

The research centre for inclusive  
access to outdoor environments



# OPENspace Research Centre

Catharine Ward Thompson

Research Professor of Landscape Architecture

OPENspace Research Centre

Edinburgh College of Art

[www.openspace.eca.ac.uk](http://www.openspace.eca.ac.uk)

## The benefits of urban woodlands

*“You can just go away by yourself. You can just disappear and nobody can see you...you can’t do that in the city, you can’t just keep walking, walking, walking”*

*“I find it’s quiet, it gets you away from everyday life. You just go away and be in a world of your own sometimes... if you’re angry at anything, just go away and get yourself all calmed down.”*

Unemployed men and women  
Central Scotland







## Open Space and Social Inclusion: Local Woodland Use in Central Scotland



Catharine Ward Thompson, Peter Aspinall,  
Simon Bell, Catherine Findlay,  
JoAnna Wherrett and Penny Travlou



# Natureforpeople

The importance of green spaces to East Midlands communities

Report Authors:  
S. Bell,  
C. Ward Thompson,  
P. Travlou,  
N. Morris,  
C. Findlay and  
A. Montarzino.

### English Nature's viewpoint

This research reveals some valuable findings about people's relationships with nature and about the importance of a wide range of sites, not just nature reserves, which have very positive associations. The findings raise a number of issues for providers and managers of green space that need to be addressed if people's engagement with, and enjoyment of local green space is to be improved.



The social agenda is as important as the economic one, yet it has proved difficult to evaluate how the environment contributes to people's social well-being and quality of life. The aim of this study was to assess this contribution by selecting a number of green spaces across the East Midlands region and to examine the relationship that people have with them.

### What was done



Shetwood Forest. An area of ancient woodland and traditional village is a major attraction for visitors to the area. Photo: Peter Winkley/English Nature

English Nature commissioned the OPENspace Research Centre at Edinburgh College of Art/Heriot Watt University to carry out research in the East Midlands. Initially six focus groups, including members of the public and people working in nature conservation, were set up in locations across the region. The groups were used to gather background information in order to devise a questionnaire. Questions were designed to investigate the different types of green space, the activities that people do in such places, and the perceptions they have of them. The questionnaire was used at 16 sites representing a sample of accessible green space, and over 460 people were interviewed. The resulting data was examined in relation to the individual characteristics of the interviewees (gender, age, social class, ethnicity etc.) and the differing character of the sites (nature reserves, country parks, forests, town parks etc.). The research gives a valuable insight into the diverse relationships that people have with nature.

# What predicts healthy use of green spaces?

## 1. Frequency of childhood green space visits

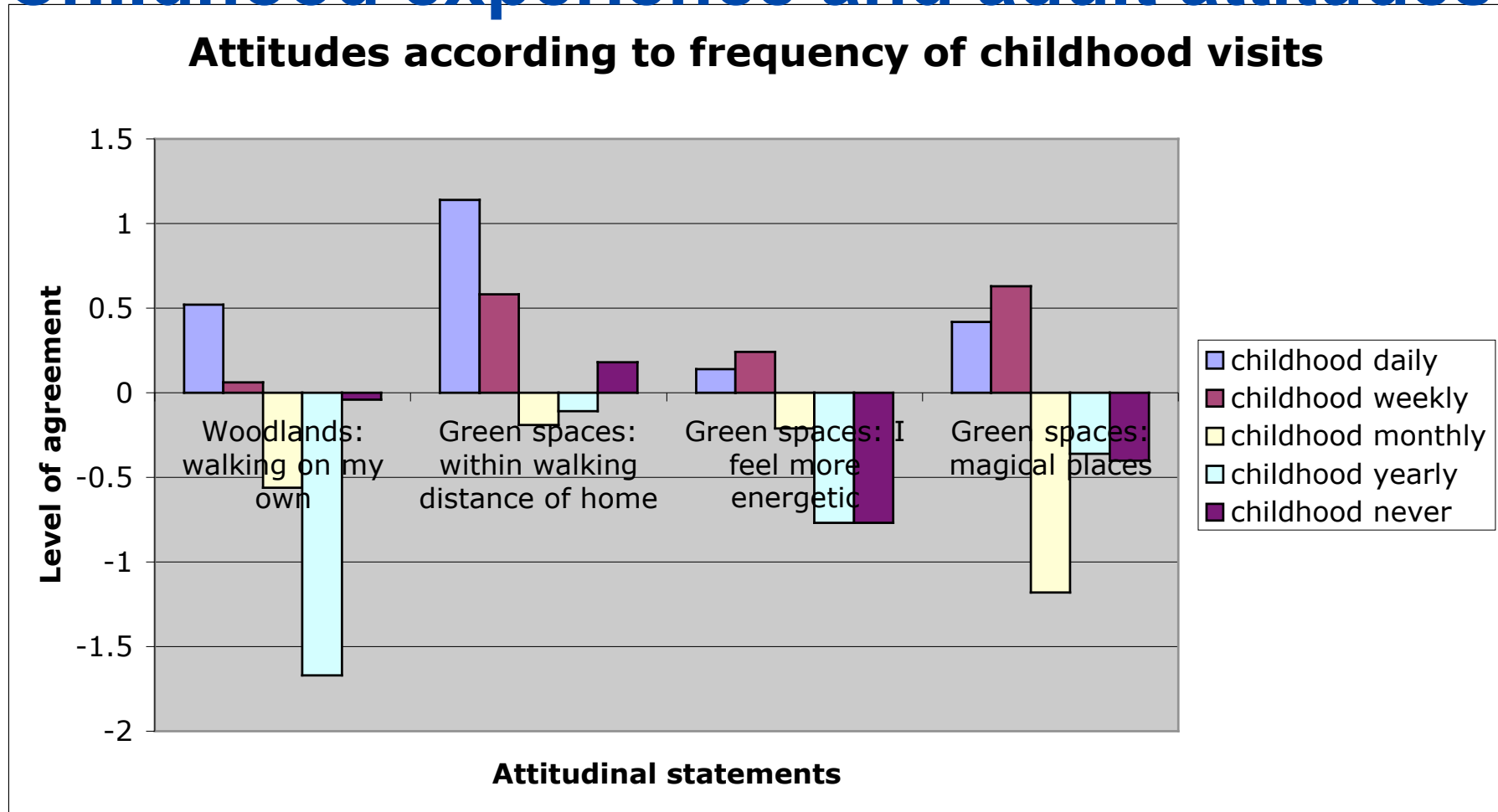
True of OPENspace research surveys in urban and rural England and in Central Scotland - people who did *not* visit green spaces frequently as children were very unlikely to visit as adults

## 2. Gender

## 3. Distance of green space from home

## 4. Whether you might visit green places alone or with family or friends

# Childhood experience and adult attitudes



Ward Thompson, Aspinall, & Montarzino (2008). The childhood factor: people's use of green places and the significance of childhood experience. *Environment and Behavior*, 40(1), 111-143



