

Case Study

Natural
environment

Bedgebury Forest

What were our objectives?

To encourage people to benefit from sporting activity in a healthy forest environment.



Project description

Active England's capital funding of £600,000 contributed to an 8km family cycle route, 15km mountain bike route, 2.5km play trail, easy access routes, a new visitor centre and toll riding for equestrian activity. Revenue funding of £100,000 enabled the project to employ a partnership development manager and outreach worker. The total project cost was £2.5million.

The project opened officially on 23rd May 2006. The Active England funding has finished and the two posts created are now funded by the Forestry Commission.

Rationale

Before its launch in spring 2006, Bedgebury Forest was 850 hectares of virtually inaccessible woodland. Bedgebury Forest borders Bedgebury National Pinetum, which is both a visitor attraction and scientifically important collection of conifers. The Pinetum covers 60 hectares with just under 50,000 visitors every year before Active England funding. The funding brought the two sites together and both sites now share a new car park, entrance, refreshments, toilets, cycle hire, showers, bike wash area, visitor centre, a classroom/ community room and friends office.

Project aims

The aim was to develop a multi-activity forest environment to encourage those who are not already taking part in sport to benefit from sporting activity in a healthy forest environment.

Project performance

Since the launch of the project there have been 248,782 visitors to the project and a throughput of around 382,742. Over 13,000 visits in 2007 and 2008 have been made via the Bedgebury Concession Scheme which is specifically for those living in a deprived area or in receipt of a disability benefit.

A recent survey suggests that cycling is top

of the list of reasons for visiting Bedgebury. The Bedgebury Forest Cycle Club (BFCC) now has 208 members, over 20 volunteers and over 300 children have accessed 'Go-Ride' courses run by the BFCC.

Good practice

Layout encourages activity

Through careful layout, the forest engages people in physical activity without them even realising they are exercising. The children's play trail is located about 500m from the visitor centre and it encourages children to explore a greater area over a longer period of time.

The undulating terrain and the fact the visitor centre lies at one of the lowest parts of the forest all contribute to an increase in people's activity. There are marked pedestrian routes and there are also 60kms of other tracks and trails where people can walk, run or cycle.

Partnership working

Partnership working has been fundamental to developing and sustaining all aspects of the facility. Several key partners have worked closely to develop programmes. The project is working with the local Sports Partnership, Tunbridge Wells County Council's sports development unit, Active Hastings, local schools, the Probation Service, the Territorial Army and local community groups to encourage people to use the site and the trails.

Inclusion

The project is focused on ensuring the site is accessible to all. Access to the forest has been improved for people with disabilities and there are a wide range of activities available to disabled users and groups. This includes archery, horse riding, cycling and electric off-road buggies. Active Hastings and Kent Outdoor Pursuits, both Active England funded projects, have used the site for activities.

The project is also actively involving local residents in design management.



To get active visit
<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/bedgebury>
For more information:
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www.sportengland.org

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