

**Monitoring the quality of experience in forests  
Thames Chase, Greater London**

**Final Report**

August 2005



**Monitoring the quality of  
experience in forests  
Thames Chase, Greater London**

**Final Report**

**Forestry Commission**  
August 2005

Prepared by:

**TNS Travel & Tourism**

19 Atholl Crescent  
Edinburgh, EH3 8HQ

Telephone: 0131 656 4000  
Facsimile: 0131 656 4001  
e-mail: [enquiries@tns-global.com](mailto:enquiries@tns-global.com)

111923

---

# Contents

<b>A.</b>	<b>Background and introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
	Background .....	1
	Method.....	2
	Report.....	3
<b>B.</b>	<b>Main results .....</b>	<b>4</b>
	Community profile.....	4
	Community .....	8
	Activities .....	10
	Places to undertake activities .....	13
	Thames Chase Community Forest .....	17
	Benefits of Thames Chase Community Forest .....	20
	Awareness and usage of local sites.....	23
	Thames Chase Community Forest – Information Provision.....	28
	Reasons for <i>not</i> visiting forests.....	30
	Frequency of visits to local forests.....	35
	Length of visits.....	36
	Importance of different aspects of visit .....	37
	Favourite aspects of forest .....	40
	Satisfaction with different aspects of visit .....	41
	Identification of issues .....	44
	Other visitors .....	45
	Other disturbances to visits .....	47
	Improvements.....	48
	Engaging the community .....	53
<b>C.</b>	<b>Postcode analysis .....</b>	<b>55</b>
	Introduction.....	55
	Mardyke Woods.....	56
	Pages Wood.....	61
<b>D.</b>	<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>66</b>

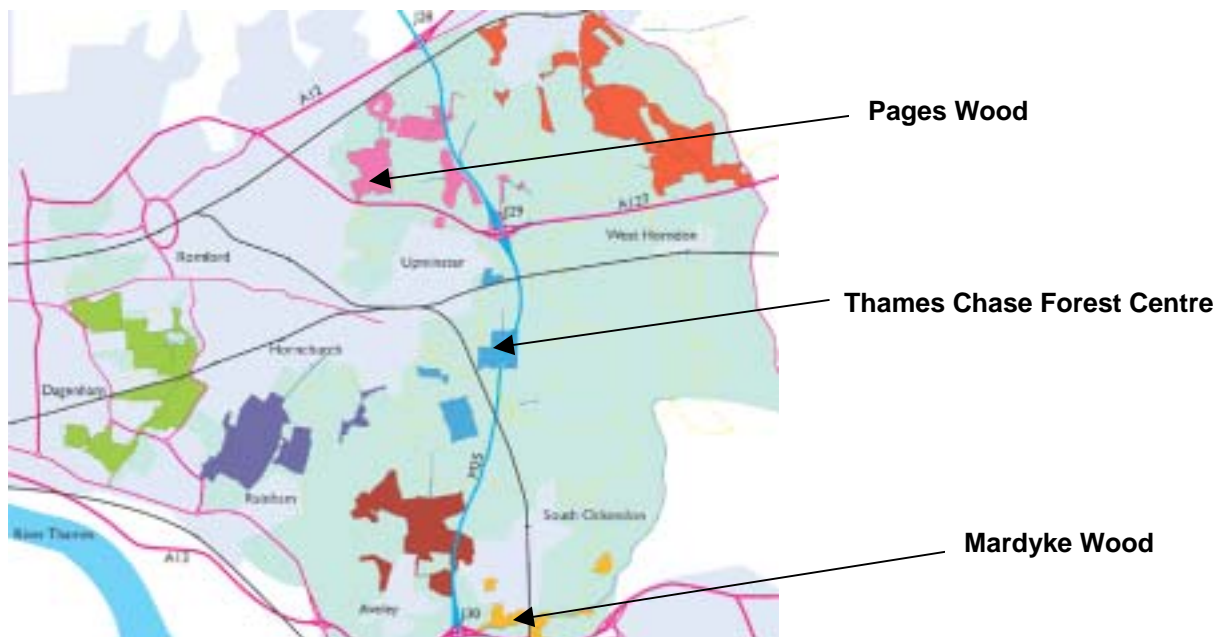
---

## A. Background and introduction

### Background

This report contains the results of a survey undertaken by TNS Travel & Tourism in neighbourhoods within the Thames Chase Community Forest in Greater London. Thames Chase was established in 1990 and is one of twelve Community Forests in England. The creation of Thames Chase is a partnership project with the long-term aim to renew and regenerate the landscape at the edge of East London and South Essex. The work of Thames Chase is divided into six key areas: creating new woodlands; managing existing woodlands; creating and improving access; involving local people; conserving and enhancing the natural environment and working in partnership and attracting funding.

The objectives of this study were to find out more about recreational activities undertaken by members of the local community, levels of use of the community forest areas, the characteristics of users and non-users, motivations for visits to community forest areas and barriers to usage, to establish the benefits of the work undertaken by Thames Chase Community Forest and to identify improvements which could be made to the forest areas and information provision. The study focused on residents who lived around two of the Thames Chase Community Forest sites, Mardyke Woods, south of South Ockendon, and Pages Wood, north of Upminster.



## **Method**

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, a quantitative survey of residents of the Thames Chase area was undertaken during November 2004. This survey was then followed up by two focus group discussions during July 2005. Further details of the methods used during each of these stages are provided in the following sections.

### *Stage 1 – Quantitative survey of local population*

A total of 323 persons were interviewed in the communities nearby Mardyke Woods (158 respondents) and Pages Wood (165 respondents) between 6<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> November 2004.

The survey involved respondents being interviewed at home with residents divided into two groups for each of the woods: those living within 1 mile of either Mardyke or Pages Wood and those living between 1 and 2 miles from the woodlands (see maps of areas covered by survey in Section C of this report). To assist in the design of the survey sample, a geodemographic analysis of these areas was undertaken using the CAMEO UK classification, thereby providing a detailed profile of the residents of these catchment areas. Section C in this report summaries the outcome of this analysis and the full CAMEO UK classifications table is appended.

Using the results of the geodemographic analysis interviewers were allocated specific addresses to undertake interviews, resulting in a survey sample representative of the population surrounding each of the woods. Only one person per household (adults aged over 16 years) could be interviewed.

### *Stage 2 – Qualitative focus groups*

On completion of the first stage of the study an interim report was produced and, following discussions between TNS and the Forestry Commission, it was agreed to undertake two focus groups with local residents. The objectives of these discussions were to follow up on issues raised in the first stage, obtaining more in-depth information on barriers to visiting Thames Chase Community Forest sites, reactions to possible improvements and further information on the benefits obtained by local communities from the restoration and development of forest sites in their local area.