## Wild Adventure Space: its role in teenagers' lives

First published 20 May 2010

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



# Places for teenagers?



*“My brothers like to make dens with friends, up the woods”*

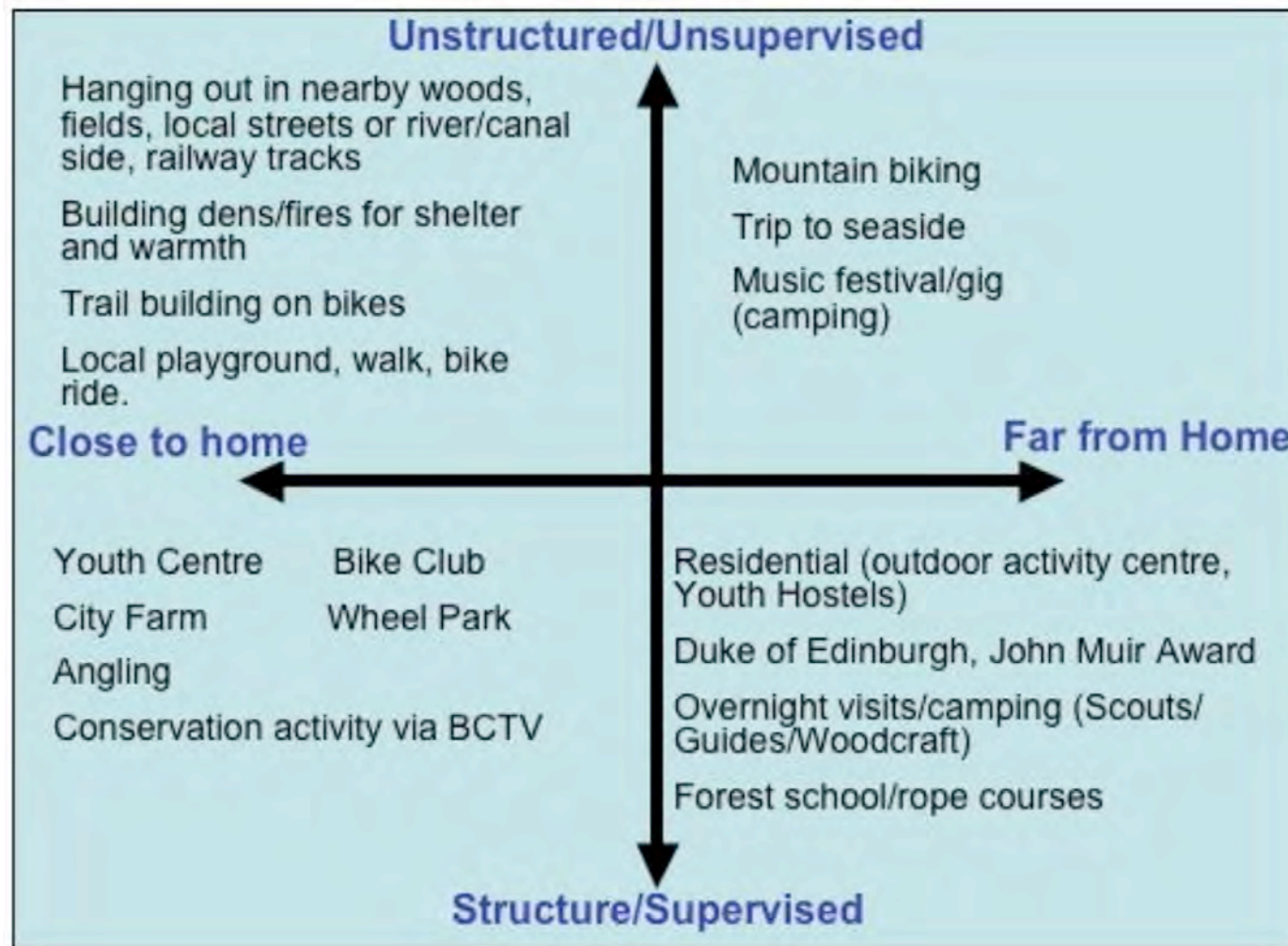


*“I like the bit up the wood, by the quarry. You can sit up at the top ...and see the whole of Edinburgh”*

Teenagers, Edinburgh suburbs



# Spectrum of opportunity for wild adventure outdoors



(adapted from HenleyCentreHeadlightVision, 2005)

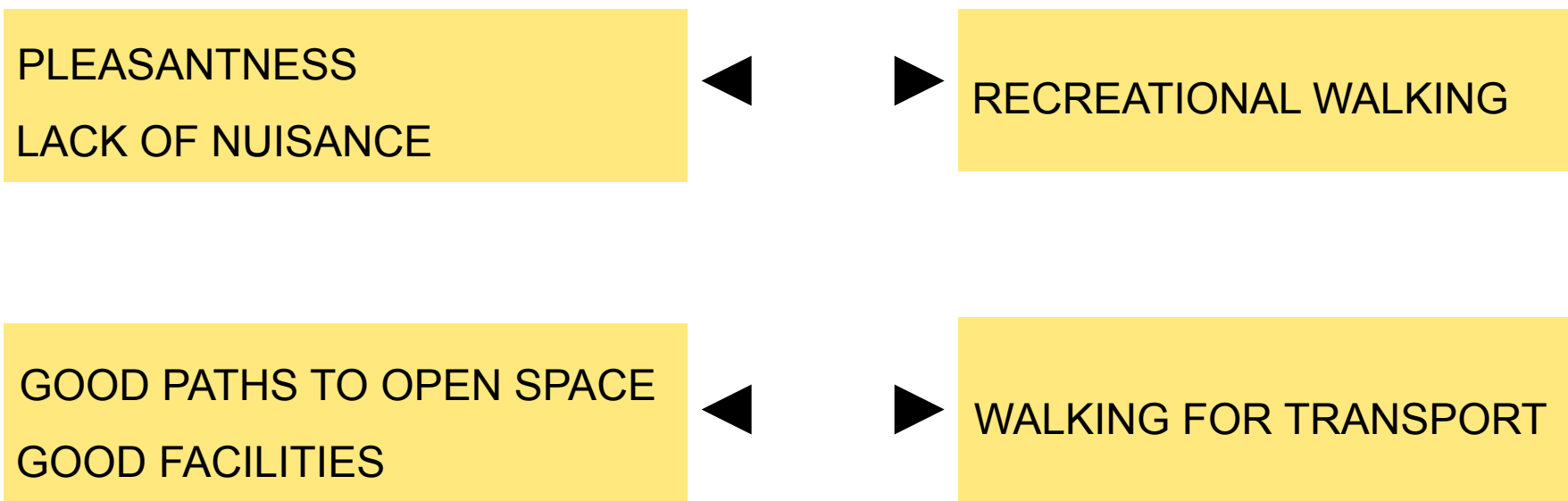


# Why do older people need to get outdoors?

In our study, older people living in an environment that makes it easy and enjoyable to go outdoors were more likely to be physically active, healthier and more satisfied with life.



