Steel Engineering Steels on its non-operational land, with the support of the Countryside Commission. As a result nearly 100,000 trees were planted, approximately half by the local community with the support of a Community Woodland Officer employed by the Project.

Public access was enhanced by the development of the Steel Valley Walk, permissive paths providing links with existing public rights of way along the valley to total more than four kilometres over 28 hectares of land. In the course of the next twenty five years this project

received European and national awards with the Steel Valley Project (SVP) growing to provide countryside management to local communities.

A unique partnership between local authorities, Tata Steels and the South Yorkshire Forest, the SVP is celebrating its Silver Jubilee in 2013. The Steel Valley Project is now moving into the next phase of its development, capitalising on the impact it has made, to develop long-term management for accessible greenspaces for local communities and people further afield.

[www.steelvalleyproject.org](http://www.steelvalleyproject.org)  
[www.stonetosteel.org.uk](http://www.stonetosteel.org.uk)

## VisitWoods: Unlocking woodland access online

Gayle Wharton, VisitWoods Project Manager, The Woodland Trust and Shona Morton, The Woodland Trust

*Many people are unaware of the accessible greenspace that exists close to their doorstep. The Woodland Trust has devoted significant effort and resources in tackling this issue as far as woodlands are concerned. The result? VisitWoods ...*

### Background

Woodlands offer visitors a unique, multi-sensory recreational experience, as well as proven health and wellbeing benefits (Making Woodland Count 2004<sup>[1]</sup>). The Woodland Trust believes that improving access is essential to achieving the Trust's aim of inspiring people to enjoy and value woodland. As part of a commitment to improving access, the Trust runs the Woods for People project, with support from the Forestry Commission, collecting data on accessible woodland across the UK. The VisitWoods project makes this data available to the public online.

Woodland Trust analysis of current access led to development of the Woodland Access Standard - now widely adopted in forestry policy - which aspires to the vision that everyone should have access to:

- a wood of at least 2 ha within 500m of their home; and
- a wood of at least 20 ha within 4km of their home

In the UK, only 16 per cent of us have access to a wood of at least 2ha within 500m of our homes, although 65% have access to a wood over 20ha within 4km of our home (Woodland Trust, 2010<sup>[2]</sup>). Overall, there are currently over 288,000 hectares of woodland in the UK that can be accessed by the public - or roughly 10% of the total woodland area.

But accessibility is not just about making space accessible: it's also about making information accessible (Tabbush and O'Brien - 2003<sup>[3]</sup>). A significant proportion of the population face barriers to getting out and enjoying their local woodland. Natural England research, amongst others, has shown that a lack of information about where to go and what do when you get there are major barriers to getting more people into woodland.

### VisitWoods

The aim of the Woodland Trust's VisitWoods project is to promote existing access to woodland, and engage the public to share their experiences of visiting woodland online in order to inform and inspire others. By transforming the raw GIS data from the Woods for People project into an engaging, easily searchable online database for the public ([visitwoods.org.uk](http://visitwoods.org.uk)) the project has played a key role in addressing this information gap.

VisitWoods is a £2.1 million, five year project funded in part through a £1.2 million grant from the Big Lottery Fund's 2005 'Changing Spaces' programme (Access to Nature) designed to help communities in England enjoy and improve their local environment. VisitWoods is supported by other funders including the Forestry Commission & Scottish Natural Heritage. Natural England's ambition was to create opportunities for people from all backgrounds to have greater access to the natural environment, raising both awareness and understanding as well as improved links to the natural world.



Image courtesy of Forestry Commission

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Since 2009, VisitWoods has been successfully informing, engaging and inspiring people about the potential of woods as a year-round visitor destination, both online and - via a series of innovative outreach projects - on the ground. In its communications and partnership work, the project has maintained a focus on three key audiences: families with young children, older people (65+) and disabled people, since these audiences in particular were identified as facing greater barriers to getting out into woodland than the population as a whole.

The website lists nearly 11,000 woods, owned by over 600 different landowners, from the 'big five' (Forestry Commission, National Trust, Woodland Trust, The Wildlife Trusts and RSPB) right down to small private woodlands offering public access. Visitwoods.org.uk enables the user to find a local wood via a simple postcode search or an advanced search tailored to particular needs or interests (e.g. woods with specific facilities or features such as toilets, car parking or cycle paths). Inspirational activity ideas and downloadable resources help users to prepare for their visit and encourage them to see woodlands in a new light. By regularly changing content and promoting this via social media and project partner websites the user experience remains fresh and interesting.

#### User-Generated Content – the key ingredient to great online content

VisitWoods.org.uk has received over two million web visits already, with over 60,000 activity sheets and maps downloaded. Uniquely, it's the visitors themselves who are helping to make the site more comprehensive, engaging and sustainable, by sharing their woodland experiences online. This 'crowd sourcing' approach allows VisitWoods to harness the enthusiasm and local knowledge of visitors who can recognise and articulate the barriers that others experience. The 'Join In' area enables visitors to add comments, photos, descriptions and symbols to the pages for each wood. Visitor feedback complements the information provided by landowners and enables visitors to make informed choices about which woods to visit, based on recent reviews.

This 'user generated content' (UGC) is as diverse as the woods themselves. Photos, comments and descriptions pinpoint entrances, share wildlife sightings, outline disabled access and review play facilities. Visitors also summarise the features at each wood in symbols so that peers can search for any specific facilities they need. However the qualitative information provided by visitors is every bit as important; UGC captures visitors' enthusiasm and passes it on, motivating others to get outdoors and discover woods for themselves.

VisitWoods online user surveys suggest that the information added by the public is one of the key reasons why people find the website so valuable in planning a day out. More than 50% of respondents stated that they would now be visiting a wood in the next three months as a result of the information they found on VisitWoods.

Volunteers were instrumental in kick-starting the addition of content,

which has gathered pace throughout the project thanks to campaign highlights such as an annual woodland photography competition. A dedicated Volunteering Officer coordinates the WebGuide volunteering programme which has been hugely successful, engaging over 180 volunteers in describing, reviewing and photographing woods and in moderating uploads from others. WebGuides also support the Woodland Trust's social media campaign, bringing woodland to a whole new audience via Facebook and Twitter.

Since the launch of VisitWoods over 3000 people have contributed to the website in this way, resulting in over 5,800 woods having UGC. To date this includes over 35,000 photos, 5000 comments and descriptions, and 30,000 symbols.

#### The Future

In 2012 the Trust was part of the Independent Panel on Forestry, which recommended that government provide 'a single web gateway for information about access to woodlands, open to public visits'. Although the government's response concurred, in a very competitive economic environment - involving difficult funding decisions - the funding required to maintain visitwoods.org.uk as a stand-alone website has not been forthcoming.

Despite this, the Woodland Trust have committed to integrating the core features of VisitWoods into their own website over the coming year and will continue working in partnership with the Forestry Commission and others, to maintain the data that powers this unique resource. This will ensure that a searchable database of all woods open to the public continues to be available online, well beyond 2013.