During the first stage of the study all respondents had been asked whether they would be interested in taking part in further research. The resulting list of names formed the basis of the focus groups recruitment. Eight respondents attended each of the discussions on the evening of 29<sup>th</sup> June 2005 as follows:

- *Group 1, 6.30pm* - residents of Mardyke Woods catchment areas (South Ockendon). Dog walkers in a mix of age groups, mainly older families and empty nesters.
- *Group 2, 8.30pm* - residents of Pages Woods catchment area (north of Upminster). Not exclusively dog walkers. Mainly families with school and pre-school age children.

Both of the discussions took place in the Thames Chase Forest Centre (see map on page 1).

## **Report**

This report provides the results of both the quantitative and qualitative stages of this study. As mentioned previously, surveys have also been completed at six other Forestry Commission sites to date, including a survey of users of Whiston Woods in Merseyside Community Forest. The results of these other surveys have provided a 'database' of some 1,692 interviews with forest users; the results of these surveys have been provided to help draw comparisons and to highlight the key variations at Thames Chase, whenever possible.

The following section provides the results of both the quantitative and qualitative stages of this study. The tables in this report provide the key results of the quantitative survey including separate analyses of the responses provided by those interviewed near Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood, those who have visited either of the woods and those who have visited neither.

In the presentation the results from the qualitative stage, a number of the key results have been illustrated by the inclusion of quotes provided by respondents.

## B. Main results

### Community profile

To determine the types of people living in the vicinity of the woodlands, survey respondents were asked to provide details regarding their age, family situation, working status and ethnicity.

#### *Survey of local population*

Nearly three out of five local residents were female (57%) and 43% were male. Notably the proportion of men was higher amongst those who had visited the forest areas within Thames Chase (63% male).

**Table B-1 – Age and lifecycle (%)**

Base: All respondents (323)

	<b>Mardyke Woods</b>	<b>Pages Wood</b>	<b>Users</b>	<b>Non-users</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Age</b>					
16 – 24	12	6	8	9	9
25 – 34	20	24	10	24	22
35 – 44	19	18	19	19	19
45 – 54	14	17	21	15	15
55 – 64	13	16	23	13	15
65+	22	18	19	20	20
<b>Lifecycle</b>					
Young Independents	14	17	15	16	15
Families	36	35	27	37	34
Empty Nesters	44	45	56	43	45
Other	6	4	2	5	5
<i>Base (Total respondents)</i>	<b>158</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>323</b>

As the table above illustrates, more than two-fifths of residents (45%) in the areas surveyed were in the Empty Nester lifecycle group (over 45 years, no children in the household), whilst 34% were classified as Families (with children under 16 living in the household) and a smaller proportion (15%) were classified as Young Independents (under 35 years, no children in household).

Some 31% of all residents were aged between 16 and 34 years and similar proportions were aged between 35 and 54 years and 55 years or over (34% and 35% respectively).

A comparison of the age and lifecycle profile of residents in the areas surrounding Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood suggests that more people aged between 16 and 24 years lived near Mardyke Woods (12% v 6%).

However, a comparison of the profile of forest users with non-users suggests that users were more likely to be aged between 45 and 64 years (44% v 28%) and in the Empty Nesters lifecycle group (56%). Conversely, those not using the forest areas were more likely to be aged between 25 and 34 years (24% v 10%).

It is useful to compare the age and lifecycle profile of users of the Thames Chase Community Forest with the averages obtained across all of the forests included in this programme of research. Thames Chase was generally more likely to attract Empty Nester visitors (56% against an average of 40%) but was visited by a lower proportion of Families (27% v 36% on average). The proportion of Empty Nesters visiting Thames Chase was the highest of all of the forest areas surveyed so far.



In terms of social class, as the table below illustrates, around a quarter of all respondents (24%) were in the AB social classes (higher and intermediate managerial, administrative or professional) while a further 31% were C1s (supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional). The remaining two out of five respondents (44%) were in the C2 and DE classes.

This is a different profile than the UK population as a whole in which only 43% of people are ABs or C1s while larger proportions are C2s or DEs (57%).

**Table B-2 – Social class (%)**

Base: All respondents (323)

	<b>Users</b>	<b>Non-users</b>	<b>Thames Chase</b>	<b>UK Population</b>
AB – ‘upper middle class’ – higher/ intermediate managerial, administrative or professional	27	24	24	17
C1 – ‘lower middle class’ – supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional	35	30	31	26
C2 – ‘skilled working class’ – skilled manual workers	23	23	23	25
DE – ‘working class’ and unemployed – semi and unskilled manual workers, state pensioners, unemployed	13	23	21	32
<i>Base (Total respondents)</i>	<b>48</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>323</b>	<i>n/a</i>

Notably, a larger proportion of users than non-users were in the higher social classes with 62% in the AB and C1 groups compared to 54%. In contrast around a quarter of non-users were classified as DEs, a somewhat higher proportion than present amongst users (23% v 13%).

People living in the Pages Wood catchment area were much more likely than those living in the Mardyke Woods area to be ABs (35% v 13%). Consequently, those resident in the Mardyke Woods area were significantly more likely to be C2 and DEs (56% v 34%).

All respondents were asked to state their ethnicity. As is shown in the table below, the vast majority of respondents were white (94% overall), around 4% were members of Asian ethnic groups and 2% were members of black ethnic groups.

As the table below illustrates, none of the respondents who indicated that they had used Pages or Mardyke Woods were members of non-white ethnic minority groups.

**Table B-3 – Ethnicity (%)**

Base: All respondents (323)

	<b>Users</b>	<b>Non-users</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>White</b>			
English	88	87	87
Scottish	6	3	3
Welsh	2	*	1
Irish	2	1	1
Other British	2	*	1
Other white	-	1	1
<b>Asian</b>			
Indian	-	2	2
Pakistani	-	1	1
Other Asian	-	1	1
<b>Black</b>			
African	-	2	2
Other Black	-	*	*
<b>Mixed background</b>	-	*	*
<i>Base (Total respondents)</i>	<b>48</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>323</b>

\* Less than 0.5%

- No responses

More than half of the Thames Chase residents were working, either full time (47%) or part time (9%), whilst a quarter were retired (25%). Smaller proportions were housewives (8%), unemployed (7%) or in full time education (2%).

The vast majority of the residents interviewed did not have any disabilities (93%) and 35% of the households had children.

### *Focus group respondent profile*

As mentioned previously, respondents for the two focus groups were recruited to fit specific criteria, as follows:

- *Group 1* - residents of Mardyke Woods catchment area. Dog walkers in a mix of age groups, mainly older families and empty nesters.
- *Group 2* - residents of Pages Woods catchment area. Not exclusively dog walkers. Mainly families with school and pre-school age children.

While social class was not used a criterion in their recruitment, the profile of respondents in each of the focus groups reflected the characteristics of each community with mainly C2DEs attending the Mardyke Woods group while most of the Pages Wood respondents were ABC1s.