# How do perceived quality and accessibility of neighbourhood open spaces affect patterns of activity?



A more pleasant neighbourhood open space is associated with a 40% increase in the likelihood of achieving more than 1 hour of recreational walking per week

# Does where you live make a difference?



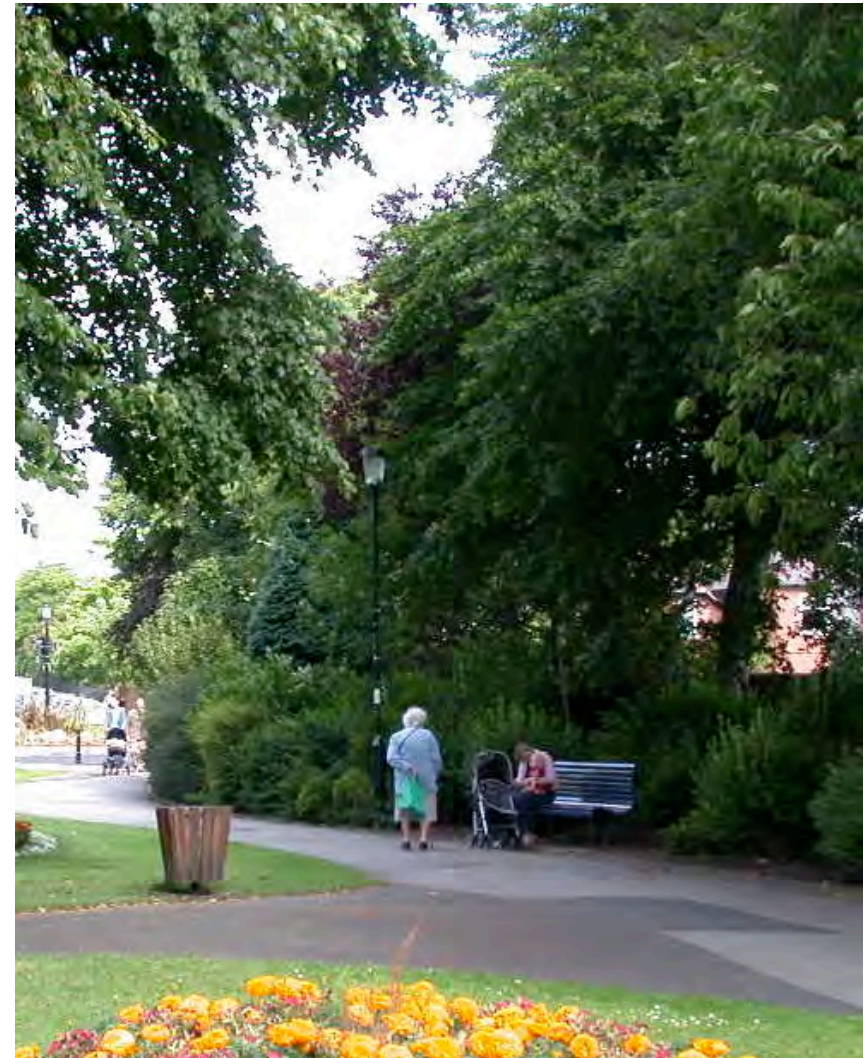
## Do you live within 10 minutes' walk of a local open space?

Participants who live within 10 minutes' walk of a local open space were twice as likely to achieve the recommended levels of healthy walking (2.5 hours/week) compared with those whose local open space is further away.

(OR = 0.46, 95% CI= 0.24–0.88)

Participants living within 10 minutes' walk of a local open space were more than twice as likely to be satisfied with life compared with those whose local open space is further away.

(OR = 2.17, 95% CI= 1.16-4.06)





# Scenario modelling to compare preferences for different options



## 1. Trees versus traffic

Participants would rather have an open space with few trees (both along paths and in the park) but **light traffic** than one with heavy traffic and lots of trees.

## 2. Trees versus facilities

Participants would tolerate lack of facilities (such as café and/or toilets) in order to have **tree-lined paths and dense trees and plants** in their local open spaces.

## 3. Aesthetically pleasing versus well-maintained open spaces

Participants would tolerate a poorly maintained open space in order to have an **aesthetically pleasing** one (i.e., **dense trees/plants, water features, wildlife**).

# CABE Space: Research questions

- How is the quality of urban green space important and significant to the health and well-being of different ethnic communities living in six deprived urban areas of England?
- What is the impact of varying quality of urban green space on health and well-being in these areas?
- What are the implications of these findings for national and local policy?

## Research summary

Community green: using local spaces to tackle inequality and improve health



# CABE: Identification of case study areas

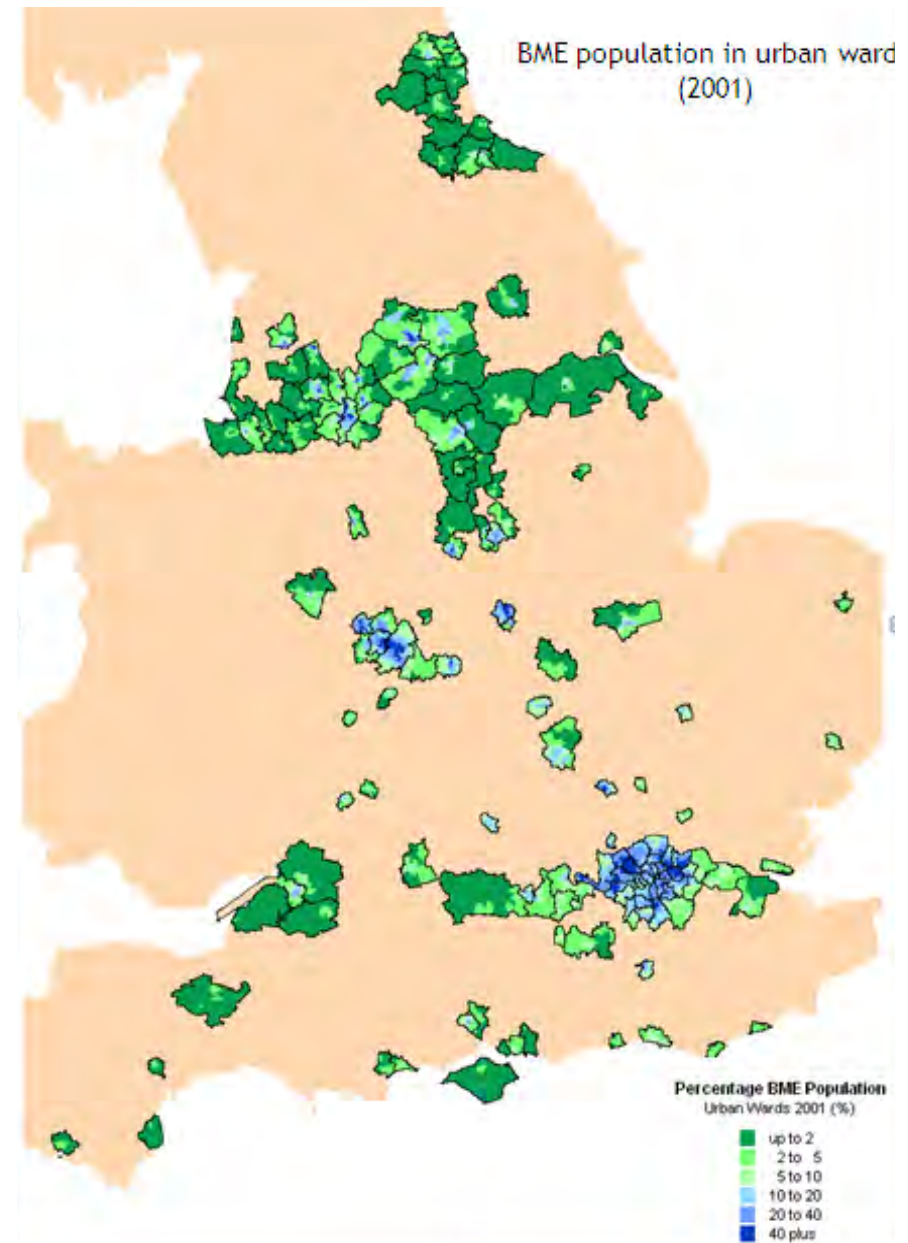
High levels of deprivation  
(IMD)

