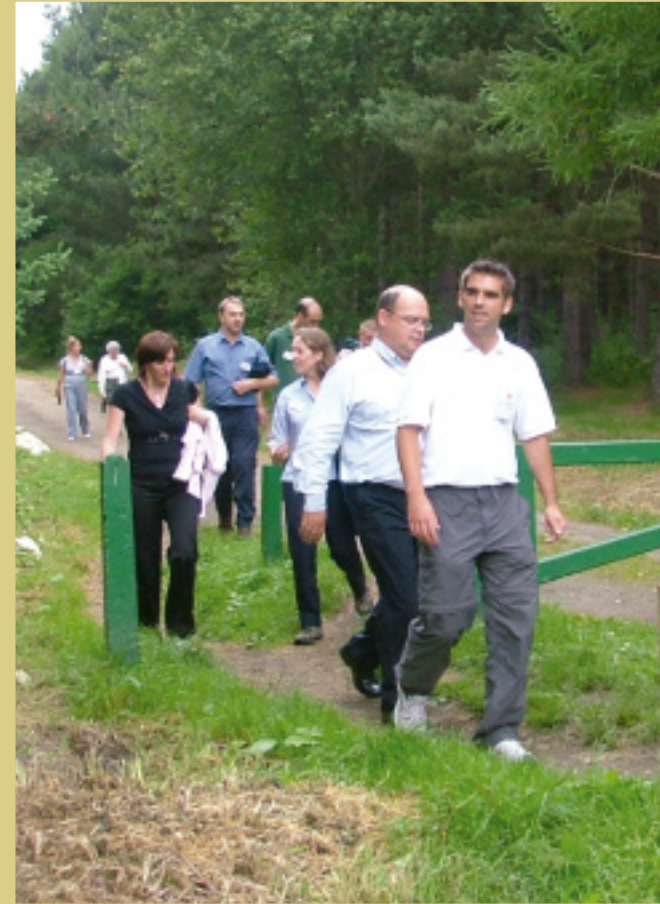


The project was evaluated by Northumbria University Primary Care Development Centre using both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods

## Key results

### GP referrals

- 33 referrals chose to participate in Chopwell Wood based activities. The completion rate for the 13-week GP referral programme was excellent at 91%.
- The majority of individuals continued to participate in Chopwell Wood activities after their programme finished.
- Proactive promotion of the project and engagement with stakeholders by the project leader contributed to 128 additional attendances at Chopwell Wood Health Project activities.
- The main impact on individuals' lives has been the improvement in physical health as a result of participating in the scheme, particularly due to weight loss.
- Social networks were developed by those involved.
- Six referral participants bought bicycles indicating a move towards a more sustainable healthy lifestyle.



## Next stage of the project

Although the project leader has now moved on, the work will continue indicating the sustainability of the Chopwell Wood Health Project. The project partners are all still involved and playing an active role in taking the work forward in the future and learning from the evaluation of the project. The fact that the project is carrying on is testament to the strong links that have been established between all the project partners and the value they place on the sustainability of the work.