### **Community**

During the focus groups some time was spent discussing how respondents defined their own community. This part of the session was followed by more specific discussions regarding the role of a community forest.

In both groups, most of the respondents perceived a fairly small geographical area as their community, generally covering an area which could easily be accessed from home. For those respondents without a car this tended to cover an area within a short walking distance (e.g. up to 2 or 3 miles) while car owners perceived a larger area as being easy to access and therefore within their community (e.g. within 7 or 8 miles).

Other influences on how respondents defined their community included the places covered within their local paper, their local authority area and even the area covered by their phone directory.

*“Even our phone directory doesn’t cover Ockendon, we’re Greys.”*

In the group which contained residents of the area around Mardyke Woods, it was suggested by some respondents that their community was where they had grown up and/or the places where their friends and relatives lived.

*“It’s where your roots are.”*

Generally, respondents perceived their communities as covering smaller geographical areas than that covered by the overall Thames Chase Community Forest. This finding has some implications on the locations likely to be considered as potential places to visit for recreation with the 'short-list' of alternatives for short trips generally found within walking distance or a very short drive from home. Places further afield were more likely to be considered as longer day trip destinations with only those places offering a wider variety of things to do and other facilities likely to be considered for this type of trip.

Also, the respondents who defined their community on the basis of their proximity to family and friends were more inclined to consider the preservation of land as beneficial because it helped reduce the development of new housing. Some of these respondents stated that anything which reduced the number of new houses built in their area could help to preserve the existing 'balance' of who lived locally, thereby supporting their community.

## Activities

### *Survey of local population*

One of the aims of this study was to find out more about the lifestyles of people living nearby Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood. During the survey of local residents respondents were asked a series of questions regarding the leisure activities they undertook outdoors and indoors and about the places they tended to undertake these activities. The table below details the leisure activities undertaken by respondents on a regular basis over the last year.

**Table B-9 – Leisure activities undertaken on at least 4 occasions during the last 12 months (%)**

Base: All respondents (323)

	Users	Non-users	Total
<b>Outdoor activities</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>64</b>
Informal activities (e.g. short walks, dog walking, cycling and running)	65	46	49
Spending time with family/friends outdoors (e.g. picnics, BBQs, play)	33	39	38
Visiting outdoor/visitor centres	50	25	29
Active outdoor recreation (e.g. hill walking, mountain biking)	23	12	13
Spending time in the countryside (e.g. bird watching)	23	8	10
<b>Indoor activities</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>62</b>
Be with family/friends indoors (e.g. meals, parties, playing games)	52	46	47
Watching sports at home/a pub/club	33	27	28
Watching live sports (e.g. attending football matches)	29	19	21
Other indoor sports activities (e.g. attending gym, swimming)	19	19	19
Pursuing a non-sports hobby/interest (e.g. gardening, crafts)	17	13	13
Playing indoor sports (e.g. football, badminton)	17	7	9
<b>Shopping for recreation</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>73</b>
<b>Concert/theatre/cinema etc</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Visit pubs/enjoy nightlife</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>General sightseeing/touring</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Visits to historical buildings/heritage</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Visit to churches/cathedrals</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>
<i>Base (Total respondents)</i>	<b>48</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>323</b>

In terms of *outdoor activities*, as is shown in the table above, similar sized proportions of respondents had regularly undertaken any outdoor leisure activities (64%) and/or indoor

leisure activities (62%) during the previous year. Around half of respondents (49%) stated that they had taken part in informal outdoor activities such as short walks, dog walking, cycling and running. Two out of five respondents (38%) had spent time with friends and family outdoors during, for example, barbecues, picnics and visits to play areas. Three out of ten (29%) had been to visitor centres, in particular those at country parks. Mountain biking and hill walking were the most common activities amongst the 13% who had taken part in any of the more active outdoor recreation activities. Some 10% had spent time visiting the countryside, participating in activities such as birdwatching.

*Indoors*, nearly half of the respondents (47%) had spent time with friends and family having meals, parties or playing games. Nearly three out of ten (28%) enjoyed watching sporting events at home or in a pub, with football was the most popular sport to watch. A further 21% spent time watching live sports and football was the most common sport attended, followed by cricket. One in eight (13%) had pursued a non-sports hobby or interest like gardening, reading and craft activities.

Respondents were also asked to state *other general leisure activities* they had undertaken during the year. Nearly three-quarters enjoyed shopping during their spare time (73%), whilst two out of five liked going to cultural events such as concerts, the theatre and cinemas (37%). A similar proportion regularly visited pubs and enjoyed nightlife (34%) while 29% went on general sightseeing and touring trips. A quarter liked visiting historical buildings and other heritage attractions (26%), whilst a fifth were visiting churches and cathedrals (21%).

As is shown in table B-8, the users of Mardyke and Pages Woods were generally more likely than non-users to participated in most of the activities listed. In terms of *outdoor* activities, users of the woods were more likely to participated in all of the activities with the exception of 'spending time with family and friends' which was undertaken by a slightly larger proportion of non-users (39% v 33%).

Users of the woods were also more likely to have undertaken most of the *indoor* activities with the exception of 'other indoor sports activities' which was undertaken by similar proportions of users and non-users.

In terms of the other general activities listed, users of the woods were more likely than non-users to have attended concerts, the theatre or the cinema, to have taken part in

sightseeing trips or to have visited historical buildings, churches or cathedrals but were less likely to have taken regular shopping trips or enjoyed regular visits to pubs/nightlife.

It is also useful to compare levels of participation in the main categories of outdoor activities amongst different demographic groups:

- *Informal outdoor activities (49% overall)* – visitors most likely to undertake these activities (i.e. short walks, dog walking, jogging, cycling) included Young Independents (56%), those aged 16-24 years (55%) and those aged 25-44 years (53%).
- *Spending time with family and friends outdoors (38% overall)* – the respondents most likely to spend spare time in the outdoors with their family and friends included those in the Family lifecycle group (46%), those aged 25-45 years (43%), female respondents and C2DEs (41% each).
- *Visiting outdoor/ visitor centres (29% overall)* – those aged 45+ (33%), Empty Nesters (34%) and ABC1s (33%) were the most likely to have visited outdoor centres.
- *Active outdoor recreation (13% overall)* – people most likely to engage in more active outdoor activities were Young Independents (30%), male respondents (22%) and those aged 16-24 years (21%).

By comparison, the Great Britain Day Visits Survey recorded that, across Britain as a whole, during 2002 the most frequently undertaken activities during day trips were: eating and drinking out (18%), walking, hill-walking, rambling (15%), visiting friends and relatives (14%), shopping (11%) and taking part in sports and other active pursuits (9%).

#### *Focus group participants*

When asked about the activities they regularly undertook in their leisure time, respondents in the focus groups provided responses reflecting those obtained in the survey of local residents. Activities mentioned in both discussions included those undertaken with children such as visiting play parks and taking cycle rides, health related activities such as walking or running to keep fit, watching television and attending cultural events such as shows at the theatre. Also, smaller numbers of respondents regularly enjoyed more formal outdoor sports including sailing, golf and fishing.