High percentages of black and  
minority ethnic populations

With same percentages of  
urban green space but varying  
quality

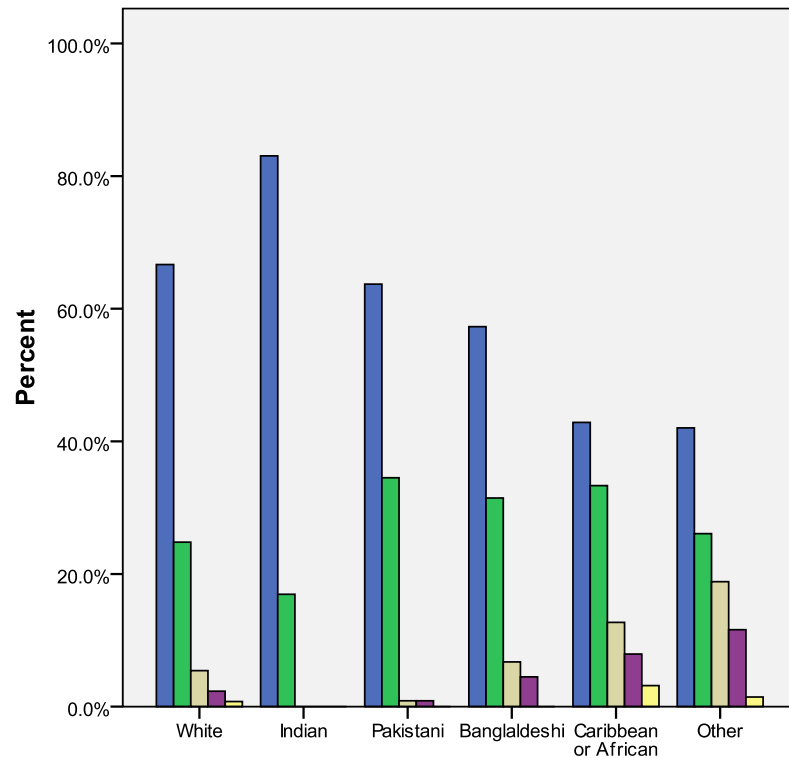
6 'paired' case study areas

- Greater Manchester A & B
- West Midlands A & B
- London A and B

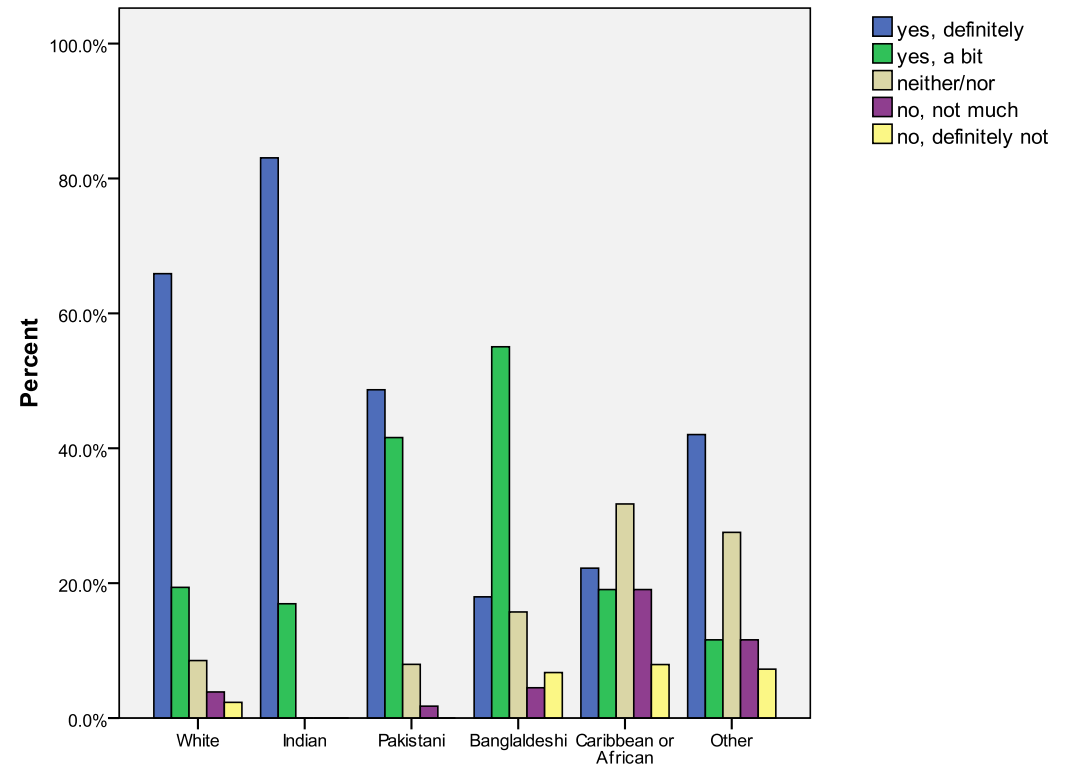




# Perceived value of urban green space for physical and mental health



Q30. If your local green space was more pleasant and you began to use it more, do you think you'd feel better about: your physical health



Q30. If your local green space was more pleasant and you began to use it more, do you think you'd feel better about: your mental health

‘Community Green’ for CABE Space: Across all groups, 60% thought better quality green space could improve their physical health and 45% perceived it could improve mental health.

