

**MONITORING THE QUALITY OF
EXPERIENCE IN FORESTS
RESULTS OF PILOT UNDERTAKEN
IN RINGWOOD, NEW FOREST**

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A. Background and introduction

Background

This report is one of the final outputs of a study undertaken by NFO Transport and Tourism which aimed to develop a methodology that would be used by Forest Enterprise to monitor the quality of visitor experiences at forest sites.

The survey method has been developed on the basis of information obtained from an extensive review of literature and detailed discussions with both forest users and managers. It is expected that this survey methodology will be used to provide both practical, management information at a local level and more general information at a district or national level. It is also hoped that, when sufficient numbers of interviews have been undertaken, results will be analysed and compared according to different geographical areas and user groups, providing significant opportunities for benchmarking satisfaction across the Forest Enterprise estate.

This report details the findings of the survey pilot that was undertaken during February and March 2003 in Ringwood Forest in the New Forest district. Piloting was also undertaken at Afan Argoed in South Wales during the same period – results of this exercise are presented under a separate cover.

Method

A total of 176 visitors were interviewed at three points within Ringwood forest (Moors Valley Country Park and access points near Verwood).

Visitors who used the site at least once a month were interviewed and asked to rate both the levels of importance of different aspects of forest visits and their satisfaction with the same aspects at Ringwood. Visitors who came to Ringwood less often were interviewed for a shorter period before being given a questionnaire regarding their levels of satisfaction. This was completed and returned, using a reply-paid envelope. Copies of the questionnaires used are appended.

Following the completion of the survey of visitors a focus group was undertaken with family visitors who used Ringwood forest. This method was suitable because the users spoken to

lived locally and could attend a discussion near the forest. These users were also regular visitors who could provide detailed information about the site and specific issues without actually having to be on-site. Respondents were given a cash 'incentive' for attending the group.

Report

This report provides the results of the pilot survey undertaken at Ringwood. A more detailed review of the development of this survey method and potential uses of the results are provided under a separate cover.

As this survey was a pilot which aimed to test the survey methods, the total sample size is relatively small. It is therefore important to treat the results with some caution. In the sections discussing importance and satisfaction results have been tested using ANOVA (analysis of variance) techniques and only statistically significant findings are discussed in the commentary.

B. Main results

Visitor profile

To determine the types of people using the forest, visitors were asked to provide some information about their age, family situation and place of residence.

Demographics

Half of visitors (50%) to Ringwood were in the Family lifecycle group (children under 16 living in the household) while 39% were Empty Nesters (over 45, no children in the household) and a smaller proportion (11%) were Young Independents (under 35, no children in household).

The age profile of respondents reflect these findings with almost half of visitors aged between 35 and 54 (46%) but only 3% between 16 and 24.

Table B-1 – Age and lifecycle (%)

Base: All respondents (176)

	%
Age	
16 - 24	3
25 – 34	17
35 – 44	32
45 – 54	14
55 – 64	17
65+	17
Lifecycle	
Young Independents	11
Families	50
Empty Nesters	39

It is notable that the largest proportions of Family visitors were found amongst the visitors who came to the site 1 to 3 times per month (74%), visitors who took part in walking without a dog (69%) and visitors who went cycling (17%). Conversely, a larger proportion of Empty

Nesters were found amongst visitors who used the site for dog walking (61%) and those who visited the site at least once a week (69%).

Origin

The majority of visitors lived in the Dorset area (73%). Those who visited once a week or more, Empty Nesters and dog walkers were particularly likely to live in Dorset (100%, 82% and 88% respectively). Conversely, visiting families and people who walked without a dog were more likely to live further away (39% and 38%).

Table B-2 – Area of residence (%)

Base: All respondents (176)

	%
Dorset	73
Southampton	10
Portsmouth	5
Other South East	8
Other	5

Trip profile

Visitors were also asked a number of questions about their current trip in terms of the length of time spent away from home, time spent in the forest and activities undertaken.

Type of trip

Reflecting the close proximity of the forest, the majority of respondents stated that they were on a short trip away from home which would last for less than 3 hours in duration (85%). Around a tenth were on a longer day trip (11%) while 5% were on holiday. It is important to remember that this survey was undertaken in February and March 2003 – if interviewing had been undertaken during the summer months the proportion of day visitors and holiday visitors may well have been higher.