There were some variations in the types of activities mentioned amongst each of the focus groups with those who lived in the area close to Mardyke Woods (mainly C2DE social classes, most without children) more likely to mention participating in social activities such as picnics, BBQs or visits to beer gardens and visits to places with formal facilities and a focal point such as a shop, visitor centre or play area for children.

By comparison, those who lived close to Pages Woods (mainly ABC1, with children) tended to plan activities around entertaining their children, often visiting places where the kids could 'let off steam', away from the television and games console and, ideally, in a place where they could learn something relevant to the school curriculum. Activities undertaken by these respondents on trips without their children tended to be more for exercise (e.g. jogging or cycling), relaxation (e.g. going somewhere quiet) or to take part in a hobby such as fishing or bird watching.

## Places to undertake activities

### *Places visited*

Respondents to the survey of local residents who had taken part in outdoor leisure activities were also asked to state where they had undertaken these activities.

**Table B-10 – Places undertaken leisure activities during last 12 months (%)**

Base: All respondents undertaking outdoor activities (273)

	<b>Users</b>	<b>Non-users</b>	<b>Total</b>
The countryside	85	49	55
A town or city	68	52	55
In a wood or forest	79	41	47
The seaside	53	30	34
By a stretch of inland water	47	15	20
Parks	-	2	2
Other	2	2	1
Don't know	2	2	2
<i>Base (Total respondents)</i>	<b>47</b>	<b>226</b>	<b>273</b>

- No responses

As shown in the table above, just over half of the respondents who had engaged in outdoor activities had done so in the countryside and/or to towns and cities (55% each). A slightly



smaller proportion had gone to woods and forests to participate in outdoor activities (47%) whilst a third had visited the seaside (34%). A fifth stated that they had taken part in outdoor activities by a stretch of inland water (20%).

Users of Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood were more likely than non-users to have visited a wider variety of types of place. In particular, they were more likely to have taken part in activities within the countryside (85%), woods or forests (79%) or at the seaside (53%).

### *Destination choices*

The focus group discussions provided an opportunity to investigate the factors affecting choices of places visited to take part in outdoor activities in greater detail. The main influences mentioned during each of focus groups were as follows:

Convenience – the proximity of potential places to visit to home was possibly most important amongst respondents in both of the focus groups. When considering places for short trips (e.g. of less than 2 hours) to take part in dog walking, a cycle ride or short trips/walks with children, respondents would often only consider places within a 5 to 10 minute walk of their home and tended not to consider, or even be aware of, places further afield.

*“It’s convenient to go to the one on your doorstep because you only want to nip out.”*

The convenience of local open spaces was particularly significant when the main reasons for taking a trip were dog walking or exercise (e.g. jogging, walking or cycling). The length of time spent doing these activities was likely to be fairly short and limited facilities would be required, therefore convenience from home was especially important.

For longer days out with family or friends, locations slightly further away (e.g. within a 30 minute drive) would be considered but for these longer duration trips places with more facilities and activities were preferred.

Habit and low awareness of alternatives – corresponding with the importance of convenience and proximity from home, many respondents also indicated that they routinely visited the same places through habit. The parks, woods and open spaces visited most often were usually those which they knew best while they had limited awareness of alternative places which may also be equally convenient to their home.

Natural backdrop/contrast – for many respondents, an important influence in decisions regarding places to visit was the natural backdrop offered in parks and woodland which contrasted with the predominantly urban surroundings in the local area.

*“You go a hundred yards and it seems like a different world.”*

*“It’s a nice surrounding, starting to mature now”*

It was mentioned in the Mardyke group that walks along the River Thames or other places with water could be particularly relaxing. It was also suggested in by some respondents that, as well as enjoying the scenery in outdoor recreation areas, they liked to find places where they could enjoy fresh air and quiet. However, these aspects could be harder to obtain in some of the local sites:

*“Most of its alongside the M25, you aren’t going to get away from the fumes!”*

Openness, space and ‘wilderness’ – for some respondents a key factor in decisions regarding places to visit was being able to allow their dog off its lead to run, freely and safely. Similarly, respondents with young children liked open locations where they could let their children ‘run off steam’, in a safe environment away from dangers such as traffic.

*“I like to take the children away from the TV and computer games.”*

Furthermore, many of the respondents with children liked to visit places which were not as ‘manicured’ as the local authority parks, preferring places where their children could spot wildlife and enjoy the open spaces and unsurfaced footpaths. Being able to visit places such as woods and parkland was seen by some of the parents as very important to their children’s upbringing, especially amongst the respondents who lived near Pages Wood.

*“They love putting wellies on and getting muddy.”*

*“These are experiences which will stay with them longer than watching TV.”*

It was agreed that areas such as Pages and Mardyke Woods contained lots of wildlife to see but this may only be an important factor in choice of where to go amongst people who already proficient and interested in identifying different species, etc.

*“...there’s quite a few different types of bird that I’ve started noticing since I joined the RSPB.”*

*“Identifying trees and flowers is quite good fun. You get a book or whatever.”*

The availability of information/ interpretation boards at some sites, providing information on the types of wildlife which could be seen was commented upon. The provision of this type of information was generally appreciated and, whilst it may not be a major influence in decision regarding where to visit, its provision would enhance the quality of experience during a visit. It was indicated that a number of the ‘favourite’ places mentioned by respondents provided information regarding wildlife to be seen, history, etc.

*“History on any of these places would be a very good thing. I don’t know what was here before but if you could look at something that went back 50 years that would be very interesting.”*

Exploration – another important factor which influences choices of places visited was the choice of paths to follow and explore. This aspect was particularly important for families with some respondents preferring places with a network of paths which allowed lots of alternative routes to be taken and others particularly positive about places with waymarked routes. Colour coded waymarkers were liked as they provided visitors with the confidence to follow new routes by reassuring them about the length of time a walk would take and their right of way whilst reduced any concerns over getting lost.

*“If you know how long it will take you can choose the best route.”*

Time with family and friends – while some respondents in the focus groups tended to take outdoor trips alone, other were more likely to go with members of their family or friends. As mentioned above, when trips were taken with young children this provided opportunities for the family to have fun together in a semi-rural environment where a fun and educational experience could be enjoyed. Respondents with children or grandchildren who lived near Mardyke Woods were also more likely to visit places which provided of children’s play equipment.

*“A children’s playground. They are able to run around, which you can’t do so much locally these days.”*

Members of the Mardyke Woods catchment area focus group were generally more likely to focus on the social element of trips from home, seeking places with play facilities for children and the opportunities to include a visit to a pub or café during a trip.

*“Its nice to go out and have a bit of lunch. People like to have a drink when you go out  
...that’s a big plus.”*

For these respondents walks and other trips to the outdoors may often be planned around a visit to a pub at the beginning or end of a walk.