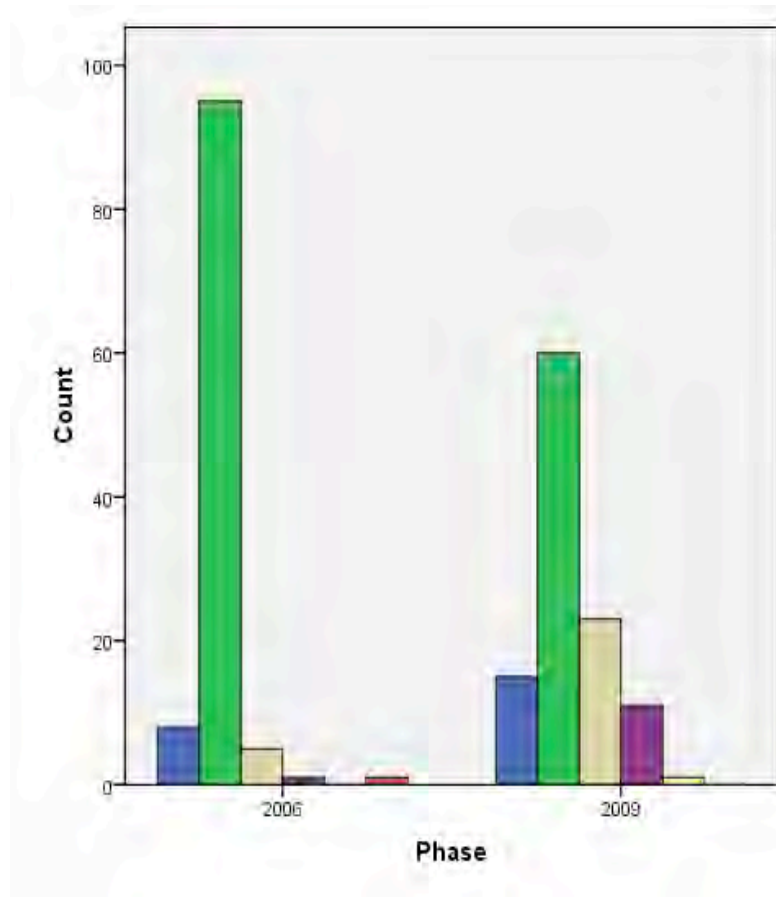


**Longitudinal study to evaluate  
Woods In and Around Towns (WIAT)  
programme  
a Glasgow case study**

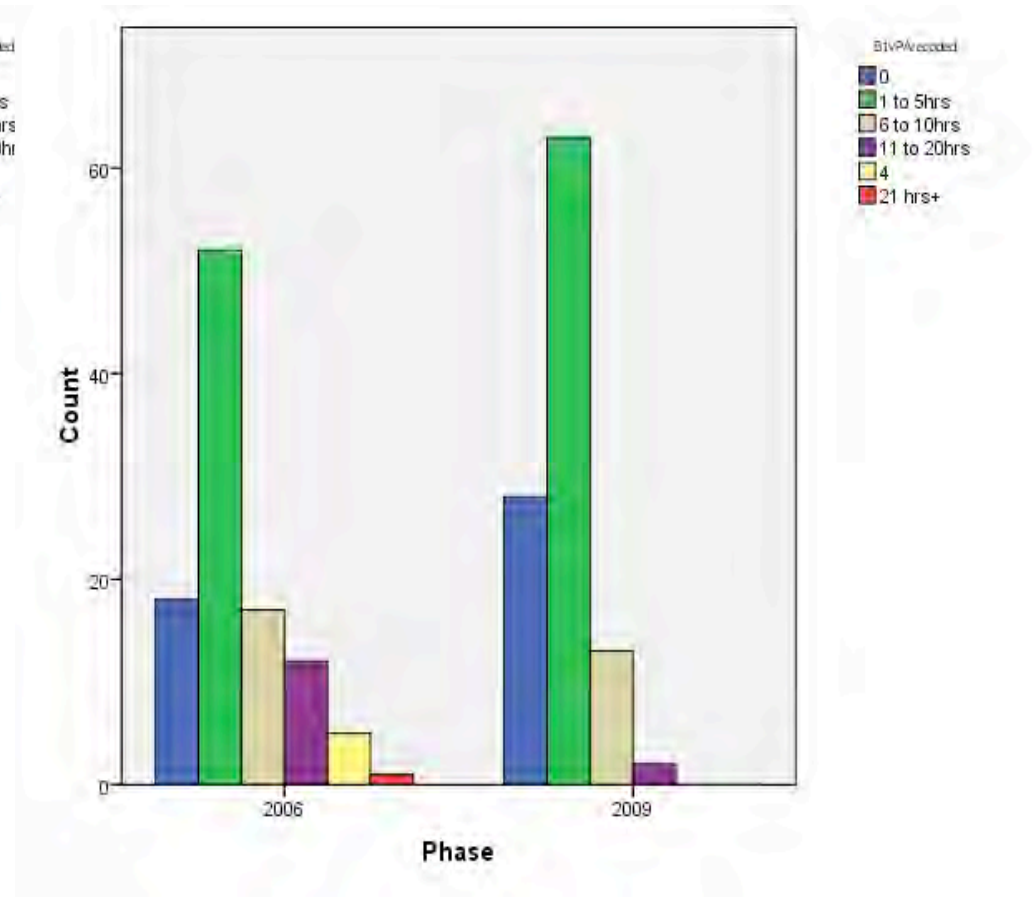
Catharine Ward Thompson, Peter  
Aspinall, Jenny Roe