[www.Visitwoods.org.uk](http://www.Visitwoods.org.uk)



Image courtesy of VisitWoods/WTPL/Philip Carpenter

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Image courtesy of VisitWoods/WTPL/Chris Affleck

## VisitWoods - More than just a website, outreach is vital too

Gayle Wharton, Woodland Trust

Despite the huge success of [www.Visitwoods.org.uk](http://www.Visitwoods.org.uk) in engaging under-represented visitors and encouraging independent visits, it is clear that a website cannot be the only answer. Direct outreach programmes - 'hand-holding' groups out into woods and showing them the huge potential of visiting local woodland - are also key. Hence targeted outreach has been a significant area of investment for the VisitWoods project.

One of these outreach projects has been running in the North East for the past three years. VisitWoods employs a full time outreach officer in East Durham, chosen as a target area. The communities in and around East Durham face high levels of unemployment, poor health and limited access to the internet, yet are geographically close to a large number of woods and natural spaces.

The VisitWoods East Durham outreach programme ([visitwoods.org.uk/east-durham](http://visitwoods.org.uk/east-durham)) has delivered a wide range of support such as training sessions, to introduce group leaders and families to different activities in the woods. The programme has worked with local groups to organise taster visits and seed-funding transport so that existing groups can offer woodland walks. By capturing case studies and undertaking independent evaluations, the programme has developed a model that could facilitate better use of green spaces in other areas of the UK.

The targets set by Access to Nature for the number of young, older and disabled people who have been engaged in the outreach programme, has been greatly exceeded; over 5000 people within these key groups will have experienced woodland at first hand when funding for the post ends in December 2013.

Without the VisitWoods outreach programme it is very unlikely that many of the groups and individuals in the East Durham area would have ever visited their local woods and certainly would not have engaged with the natural environment in the way they have done.

It is clear from this work that a considerable amount of support and 'hand-holding' is required to facilitate target audiences for VisitWoods. Without active encouragement and help in planning a visit and assistance (often to overcome specific barriers) it is very unlikely that these individuals and families would have visited their local woods. However, having visited once, many have subsequently been back and expect to return again more regularly in the future.

## The Big Tree Plant (BTP) - Recreation though Re-creation?

Mark Durk, Policy Advisor – Green Infrastructure, FC England

In 2010 the Coalition Government launched The Big Tree Plant, a national tree planting partnership of community organisations in England<sup>[1]</sup>. It aims to plant one million trees in neighbourhoods and get more people involved in planting and caring for trees, thus making neighbourhoods more attractive, healthy places to live<sup>[2]</sup>. FC England delivers The Big Tree Plant grant scheme through a contract with Groundwork London and a £4m budget, overseen by an independent Grants Panel.

An important focus of the scheme is to benefit deprived areas with little existing greenspace. A spatial framework using the Index of Multiple Deprivation<sup>[3]</sup> and the General Land Use Database<sup>[4]</sup> has been devised to inform applicants and decision makers.

But the Big Tree Plant is not just about trees. Encouraging local communities and groups to take part and care for their trees in their local spaces is of prime importance. This helps ensure that trees will be where local people want them – as close to the doorstep as is practicable. Over 150 groups have successfully applied, ranging from tenant groups of housing associations to 'umbrella' groups, covering city-wide or in some cases England-wide projects. These projects are focused in, though not exclusive to, major conurbations and towns in England.

The grant scheme was designed to be simple and accessible, devolving power to local groups and encouraging them to do the projects they want. The result is a wide range of projects, including street trees, orchard planting as part of local food initiatives, native and non-native trees. Finding match funding has been equally innovative, with groups using

professional advice, local authority maintenance costs, and 'in kind' use of equipment to boost their budgets.

A number of themes are emerging from forthcoming research<sup>[5]</sup> into the characteristics of community groups and the benefits and challenges they have experienced through BTP. Not surprisingly, nature conservation and improving the aesthetic appeal of the local area, are main drivers. Benefits identified by the Groups include: new skills and learning; improved physical and mental health; social bonds; sense of ownership and pride; connection with nature; and increased confidence.

In most instances groups were 'hands on' in planting and caring for trees. Local people were consulted and involved and new networks and collaborations formed to help both plan and deliver projects. All groups interviewed as part of the research had plans for carrying out further projects and/or inspiring others – an interesting legacy.

The heartening message is that local people and communities have benefitted, and will continue to benefit, from engaging with trees as a means of social and personal development, creating new spaces, recreation, and 'an escape from normal life'.

Perhaps with more similarly targeted projects 'accessible leafy suburbs' could eventually become characteristic greenspace on everybody's doorstep.

Image courtesy of Birmingham Trees For Life



### Contact

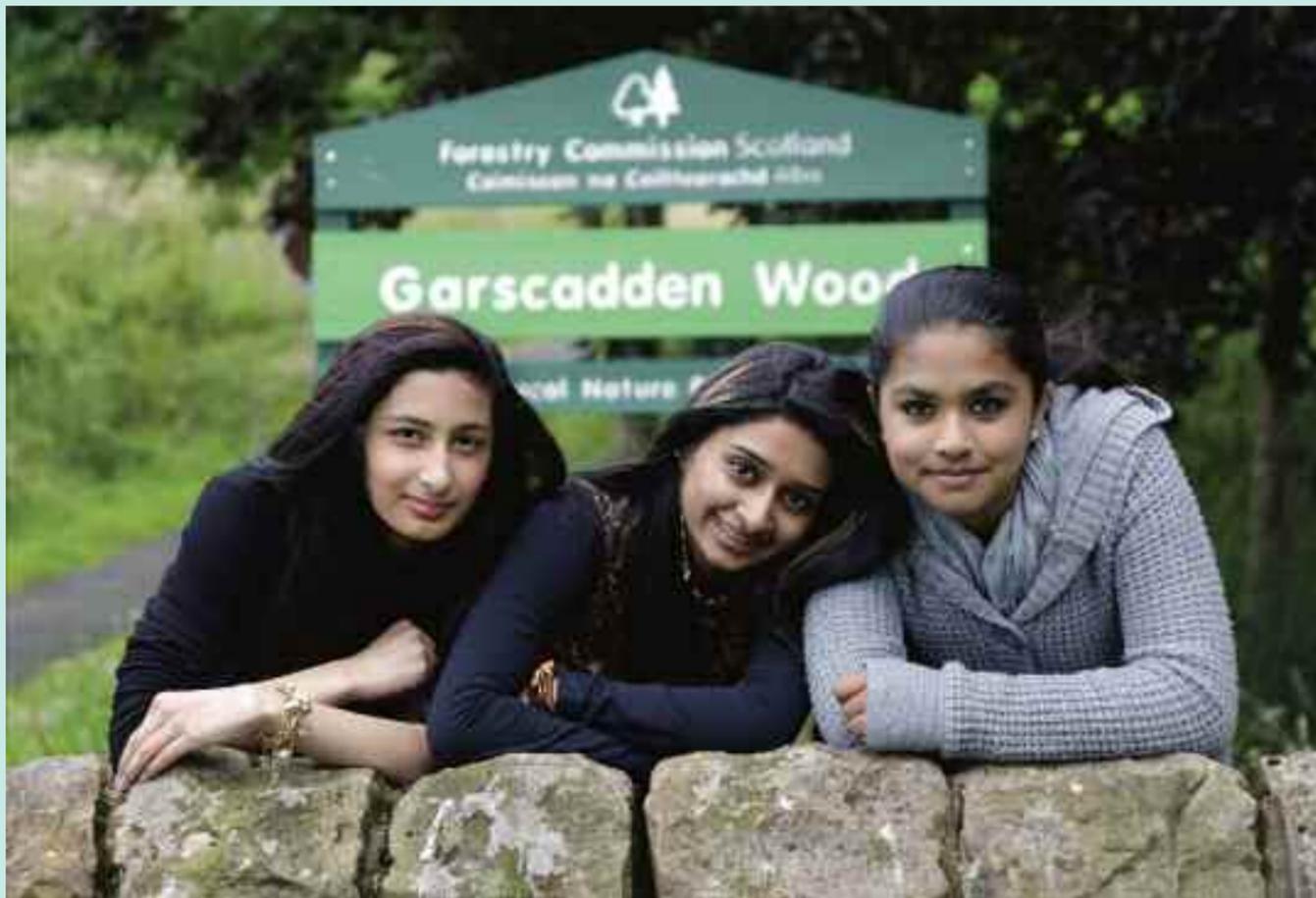
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## The Woods In and Around Towns (WIAT) Programme: delivering accessible local woods for local people