Table B-3 – Type of trip (%)

Base: All respondents (176)

	%
On a short trip of less than 3 hours from home	85
On a day out for more than 3 hours from home	11
On holiday away from home	5

Visitors most likely to be on a short trip of less than 3 hours' duration included Young Independents (95%) and dog walkers (90%). Visitors more likely to be on a longer day trip included those in the Family lifecycle (18%) and those who visited less than once a week (17%).

In the focus group, the amount of time visitors were prepared to travel with young children was discussed. Generally, it was agreed that journeys of more than 30 or 40 minutes were too long for young children. As such, it is not surprising that the majority of the Family visitors interviewed lived within the local area and were on a short trip from home.

Frequency of visits

In terms of frequency of visit, around 1 in 6 visitors interviewed stated that they usually visited the site every day (16%), 15% visited between 1 and 6 times a week, 20% visited between 1 and 3 times a month and 38% visited between 1 and 6 times a year. Around a tenth of visitors (11%) usually visited the site less than once a year or were on their first ever visit (11%).

Table B-4 – Frequency of visits to forest (%)

Base: All respondents (176)

	%
Every day	16
4 to 6 times per week	8
1 to 3 times a week	7
1 to 3 times a month	20
4 to 6 times a year	15
1 to 3 times a year	23
Less often	6
First ever visit	5

Length of visits

Visitors spent an average of 2 and a quarter hours in Ringwood Forest. The largest proportions spent between 30 minutes and an hour (20%) or between 2 and 3 hours (26%).

Table B-5 – Length of visit (%)

Base: All respondents (176)

	%
Up to 15 minutes	2
15 – 30 minutes	9
30 minutes – 1 hour	20
1 hour – 2 hours	18
2 hours – 3 hours	26
3 hours – 5 hours	18
More than 5 hours	7
<i>Average</i>	<i>2hrs 14 mins</i>

It is interesting to note the variations in average length of visit between different user groups and types of visitor. Generally, visitors spending the longest time included those in the

Family lifecycle group (3 hours), and those who visited less than once a month (3 hours). Conversely, the shortest visits were usually taken by Empty Nesters (1hr 20 mins), people who visit more than once a week (1hr) and dog walkers (1hr 14 mins).

Activities undertaken

When asked what they did during their visit, the most frequently mentioned activities included walking without a dog (47%), dog walking (39%), visiting the children's play area (27%) and picnics (22%).

Table B-6 – Activities undertaken during visit to forest (%)

Base: All respondents (176)

	%
Walking without a dog	47
Dog walking	39
Children's playground	27
Picnic	22
Motor sports	13
Seeing something in the woodland (e.g. sculpture)	10
Cycling on waymarked tracks	9
Cycling off waymarked tracks	6
Running	5
Birdwatching	5
Nature/ natural history visit	3
Climbing	3
Hill walking/ rambling	2
Photography	2
Orienteering	2
Horse riding	1
Others	5

Visitors most likely to take part in walks *without* a dog included Families (65%) and those who visited the site less than once a month (64%). It is interesting to note that a third of those visitors who took walks also had a picnic (32%) and 18% went to see something in the forest such as sculpture or an ancient tree.

The vast majority of visitors who came to the site once a week or more were dog walkers (82%). Also, around three-fifths of Empty Nesters were dog walkers (61%). It is notable that people who took part in dog walking were generally unlikely to participate in other activities.

The activities undertaken at Ringwood were also discussed during the focus group. In this discussion, both organised events that were held at the Country Park and more informal activities were discussed. Activities mentioned specifically included having a 'kick around' with a football, feeding the ducks, picnics and, most often, visiting the play trail.

These visitors tended to undertake the same activities during most of their quite frequent visits. Visits also tended to be quite short (e.g. an hour or two).

Importance of different aspects of visit

To identify the drivers of quality, it was useful to ask visitors to rate how important different aspects were in their decision to visit the site. Visitors could rate each of a list of aspects as ‘very important’ (+2), ‘quite important’ (+1), ‘neither important nor unimportant’ (0), ‘not very important’ (-1) or ‘not at all important’ (-2). Scores were then applied to responses, allowing averages to be obtained across the whole sample - the higher the average score, the more important the aspect is across the sample as a whole.

This analysis suggests that the priorities amongst visitors to Ringwood were ‘feeling happy to leave their car in the car park’, the opportunities to ‘enjoy scenery and views’ and ‘feeling safe in the forest’. The most important ‘facility’ is ‘sufficient car parking’. In the chart below an overall ‘average’ of all of the mean scores has been included in the ranking. Any aspect above this level can be considered as very important to the site amongst *all* visitors while the other aspects may be of less importance overall or only important to some groups of visitors.