### **Thames Chase Community Forest**

Before talking in detail about visits taken to places locally, respondents in the focus groups were asked to provide their views on what they expected the role of the Thames Chase Community Forest to be and what, in their opinion, were the benefits of creating community woodland areas in the Thames Chase area.

When asked, without prompting, what they thought the Thames Chase Community Forest was aiming to achieve, a response provided in both focus groups was that they were aiming to ‘join up’ a number of different open spaces into a number of larger, connected areas which would be linked by a network of paths.

*“There seems to be an attempt to link up all these different areas to make one vast organisation, if you like, called Thames Chase.”*

*“Is the eventual idea that you will be able to get from A to B, that they should be linked somehow?”*

*“The farmland as such isn’t really used so I thought that was the whole point..to join them up.”*

Other respondents perceived the purpose of Thames Chase Community Forest as less to do with linking geographical areas but more to do with creating connections between the owners of different recreational spaces, establishing linking routes and providing information and publicity together.

*“Belhus is owned by Essex and it borders Thames Chase planted areas but Belhus people people don’t know how to get into the other one – they don’t really communicate to each other...Everybody needs to talk to each other more!”*

Another common perception in both groups was that Thames Chase Community Forest was aiming to protect areas of open space from ‘threatened’ developments such as

housing. Some of the respondents, especially those from the Mardyke Woods catchment, perceived the forests as ways of preventing an 'influx' of new residents to their area.

*“There seems to be an attempt to create a bastion against all the housing development we’re facing. It’s going to become more and more important to have these places.”*

*“It’s sort of similar to the green belt in a way. Providing space in between the developments.”*

As well as obtaining these unprompted views on the purpose of the Thames Chase Community Forest area, respondents were asked for their reactions on whether or not the organisation’s aims should include the provision of places for *socialising, education, health and therapy*.

In both groups, it was generally felt that the sites within Thames Chase Community Forest such as Mardyke or Pages Wood could provide all of these elements. However, it was generally agreed that the priority for Thames Chase should be the development of the educational value of their sites. Reactions to each of the possible ‘themes’ included the following:

*Places to socialise* – this theme received the least enthusiasm in both groups. Whilst earlier discussions had identified opportunities to spend time with family and friends, playing and talking, as reasons for taking trips to the outdoors, this was seen as part of visits which would be difficult for the Thames Chase organisation to develop or improve upon. Potential suggestions of how to develop the potential of forests as places to socialise included the provision of more play facilities, facilities for events such as BBQs or picnics or the hosting of community events such as open days or family fun days.

*Place for education* – respondents in both groups were much more enthusiastic about the importance of the Thames Chase Community Forest in providing places for education. Educating children was seen as most important although some of the respondents also thought that adults could learn from visits too.

The subjects that respondents would most like to be communicated to visitors related mainly to nature and wildlife, the environment, sustainable uses of wood and the local, historic significance of the different sites.

*“...the thing I find interesting is when some of the parks have living history events and they have people working on the site...that brings people in.”*

An example was provided of an event which took place recently at Harl Court Woods where demonstrations of uses of locally grown wood were found to be both enjoyable and educational.

*“...the children thoroughly enjoyed watching the bloke with the lathe making things out of wood...it was really good to find out what he was doing and the ethos behind it.”*

Generally it was agreed that whilst socialising, health and therapy were all part of what Thames Chase Community Forest should offer, education was most important, especially in relation to children. As discussed in more detail later in this report, respondents felt that an important way to promote awareness of the sites could be through schools and youth groups.

Places for health – some respondents in the focus groups stated that trying to keep fit and healthy motivated them to visits the outdoors. Activities undertaken which were seen as beneficial for health included walking, running and cycling. However for most of these respondents, while health was recognised as a benefit of taking part in outdoor recreation, it was not their sole reason for taking trips to local sites.

When prompted on whether Thames Chase Community Forest should actively promote and develop the health benefits of visits to their sites, reactions were varied. Facilities such as trim trails and other outdoor fitness equipment/ facilities were seen as more suited to children than adults who would feel self conscious using them. However, providing information on the length of paths and associated benefits of walking different distances or for different durations was more likely to encourage both adults and children to take exercise.

Places for therapy and relaxation – being able to enjoy peace and quiet, fresh air and solitude in a natural environment were seen as important reasons for visiting woods as all of these elements helped respondents to relax.

*“When I go to a place like Belhus Woods, one of the things I like is actually going and not seeing anyone else.”*

In relation to the objectives of Thames Chase Community Forest, it was generally agreed that their role should be to maintain the ‘escape’ from the surrounding noisy, urban environments which their sites offered. In order to do so it was hoped that visitor numbers would remain fairly low and that some of the existing problems of noise pollution from adjacent roads such as the M25 would be reduced as trees grew.

As most of the respondents found that being independent and away from groups of people was an important part of the relaxing experience, there was little support amongst the members of the focus groups for the provision of ‘organised’ activities aimed to enhance the therapeutic value of the sites such as Tai Chi groups.

### Benefits of Thames Chase Community Forest

To gain more insight into the perceptions of community forests such as Thames Chase, all respondents in the survey of local residents were asked what, in their opinion, were the main benefits of creating woodlands and community forests in the Thames Chase area.

**Table B-6 – Benefits of creations of woodlands and community forests in Thames Chase (%)**  
Base: All respondents (323)

	Users	Non-users	Total
Good for wildlife	90	73	76
Creates natural environments for future generations to enjoy	81	68	70
Creates areas for outdoor recreation for others	75	62	64
Improves the landscape	77	61	63
Encourages nature studies	75	49	53
Create areas for my personal use	63	47	49
Improves the reputation of the area	73	44	48
Others	1	13	14
None/ can't see any benefits	-	1	1
Don't know	-	1	1
<i>Base (Total respondents)</i>	<b>48</b>	<b>275</b>	<b>323</b>

Three-quarters of the respondents thought the main benefit was that it is good for wildlife (76%), whilst the creation of natural environments for future generations to enjoy was important for a slightly smaller proportion (70%). Just under two-thirds of all respondents appreciated the creation of areas for outdoor recreation for others (64%) whilst a smaller

proportion (49%) stated that the main benefit was that it created areas for their personal use. Some 63% said that the work in Thames Chase improved the landscape, 53% felt that it encouraged nature studies, whilst 48% thought that a positive outcome was an improvement to the area's reputation.

Again, there were some significant changes between those who stated that had visited Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood over the last 12 months. Users were more likely to see benefits from the creation of woodlands and community forests in the Thames Chase area, in particular the improvement of the area's reputation (73% v 44%) and encouraging nature studies (75% v 49%).