Bob Frost, Community Development Policy Advisor, Forestry Commission Scotland

### Introduction

The WIAT programme is a key focus of Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) activity in urban Scotland. The programme aims to help improve the quality of life of people living and working in Scotland's towns and cities by:

- Bringing neglected woodland into management;
- Creating new woodlands; and
- Supporting people to use and enjoy their woods.

WIAT woodlands are those within 1km of settlements with a population of over 2000 people. The reason for a tailored programme for these woods is that the majority of Scotland's people (c. 68%) live within the WIAT area. Therefore, these woods have the potential to provide health and well-being benefits - through for example improved access opportunities - to a significant proportion of the population. The programme concentrates on local woods and informal, everyday use. It was originally designed to meet the need for co-ordinated action to address:

- A lack of understanding and appreciation of the positive benefits of woods for people in towns and cities;
- The growing neglect of urban woodlands; and
- The ad hoc nature of funding preventing planned management of woods.

Since its launch in 2005 the programme has evolved from focusing on opportunities as they arose, to being a widely adopted and embedded way of working with in Scotland's urban areas.

### How is the WIAT programme delivered?

For FCS there are five main delivery mechanisms:

1. Information and guidance for practitioners e.g. the design and delivery of an Urban Woodland Design Course;
2. Regulation e.g. ongoing work to establish a link to the land use planning system;
3. Incentives e.g. bespoke forestry grants for both physical management of WIAT woods and funding to facilitate greater use;

4. Public sector services and partnerships e.g. establishment of strategic partnerships in the main urban areas including Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen; and
5. Direct delivery by FCS e.g. purchase of over 4000 hectares of land to create new woods and through management agreements and leasing of existing woods.

### What has been achieved?

WIAT has seen over £50million of FCS funds invested in improving the delivery of public benefits from urban woods. This has included funding more than 150 projects through WIAT forestry grants. A significant proportion of this investment has been in areas that score highly on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (i.e. areas of greatest social need), and identified as priority areas under the programme. Examples of specific projects include:

- i. Craigmillar (Edinburgh) – 62 hectares of woodland now under active management and an ongoing programme of community engagement including Forest School and greenspace referral.
- ii. Cuningar Loop (Glasgow) – 30 hectare brownfield land site. FCS is developing the site as the main greenspace for the surrounding communities – part of the Commonwealth Games Community Forest.
- iii. River Don Woods (Aberdeen) – 40 hectares of riparian woodland in Aberdeen City – woodland management, footpath improvement and a community outreach programme have been delivered.

### WIAT programme highlights since 2005

- 25% of WIAT woodland in Scotland has received financial support from FCS to develop management plans, undertake physical improvements and run outreach programmes;
- On average 40% of Local Authority owned woodland in Scotland is now under management;
- Over 400 kilometres of new or upgraded footpaths funded in WIAT woods;
- WIAT managers are now able to proactively plan the management of urban woods;
- WIAT has contributed to the increased proportion of the Scottish population that now live within 500m of an accessible woodland – this is (approximately) an additional 610,000 people that can now access their local wood.

### Measuring the real impact: building the evidence base

The programme has met or exceeded the majority of its initial targets for outputs, for example: the area of woodland bought under active management; length of footpaths created or upgraded; and the area of new woodland creation. However, the ongoing challenge is to evaluate the direct impact of the programme's investment in delivering against its ambition to deliver social benefits such as improving people's quality of life.

A long-term study carried out in the WIAT woods in Drumchapel, Glasgow (an area of high multiple deprivation) set out to monitor the

societal impact of physical improvements to the local woods (e.g. entrance features, clearing lines of sight and upgrading the footpath network). This physical intervention was complemented by a community outreach programme (e.g. Health walks, conservation volunteering and Forest School). The research investigated whether people's perceptions and attitudes towards those woods changed as a result of the programme of activities. The study showed:

- Evidence of positive change to people's attitudes, perceptions and values associated with local woodlands (e.g. quality of physical environment, importance of woodlands to quality of life etc.);
- A change in the pattern of woodland use, particularly frequency of use in summer; and
- Residents feedback showed that the project had a positive impact on people's lives (e.g. people feeling that 'their' wood was a place they would go with family and friends).

Preliminary analysis from a follow-up study at Drumchapel carried out at the end of 2012 suggests that the positive picture has been maintained (pers. com). A full analysis of this recent research is being done in parallel to work being undertaken by Forest Research (see Woodland improvements in deprived urban communities: what impact do they have on people's activities and quality of life? in this journal).

WIAT work in Drumchapel is now in its eighth year and FCS recently signed a 10 year lease with Glasgow City Council, who own the wood. From the evidence presented above and the direct feedback from members of the local community this continued commitment is welcomed and should continue to contribute positively to people's lives. The evidence gathered to date can be used directly by delivery colleagues designing and planning future site activities. However, key questions still remain when trying to identify the most effective practical methods and interventions, or combination of methods, to deliver these benefits e.g. what is the optimal mix of physical site improvements and community engagement activity to maximise the public benefits from WIAT woods?

This key question maybe answered as part of long-term health study being taken forward by researchers from the University of Edinburgh and University of Glasgow in WIAT woods managed by FCS. That study will attempt to investigate what type of intervention has been most effective: is it physical change in the woodland environment itself or is it local people becoming involved in activities like organised walks after the physical works are completed?

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### Looking to the future

Recent research has strengthened the evidence that delivering accessible local woods for local people, combined with active engagement, leads to increased use of local woodlands and improvements in the quality of life of local people.

The challenge for the WIAT programme and other greenspace initiatives is how to sustain the delivery of these benefits over the long term, particularly in areas of greatest social need. The current phase of the WIAT programme (2011-2014) will shortly be reviewed in close collaboration with key stakeholders. That review will draw on this expanding evidence base to convince decision-makers that the programme is worth the continued investment, and critically, that it is making a difference to people's lives. In this way the WIAT programme is truly becoming an example of evidence-based Government policy that is transforming people's lives.



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## Urban woodlands in Scotland: proven values of increasing access.