Table B-7 – Importance of different aspects in decision to visit (mean score)

Base: All respondents (176)

	Importance score
<i>Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park</i>	1.74
<i>Being able to enjoy scenery and views</i>	1.68
<i>Feeling safe in the forest</i>	1.64
<i>Being able to enjoy wildlife</i>	1.59
<i>Enough car parking</i>	1.54
<i>Being able to spend time with family and friends</i>	1.48
<i>Value for money of your whole trip or day out</i>	1.48
<i>Choice of paths for walking</i>	1.34
<i>Clean toilets</i>	1.01
<i>Clear signposting on footpaths</i>	0.99
<i>Solitude, peace and quiet</i>	0.89
AVERAGE	0.84
Choice of trails for other activities (e.g. cycling or riding)	0.74
Leaflets and information about the place you are visiting	0.62
Children’s play equipment	0.54
A café	0.12
Availability of staff at the site (e.g. rangers)	0.12
A shop	-0.17
Baby changing facilities	-0.44

When comparing these scores it is important to bear in mind that not all variations are statistically significant. For example there is no significant difference between the mean scores given to 'Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park' and 'Feeling safe in the forest'. There is however, a statistically significant difference between 'Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park' and 'Being able to enjoy wildlife'.

This ranking should therefore be treated as providing a broader indication of what is most important and what is least important to visitors.

While these averages provide an overview of the importance of each element across *all* visitors, it would also be useful to look at the levels of importance to specific user groups. However, due to the relatively small size of sample used in this survey pilot it is difficult to identify any statistically significant variations in the responses provided by different groups of users.

Respondents were also asked to specify what else, if anything, had influenced their decision to visit. While 16% of respondents indicated that there were no other reasons, larger proportions mentioned the children’s play facilities (22%) and/or the convenience of the site to their home (19%).

Table B-8 – Other influences on decision to visit (%)

Base: All respondents (176)

	%
Children’s play area, trains, play trail	22
Convenience/ close to home	19
Weather/ a day in the sun	16
Just for some fresh air/ a day out	13
Regular activity	10
Cheap	9
Walking the dog	7
Motor sports	5
Cycling trails	5
Half term	4
Recommended by friends/ relatives	2
To have a coffee	2
No other reasons	16

In the group discussion undertaken with members of the Family lifecycle, respondents were asked about what influenced them when they were deciding where to visit with young children.

These visitors particularly liked to find places to visit which were cheap (or free), places where healthy activities could be undertaken and places where their children were safe to play. Popular types of destinations included beaches and forest sites such as Ringwood.

Ringwood was particularly popular amongst family visitors because of the play facilities for children. When asked to prioritise the most important factors when deciding where to go for a day out, cost, availability of parking, travel time from home and the provision of facilities for babies and children were mentioned most often.

Specific comments made during the group discussions regarding the facilities at Ringwood included concerns about the quality of the café (although some said that it had now improved) and issues regarding the car park being closed during the busiest periods.

For these visitors peace and quiet was less important and unlikely to be found around the play facilities in Ringwood. The respondents who had a season parking ticket also stated that this facility offered excellent value for money, especially when compared with some of the alternative places that trips might be taken with children.

Favourite aspects of forest

When visitors interviewed in the survey were asked about what they liked most about Ringwood Forest, the most frequently provided responses related to peace and quiet, tranquillity and scenery (19%), the availability of children’s activities (18%), good walks (16%) and wildlife/ trees (12%).

Table B-9 – What like most about site (%)

Base: All respondents (176)

	%
Peace/ tranquillity/ lovely scenery	19
Children’s activities	18
Good walks	16
Wildlife/ trees	12
Close to home	9
Space/ hills	9
Walking in the fresh air	5
All the facilities I need	3
Cycling trails	2
Walking area for dogs	1
Don’t know/ not stated	41

The answers provided to this question varied between different visitor groups. Almost a third of respondents in the Family lifecycle group stated that the children’s activities were what they liked most about the forest (31%) while Empty Nesters were more likely to mention the peace, tranquillity and scenery (29%) or wildlife/ trees (22%).

Visitors who took part in dog walking were also more likely to mention the peace, tranquillity and scenery (32%) while 31% mentioned wildlife and trees and a quarter mentioned the good walks (27%).