There were very few significant differences between different types of respondents in terms of socio-demographic groups. Male respondents were slightly more likely than females to mention improvement of the area's reputation (55% v 43%) and ABC1s were more likely than C2DEs to mentioned any benefit from the creation of woodlands in Thames Chase, in particular the creation of natural environments for future generations (78% v 60%); improvement of the landscape (70% v 55%) and the encouragement of nature studies (59% v 45%).

When asked about the benefits of improving and protecting open spaces such as those managed by Thames Chase Community Forest, responses in the focus groups largely reflected the results of the survey of local residents.

Most of the respondents perceived the main benefits of the restoration and protection of the land for forestry in terms of the local environmental gains. It was stated that a large amount of housing development was underway or planned for the local area so the protection of the land by Thames Chase Community Forest was an increasingly important way of protecting the remaining open spaces. One respondent referred to these spaces as the area's 'lungs'.

*"These are vital areas. There is so much building development around – places like this are going to be more and more vital."*

*"It's a pretty good way of preserving the green belt."*

Other respondents saw the key benefits of protecting the land as playing a part in environmental protection at a wider, global scale. For a number of respondents the planting of trees and protection of green spaces was simply seen as doing the 'right thing' for future generations.



*“I think it’s all to do with the environment, greenhouse, all that sort of stuff.”*

In addition to the above, unprompted discussions, reactions were also sought to some of the other potential benefits of the work undertaken in Thames Chase. Some of the reactions received included the following:

*A place for wildlife* – all of the focus groups respondents agreed that this was one of the most important benefits gained from the protection of the Thames Chase sites. As mentioned above, the wider protection of green spaces and the associated flora and fauna was seen as an important ‘counter balance’ to the housing development already taking place in the area.

*A place for future generations* – it was suggested that the planting of trees in the areas managed by Thames Chase Community Forest suggested a long term commitment to the protection of these pieces of land. Building on some of the comments made earlier on the role of the community forest in educating young people about the environment, it was suggested that protecting the land for these future generations was even more important than the immediate benefits which could be obtained by the area’s current residents.

*“We are all benefiting from it now but when the trees become established and matured, future generations will benefit even more.”*

*A place for tourists* – most of the respondents in both of the focus groups saw little, if any role for the community forests in attracting tourists to the area. Conversely, it was agreed that the sites should primarily benefit the local communities by protecting the environment and providing places for outdoor recreation.

Any use of these sites by visitors to the area was expected to be during trips to visit friend or relatives who lived locally or incidental:

*“I can’t really see these places as tourist attractions. It might be somewhere they pop in incidentally.”*

*“My parents come down and we do go to these places by mainly because they are used to the fresh air and green trees.”*

*Improving the area’s reputation* – while most of the focus group respondents saw the improvement of the local area’s environment as the greatest benefit of the Thames Chase

Community Forest, fewer saw any related improvements to the area's reputation as important benefits.

However, it was recognised by some of the respondents in the focus group containing residents of the area around Pages Wood that the improvements to that site had provided wider benefits to the overall amenity of the local area.

*"I think that the area where I live has improved because of Pages Wood. When I first saw it being planted up I didn't have much interest but now that it is established it has definitely improved the area."*

## **Awareness and usage of local sites**

### *Survey of local residents*

During the survey of local residents, respondents were shown a map and a list of the sites within Thames Chase Community Forest area and asked which of these they were aware of and which they have visited during the previous 12 months.

As Table B-4 illustrates, responses were obtained according to the seven different 'zones' which comprise the overall area. Most respondents had heard of one or more of the sites in the Aveley and Belhus (77%) or Brentwood (73%) areas. The best known specific locations within Aveley and Belhus were Belhus Woods Country Park and Belhus Park (67% and 47%) while the most heard of places in the Brentwood area were Thorndon Country Park North and South (50% and 45%).

Around half of respondents were aware of one or more of the sites in the Rainham and Corbets Tey area; North of Upminster or Mardyke Valley (51%, 50% and 47%). In the North of Upminster area, the most well-known sites were Tylers Common (29%), *Pages Wood* (25%) and Tylers Wood (23%). The most heard of in the Mardyke Valley area were *Mardyke Woods* (34%), Davey Down Riverside Park (33%) and Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre (32%).

Two out of five had heard of any of the sites in South and East of Upminster area (42%), whilst a smaller proportion were aware of any in the Dagenham Corridor (35%).

**Table B-4 – Awareness and usage of Thames Chase (%)**

Base: All respondents (323)

	Aware of	Visited
<b>Aveley and Belhus</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>37</b>
Belhus Woods Country Park	67	29
Belhus Park	47	18
Belhus Chase	27	5
Kennington Park	22	6
Warwick and White Post Woods	9	1
Oak Wood and Ash Plantation	5	1
Cely Woods	3	1
<b>Brentwood Area</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>37</b>
Thorndon Country Park North	50	20
Thorndon Country Park South	45	16
Warley Country Park	39	11
King Georges Playing Field	31	14
Hartwood	27	11
Shenfield Common	27	8
Little Warley Common	22	5
Warley Gap	21	6
Warley Place	18	5
Donkey Lane Plantation	4	1
Old Park	4	*
<b>Rainham and Corbets Tey</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>17</b>
Hornchurch Country Park	40	14
Berwick Woods	20	6
Parklands	12	1
Ingrebourne Valley	11	2
Bonnetts Wood	8	1
Berwick Glades	7	*
<b>North of Upminster</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>20</b>
Tylers Common	29	10
<i>Pages Wood</i>	25	12
Tylers Wood	23	4
Harold Court Woods	18	8
Folkes Lane Woodland	11	2
Essex County Council Woods	6	1
Pot Kiln Wood	5	1
<b>Mardyke Valley</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>18</b>
<i>Mardyke Woods</i>	34	4
Davy Down Riverside Park	33	9
Grangewaters Outdoor Education Centre	32	5
Dilkes Park	23	7
Field of Peace	3	-
<b>South and East of Upminster</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>14</b>
Stubbers Adventure Centre	38	9
Cranham Marsh	14	2
Thames Chase Forest Centre	10	4
Cranham Brickfields	8	2
Franks Wood	5	*
<b>The Dagenham Corridor</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>10</b>
Central Park	23	5
Eastbrookend Country Park	14	3
Old Dagenham Park	13	2
Bretons Outdoor Centre	13	2
The Chase Local Nature Reserve	12	4
Beam Valley Country Park	5	*
<b>None of these areas</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>27</b>
<i>Base (Total respondents)</i>	<b>323</b>	<b>323</b>

\* Less than 0.5%

- No responses

While the proportions having visited any of the forests during the last 12 months were much lower than the awareness figures, it is notable that around three-quarters of local residents had visited one or more of the locations listed (73%). Sites in Aveley and Belhus and the Brentwood area had been visited by the largest proportions with over a third having been to one or more of the places listed in each area (both 37%).

A fifth of the respondents had been to sites in the area North of Upminster recently (20%) while a similar proportion had visited the Mardyke Valley (18%) or Rainham and Corbets Tey (17%). Slightly smaller proportions had been to the locations listed in South and East of Upminster and the Dagenham Corridor during the last year (14% and 10%).