**Bianca Ambrose-Oji, Social Scientist, Centre for Human and Ecological Sciences, Forest Research**

The philosophy of WIAT was that by improving the look and condition of a woodland, people's perceptions of their area would change, and more visitors would visit what were previously neglected or underused woodlands. By increasing access it was suggested that there would be greater community use and sense of satisfaction of their local environment, with corresponding improvements to individual health and wellbeing.

A recently completed evaluation commissioned by FC Scotland used longitudinal data collected by partners and grant recipients. These data included baseline measures and a "counterfactual case" i.e. a site that had no WIAT interventions. Conservative methods tested whether there were any observable changes to patterns of visits to woodlands and to people's perceptions of woodland and environmental quality. The research went on to assess the value of those changes.

The evidence showed that more people from C1 and C2 socio-economic groups were visiting WIAT woods after intervention, and that visit rates increased overall by 20-25% compared to the baseline. The greatest degree of change in perceptions about the contribution of woodland to people's quality of life came from the DE socio-economic group. Although visits became shorter in duration they happened more often, so that overall time spent in woodlands increased. Also noticeable was an increase in the diversity of activities. Instead of just dog walking, people started using woods for family walks, playing games, exercising, walking routes to work or school, and riding bicycles. None of these effects were found in the counterfactual case. The benefits to health using the metabolic equivalent of task (MET) concept and monetary values placed on Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs), using the most conservative methodology, were shown to be between £0.36M (low) to £3.2M (high) with central estimates of £1.4M (per year, in 2012 prices). Values for recreation using the most conservative method were between £13M (low) and £26M (high) with central estimates of £19M (per year, in 2012 prices). In short the WIAT programme achieved its objectives, representing a good return on public investment, and the model underlying it can be considered a proven concept. The full report will be available from Forest Research this autumn.



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## Woodland improvements in deprived urban communities: what impact do they have on people's activities and quality of life?

Catharine Ward Thompson, Director, OPENspace Research Centre, University of Edinburgh and Jenny Roe and Peter Aspinall, School of the Built Environment, Heriot-Watt University

Green space in the residential environment is associated with a range of health benefits but there is very little evidence on the impacts of environmental interventions in nearby green space on patterns of use, physical activity, or perceptions of the neighbourhood environment.

This paper presents the results of a study involving a natural experiment: improvements under the Woods In and Around Town (WIAT) programme in a disadvantaged urban community, compared with a similar community without environmental interventions in local green space, both in Glasgow, Scotland. A repeat cross-sectional survey of the community resident within 500 m of the local woodlands or green space (n = 215) used a quota sampling framework based on each community's demographic profile. Outcome measures included perceptions of neighbourhood quality of life, neighbourhood environment, and local woodland qualities, frequency of woodland visits and levels of outdoor physical activity.

Results show highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ) difference over time in the intervention site in perceptions of the quality of the physical neighbourhood environment, an indicator of quality of life. The research also found significant differences in woodland use ( $p < 0.001$ ), in the frequency of summer woodland visits ( $p < 0.05$ ), in attitudes to woodlands as places for physical activity ( $p < 0.01$ ) and in perceptions of safety ( $p < 0.05$ ) in the intervention site over time, compared with no significant change in the comparison site.

We conclude that environmental interventions in deprived urban locations can positively impact on use patterns, perceptions of environment and, potentially, activity levels and quality of life.



## Urban green space, mortality & morbidity

Prof. Richard Mitchell and Prof. David Miller

Recent research by The James Hutton Institute, University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, Heriot Watt University, and Biomathematics and Statistics Scotland asks if there is a link between green space and population health in Scotland. Overall, it finds evidence that access to, and use of, green space is favourably associated with risk of mortality and risk of poor mental health for some people, but relationships between green space and health are weaker in Scotland than England and Wales. This research is part of the Scottish Government's GREENHEALTH project.

### Background

Studies from around the world have found a link between how much green space a neighbourhood has and the health of the resident population. We expect to find this link because evidence from experimental studies in the laboratory and field suggests that being in natural environments may reduce stress, enable recovery from fatigue, lower blood pressure and promote healing. Green spaces may also encourage physical activity, and social contact. However, not all studies found a link between green space and health; the relationship varied by country, gender, socio-economic position and, importantly, by the measure of health used. The reasons for this variation are not yet clear.

There has been very little work looking at the relationships between green space and health in Scotland specifically. This research asked three key questions: (1) is there a link between green space and population health in Scotland?; (2) is the strength of any link different to that in England and Wales?; and (3) does the amount of green space in the neighbourhood or use of green space matter more for health? The research used several different definitions of health and looked at how the answers to the research questions varied by age, gender and level of affluence.

### Mortality

Figure 2 shows the relationship between the amount of green space in urban neighbourhoods and the risk of mortality for working age men. The risk is shown relative to urban areas with the least amount of green space, and the further a bar extends below the horizontal axis, the lower the risk in that type of area. The risk of death excludes that from external causes such as traffic accidents or suicide. The graph shows that in England and Wales, the risk of mortality falls as the amount of green space in an urban neighbourhood increases. This relationship is not found in Scotland.

These relationships were also explored separately for men and women, for older, working and younger age people, for more and less urban areas, for richer and poorer groups, for deaths from

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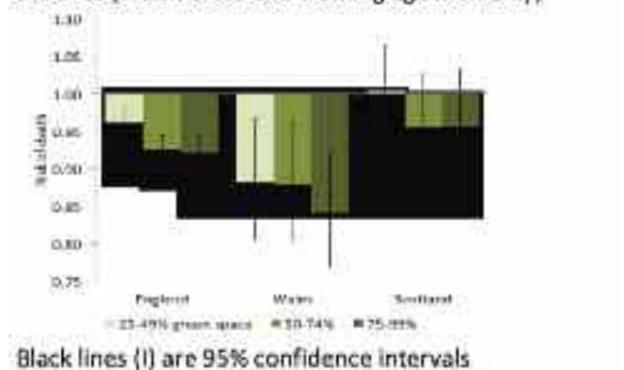
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**Figure 2: Risk of mortality by amount of green space in the area (urban areas and working age men only)**



cardiovascular and respiratory disease and for different definitions of green space and neighbourhood. In Scotland, we only found a significant, protective relationship between mortality and green space for working age men living in the poorest two income-deprivation quartiles. Among these working-age men, those resident in the greenest urban areas were about 16% less likely to die than those resident in the least green urban areas. The absence of effects for women echoes findings in England and Wales, and is likely linked to gender differences in the frequency and type of green space use. Women are known to use green spaces less often than men. We explored many possible explanations for why some relationships between green space and health appear different in Scotland but were not able to explain it. We could not allow for differences in the quality or types of urban green space within Scotland, and between England, Wales and Scotland, and it is possible that this is partly responsible. More likely however, the Scottish population has a higher level of underlying poor health and risky behaviours such as smoking and drinking. The impact of green space on risk of mortality is, even in England, relatively weak. Any benefits of green space in urban Scotland may be swamped by other things that damage health.