Satisfaction with different aspects of visit

Visitors were provided with a list of different elements of the site and asked to rate how satisfied they had been with each during their visit. Respondents could rate each of the list on a five point scale which included 'very satisfied' (+2), 'quite satisfied' (+1), 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' (0), 'not very satisfied' (-1) or 'not at all satisfied' (-2). Also, if visitors had no experience of a specific element they were asked to indicate that they did not know.

Scores were then applied to responses, allowing averages to be obtained across the whole sample - the higher the average score, the more satisfied visitors were with this aspect. This analysis suggests that, overall, visitors were most likely to be satisfied with the opportunities to spend time with family and friends, value for money and being able to enjoy the scenery and views. In the chart below an overall 'average' of all of the mean scores has been included in the ranking. Elements below this average include the provision of leaflets and information about the site and the availability of staff on site.

Table B-10 – Satisfaction with different aspects at forest (mean score)

Base: All respondents (176)

	Average
<i>Being able to spend time with family and friends</i>	1.76
<i>Value for money of your whole trip or day out</i>	1.68
<i>Being able to enjoy scenery and views</i>	1.67
<i>Feeling safe in the forest</i>	1.64
<i>Children's Play Equipment</i>	1.62
<i>Choice of paths for walking</i>	1.58
<i>Being able to enjoy wildlife</i>	1.53
<i>Solitude, peace and quiet</i>	1.51
<i>Enough car parking</i>	1.45
AVERAGE	1.42
Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park	1.42
Clean toilets	1.41
Choice of trails for other activities	1.41
Baby changing facilities	1.33
Cafe	1.28
Clear signposting on footpaths	1.26
Shop	1.17
Leaflets and information about the place you are visiting	1.06
Availability of staff at the site	0.89

When comparing these scores it is important to bear in mind that not all variations are statistically significant. For example, there is no significant difference between the scores given to 'Being able to spend time with family and friends' and 'Feeling safe in the forest'. There is however, a statistically significant difference between 'Being able to spend time with family and friends' and 'Children's Play Equipment'.

This ranking should therefore be treated as providing a broader indication of what visitors are most and least satisfied with.

Expectations V Reality

Respondents to the self completion questionnaire, who were either on their first ever visit to the site or visited less than once a month, were asked to indicate how their overall visit had compared with expectations.

While the majority of respondents did not provide a response to this question, 14% of visitors had found the forest to be better than expected while 1% found it to be worse than expected.

Table B-11 – Overall rating of visit to forest compared to expectations (%)

Base: All self-completion respondents (77)

	%
Much better	6
A little better	9
As expected	19
A little worse	1
Much worse	-
Don't know/ not stated	64