Around a quarter of respondents (27%) had not visited any of the listed woodlands during the last 12 months and 3% had not heard of any of them.

In terms of the specific locations listed, the single most visited site was Belhus Woods Country Park (29%), followed by Thorndon Country Park North (20%), Belhus Park (18%) and Thorndon Country Park South (16%). Some 12% of respondents stated that they had visited Pages Wood over the last year whilst 4% had been to Mardyke Woods.

#### *Focus group respondents*

During the focus groups respondents were asked to name the specific places they tended to visit locally on days out and shorter trips which involved walking or other outdoor activities. The question was asked prior to respondents seeing any of the Thames Chase Community Forest publications or other lists of local sites to ensure an unbiased response. Places mentioned and reasons for visiting these locations included the following:

*Belhus Woods Country Park* – mentioned by respondents in both focus groups, this site was liked due to its compact size, provision of circular walks, trees which offer shelter in the rain/ uncertain weather and geese for children to see.

*“..if it’s going to rain you can whiz around Belhus Wood. It’s small enough to get around.”*

*Thorndon Country Park* – this larger location was also mentioned in both of the focus groups. Reasons for choosing to visit this location included the larger size of the site, natural backdrop, hills, trees for children to climb and specific references to wildlife including bluebells and funghi which could be seen. The large network of paths at this location was also provided as a reason for visiting.

*“..we’re working our way to find as many different ways around in a circle as possible – there are a lot of criss-crossing paths to explore and lots of bits we haven’t found yet.”*

Bedfords Park – this location was mentioned amongst the group of respondents who lived close to Pages Wood. Bedfords Park is outside of the Thames Chase Community Forest area, three miles north of Romford. Reasons for choosing to visit included the deer to see and the new visitor centre. However, it was commented by one respondent that they had been disappointed by the visitor centre:

*“The new purpose built centre is appalling..there’s nothing inside, no real focus on anything like the wildlife.”*

Havering Country Park – this site which was also mentioned by respondents from the Pages Wood area and is outside of the Thames Chase Community Forest. Reasons for visiting this location included the muddy bridle paths which could be fun for children:

*“..if you want mud and boots go to Havering Country Park!”*

Aveley Woods – this site was mentioned by a respondent in the focus group which contained people who lived close to Mardyke Woods. The main reason for choosing to visit this location was its proximity to a pub which provided a play area for children.

*“There’s a nice pub in Aveley called the Henry Gurney (?) and that is a real lovely place to go to. They’ve got loads of tables outside and there is a lake there. There’s stuff for the kids, you know, a playing area and there’s a restaurant.”*

Hainault Forest – this location which is north of Romford, outside of the Thames Chase Community Forest area, was mentioned by respondents in both of the focus groups as a potential destination for a full ‘day out’. Particular aspects of this site which were liked included animals and wildlife to be seen and educational area.

*“You can take the kids there and have a really lovely day out. It’s a smashing place, it really is. You can go on a Sunday and there are hundreds and hundreds of people there because it’s such a lovely place.”*

Coalhouse Point – this location, on the Thames near Tilbury, was mentioned as a place to visit by respondents in the Mardyke Woods focus group. Reasons for choosing to visit this location included the variety of things to see (i.e. heritage, river, grassland) and places to

walk and have picnics, including opportunities to walk along the river which created a focus and the proximity of pubs to visit.

Grays Beach – this location was also mentioned by a number of the respondents in the focus group containing residents of the Mardyke Woods catchment area. This location was visited by these respondents because of the number of facilities available such as places to eat and play areas for children.

*“It’s sort of a play area come a little park as well and it’s got a little restaurant there.”*

Other places mentioned by respondents as potential places to visit included Lee Valley Regional Park, Westley Heights, One Tree Hill and Davy Down.

It is notable that, on the whole, respondents in each of the focus groups mentioned places to visit which were within a close proximity of where they lived. Those who lived in the area surrounding Pages Wood mentioned locations no further south than Belhus Woods while those who lived close the Mardyke Woods were more likely to mention places further south, closer to the Thames.

Also the types of places mentioned were generally restricted to country parks with facilities such as visitor centres and waymarked paths or, amongst the residents of the Mardyke Woods area, places with facilities such as a pub and play facilities. Other locations with fewer facilities such as Pages and Mardyke Woods were less likely to have been mentioned as potential places to visit for walks, largely because of a lack of awareness of where the sites were and the facilities available.

### **Thames Chase Community Forest – Information Provision**

During the focus group discussions some time was spent looking at information provided by Thames Chase Community Forest. These discussions were held towards the end of the focus group sessions, to ensure that responses to questions asked earlier about places visited locally and awareness of different locations were not influenced by exposure to this promotional information.

#### *Out and About in Thames Chase*

When shown the Out and About in Thames Chase pack of leaflets, reactions from respondents in both focus groups were very positive. However, few if any of the respondents had ever seen this information before, either in a printed format or on the Internet.

*“I think they’ve got this on the computer at Bedford Park”*

As discussed previously, levels of awareness of the range of sites within the Thames Chase Community Forest area were fairly low, with most respondents only familiar with a small number of the larger places such as country parks. It was agreed by most of the respondents that the information in these leaflets would be extremely valuable in helping them to widen the range of places they would visit on trips from home, both in terms of days out and shorter, local trips for dog walking, to entertain children, exercise, etc.

*“That’s brilliant, they’ve got the whole lot.”*

*“It would live in the car.”*

*“You could actually go and find somewhere you hadn’t been to before.”*

*“It gives you more of a choice than just thinking ‘where did we go the other day?’ this is all the information you want.”*

The format of the leaflets with a map showing the overall Thames Chase area and more detailed maps and information for each of the seven ‘zones’ was also seen as easy to use and understand and providing exactly the correct levels of detail and types of information.

Reflecting the earlier discussions on the proximity of places visited to the respondent’s homes and definition of local communities, some of the respondents felt that they would not

use the full range of 7 leaflets (i.e. those covering each of the 'zones' in detail) but would be more likely to only visit the places closest to their home.

The pricing of the pack of leaflets at £2 received a mixed reaction. For many of the respondents, in both groups, this price seemed fair given the amount of information contained in the leaflets and likely costs to produce them. However, a minority of respondents were less likely to pay this amount of money for the whole pack, especially since they may only use two or three of the leaflets contained in it.

### *Eyes and Ears in your Woods*

Respondents in the focus groups were also shown the credit card sized 'Eyes and Ears' card which provides telephone numbers for locals to contact if they want to report vandalism or other inappropriate or dangerous behaviour taking place at sites in Thames Chase.

Reflecting some of the issues covered later in this report, the card was seen as a very useful way to help to improve the Thames Chase sites by ensuring that the site managers could be made aware of vandalism, disturbances to wildlife, etc. It was also suggested that distributing the cards would help to generate support and local pride in the woods.