OPENspace Research Centre, Edinburgh  
College of Art

# Changes in physical activity over time



**Drumchapel**

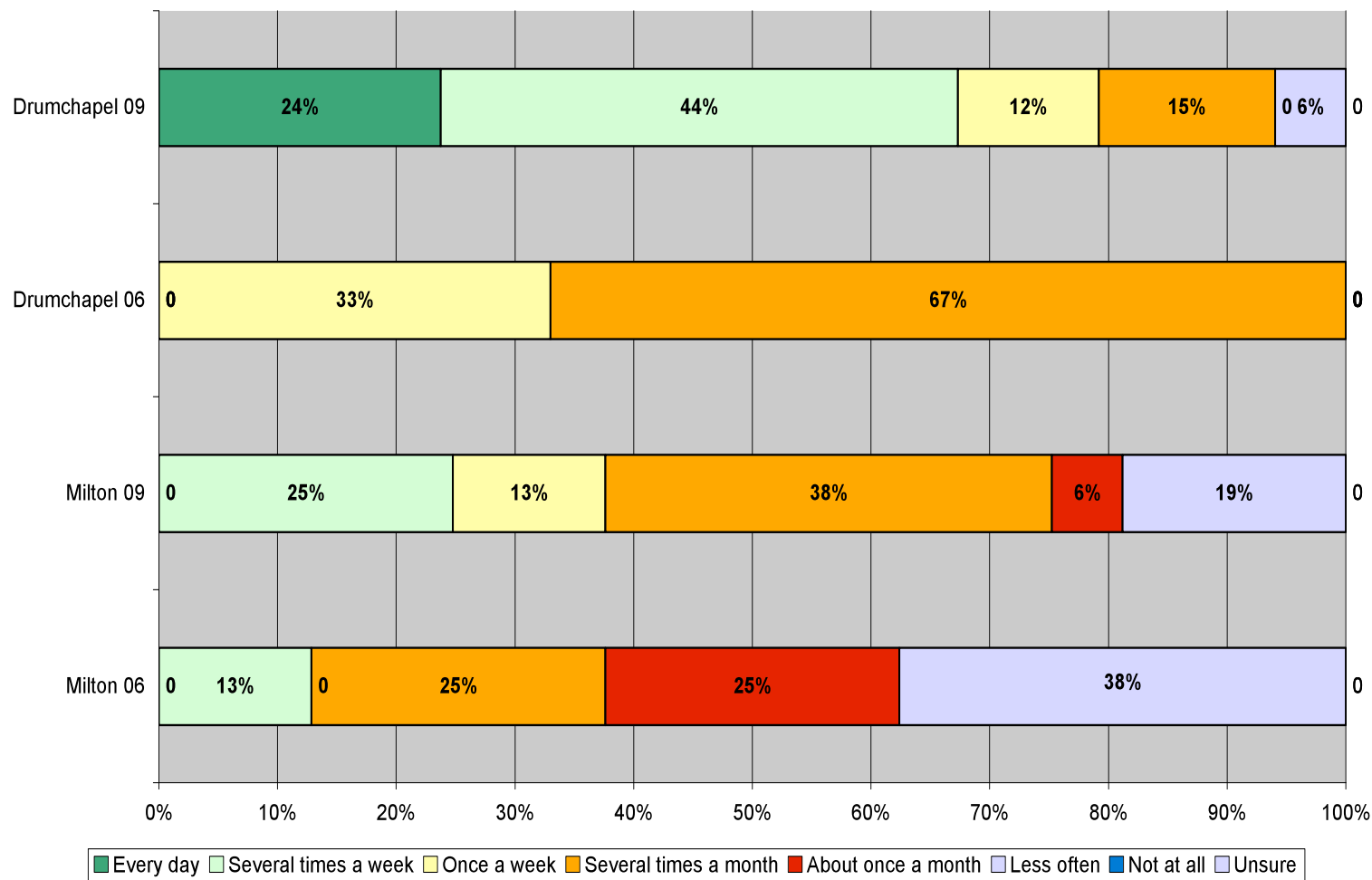


**Milton**



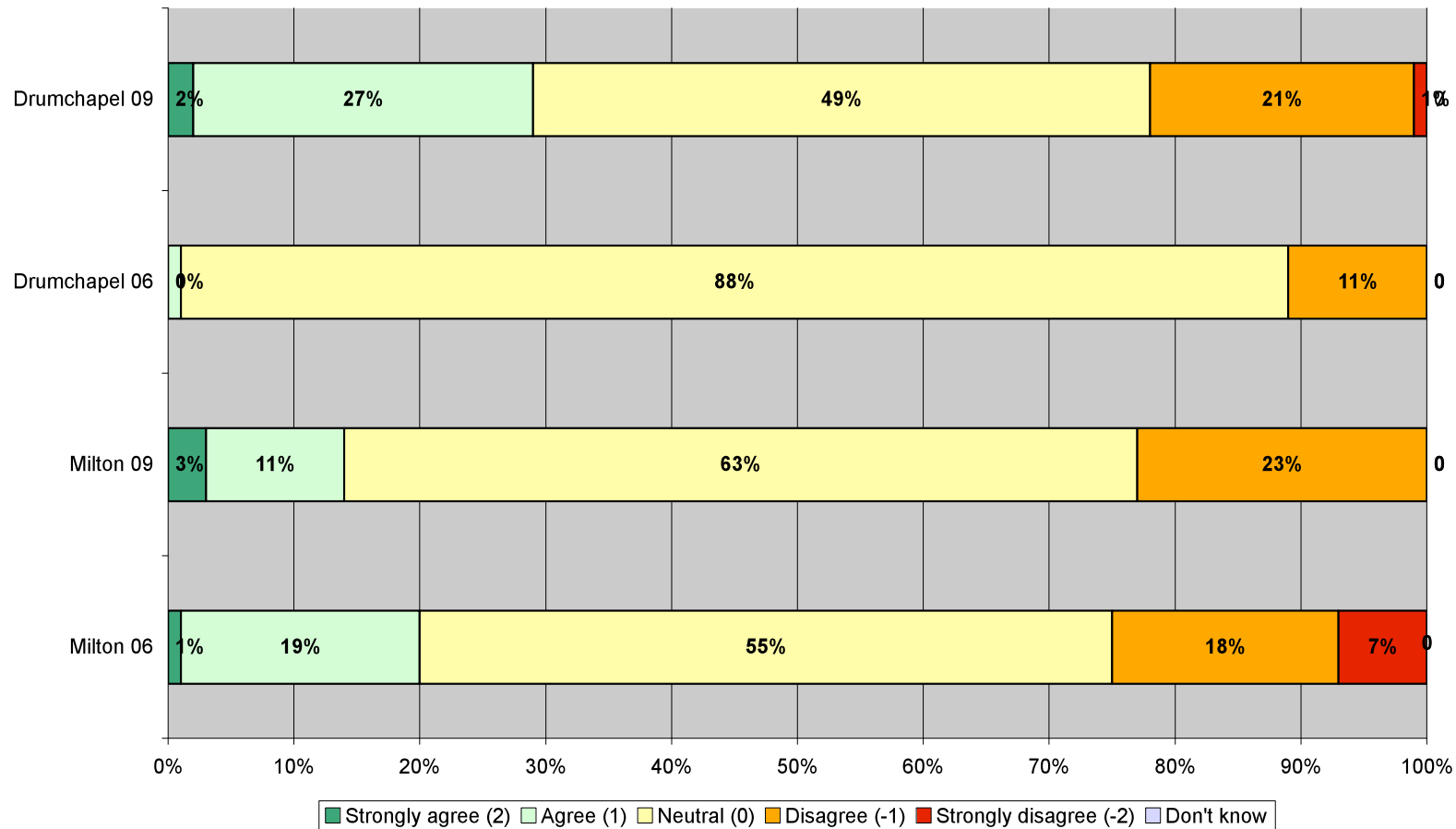
# Changes in visits to local woodlands over time – summer visits

E5 - Frequency of visiting the woodlands between Apr-Sept



# Changes in attitudes to healthy activities in woodland

D6 - I can pursue healthy activities in the woodlands



"The Peak District National Park Ranger Service is pleased to have been involved in the development and testing of the Site Finder toolkit. It is an invaluable aid to all countryside site managers which not only gives the incredible gift of being able to see yourselves as others see you – but shows you how to act upon it!"