Identification of issues

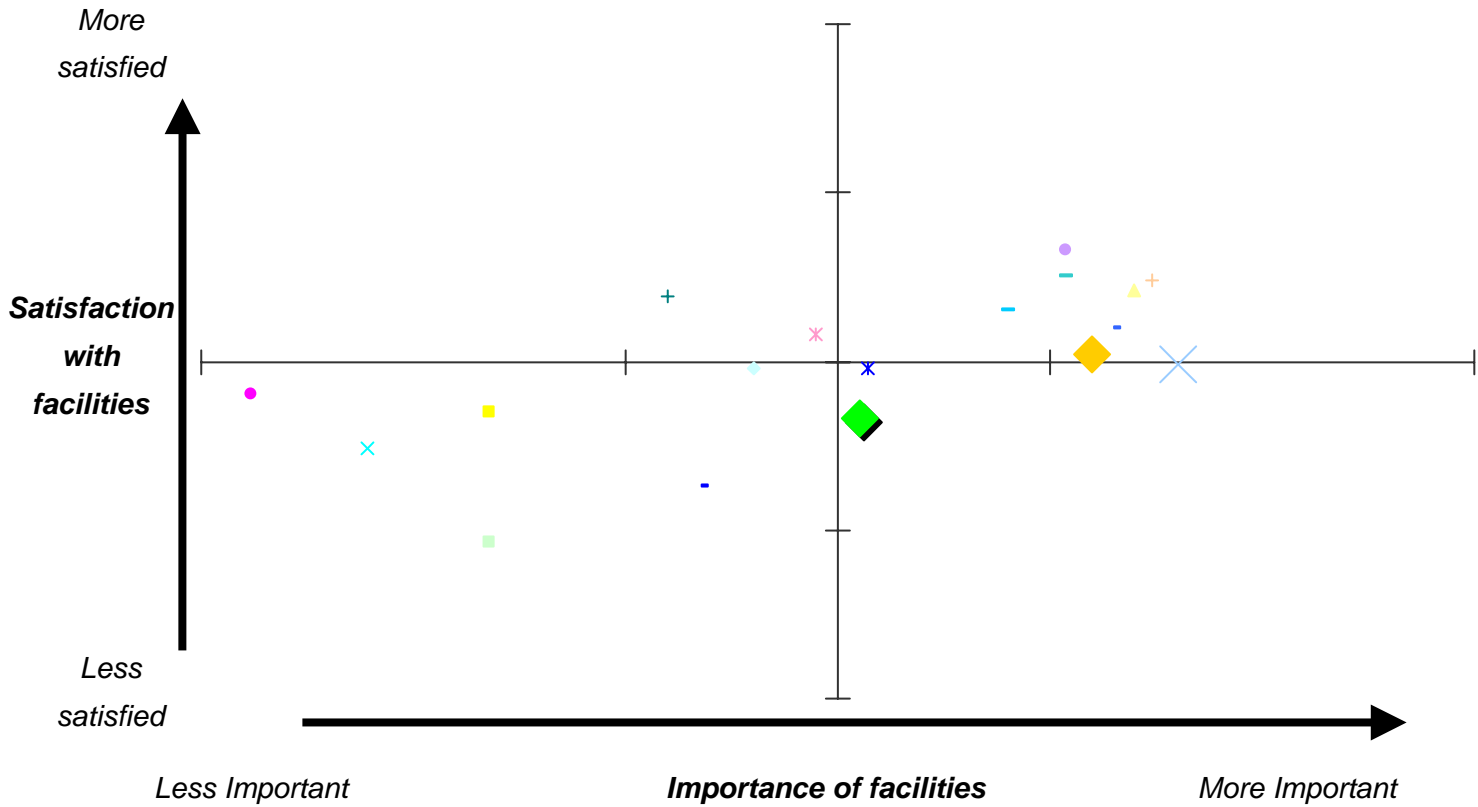
Tables B-7 and B-11 illustrated a ranking of the overall levels of importance and levels of satisfaction visitors have with different aspects of the 'visitor experience' at Ringwood. It is useful to combine these two measures to identify the elements which are most relevant to improving quality.

The chart opposite presents each of the elements that were rated in terms of both importance and satisfaction. The centre point is where the 'average' importance crosses the 'average' satisfaction score (as in B-7 and B-10). Each of the elements are plotted in the 4 quadrants as follows:

- Top left – *More Satisfied - Less Important* - children's play equipment and solitude. Visitors are generally very satisfied with these elements although they are rated as less important on average.
- Bottom left – *Less Satisfied – Less Important* – baby changing facilities, choice of trails, shop, availability of staff, leaflets and information. Overall, visitors are less satisfied with these aspects but they are also seen as less important by most visitors. These elements can therefore be considered as lower priorities for investment.
- Top right – *More Satisfied – More Important* – spending time with family and friends, value for money, choice of paths, safety in the forest, being able to enjoy scenery/ views, being able to enjoy wildlife, enough car parking. Elements in this quadrant are rated highly in terms of both importance and satisfaction. These are the forest's key strengths which should be maintained.
- Bottom right – *Less Satisfied – More Important* – clean toilets, clear signposting, feeling happy to leave car in car park. Elements which are in this quadrant are rated as more important than 'average' but have received lower than average satisfaction scores. These are elements which possibly require further attention.

It is important to note that the scores presented in this chart are averages across *all visitors* during the period in which the survey took place. As discussed previously, not all variations in scores are statistically significant so results should be treated as indicative (especially with the relatively small samples used in this survey pilot).

Analysis of importance of elements of visit V satisfaction with same elements
 Base: All respondents (176)



- ◆ Enough car parking
- ✕ Shop
- ✕ Clean toilets
- + Children's play equipment
- Choice of paths
- Availability of staff
- ✕ Happy to leave car in car park
- Spend time with family/ friends
- Being able to enjoy wildlife
- ◆ Clear signposting
- Café
- Baby changing
- Leaflets & info
- ◆ Choice of trails
- ▲ Safe in the forest
- ✕ Solitude etc.
- + Being able to enjoy scenery/ views
- Value for money

With a larger overall sample size it would be very useful to segment the results further according to distinct user groups to identify the priorities amongst, for example, Families, dog walkers or cyclists.