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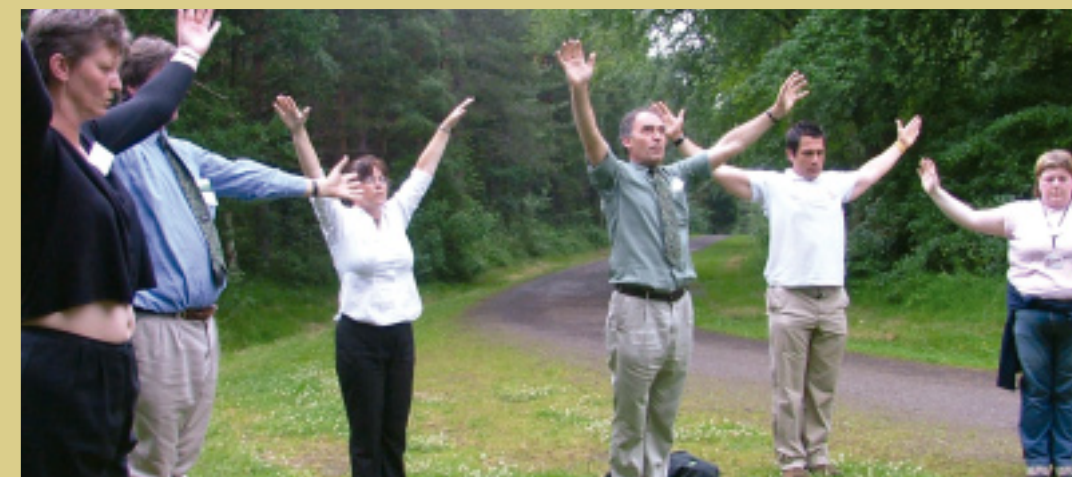
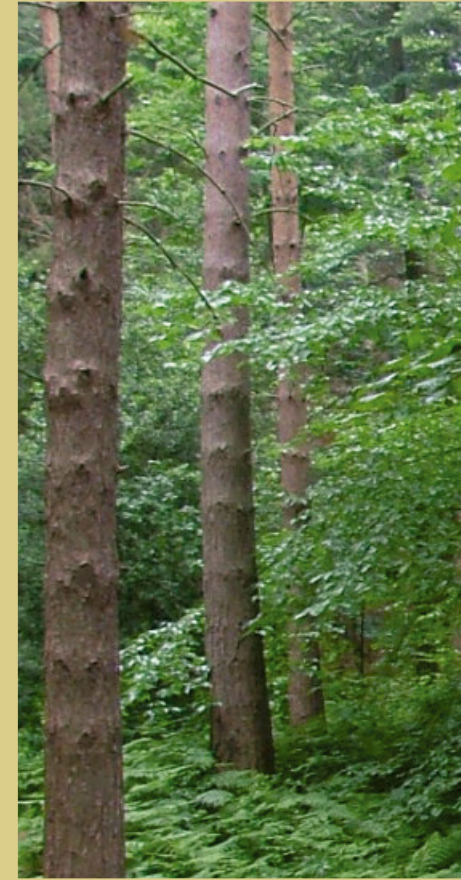
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To find out more about the project and download the evaluation report go to:  
<http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/chopwellhealth>

To view the regional leaflet for health professionals 'Health and well-being: the role of woodlands in the North East of England' go to:  
<http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/chopwellhealth>

To download the new Forest Research publication 'Trees and woodlands: nature's health service' go to:  
<http://www.forestresearch.gov.uk/fr/infid-5zbbg5>

Active Woods: Naturally Good for You is a promotional campaign to establish a link between health and well-being and woodlands in people's minds. To find out more go to the Active Woods website at:  
<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/active>



**active woods**  
 naturally good for you

# Chopwell Wood Health Project

Improving the health and well being of local communities in North East England through the use of woodland



An innovative project of school visits and General Practitioner referrals to encourage people to develop healthier lifestyles in a partnership between the Forestry Commission, Gateshead Primary Care Trust, Derwentside Primary Care Trust and the Friends of Chopwell Wood.

The project took place at Chopwell Wood a 360 hectare mixed woodland managed by the Forestry Commission for public benefit. The wood is within the western area of Gateshead bordering onto Derwentside (County Durham).

## School visits

- Over 200 young people and staff from four local primary schools participated in the programme.
- Each school had four visits to Chopwell Wood. Two visits were to undertake physical activity such as orienteering, one visit concerned issues of healthy eating and nutrition and a further visit focused on complementary therapy and stress reduction.
- After the visits there was a significant increase in the percentage of pupils regarding the wood as a healthy place.
- Parents and staff felt very strongly that the programme of visits had a positive influence on the young people including:
  - Increased awareness of nutrition and healthy lifestyles
  - Increased knowledge, awareness and appreciation of nature and the environment
  - Increased levels of physical activity
- Thirty-five per cent of children had been to Chopwell Wood before attending the school visits. This rose to forty two per cent afterwards indicating increased use by pupils and their families.
- All four schools indicated a strong desire and willingness to carry on being involved in the project.



*'I like going on adventures and to me that was a pretty good adventure' (Young pupil, Derwentside School)*

*'It's a brilliant concept' (Teacher, Derwentside School)*

*'You've got to do it for the simple reason it gets your body moving and it eases your aches and pains for a little while... and it's good fun' (GP referral patient)*



# Health in the North East

The current generation of people living in the North East has the lowest life expectancy and the highest levels of ill health in the country. Twenty-three per cent of Gateshead residents and twenty-five per cent of Derwentside residents have a long-term illness both of which are high compared to the national average of eighteen per cent.