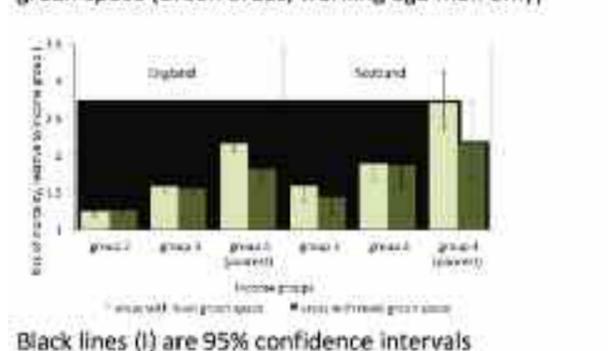
### Inequalities

A study in England suggested that socio-economic health inequalities might be narrower among those living in greener urban areas, perhaps because green space in such areas is a freely and readily available resource for protecting health. We looked for the same kind of relationship in Scotland.

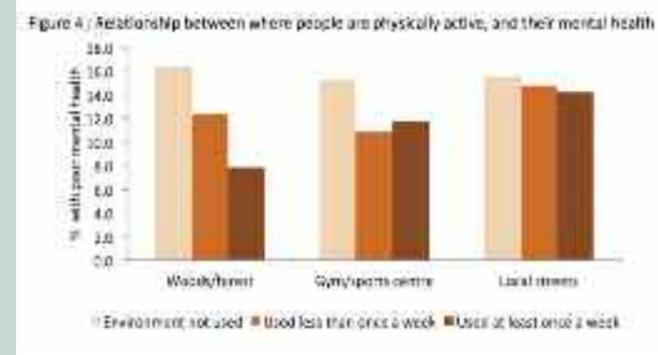
We compared the socio-economic health 'gap' between the least and most green urban areas. We measured the gap between 5 income-related groups. Figure 3 shows the risk of mortality in income groups 2-4, compared with the wealthiest group, 1. As income-deprivation increases, the relative risk of mortality rises (the bars on the graph get taller). However, the rise is less steep in the areas with most green space. In the most green urban areas in England, the gap in risk of mortality between the most and least deprived is significantly smaller than in the least green areas. This is also true in Wales, though these results are not shown in figure 3. Whilst the pattern is similar in

Scotland, reduction in the health gap in the greenest areas is not statistically significant.

**Figure 3: Socio-economic inequalities, by amount of green space (urban areas, working age men only)**



For the Scottish population only, we were able to explore relationships between how much green space an individual has in their neighbourhood, their use of green spaces for any kind of physical activity (such as going for a walk), and their socio-economic position. Figure 4 shows that use of green space for physical activity is not strongly related to how much green space there is in the neighbourhood, and that for those on lower incomes more green space in the neighbourhood is not associated with greater use for physical activity. This may explain why Scottish socio-economic inequalities in health do not seem narrower in greener areas.

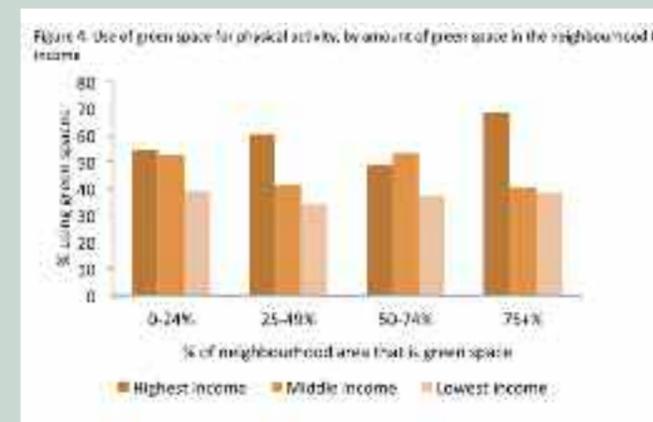


### Morbidity

We explored relationships between green space and mental health, wellbeing, two different measures of obesity, and markers of cardiovascular and respiratory health including blood pressure and c-reactive protein. This work was also able to consider both the amount of green space in a neighbourhood, and whether the individual used green space for physical activity.

We found that regular physical activity in green environments appeared far more protective of mental health than that in other places, like the gym or streets (figure 4).

Regular users of green space for physical activity had about half the risk of poor mental health among non-users. We also found that levels of c-reactive protein, (a marker of inflammation that predicts cardiovascular disease and for which lower levels are healthier), were



lower in men who regularly visited green spaces than in those who did not. We found no other evidence that the amount of green space in the neighbourhood, or regularly visiting green spaces for physical activity brought health benefits that weren't also provided by physical activity in other non-green environments. We also found no evidence that socio-economic inequalities in these aspects of health were related to levels or use of green space.

### Research undertaken

This research used pre-existing data. Analyses of mortality risk used death records made available to us by the Office for National Statistics and General Register Office For Scotland under special license. We matched them to data describing amount of green space in the deceased's neighbourhood, where the definition of green space included parks, forests and areas of open grass, but excluded domestic gardens. We defined neighbourhood using Census Area Statistics Wards, an administrative unit used in reporting of the decennial census. We allowed for other factors which might explain the association between green space and mortality, including age and sex, affluence (because wealthier people are both more likely to live in greener areas to be healthier), and air pollution (because greener areas tend also to have less air pollution).

We checked that our results were not particular to the data used and definitions of green space or mortality. We repeated analyses for Scotland, using mortality data at datazone level and an alternative measure of green space from the European Environment Agency. We also checked whether excluding Glasgow (known to have particularly poor population health) affected the results. None of these checks produced different results.

Relationships between green space in the neighbourhood, use of green spaces for physical activity, and morbidity were explored using the 2008 Scottish Health Survey (SHS). Green space data were joined

to the SHS survey data under special licence, so that we knew the amount of green space in each SHS respondent's neighbourhood. The SHS also asked respondents about where they undertook physical activity. Our analyses were able to allow for how much exercise people got overall, other environments they used, their levels of income, age, sex, employment status and, when appropriate, their smoking status. We checked for differences in our results by age, sex and income level.

### Conclusions

Relationships between how much green space people have in their neighbourhood and their risk of mortality, are weak or absent in Scotland. This is different to England and Wales. There does appear to be a protective relationship for Scotland's poorest men. There was some suggestion that Scottish socio-economic inequalities in health are narrower among populations with more green space in their neighbourhood, but this relationship was also weak and not statistically significant.

However, those who use their green space regularly are at much lower risk of poor mental health than those who do not, and men who are regular green space users may also have lower, and thus healthier, levels of c-reactive protein.

The protective relationship between regular use of green space and risk of poor mental health is an important finding. Although this kind of study cannot prove that green space per se protects mental health, it does echo findings from small scale lab and field experiments, providing more confidence in our results.

### Policy implications

This work has implications for those involved in planning and managing green spaces, and for those involved in protecting and improving population health in Scotland.

- Simply increasing the amount of green space available in urban areas is unlikely to have impacts on population mortality rates or socio-economic health inequalities.
- Regular use of green space does appear to be good for mental health. Helping people to become and stay regular users could be a useful additional means of protecting and enhancing mental health.
- Those who use green spaces as children are far more likely to do so as adults. Schemes proven to be effective in introducing and encouraging children to use these spaces should be expanded. This may produce a lasting, multi-generational impact.
- Local walking groups are effective at introducing adults to, and maintaining their use of, green spaces for physical activity.