Other visitors

When asked which of a list of other users they had encountered during their visit, around two-thirds of respondents had encountered walkers (63%), some 54% had encountered children and 46% had encountered cyclists. Around a third of visitors had not encountered any of the other user types listed (35%).

Table B-12 – Other visitors encountered (%) and impact on enjoyment (row %)

Base: All respondents (176)

	%	Increased enjoyment a lot +2	Increased enjoyment a little +1	Made no difference 0	Decreased a little -1	Decreased a lot -2	Score
Walkers	63	17	9	70	3	-	+0.41
Children	54	19	21	54	4	1	+0.53
Cyclists	46	9	9	77	2	2	+0.19
Horse riders	31	11	20	60	5	2	+0.33
Vehicles driving in the forest	19	9	12	48	9	3	+0.19
Anglers	15	4	7	59	4	-	+0.15
Motorbikers/ moto cross	15	4	-	35	12	23	-0.68
None of these visitors	35						

Respondents who had encountered each of the different user groups were asked to indicate whether or not this had increased or decreased their overall enjoyment. Mean scores were applied to results from +2 if a user group 'increased enjoyment a lot' to -2 if they 'decreased enjoyment a lot'.

As the table above illustrates, on most occasions encounters with other visitors had no impact on enjoyment. Children were most likely to have enhanced the experience of other visitors with 19% of those who encountered them stating that they enhanced their enjoyment 'a lot' while 5% stated that they had decreased their enjoyment.

Motorbikers or people taking part in moto-cross were more likely to have decreased enjoyment. Over a third of the visitors who had encountered this user group (35%) stated that their presence had decreased their enjoyment.

It is interesting to note variations in the responses provided by different types of visitors. For example, encounters with children had the most positive impact upon people in the Family and Empty Nester Lifecycle groups (mean scores of 0.52 and 0.59 respectively) but were more likely to 'make no difference' to dog walkers (61%).

Those respondents who had been disturbed by other visitors were asked to provide details. Some of the answers provided are reproduced below:

I like to be alone as far as possible, cyclists are a nuisance as they come up on you and frighten you and are often rude and arrogant.

Boisterous children in the large playground left totally unsupervised which made it difficult for the smaller ones 5-8 year olds.

Motor bikes would not be welcome as frightening, very noisy.

People leaving rubbish on floor – perhaps a sign saying take rubbish home.

Some children were not using the equipment appropriately, I feel some of the children were too old to use equipment.

Disturbances to visit

Respondents were also presented with a list of potential negative disruptions and asked what impact, if any, each had on their visit. As the table below illustrates, the majority of respondents either indicated that each of the potential impacts either ‘didn’t reduce their enjoyment’ or that they did not know (suggesting the impact had not been encountered).

The disruptions most likely to have had any effect were dogs and dog dirt (decreased the enjoyment of 20% of visitors) and litter or fly tipping (decreased the enjoyment of 18%). The disruption least likely to have impacted upon enjoyment was forest operations (decreased enjoyment of 4%).

Table B-13 –Impact of potential issues on enjoyment (row %)

Base: All respondents (176)

	Didn't reduce enjoyment 1	Decreased a little 2	Decreased a lot 3	Don't know	Score
Noise from other users or motorised sports	47	6	3	44	1.20
Litter or fly tipping	38	11	7	43	1.46
Dogs and dog dirt	44	14	6	36	1.41
Muddy tracks	49	16	2	33	1.31
Vandalised missing or damaged signposts	49	4	1	47	1.10
Forest operations such as felling	58	3	1	39	1.06

Respondents were asked to indicate what else, if anything had decreased their enjoyment. Some of the answers provided are reproduced below:

Roadways broken and muddied up by rally

Rumour of a stalker – a man in the forest, I am worried.

Unsupervised children. You can do nothing about it.

No bins.

Keep it wild. Don't gloss it up, natural.

I get really annoyed when I bring so many people here regularly that they close the entrance because of lack of car parking space. They really should open up more areas for people to park.

Lack of toilets at play trail. It's a long way to walk back. Its easy for me because I have a little boy but a basic toilet for older kids/adults would be helpful.

No toilets in forest trail area for small/young children, too far to walk to information centre. Don't have to be posh just basic please.