Health promotion objectives identified by the Department of Health that can be achieved by using woodlands include:

- Tackling obesity
- Increasing physical activity
- Improving mental health and well-being
- Helping children and young people to lead healthy lives
- Promoting healthy and active life amongst older people



## Survey of woodland users

- 99% of respondents felt that visiting Chopwell Wood had a positive impact on their health and well-being.
- 60% thought that visiting had an impact on health through undertaking physical activity.
- 40% thought that visiting had an impact on their mental and/or physical health.
- 86% of respondents were regular visitors to Chopwell Wood.
- The health benefits identified were experienced by all visitors irrespective of the frequency of their visits to Chopwell Wood.



## Aim of the project

The aim of the Chopwell Wood Health Project was to improve people's health and build the evidence base in relation to woodlands and health. It was established to explore what the key contributions of woodlands might be in getting people to be more physically active. A health development worker was employed as project leader to take the work forward.

## Project activities included:

- A General Practice (GP) woodland-based activity referral scheme in partnership with Gateshead Primary Care Trust. Participants could be referred to Chopwell Wood to walk, cycle, undertake Tai Chi or conservation work.
- School visits in support of County Durham and Darlington Healthy School Standard in partnership with Derwentside Primary Care Trust. Pupils had physical activity sessions, a complementary therapy/relaxation session and a healthy eating session.
- A survey was also undertaken by the Friends of Chopwell Wood of current woodland users to understand why people use the wood and the benefits they gain from this.

## Other activities included:

**'It is the free prescription without medicine'**- leaflet produced for distribution at GP surgeries surrounding the wood.

**'Footsteps to fitness'**- leaflet produced giving people a guide to walks in Chopwell Wood and showing how many calories they might burn if they walked specific trails.

A launch event was held in the wood to publicise and promote the project.

**'Health and well-being: the role of woodlands in the North East of England'**- leaflet produced for and targeted specifically at health professionals in the North East.

A celebration event was held in the wood after the project had been running for one year. Fourteen health professionals including the Chief Executive of Gateshead Primary Care Trust attended, along with twenty nine other organisational representatives.

## Cost effectiveness

- A woodland-based physical exercise project can be highly cost effective if an existing resource, such as Chopwell Wood, is used as there is no need for capital expenditure on large-scale infrastructure.
- 51K was allocated to the project to cover the salary of the project leader and other project activities. The led walks were undertaken by the project leader. Cycling and Tai Chi were led by contractors paid per session. Cycling costs were £208 for 13 weeks (the length of a GP referral scheme) at 1 session a week and for the same time period Tai Chi was £278. This emphasises the low running costs of activities.
- The wood has the capacity to cater for a larger number of clients in need of physical activity with only minimal increases in running costs.

## Project process

- Importantly, the project partners came together to develop and design the project from the beginning. Because of this both Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) were able to focus on their priority target areas.
- The Forestry Commission (FC) provided the venue for the project to take place, financed the employment of the project leader and led regular steering group meetings held at the Forest Classroom in the wood so that all partners could contribute ideas and experience as the project developed.
- The enthusiasm of the health promotion specialists from both PCTs, who were part of the steering group, was crucial. They were well supported by senior staff within their organisations who were keen to see the PCTs establishing new links with organisations that were not their usual partners.

- The PCTs were able to contribute:

-in kind support

-funding

-advice and experience on health issues and health promotion

-links to wider health networks within the North East

- The Friends of Chopwell Wood (a voluntary organisation) added value to the project by getting actively involved. They carried out the survey in the woodland and six members trained as Physical Activity Motivators thus providing extra support to the project. They also played an important role in publicising the project to local people.

- The Chopwell Wood Project Leader played a key role in championing the project at both a strategic level with stakeholders and at an operational level with project users.

- Forest Research, the research agency of the Forestry Commission, played an important role by managing the evaluation contract with Northumbria University and by being able to set the work in a national context.

- The evaluators brought enthusiasm and commitment to the project by seeing the work as valuable to themselves, their business as well as to the project partnership. They gave regular updates on the progress of the work to keep the partners informed.

