

Easy Access Discovery Trail

Alice Holt

1. Protected Characteristic category

Disability, age

2. Partner organisations/participants

- Alice Holt Forest in South East England Forest District (Education and Recreation)
- Treloar Trust - development and creation of 'Talking Pages' booklet for use by people with speech and language disabilities
- JLS construction, hard surface, rails and culvert work

Funding:

- Binsted Parish Council
- South Downs National Park Authority
- Hampshire Playing Fields Association

3. Project title and details of initiative

Easy Access Discovery Trail – Upgrade of an existing Forestry Commission trail with activities at various points. Due to the poor state of repair, people with disabilities had reduced access. Upgrading and redesigning the trail will enable wheelchair users, people with speech and language difficulties and visual impairments to benefit from and enjoy the forest experience.

4. Initiative/Project aims and background

The Forestry Commission teamed up with Treloar Trust, a renowned school and college for students with physical disabilities, to launch an interactive forest adventure trail for people with disabilities.

The upgraded trail opened in October 2011 and is educational in that it enables first hand experience of the forest and encourages learning about its features. It also provides opportunities for physical activity through the Active Kids Extra supplement.

The trail engages with people as they explore the forest with their senses, emotions, thoughts and imagination. Along the trail visitors can peep through a hidey hole,

Good Practice case studies

listen to the sound of trees creaking in the wind, feel the texture of the soil, try den building or make up a story in the deepest, darkest part of the forest.

The trail has a hard surface and rails, making it suitable for wheel chair users. It is wider in places and loops around trees to enable people to feel the trunk of a tree or to count the rings on a log. These are just some of the things wheelchair users would not have been able to experience before.

The trail has a guide created by expert staff at Treloar's for people with speech and language difficulties called 'Talking Pictures'. It uses pictures and words to create an unspoken dialogue with each person, such as, "what can you smell?" The person responds by pointing to a picture, which could be leaves, soil, forest stink, fairy dust or witches brew.

Dave Allen, tutor at Treloar's, said:
"Most people don't have any idea what it is like to experience a forest by wheelchair or with a disability. You just cannot imagine how vulnerable they feel. The new trail means disabled young people can dare to explore the forest and experience something life affirming."



Example of 'talking Page' Booklet (designed by Treloars)



5. Future plans

- Encourage public use of the trail; and maintain/raise standard of the trail.