Improvements

When asked what, if anything, needed to be improved at Ringwood, two-thirds of visitors either stated that nothing should be improved or that they 'didn't know' what should be improved (64%).

The suggestions that were made are listed below. Around 1 in 20 visitors suggested that the footpaths should be improved (6%) while a similar proportion suggested that the forest should be kept as natural looking as possible (6%). Other suggestions made by more than a single respondent included more bins (5%), more children's activities (4%) and more maps and signage (4%).

Table B-14 – Suggested improvements (%)

Base: All respondents (176)

	%
Footpaths improved/ more gravel	6
Chop down trees planted by man/ keep natural	6
More bins	5
More children's activities	4
More/ improved maps/ signs	4
More trails	1
Better weather	1
Nothing/ fine as it is	23
Don't know/ not stated	41

The key issues arising from the survey and possible solutions were discussed in more detail during the subsequent group discussion that was held amongst visitors who had young children. Some of the main areas discussed are summarised below:

- *Bins* – while the visitors spoken to mostly understood the reasons for bins not being provided in the forest (e.g. impacts on wild animals, habitats), there was unanimous support for the provision of a single bin next to the ice cream kiosk so that people could deposit their ice cream wrappers. It was mentioned that, in the past, the ice cream van

had supplied a bin that was taken away at the end of the day. However, since the kiosk was built the bin had disappeared.

- *Signposting* – it was also suggested that notices should be provided explaining why there were no rubbish bins. While locals and regular visitors knew the reasons, other people were often seen wandering around looking frustrated.
- *Toilets* – there was very strong and unanimous support amongst respondents for the provision of a toilet at the far end of the play trail. The lack of toilets at this point currently discourages visitors with young children from venturing further into the forest, possibly contributing to crowding closer to the car park.
- *Bicycle hire* – at the moment the maximum duration of bicycle hire is 4 hours. However, if visitors want to hire a bicycle for longer it is necessary to pay double. It would be preferred if the prices were for either a half day or a full day.
- *Information* – it was suggested that contact numbers for rangers should be provided to allow visitors to report vandalism and bad behaviour. Doing so would both assist the rangers with site management and encourage visitors to feel that they were important in the preservation of the forest.
- *Play facilities* – specific comments included complaints that the Ant Hill looks like it should be climbed on although this is not allowed.

“It just says ‘Climb on me’”

It was also mentioned that not all of the play facilities were as good as others. The Indian Village was given as an example of what was liked most while the maze and carved poles were seen to be quite boring and not used much.

- *Picnic tables* – It was also suggested that more picnic tables around the play trail would be desirable in busier periods.

“They have picnic tables round the play trail but there’s not enough and it’s impossible when it’s busy to try and find somewhere to sit and eat.”

- *Forest operations* – Visitors generally understood and accepted the forestry operations that took place. However, it was suggested that more information on why the work was taking place and what would happen next would be appreciated. One respondent had been frustrated when a member of staff had been unable to explain the purpose of a forest operation:

“I went to ask once and they couldn’t tell the answer. That kind of threw me and I thought – ‘Why don’t you know?’”

- *Communication* – a general finding related to improvements was the need to ensure good communications between the site management and users regarding issues such as why there were no bins, why trees were being cleared and why the car park was closed. It was agreed that if visitors knew the reasons for actions such as these they would be more likely to accept them.

“They should give us some information on it, like the bins and things. A lot of things are assumed. You go in there and you don’t see the reason for something. In a sense it’s not your business, but it’s nice to know.”

Priorities

After discussing the possible areas where improvements could be made in this forest area, the respondents were asked to identify the priorities. The key priorities for visitors with young children were given as:

- The provision of a litter bin by the ice cream kiosk.
- The provision of a toilet at the far end of the play trail.
- Addressing car parking problems, especially the closure of car park at busy times.
- Improvements in communication with visitors especially regarding the reasons for actions such as not providing bins, felling or car park closures.