Sean Prendergast, Head of Access and Recreation,  
Peak District National Park, England

The Site Finder Toolkit is based on studies of countryside recreation sites across Britain. The Forestry Commission supported research to identify the real wayfinding issues for visitors. Site managers and visitors were interviewed, aspects of the visitor wayfinding experience were role-played and visitor behaviour was observed. Four main issues were identified as likely problem areas:

1. Inconsistency in names and labels used for the site
2. Lack of advance warning or reassurance at key road junctions
3. Potential visitors missing the site entrance
4. Confusion once on the site

The Site Finder Toolkit provides resources to deal with these four key areas.

This toolkit focuses on visual access to facilities at the site arrival area. Some visitors will have sensory or mobility impairment and you may need to consider a separate, accessibility audit of your site in order to help in complying with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005.

Copyright ©2007



by  
Katherine Southwell  
Catherine Ward Thompson  
Catherine Findlay

Published by OPENspace research  
centre, Edinburgh College of Art

Copywriting and Project Management by  
Cygnus Extra Ltd

Design and Production by Filix Ltd

in association with



Forestry Commission

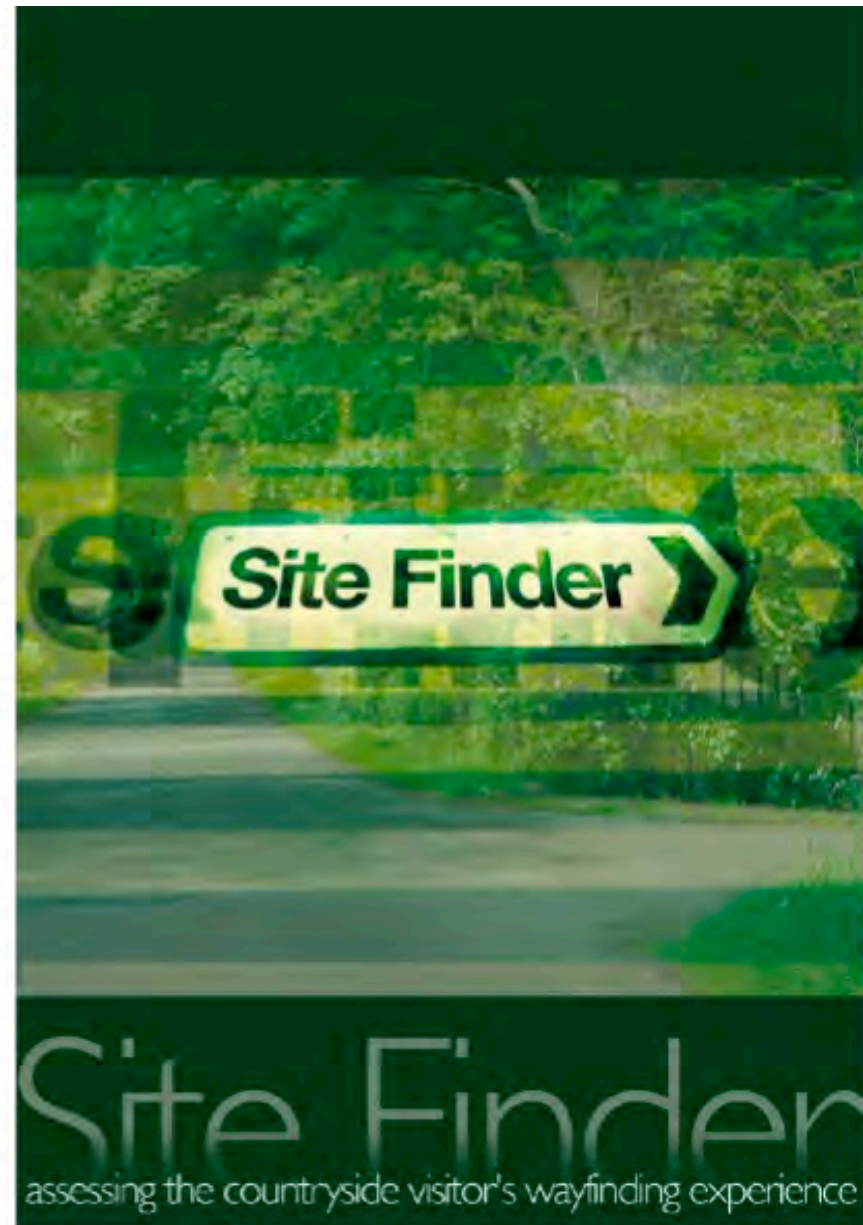
The Forestry Commission is the government  
department responsible for the protection and  
expansion of Britain's forests and woodlands.

© 2007  
OPENspace research centre  
Edinburgh College of Art  
Lauriston Place  
Edinburgh EH3 9DF, UK

tel: +44 131 221 6177  
fax: +44 131 221 6157

E-mail: [OPENspace@eca.ac.uk](mailto:OPENspace@eca.ac.uk)  
<http://www.openspace.eca.ac.uk>

Site Finder assessing the countryside visitor's wayfinding experience





# Four Problem categories



## 1. Pre-arrival information

What do I want to do and where do I go? - **Information Consistency**

## 2. Approach routes

How do I get there? - **Route Connectivity**

## 3. Finding the site entrance

Is this the right place? - **Entrance Reassurance**

## 4. Arrival on site

Where are the toilets/bike trails, etc? - **Arrival Legibility**



## Site Finder

[←BACK](#)[HOME](#)[INFO!](#)[HELP?](#)[NEXT→](#)

Welcome to Site Finder. This wayfinding toolkit has been designed to help you assess how easy it is for visitors to find their way to your countryside recreation site and investigate the nature of any problems.

Work through the whole toolkit for a comprehensive picture, or focus on a particular area of concern. You will find that you need to use the relevant Survey Tools before working with the Analysis Tools.

