

Haldon Forest Park Project

Fun in the forest for visitors of all abilities



Haldon Forest Park is a pioneering outdoor activity centre that provides a wide range of facilities and activities for all ages and abilities to enjoy. With more than 20 miles of newly-built trails, visitors can choose to take a leisurely stroll through the woods, experience the natural environment along the Sensory Trail, or cycle at high speed on an adrenaline-charged downhill mountain bike run. Visitors are encouraged, through regular physical activity, to progress from walking along a simple introductory trail to more challenging activities in a bid to get fit and improve their health. Haldon Forest Park is no ordinary walk in the woods.

objectives

- To create a high quality outdoor hub with an extensive network of all ability, cycling, mountain biking, walking, running and horse-riding trails and visitor facilities.
- To deliver a diverse programme of events to attract visitors from target groups: the over 45s, women and girls, the disabled, people from disadvantaged backgrounds, young people, and those leading a sedentary lifestyle.
- To develop the first UK all-ability exercise trail in partnership with specialists in outdoor adventure for disabled people the Calvert Trust.

actions

- The creation of a visitor hub.
- Installation of different trails for walking, cycling, children's play and horse riding.
- Employment of an Outreach Ranger to develop a major programme of events and activities to attract target groups.
- Consultation with representatives from target groups. The main barriers to participation were found to be access difficulty, lack of information, safety fears, and the lack of activities and facilities.
- The development of comprehensive visitor monitoring and evaluation.

achievements

- Twenty-six miles of trails including a Play Trail, Sensory Trail, Family Cycling, Adventure Cycling, Mountain Biking and 10 miles of forest tracks for horse riding.
- Creation of a den-building and free-play area, dedicated events and training area, and the provision of a specially adapted minibus for the less mobile.
- First UK 'all-ability trim trail' built and being tested.
- Installation of a large car park and facilities.
- Centre for Contemporary Art and the Natural World (CCANW) Project Space established and events programme underway.
- Since opening on Easter Sunday 2006, 85,000 people have participated in physical activity.
- Haldon offers a 'free-ride' cycle area and has hosted a number of cycling events and competitions.
- Programme of organised events from guided wildlife walks to ladies adventure bike rides, art and music events.

background

Haldon Forest lies approximately five miles south of Exeter. The majority of the 1,400ha site is designated as a SSSI (Site of Scientific Special Interest) due to its breeding birds of prey, butterflies and fragments of heathland. 457,410 people live within a 15-mile radius of the site. Forty per cent of the resident population are over 50 years old (a key Sport England target group) and 64% of this area has levels of deprivation above the national average.

One of the key drivers behind the provision of recreational opportunities in the forest is the Government's Strategy for Delivering Sport and Physical Activity (Dec 2002). The Game Plan target is for 70% of the population to be reasonably active by 2020. The sports and recreation potential of the forest network in the South West region is huge. But only a small part of this full potential has been realised – constrained largely by a lack of financial resources. Recognising the opportunity for outdoor activity in a forest environment Sport England made an initial investment in Haldon Forest. Over the next three years the Forestry Commission aim to quadruple the number of people using Haldon for physical activity to 120,000.

This investment has attracted additional revenue from other sources. The Forestry Commission is currently developing Phase 2, which will deliver an economically sustainable facility attracting additional revenue from a café and bike hire facility.

quotes

"I was particularly interested in your play trail as I am part of a small working group to improve play areas in our local village. Your play equipment seems to be exactly what we want...I haven't seen anything like it in any of the dozens of brochures that we've looked at!" A visitor.

"As a local resident I am proud to be involved in delivering the exciting new Haldon Forest Park. [It's] for everyone and we want to embrace the philosophy that 'activity is easier to do than you think.'" Ian Lynch, Project Manager, Haldon Forest Park.

partners

Calvert Trust Exmoor
Centre for Contemporary
Art and the Natural World
Devon County Council
Exeter Mountain Bike Club
Exeter Racecourse
Forestry Commission
Primary Care Trusts
Teignbridge District Council
Teignbridge, Mid Devon and Exeter
Regional Public Health Group (GOSW)

funding

Total:

£955,542

Calvert Trust Exmoor	£12,869
Charitable Trusts	£157,673
Landfill Tax Credit Scheme	£20,000
Sport England	£763,000
Teignbridge District Council	£2,000

lessons learnt

- The skill and expertise required to build sustainable single-track mountain bike trails is very different from building wider stone surfaced trails. Good advice available from International Mountain Biking Association (IMBA) but contractors need training.
- In order to offer the full 'ladder of fitness' progression more emphasis in Phase 1 should have been placed on introductory and intermediate level mountain bike trails. This will be addressed in Phase 2.
- Investing in a seven days a week ranger presence, a warm welcome and outreach work can be more effective than a large visitor building.