### Contact

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## Commonwealth Woods

**Hugh McNish, Central Scotland Health Advisor, Forestry Commission Scotland**

**Contrary to popular belief, Glasgow boasts a high proportion of accessible greenspace: over 20% of the City's total land area. Despite being located at the centre of a large conurbation, the City offers easy access to parks, green spaces and high quality surrounding countryside. In fact Glaswegians often refer to their city as 'the Dear Green Place'. A new project designed to encourage people to head outdoors, get active and enjoy their local woods has been launched in Scotland as an official legacy of the 2014 Commonwealth Games.**

### Background

The Commonwealth Woods is an initiative comprising thirteen woods in and around Glasgow that aims to engage with people living in socially and economically deprived communities and encourage them to visit their local woods more often.

Led by Forestry Commission Scotland, it involves a partnership project comprising the Woodland Trust Scotland, the Commonwealth Forestry Association, Glasgow City Council, Clyde Gateway, Cassiltoun Housing Association, West Dunbartonshire Council, South Lanarkshire Council and Paths for All. The network contains a range of woods of various ages

and stages of development: from well established 'destination' woods with important ancient trees and wildlife; to newly-planted woods; to a riverside park being created out of derelict land opposite the Commonwealth Games athletes' village. Each of these woodland settings offers outdoor spaces for local people and visitors to experience free events and activities, get active or just to go for a walk in the fresh air.

### A lasting legacy

The project has been specifically designed to fit with the Commonwealth Games National Legacy plan and will play a key role in delivering a health improvement legacy, encouraging people across Glasgow and the Clyde Valley area to use their local woods and raising awareness of the benefits of being active outdoors. It will also deliver an important green legacy that helps to inspire and inform local communities about the valuable role of trees and woodlands and making links with the wider Commonwealth woodland community.

Building on initiatives including the Central Scotland Green Network and the FC Scotland Woods In and Around Towns initiative, a key philosophy of the Commonwealth Woods project is to leverage existing networks and activities to help deliver the project and to

make it self-sustaining. The ambition is for local communities to continue using their local woods and organise community events beyond the 2014 Games. By sharing information and resources across the network and with wider stakeholders, professionals and practitioners, the partners also hope to showcase the project as an example of best practice in urban forestry management which can be replicated in other parts of the UK.

### Challenging behaviour

While some of the woods in the network already have strong connections with local communities, others are less well known. To raise awareness of the network an official launch event - involving school children and former Commonwealth Games medallist Susan Egelstaff - took place in June 2013 at Overtoun Estate near Dumbarton. It also included the launch of a dedicated website ([www.commonwoods.org.uk](http://www.commonwoods.org.uk)) and a leaflet where people can view a map of the network and find their nearest Commonwealth Wood.

According to research commissioned at selected Commonwealth Woods ahead of the launch, nearly seven in ten (68%) of all residents surveyed are already aware of a woodland in their local area, but only a third (27%) of those who are aware of their local woodland use it regularly or often. Lack of a reason to visit a wood was cited as the most common reason (27%). As such, another key objective of the project is to challenge people's perceptions of Glasgow's urban woodlands and seek to achieve a behaviour shift that brings greater social engagement with the Commonwealth Woods, through increased visits for leisure and exercise.

Researchers asked people what would make them more likely to use their local wood, more often. More fun activities for children and families was mentioned by just over a third (34%) and regular events by 28 percent. Nearly a third (28%) said they would visit to improve their health, fitness and wellbeing - or just to enjoy the outdoors.

So, over the next year the Commonwealth Woods network will promote a programme of community activities and events for people



of all ages and abilities to enjoy, from teddy bears' picnics, tree planting, storytelling and guided walks, to Commonwealth themed arts projects and competitions.



### Get Active, Get Involved, Be Inspired

At the heart of this programme are three core campaigns designed for people to get involved, get active and be inspired by the Commonwealth Woods. Each aims to engage with diverse sections of the local community through a range of educational, engagement and health related activities. These are intended to inspire communities and promote cultural links with Commonwealth countries through woods and forests, sport and activities. In cooperation with the Commonwealth Forestry Association ([www.cfa-international.org](http://www.cfa-international.org)) each wood in the network is being twinned with a Commonwealth country, which will help shape local community events and activities.

Scheduled to run at different times before, during and after the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games, some of the major activities include:

- An arts and sculpture project: This will involve local communities from across the thirteen woodland areas in designing a themed sculpture, such as a totem pole. The sculptures will form part of a physical legacy: a trail to be unveiled following the Commonwealth Games at the network's flagship wood, Cuningar, just opposite the athlete's village.
- A photography competition: This is for people across Glasgow and Greater Glasgow and those living in Commonwealth countries to get involved by taking pictures of their local woods, which will be shared via social media. Winning entries will be used to make a Commonwealth Woods calendar. The competition will also offer opportunities for guided photography walks to be hosted at the woods, involving local camera clubs, professional photographers and media.

- Creating new paths and networks: A dedicated 'Paths for All' ([www.pathsforall.org.uk](http://www.pathsforall.org.uk)) co-ordinator will identify new path networks and co-ordinate walking groups across the Commonwealth Woods.
- Woodland Games: This is a special events activity designed for schoolchildren to celebrate the Commonwealth Games and help them get active and enjoy their local woods. Pupils take part in sporting related activities in the woods, some with a Commonwealth theme. The inaugural event involved over 90 primary school pupils competing in sports such as cross country running, archery, tug of war, javelin and shot putt, with the winning school receiving a special oak trophy.

The project is being supported by a marketing and communications plan to engage with local and national audiences. Traditional, online and social media include personal blogs from former athletes and hints and tips of things to do in local woods. This will help to raise awareness of the project more widely across the UK and internationally, and serve to inspire others to get outdoors and enjoy their local woods.

Among the woods in the network are: the Kilpatrick Hills incorporating Lang Craigs and Overtoun Estate in West Dunbartonshire; Garscadden Wood in Drumchapel; Boden Boo and Johnstone Woods in Renfrewshire; Cuningar (the flagship Commonwealth Wood), Old Mine Nature Park and Rawyards in South Lanarkshire; Auchenshuggle, Cathkin Braes (the official mountain biking venue for the Games) Castlemilk and Easterhouse in Glasgow.

#### Conclusion

The Commonwealth Woods initiative is already starting to raise awareness of the benefits of accessible woodland on the doorsteps of several deprived Glasgow communities and early results around community engagement and behaviour change are encouraging. In the lead up to July and August 2014, the project will play a key role in encouraging people to actively use their local woods. As part of the Commonwealth Games National Legacy plan the Commonwealth Woods initiative will deliver a legacy of health benefits and a legacy of green infrastructure that will serve to inspire and inform local communities about the valuable role of trees and woodlands and make links to the wider Commonwealth woodland community.

[www.commonwealthwoods.org.uk](http://www.commonwealthwoods.org.uk)



## Tackling climate change through design and management of accessible urban greenspace

Deryck Irving, Programmes and Partnership Manager, greenspace scotland<sup>[1]</sup>

Climate change is one of the major challenges facing Scottish towns and cities and the people who live in them. Scottish Government policy clearly outlines the need for action to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases through changes in technology and in lifestyles. It also highlights the need, regardless of how effective we are in reducing emissions, to take action to cope with the consequences of the climate change which is already happening.

