



To find out more about...

Chopwell Wood Health Project

Friends of Chopwell Wood.
Liz Searle Tel: 01207 542495.
Website www.jadz.demon.co.uk/focw/Health_Project.htm

Gateshead PCT's involvement

Amanda Potts, Health Promotion Lead. Tel: 0191 478 9061.
Email: a.potts@ghpct.nhs.uk

...the benefits of exercise and an active lifestyle

Dr Rob Dawson, Medical Centre, The Grove, Rowlands Gill, NE39 1PW

Derwentside PCT's and Durham schools' involvement

Kim McGarry, Health Promotion Specialist. Tel: 0191 374 4144.
Email: kim.mcgarry@durhamclspct.nhs.uk

...evaluating the project

Hilary Snowdon. Tel: 0191 215 6074.
Email: hilary.snowdon@northumbria.ac.uk

...using the North East Community Forests for promoting health

Clive Davies, Regional Director. Tel: 0191 460 6200.
Email: clive.davies@necf.org.uk

...using Forestry Commission and other woods for promoting health in the North East of England

Graham Gill, Forest Enterprise District Manager. Tel: 01434 220242.
Email: graham.gill@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
Website: www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/activewoods

...getting a National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence – North East viewpoint

Soumen Sengupta, Regional Associate Director. Tel: 0191 374 4205.
Email: soumen.sengupta@had-online.org.uk

Walking the Way to Health (WHI)

See the WHI website: www.whi.org.uk

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers' Green Gym initiative

Andy Watmough, Regional Manager. Tel: 01388 529300.
Email: a.watmough@btcv.org.uk
Website: www.btcv.org/greengym/regions/north-east.html

Green Exercise

North East regional 'green exercise' working group.
Contact: Bill Kirkup, North East Land Links Project Manager.
Tel: 0191 441 4402 Email: bill.kirkup@necf.org.uk

BTCV Green Gym Initiative

Andy Watmough, Area Manager, Tel: 01388 529300.
Email: a.watmough@btcv.org.uk
Website: www.btcv.org/greengym/regions/north-east.html



health and well-being

The role of woodlands in the North East of England

A guide for health and education professionals in the North East

The following websites have more information about woodlands and health.

www.forestresearch.gov.uk/website/forestresearch.nsf/ByUnique/INFD-5Z5ALT

www.teachernet.gov.uk/growingschools/resources/placestovisit/categories.cfm?id=4

www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/activewoods

www.countrysiderecreation.org.uk

The North East of England faces particular health challenges. Last year, the Regional Director of Public Health, Dr Bill Kirkup, said:

“The current generation in the North East has the lowest life expectancy and the highest levels of ill health in the country. We have to make it easier for individuals to eat more healthily, undertake more physical activity and give up unhealthy lifestyles”

Woodlands have a role in helping to promote physical activity and improve people's health and meet agencies' health and education targets.



Recent Government Healthy Living Initiatives

Initiative	Specific Targets and Aims
Choosing health, the 2004 Department of Health (DH) White Paper, identified six priority action areas – woodlands can help address four of them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tackling obesity, including nutrition • Increasing physical exercise • Improving mental health and well being • Reducing inequalities
In December 2004, the Chief Medical Officer for England issued ten tips for better health in 2005. Woodlands can help with four of them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tip 3 – Be physically active for at least 30 minutes, five days a week – the ‘five-a-week’ target. • Tip 4 – Maintain, or aim for, a healthy weight. • Tip 6 – Protect yourself from the sun. • Tip 10 – Manage stress levels –for example, through physical activity.
National Service Frameworks (NSFs), issued by the Department of Health, set out ways for improving health for a range of health conditions and patient groups.	Improve the health of people in the NSF groups, eg. people at risk of heart disease, cancer, diabetes, older people, children, young people and people with mental health problems.
The 2004 joint DH and Department for Education and Skills (DfES) National Healthy Schools Standard aims to improve schools’ and pupils’ health.	The Standard encourages schools to promote physical and emotional health and achieve the National Healthy Schools Standard through curriculum and other activities. Partnerships between local education authorities and NHS Primary Care Trusts support schools in these tasks.



A North East Regional Example: Chopwell Wood Pilot Health Project – What is it?

Chopwell Wood is a large Forestry Commission woodland, just to the west of Gateshead, and adjoins the communities of High Spen, Rowlands Gill and Chopwell. The woodland has a strong history of community involvement and for this reason it was chosen to host a woodlands and pilot health project. The wood is also the venue for an annual forest festival held on the second weekend in July each year. The Chopwell Wood Pilot Health Project was set up to explore the role England’s woodlands can play in the government’s health agenda by offering enjoyable health-promoting activities in an attractive environment.