### Survey Tools

Information Survey

Visitor Questionnaire

Sign Survey

### Analysis Tools

Information Match

Journey Experience

Entrance Assessment

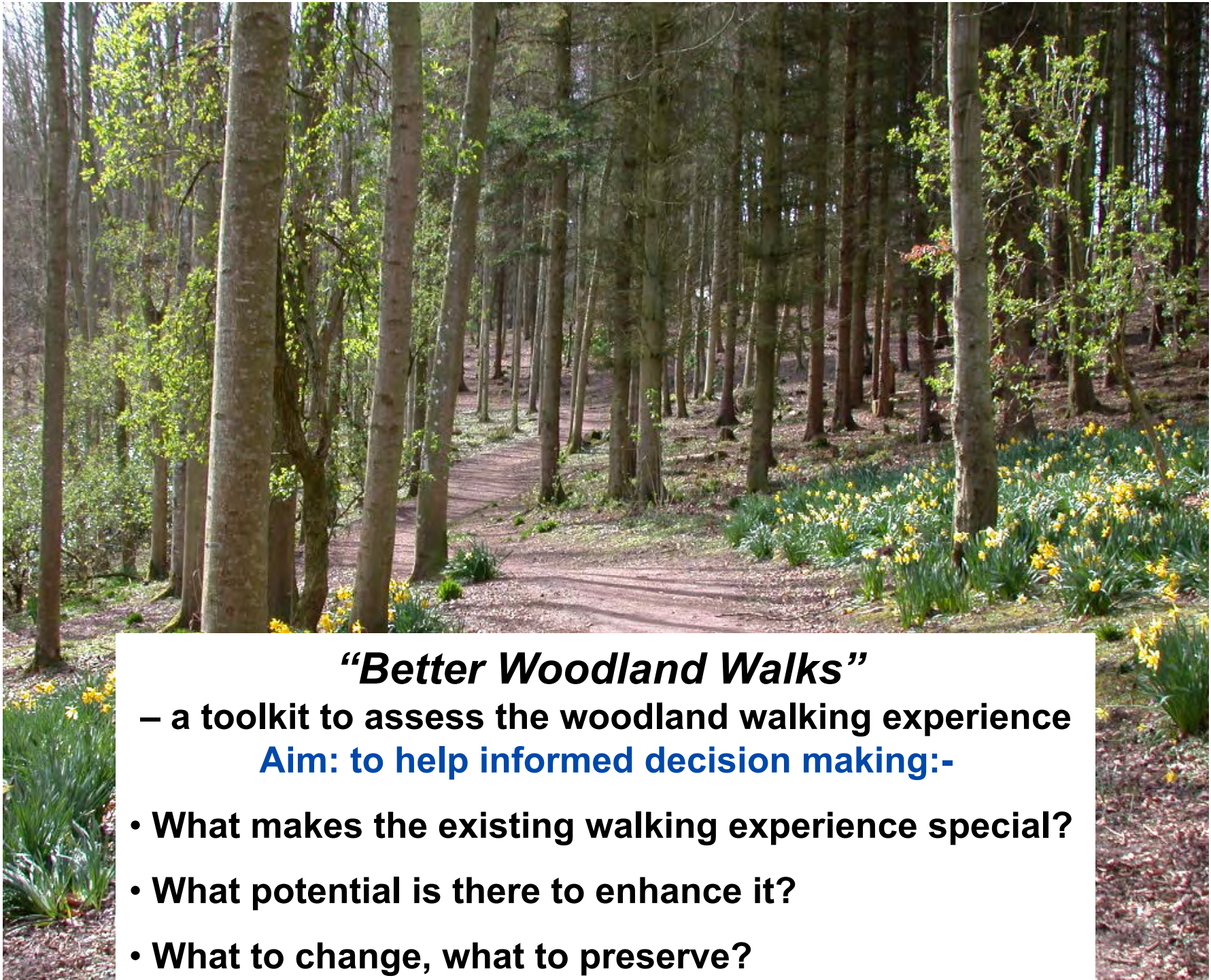
Arrival Area

Countryside facilities should be accessible and easy to find, even for people who have never visited a site like yours before.

The Site Finder Toolkit can make it easier for everyone to find and enjoy your site.

**Getting Started** →





## ***“Better Woodland Walks”***

**– a toolkit to assess the woodland walking experience**

**Aim: to help informed decision making:-**

- **What makes the existing walking experience special?**
- **What potential is there to enhance it?**
- **What to change, what to preserve?**



## Tool 3





## Entrance Assessment

– Are the entry points encouraging people to come in? - Are they effective 'gateways' to the woods?

### Task 3-1 CHECKLIST FOR 'GATEWAY EFFECT' (see attached one-page tick box sheet)

- Use tick box sheet (provided overleaf) to help you assess the effectiveness of your entrances.
- Some examples of entrances are shown below to highlight the benefits of an entrance with good 'gateway' effect.

### SOME EXAMPLES OF: a) strong gateway effect

			
Threshold experience	Inviting and reassuring	Sense of arrival	Entrance announcement - signs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a strong sense of entering the woods</li> <li>• welcoming and accessible to all</li> <li>• stands out as an entrance at the edge of woods without needing a sign to invite people in</li> <li>• highly visible, but fitting with environment</li> <li>• creates 'natural' gateway to the woods</li> <li>• leads you into the woods with ease</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• enticing – a sense of intrigue, or '<i>what's around the corner?</i>'</li> <li>• feels very safe to enter if well managed vegetation and paths at entrance</li> <li>• a clear view of the path ahead leads you in</li> <li>• no ambiguity, clear and simple visual cues (<i>'you are entering the woods, and this is definitely the way in'</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• a transitional (or 'halfway') space between the street and the woods reinforces sense of arrival</li> <li>• a place to pause and consider options, and make the decision to enter (or not)</li> <li>• careful placement of entrance sign helps draw people in for a look, and creates comfortable place to stand without being in the way of others and/or traffic</li> <li>• sign placement matters – it acts as a 'friend' in the landscape</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• entrance threshold signs can work well with trees and pathway to create a 'natural' gateway if no other form of gateway exists</li> <li>• signs must provide minimum information to maximum effect</li> <li>• clear and simple messages only - the name of this place, which entrance this is, key activities/facilities</li> <li>• the 'look and feel' of a sign must fit with its surroundings &amp; locality, but be visible</li> </ul>

## Task 6-1 Putting it all together: Action list

Item	Key issues	Recommendations / output	Action priority & cost £ £ £		
			Now	Medium term	Long term
1. Path choice	Where are your priority paths and entrances for focussing resources? What should be changed or preserved to promote and enhance the woodland walking experience?				
2. Woodland user experience	What are the key qualities that feature in people's woodland walking experience? What phrases are people using to describe the woodland experience?				
3. Entrance assessment	Is the entrance layout like a 'gateway'? Does the entrance provide a pleasant and inviting arrival point? Does the layout provide a comfortable space for people to stand and look around, read the sign? Does anything need to change – vegetation clearance? Sign position? Sign information?				
4. Wayfinding, signs and information	Is there a wayfinding problem? Do you have the right information in the right place? Do you need to add, remove, change or reposition signs – if so what to change, and where? Do you need to change published information?				
5. Whole experience – analysis and mapping	What opportunities exist for improving the user experience e.g. enjoyment of views, pleasant places to sit/rest/look. What are the current problem spots and what can be done to improve the whole experience?				

What to  
change /  
what to  
preserve?

# Findings from the Outdoor and Health Network

Researchers and policy-makers  
Led by UHI Millennium Institute



# How can we improve longitudinal data available?

Published paper:

Park, J.J., O'Brien, L., Roe, J., Ward Thompson, C.  
and Mitchell, R. (2011)

The natural outdoors and health: assessing the  
value and potential contribution of secondary public  
data sets in the UK to current and future knowledge.

*Health & Place* 17, 269-279,

doi:10.1016/j.healthplace.2010.11.005

# OHN – outcomes available

- helping answer fundamental questions about relationship between landscape & health
- piloting innovative qualitative approaches
- helping engage public in participation

**See [www.outdoorshealthnetwork.co.uk](http://www.outdoorshealthnetwork.co.uk)**

[www.openspace.eca.ac.uk](http://www.openspace.eca.ac.uk)



Innovative Research in  
Landscape and Health

Edited by Catharine Ward Thompson,  
Simon Bell & Peter J. Aspinall

