

Executive Summary

The Health Woodland Improvement Grant (Health WIG) was piloted in the West Midlands between 2003 and 2007, as a result of the developing links between forests and woodlands and the regional and national health agenda. This report evaluated six of seventeen successful projects.

The evaluation concluded that the two core objectives of the Health WIG were achieved.

Firstly, the Health WIG helped to establish a mindset by linking health and wellbeing to activity in a woodland setting. Currently, over 700 people regularly participate in roughly 50 woodland walks in the six areas of the projects evaluated. The link enabled organisations to obtain further funding, mainly from local PCT's who recognised the health achievements, and encouraged the sharing of expertise and experience.

Secondly, key green infrastructure has been created in a variety of areas ranging in their levels of deprivation, providing more open space in the long term and thereby encouraging new and existing users. Over 95% of the infrastructure the Health WIG provided is still in place.

However, some fundamental questions did arise during the course of the evaluation, in terms of the long-term sustainability of the projects due to their reliance on the voluntary sector and funding from other organisations. Furthermore, it was felt the grant could have made a greater impact in its contribution to health, by funding health walking opportunities where none existed and by expanding the remit of the grant to include other woodland based health activities.

Finally, the report lists some recommendations should the grant be re-introduced.

Fixed Capital Project

Certain projects highlighted a need for minor further funding following completion of the initial project to cover maintenance costs, for example for further pamphlet print runs or replacement of damaged infrastructure.

Private Sector Engagement

Only public bodies, as opposed to private sector landowners, submitted applications for the Health WIG. Therefore, private landowners should be specifically targeted in the future.

Post Funding Support

Various stakeholders interviewed highlighted the need for further FC engagement. Many felt the FC embodied the role more of a cash provider than a long-term partner in a project.