The Project does this mainly through working with two projects:

Gateshead’s Exercise Referral Scheme – Gateshead’s Opportunities for Active Lifestyles (GOAL) in conjunction with the joint Gateshead Primary Care Trust (PCT); and

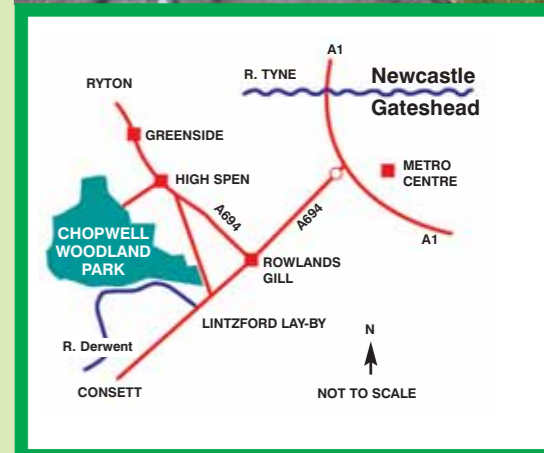
Healthy schools – with Derwentside PCT and local County Durham primary schools.

Project Officer, Nicholas Powell, works closely with health promotion staff in the two PCTs, local Gateshead GPs and Derwentside teachers. The project has recruited and trained qualified volunteer health walk leaders and Physical Activity Motivators who provide supervised activities.

These projects include partnerships with private and voluntary organisations, and offers weekly cycling and tai chi sessions, a fortnightly health walk and a range of conservation and gardening activities. All activities are open to members of the general public and to referred clients. The project has also engaged with local community and hard-to-reach groups.

Four Derwentside primary schools have participated in activities ranging from orienteering to pond dipping, with all schools participating in a “Why 5?” session delivered by Derwentside Primary Care Trust. These lessons focus upon the importance of consuming at least 5 portions of fruit and vegetables per day and are combined with messages relating to environmental and physical activity issues.

Hilary Snowdon, Primary Care Development Centre, University of Northumbria, is evaluating the project.



How woodlands can help achieve these health and education targets.

Woodlands provide opportunities for different types of activities with:

Physical health benefits - Physical activity, eg. walking, cycling or jogging. Woodlands are perfect places for meeting part of the **‘five-a-week target’**. Some woodlands have calorie-counting exercise trails, encouraging people with their weight control. Walking in woods is a great way to get and stay healthy. Research indicates that woodland plays a key role in helping people to adhere to activity programmes.

Mental health benefits - There’s good evidence that woodlands and green spaces can be ‘therapeutic landscapes’ and reduce stress levels.

Social health benefits - Woodlands can be the setting for many different social activities - walking with friends and family or in groups, having picnics, or even community tree planting. And these can improve people’s social well-being.



Such woodland activities are free for the user! Green gyms have no annual subscription fee!

What’s the evidence that woodlands can contribute to the health agenda?

Forestry Commission (2004) West Midlands Woodland and Health Pilot Project Evaluation.

‘...growing awareness amongst some health professionals that woodlands and forests make highly suitable venues for recreation and physical activity.’

Henwood, K. (2003) Environment and health: Is there a role for environmental and countryside agencies in promoting benefits to health? NHS Health Development Agency.

‘... contact with nature ... can bolster mental health especially, at least in the short term.’

Pretty, J., Griffin, M., Sellens, M. and Pretty, C. (2003) Green Exercise: Complementary Roles of Nature, Exercise and Diet in Physical and Emotional Well-being and Implications for Public Health Policy, Centre for Environment and Society Occasional Paper 1, University of Essex.

‘Green exercise is likely to have important public and environmental health consequences.’

Tabbush, P. and O’Brien, L. (2003) Health and Well-being: Trees, Woodlands and Natural Spaces. Forest Research, Farnham

‘With the ever-increasing emphasis on the relationship between healthy lifestyle, access to natural space and expenditure on curative medicine, the opportunity to develop the use of forests and woodlands as health living centres should be embraced!’

Pretty, J., Griffin, M., Peacock, J., Hine, R., Sellens, M. and South, N. (2005) A Countryside for Health and Wellbeing: The Physical and Mental Health Benefits of Green Exercise. Countryside Recreation Network.

‘Comparing green exercises, activities in woodlands led to the highest improvements in self-esteem.’

And the Government’s two 2004 documents, the White Paper, ‘Choosing Health’, and the Chief Medical Officer’s report, ‘At Least Five a Week’, both stress the need to increase young people’s and adults’ activity levels to improve health levels.