Greenspaces and green networks have the potential to contribute to both these sets of actions and to create more resilient and liveable communities. This has been recognised in Scottish Government guidance on green infrastructure and placemaking<sup>[2]</sup>. However, whilst this guidance (and much of the other work in this area) focuses on masterplanning and the design of new developments, the vast majority of people live and work in places which already exist. For example it is estimated that 90% of Glasgow's 2050 housing stock is already extant greenspace scotland is therefore working with local authorities and communities in urban Scotland to develop ways of integrating green infrastructure and climate change action into existing neighbourhoods.

The first element of this is to see how existing greenspaces can be managed to address climate change priorities. In Aberdeen, greenspace scotland has been working with the City Council and the Friends of Hazlehead to develop Hazlehead Park as a 'pioneer climate-ready park'. The project has identified four major sets of mitigation actions:

- improvements to the park aimed at drawing in the local community and reducing their need to travel elsewhere for recreation
- improvement and promotion of active travel links to and through the park
- a range of energy savings and renewables options relating to park buildings
- management changes in terms of mowing regimes and the timings of work that will help to reduce carbon emissions.

A suite of climate adaptation actions includes:

- naturalisation of drains and burns and creation of new wetland areas to reduce flooding risks to neighbouring homes and businesses;
- maintenance and enhancement of shade within the park to cope with increased temperatures; and
- habitat creation and management to increase habitat connectivity and enable wildlife to adapt to the changing climate.

These proposals are now being incorporated into the Management Plan for the Park and the Business Plan for the Friends of Hazlehead.

A similar project is underway working with the Public Park Improvement Group in Dunfermline. Further parks projects are under discussion in Cumbernauld and Dumfries.

The second element of greenspace scotland's climate change work is to examine how green elements can be retrofitted into existing streets, town centres and other 'greyspace' to assist in climate change action. In Glasgow greenspace scotland is working with the City Council and local partners to propose green infrastructure options for five key centres that place climate change actions (water management, shade/shelter, carbon capture etc.) within a wider urban design perspective. The aim is to create better places to live, work and visit which are also more resilient to the predicted changes in Glasgow's climate and which contribute to the city's overall climate change targets. Proposed options for Glasgow include:

- a range of retrofit green infrastructure interventions, including rain gardens, street trees and green roofs designed to be accommodated into the existing streetscapes;
- options for both temporary and permanent elements of green infrastructure with a planned transition from temporary to permanent

Details of these programmes and our other climate change work can be found on the greenspace scotland website:

<http://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/greenspace-and-climate-change.aspx>

We are still looking for additional partners to work on parks, town centres and a new programme looking in more detail at residential areas. Ultimately we will look to draw the experience, learning and case studies from these urban greening pioneer projects to develop further climate change e-resources and national guidance.



#### Contact

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#### References

[1] Greenspace scotland 5 Alpha Centre, University of Stirling, Stirling FK9 4NF is an independent charitable company. We work with a wide range of national and local partners to improve the quality of life of people living and working in urban Scotland through the planning, development and sustainable management of greenspaces. Our activities include: developing and sharing practice, research and knowledge management, policy and funding advocacy, partnership development and support. We also provide bespoke consultancy, training and support to national, regional and local organisations

[2] Green Infrastructure Design and Placemaking, Scottish Government 2011 <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/362219/0122541.pdf>

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## Accessible bluespace on your doorstep: the Canal & River Trust

Chris Barnett, Economic Development Officer, Canal & River Trust



**British Waterways is no more. In July 2012 a new charity, the Canal & River Trust was born. Its aims are not only to continue to maintain the 200 year old infrastructure but to tap in to people's enthusiasm to become more involved in the running of England and Wales inland waterways...**

### Background

The Canal & River Trust is responsible for 2,000 miles of waterways, the UK's third largest collection of listed buildings and structures, 63 Sites of Special Scientific Interest and over 1,000 wildlife conservation sites. Half the UK population lives within 5 miles of a canal or river and nowadays more people are using them than at any other time in history. The very nature of these waterways means they run through towns, cities and countryside, and are becoming more accessible as new ways are explored to involve local people in their care and development.

The organisational change primarily came about through financial necessity, with the current funding squeeze threatening British Waterways' level of government grant and the Treasury eyeing its significant property portfolio as ripe for a state sell off. More radical though, is the change to give greater 'power to the people'. By involving them in helping with maintenance tasks, lock-keeping duties, acting as rangers, carrying out wildlife surveys and so on, they've become key players – and feel a greater commitment to the cause. In turn it's hoped that along with many others, they'll be willing to help fund the waterways upkeep through regular donations.

The whole idea is to foster an environment where local people, enthusiasts, businesses and public authorities buy in to the benefits of working in partnership with the Trust and feel an empathy with its role, rather than being just takers of the services that waterways can offer. It's hoped that sceptics will participate rather than criticise from afar. Partnerships are genuinely encouraged – in fact they're written in to the new constitution. Each of the eleven waterway areas has a

regional partnership drawn from the local community; an All Wales partnership considers Welsh waterways issues; and another exists for museums and attractions. Each works closely with local management teams, playing an important role in promoting use and ownership of its local waterways.

### First year's progress

Some highlights since July 2012:

- Nearly £1million of voluntary donations helped to fund community projects, wildlife habitats and waterway heritage.
- Volunteers contributed 203,000 hours (29,000 days). Work ranged from environmental research to helping to keep canals open; helping children discover waterway heritage to clearing up towpaths.
- 17 corporate partners pledged support, including Marks & Spencer, Google and People's Postcode Lottery.
- Nearly £6million partnership funding was secured to improve wildlife habitats, towpath access and repairs to historic structures.



### Have the changes had any impact on accessible bluespace and greenspace on the doorstep?

Wider usage is a big aim not only of the Trust but also of many 'outdoor' organisations – but this can have an impact with the ever constant threats to the environment and ecology.

The Trust is challenging and encouraging their staff and volunteers to think beyond simply protecting the natural environment, towards looking at what can be done to improve it and keep the waterways special. Since July 2012 over 400 improvements have been delivered and recorded including:

- Improved quality at six Sites of Special Scientific Interest.
- 4km of hedgerow improved, 2,000 new trees planted and 3,700m of new soft bank protection installed.
- Landscape improvements or reduced litter and fly-tipping at 59 sites.

### Walking along canals

The Trust believes that taking a walk along a canal is something that should be enjoyed by as many people as possible and should be actively promoted for the known health and wellbeing benefits that this brings. At the same time walkers may develop or continue their interest in the historic and natural sights that exist.

While not all routes are suitable for people with disabilities, towpaths are often flatter and more accessible than other footpaths. For people with disabilities looking to enjoy the waterway network, the problem is often finding out in advance whether a route will be suitable. Many local councils provide information about accessible walks in their areas and the website [www.walkwithwheelchairs.com](http://www.walkwithwheelchairs.com) goes a stage further by consolidating a lot of this information. The site currently features an accessible walk near Devizes along the Kennet & Avon Canal. The new charity also provides an audio trail for the blind and visually impaired at Hatton Locks up in the Midlands.

Together with Transport for London, the Canal & River Trust is improving a mile-long stretch of towpath in Islington, the busiest section of the 2,000 mile network. Used by up to 500 cyclists and 300 pedestrians during the morning peak period, the towpath has been

improved to make it easier for the hundreds of walkers, cyclists, joggers and boaters, who use it every day to share the space.