Key findings

The survey and in-depth interviews undertaken at Ringwood have provided an insight into levels of satisfaction at this site, especially amongst visitors with children. A number of key findings have emerged from this exercise:

- Around half of the visitors to this site are in the Family lifecycle group while two in five are Empty Nesters. Nearly all live locally and visit on relatively short trips. The most popular activities at Ringwood include walks, often with a dog, using the children's playground and picnics.
- Overall the most important elements of a visit relate to car security, being able to enjoy scenery and wildlife, feeling safe and the provision of sufficient car parking. The children's play facilities and the convenience of the site to home were also mentioned as reasons for visiting the site.
- Overall, visitors are most satisfied with the opportunities to spend time with family and friends, the value for money obtained, scenery and views, the safe environment and the children's play equipment.
- Areas most likely to have caused dissatisfaction at this site included motorcross bikers (and the damage they cause), litter, dogs and dog dirt and muddy tracks. Key areas requiring attention included the provision of toilets, signposting and car parking.
- The key suggestions for improvements included footpath improvements, provision of bin(s) at specific locations, provision of a toilet at a specific location and the improvement of communication between the site management and visitors.

C. Appendices

Discussion guide used in qualitative stage

Questionnaires used in quantitative stage

Discussion Guide used in Focus Group

1. Introduction

- Background information – Purpose of survey – done a large survey which they were included in and now want to find out a bit more about what is good and bad about site and what could be done to make it better for families.
- What is their family situation? How many children? What ages?

2. General - Choosing places to visit with children

- What types of place do they like to visit with their children? Include urban and rural places first then focus more on countryside sites.
- What affects their decision on where to go. Probe on convenience from home, parking, facilities for children (what facilities?), weather (shelter in forests?), nature and wildlife.
- To what degree do they decide or is it the child's decision?
- How does the age of children affect choices of places to visit on days out/ shorter trips – does this change as they grow up?
- **Summarise: Which factors are most important to them when they are choosing where to go?**
- Ask for example of favourite places to visit with children – what makes these places particularly good?

3. Particular likes about Moors Valley/ Ringwood

(1) IMPORTANCE

- During a typical visit to Ringwood/ Moors Valley what activities do they take part in – probe on tree top trails, play trails, railway, visitor centre, café, cycling, nature walks etc.
- How long would a typical visit last and do they always do the same activities?
- What are their main reasons for choosing to visit this site? What are the important factors in their decision to visit instead of somewhere else UNPROMPTED then PROMPT:

Children's facilities – play trail, adventure playground etc

Adult facilities – café, visitor centre

Parking

Proximity to home

Wildlife at this site

Scenery/ backdrop/ peace and quiet

Value for money – cheaper than other options?

For each mentioned **why are they important?**

Of those mentioned, **which are the most important** when visiting Moors Valley/ Ringwood?

(2) SATISFACTION

- Looking at the important factors (as identified above) – **does Moors Valley/ Ringwood always provide these?**
- If yes, ask for examples of particularly good experiences
- What, if anything, makes this site particularly **more** attractive to visit with children than elsewhere? UNPROMPTED i.e. what do they do best at this site?

5. Particular dislikes

- On the other hand – we are also interested in how the site could be improved upon.
- Thinking of Moors Valley/ Ringwood– can they think of any examples of any poor experiences when what was important was not provided.
- What if anything, makes this site less attractive to visit than other sites that other places they can go to with children? What are the downsides? UNPROMPTED then PROMPT:

Litter and tipping – who causes it?, particularly bad near play trail?

Dogs and dog dirt – scary for children, unhygienic

Other users – too many visitors, unsupervised children, horse riders, cyclists

Noise – too many children, other users?

Muddy tracks – bad for kids, prams, dirty

Facilities – e.g. lack of toilets, café suitable for kids?

Forest operations – muddy tracks, closed tracks/ parts of trails

Motorised sports – noise and fumes

Car parking – limited, sometimes closed, expensive for locals?

- Which are the biggest issues?

6. Suggestions for improvements

- Having discussed what is important to them and what is good and bad about Moors Valley/ Ringwood – would now like to think about possible ways of improving the site. Again have some ideas from survey but want hear theirs first.
- UNPROMPTED. Thinking of the issues, what could be done to improve things? (**esp on trips with kids**)

- *PROMPT:*

Toilets nearer play trail for kids

More bins/ signs suggesting people take litter home near play area – which?

Staff to supervise play areas

More paths/ trails with things for kids to do, signs to follow

More organised children's activities e.g. holiday clubs for kids

More refreshment points around the play trail

More informal play structures – e.g. Den Building

More information/ interpretation boards in the forest.

- What else? What about improvements elsewhere in Ringwood and the other local forests?
- Is there a need for more places like Moors Valley in the area or is this sufficient?

7. Summary

- What are the priorities for the people who manage the site? What should they be doing first?
- Any other messages they want passed back to the Forestry Commission?

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