

## Wider application

Investigating local people's relationship with urban woodlands can help to inform the decisions of designers and urban foresters. This in turn can maximise public appreciation and help to target resources effectively.

## Further information

### National Urban Forestry Unit

This leaflet is one of a series produced by the National Urban Forestry Unit. NUFU provides a national focus for the exchange of information and good practice in urban forestry. If you would like further information on other case studies or their application, or if you have examples of good practice to share with others, please contact:

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### Further reading

**Burgess J (1995)** *Growing in confidence*, CCP 271, Countryside Commission, Cheltenham

**Bussey SC (1995)** *Woodlands as a community resource - the public use and perception of woods in Redditch*. In: Coles RW (ed) *Community Forestry in an urban context*. Proceedings of the Frontdoor Forestry Conference, University of Central England, Birmingham

**Gibson T (1996)** *The Power in Our Hands*, John Carpenter

**Millward AM (1999)** *Impact of woodland management at Greets Green Playing Fields*. Report to the National Urban Forestry Unit (unpublished)

**Millward AM and Mostyn BJ (1989)** *People and nature in cities: the social aspects of planning and managing natural parks in urban areas*. Urban Wildlife Now No. 2, Nature Conservancy Council, Shrewsbury

**Neighbourhood Initiatives Foundation (1995)** *Planning for Real: Community pack*. NIF, Telford

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# Urban Forestry in Practice

## Assessing local attitudes to woodland creation and management



CASE STUDY 26

# Assessing local attitudes to woodland

## Introduction

Over 80% of the users of most urban greenspace live within a 300m radius. It is important to find out how local users feel about their urban woodland. Taking their views into account can improve the quality of woodland experience and ensure that resources are spent wisely. A number of techniques can be used to sample local opinion.

## Specific examples

### Project names and locations

**GREETS GREEN PLAYING FIELDS, WEST BROMWICH** West Midlands, UK

Grid reference SO 988 917

**BESTWOOD COUNTRY PARK, NOTTINGHAM**, UK

Grid reference SK 565 472

**BIRCHWOOD BROOK PARK** Oakwood, **WARRINGTON**, Cheshire, UK

Grid reference SJ 658 910

### Project partners

#### Greets Green

- National Urban Forestry Unit
- Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council
- Hamblets Tenants & Residents Association
- Groundwork Black Country
- Wildlife Trust for Birmingham and the Black Country

#### Bestwood

- Countryside Commission (now Countryside Agency)
- Nottingham County Council

#### Birchwood Brook

- Warrington & Runcorn Development Corporation
- Ecological Parks Trust
- Nature Conservancy Council (now English Nature)

### Site descriptions

**Greets Green:** 18 ha of close mown grass. Around 4.2 ha of new woodland, 10 football pitches and a school running track were enclosed by planting between 1987 to 1991.

**Bestwood:** A remnant of Sherwood Forest, located in the urban fringe to the north of Nottingham, surrounded by housing estates and a school. The woodland was reclaimed from dereliction and neglect between 1974 and 1982.

**Birchwood Brook:** A 12 ha park of oak and birch woodland, wildflower meadows and wetlands created in the 1980s from an area of abandoned railway sidings and a drainage channel, along the edge of a new housing estate.

### Project objectives

- To survey the attitudes of users towards new woodland planting or existing mature woodland
- To assess how people use woodland
- To assess community satisfaction with the management work undertaken



Local woodland is generally popular with those who use it, and their ideas and commitment can improve it even further

## Methods

### Planning for Real (Greets Green)

Local residents expressed concern that newly planted woodland was hiding criminals and there was pressure for all the planting to be removed. In 1995, a Planning for Real exercise was used to identify planting blocks which were causing particular community concern. A simple cardboard and polystyrene model of the site enabled residents to reposition the elements of the landscape, and explain their views of the woodland.

Over a three hour period, as part of a local fun day, 53 people (young and old) visited the model and used suggestion cards to express their ideas. Flip charts were used for them to score the priority they gave to the different suggestions. As a result, it was agreed that 40% of woodland blocks needed to be thinned and only 7% removed.

Planning for Real offers particularly useful techniques for gathering local knowledge and building public involvement



### Questionnaire survey (Greets Green)

In 1999, 120 local people were interviewed, either on their doorstep or on site. The interviews took 20 person hours, and the sample was considered typical of the neighbourhood, when checked against local census data. When asked what had pleased them most about the management work, 54% mentioned the thinning out, 15% the overall improvement in how the site looked and 8% said they felt safer when using the site.

### Visits and group discussion (Bestwood Country Park)

Six single gender groups of seven people walked through the wood for approximately 1½ hours, accompanied by two rangers. In a group discussion they then shared their feelings and experiences. Although people enjoyed the woodlands, they also had fears for their personal safety and of getting lost. They also identified the need to reduce conflict by providing for different types of users such as horse riders, cyclists and motorcyclists. These findings led to the following design and management guidelines:

- Increase the presence of staff in woods (rangers and foresters)
- Publicise the positive benefits of urban woodlands to counteract unfounded fears
- Increase visibility from woodland paths
- Reduce the number of potential hiding places
- Show time and distance, as well as direction and destination on waymarking signs

### Observation study / group discussions (Birchwood Brook Park)

The observer followed a pre-determined circuit and users were recorded onto a site map, using a coding system (e.g. DW for dogwalking) according to their location, gender, age and activities. On this site observations were collected over 50 hours (but 20 would normally be sufficient) and used to map the microgeography of use. Statistical tables were drawn up of the relative popularity of activities, the proportions of users from different genders and age groups, and when the park was most and least often visited.

Whilst a number of adults believed that the absence of formal play facilities meant that the site was of little value to children, the observation study confirmed it to be a popular place for informal play by children, who made up 60% of all users.