### The future

Statements in the 'Looking Ahead' section in the recently published Trustees' Report & Accounts give a clear indication of intentions;

"Whilst we are developing our priorities through this early period in our existence they are likely to include plans to:

- further improve the overall condition of the waterways and towpaths ensuring they are safe and accessible for as many people as possible
- encourage as many people as possible from a wide range of backgrounds and interests to enjoy the waterways
- safeguard our precious heritage and environment for future generations
- The Trust is committed to making the beauty of the waterways' natural and historic environment relevant and accessible to millions of people."

This can give countryside users great comfort that waterways as a haven for recreational use is assured for some time to come.

[www.canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk)



## Improving access to the waterways

Chris Barnett, Economic Development Officer, Canal & River Trust



Improving access to the waterways has always been a key objective and this will certainly continue: as the Trusts' new strapline puts it "keeping people, nature & history connected" there is a clear intention to actively promote people's interaction with waterways and the countryside, and people's desire to work with, live near and explore all that waterways have to offer. The motivation and momentum is there. Partnerships Chairs spoke of plans for their area:

"A top priority project for the Waterway is the transformation of the canal corridor right through the heart of the City of Manchester, linking Castlefield with Piccadilly Basin. Securing the first £15,000 has enabled us to make a start on this, working closely with Manchester City Council and Cityco." – Walter Menzies, Manchester & Pennine

"Through our partnership we are working with the Mirfield Community Partnership and volunteers to make river and canal banks safer, tidier and more accessible. This exciting project will create a new four-mile walking and cycling route from Cooper Bridge, Huddersfield to Calder Bridge, Ravensthorpe." – Mark Penny, North East

"We've worked closely with The Wildlife Trust to embed our priorities in their Nature Improvement Area bid. That has meant we have become a key partner in this project and ensured waterways are a cornerstone in a wider environmental improvement project." – Peter Mathews CMG, West Midlands

Further examples demonstrate the Trusts' active commitment:

In Birmingham two projects are helping to improve the city's waterways, encourage more people to take an interest in them and get involved with caring for the environment.

With funding from Natural England as part of its Access to Nature Programme the Canal & River Trust is working with Asian and black

and mixed ethnic communities in east Birmingham, helping them to develop a connection with their local canal. For years the Birmingham Heartlands Canal Ring has been undervalued and underused by those living along its length.. Few children in these communities were aware of canals or even knew there was one on their doorstep. By taking part in wildlife surveys and helping to create new habitats, their eyes are being opened to the benefits of local waterways. Schoolchildren helped monitor the wildlife at Saltley Pools in the Nechells area of the city, and erected bird boxes at the site. They learned about the history of the canal and why these green corridors are vital for the survival of many different species.

Working together with The Wildlife Trust, Canal & River Trust is also transforming Birmingham Canal Main Line into a green oasis in the heart of the city. During this three-year long project they are planting nectar rich plants, herbs and fruit trees to improve foraging for the variety of species that live along the 17km of canals in Dudley and Birmingham. A designated stretch of the canal bank will be softened with coir rolls making it easier for endangered mammals such as water voles to burrow into and native plants will help encourage Dragonflies and Damselflies into the heart of the city. There will be scrub management for rare and fragmented heath and woodland management to create a more diverse environment.

Neil Wyatt, Birmingham & Black Country Wildlife Trust & West Midlands Waterways Partnership member said; "This project will help create a much wider corridor for species that live along the canal network and encourage more people to explore this 'hidden' wildlife. Improving the waterside environment will bring a lasting change to the area, creating better access to our wonderful natural environment for people of all backgrounds, which many of us often take for granted."

Making canals accessible to all is a priority for Glandŵr Cymru – the Canal & River Trust in Wales. Together with partners they are upgrading the condition of towpaths to encourage more people to visit and enjoy the waterway. £204,000 was invested on the Montgomery Canal by Powys County Council and the Welsh Government to complete 2.5 km of towpath between Berriew and Brithdir. In March 2013 a further £200,000 was secured to complete the 2.7km 'missing link' between Newtown and Welshpool. On the Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal, 6km of towpath between Llangattock and Llangynidr also stands to benefit from £105,000 of investment from the Welsh Government's "Safer routes in the community" programme.

[www.canalrivertrust.org.uk](http://www.canalrivertrust.org.uk)

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## CRN Conference 2014 - Participate Outdoors - Book Now!

**PARTICIPATE OUTDOORS: strategies and actions to motivate people to participate and engage in outdoor sport and recreation**

**12 March 2014, 09:30 – 16:00**  
**Foss House, York**

Pre-conference  
 Tour of Dalby  
 Forest  
 11 March,  
 14:00-17:00  
 (optional)

This conference will examine the changing trends in participation in outdoor recreation and sport and will discuss why and how to deliver increased opportunities for participation. Whether rural or urban, local or remote, outdoor recreation can bring many social, environmental and economic benefits. This event will help you to learn what motivates people to participate and the way in which participation trends are being shaped and changing. This conference will help all those involved in providing opportunities for outdoor recreation to drive up participation figures and to maximise the associated benefits.

Delegates will:

1. Gain a better understanding of why it is important to engage people in outdoor sport and recreation.
2. Hear about the current trends in participation and what motivates people to engage in outdoor recreation and sport
3. Learn of successful approaches that can be used to enable and facilitate participation
4. Explore how increased participation can be provided for and managed in a sustainable way.



Pre-conference tour

For delegates traveling to York the day before the conference, join us for an afternoon tour of the award winning Dalby Forest Visitor Centre and world class mountain bike trails. We will look at the facilities and services and how this development has helped to grow the local tourism economy. Tour will start at 2pm and conclude at 5pm. Dalby Forest is approximately 50 minutes drive from York.

## Programme

09:30	Registration and coffee
10:00	Welcome from Chairman of CRN
10:10	Keynote – Current trends in participation and motivational forces Simon Bell, OpenSpace Research Centre
10:45	Keynote – Understanding your audiences – segmentation. Simon Christmas, Independent Consultant
11:20	Break
11:30	'WHO' workshops (choice of 4) – a look at audiences and society segments to gain an understanding and sharing experiences of enabling people to gain access to the outdoors – what more can be done: 1. Female participation in outdoor recreation, Ursula Fearson, Mountaineering Ireland 2. Youth, Catherine Miles, Snowdonia-Active 3. Local communities, Claire Overend, Outdoor Recreation NI 4. BME, TBC
12:30	Time to view what other workshops have considered
12:45	Lunch and networking
13:45	Keynote – Britain on Foot campaign Andrew Denton, Outdoor Industries Association
14:20	'HOW' workshops (choice of 4) – what actions can be taken to enable people to participate in outdoor recreation and sport? 1. Information and use of technology, TBC 2. Welcome spaces – the provision of facilities, Alan Eves, Forestry Commission England 3. Empowering people to take action, Zoe Goss, Stepping Stones 2 Nature 4. Activities and events – what works, Philip Broadbent-Yale and Rob Joules, National Trust
15:20	Time to view what other workshops have considered
15:35	Summary of the day
16:00	Close

## Booking Details

Cost:	£130.00
Discounts:	Earlybird – 10% off before 31.11.13 (use code 'early10') Executive members – 15% off (contact your CRN rep for code) Support Members – 10% off (contact your CRN rep for code)

**Book online: <http://participateoutdoors.bpt.me/>**



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