However, it was also suggested that this card would be less effective in helping to actually prevent appropriate behaviour or catching the perpetrators. As discussed later, there was greater support for the increased presence of ranger staff on sites to help to 'police' those places where problems occurred regularly.

*“You want somebody there at the time. It's no good phoning up and dealing with it the day after. So it's of limited use.”*



## Reasons for *not* visiting forests

### *Survey of local residents*

To get an indication of the potential barriers for people to visit forests and woodlands, all respondents in the survey of local residents were asked if there were any reasons which prevented them from visiting forests and woodlands at all or as much as they would have liked to during the last 12 months. Firstly, the respondents were asked this question for forests and woods in general and then for either Mardyke Woods or Pages Wood, depending on where they lived. The table below shows the reasons mentioned by 2% or more of respondents.

**Table B-5 – Reasons for not visiting forests**

Base: All respondents (323) and all those living near either Mardyke Woods or Pages Wood (158 and 165)

	<b>Mardyke Woods</b>	<b>Pages Wood</b>	<b>Forests generally</b>
Too busy/working/studying	16	12	33
Poor health	8	1	6
Illness within the family	6	1	5
Weather	-	2	4
Too old	2	2	3
Don't go to forests/not interested	3	1	3
Just had a baby/pregnant	2	1	3
Never heard of it/don't know where it is	18	17	3
No transport/too far away	6	1	3
Disabled/poor eyesight/blind	3	1	2
Difficult due children/babies	1	1	2
Does not feel safe to visit	4	-	2
No particular reason	30	30	21
Nothing, have been going as often as I liked	3	13	14
<i>Base (Total respondents)</i>	<b>158</b>	<b>165</b>	<b>323</b>

A third of all respondents claimed that they were too busy working or studying to visit forests and woodlands (33%). A tenth stated either their own poor health (6%) or illness within the family (5%) was the reason they did not go to forests as much as they would like. A fifth could not come up with a particular reason (21%) and 14% said that there was nothing stopping them from going as often as they liked to forests and woodlands.

Of the respondents living in the community near *Mardyke Woods*, the most common reasons for *not* visiting that particular woodland were lack of awareness and knowledge (18%) and too busy a lifestyle (16%). Some 4% did not feel this woodland was safe enough to visit and 30% could not provide a particular reason.

The two most common barriers to visits to *Pages Wood* were the same: 'never heard of it/don't know where it is' (17%) and 'too busy working/studying' (12%). Again, 30% could not give a particular reason whilst some 13% had visited *Pages Wood* as often as they liked, compared to 3% for *Mardyke Woods*.

Those aged 25-44 years and 45-54 years were the most likely to claim that they were too busy to visit forests (40% and 44%). Young Independents and Families were also more likely to state that they were too busy to visit forests and woodlands (38% and 36%). Empty Nesters on the other hand, were most likely to mention poor own health or illness within the family (18%).

Families and Young Independents were the most likely to lack knowledge of *Mardyke Woods* and its whereabouts (27% and 14%), whilst Empty Nesters were more likely to feel that this woodland was an unsafe place to visit (7%). The pattern was the same amongst those living near *Pages Wood*, where 26% of Families and 18% of Young Independents had not heard of this site and 5% of Empty Nesters stated that they were too old to visit the area.

Lack of general awareness and knowledge seem to be the main barriers to visiting these sites, especially in the case of *Pages Wood*. All those respondents who had not visited any of these two woodlands during the last year were asked if there were any other reasons that had not been to the woods. A quarter of those interviewed near *Pages Wood* stated again that they had never heard of the wood or they did not know where it was (26%). Another 2% did not think the area was well advertised.

Amongst respondents living close to *Mardyke Woods*, a tenth mentioned reasons linked to lack of awareness, knowledge and marketing (10%). A similar proportion confirmed that they were too busy (11%).

Those interviewed in the vicinity of *Mardyke Wood* were more likely than those living near *Pages Wood* to state that poor health (8%) and illness (6%) within the family prevented them for visiting the forest as often as they would like. This seems to be linked to the higher

proportion of people categorised as social class C2DE near Mardyke Woods (56% v 34%), where those unemployed etc due to illness and poor health are included.

#### *Focus group respondents*

During the focus groups some time was spent discussing reasons for not visiting Pages and Mardyke Woods and the other sites within the Thames Chase Community Forest. The responses provided reflected those obtained in the local residents survey with lack of awareness being the main issue. The following bullets summarise the issues which were mentioned:

Awareness – throughout both focus groups it was apparent that despite the proximity to their homes of many of the Thames Chase sites, awareness of the places which could be visited was generally low. On seeing the Out and About in Thames Chase leaflets many of the respondents were surprised at the range of places and indicated that the provision of this type of information would widen the range of places they went to on trips and possibly increase their frequency of trips to the outdoors generally.

*“It has to be publicised that’s the big thing.”*

*“People don’t know about all of these new areas. They see them as you drive past on the M25 and you think, ‘what’s that?’”*

Access – the accessibility of sites was mentioned as an issue affecting choices of places to visit, especially amongst respondents who lived close to Mardyke Woods.

For these respondents the places they could visit were generally limited to those which were close enough to be walked to from home. Some of the Thames Chase sites, including the area around the Thames Chase Forest Centre, were seen as being only accessible by car. The option of using public transport to reach sites was perceived as unviable due to difficulties in finding out bus routes and times and the proportion of a trip that would be spent travelling.

*“I think transport is a problem. A lot of people might know about, say, a place like this but not be able to get there ‘cause not everybody has cars.”*

Habit/ convenience – another key reason for not visiting Thames Chase Community Forest sites was that respondents tended to be in the habit of visiting the same places regularly. This was especially likely to be the case in trips taken for dog walking or other short duration trips for exercise, entertaining children, etc. On these occasions, respondents would ‘nip out’ to the places they knew best without considering alternative destinations.

*“It depends on what you are going to do. If you are going to walk your dog or cycle then you’re going to go local.”*

These discussions suggested that more could be done to influence the choices of destination for longer day trips from home as, for many respondents, very short trips for casual recreation such as dog walking would always be restricted to places close to home. However, in some cases awareness could be increased of alternative places to visit which were also close to home but unknown.

*“You could move them around! Can I have Thorndon at the end of my road please?”*

Safety – reflecting the findings of the survey of local residents, the issue of personal safety during visits to outdoor sites was only mentioned amongst residents of the area close to Mardyke Woods. Both men and women in this group agreed that their concerns over personal safety would influence where they would visit. While none had experienced any major issues affecting their safety, some of the respondents had felt uneasy when they encountered large groups of youths.

*“Speaking as a woman, a lot of places like this, I feel quite nervous...you’re in a wood and you’re walking along and it’s just the word is not a nice place now.”*

*“You daren’t look at them. They’re smashing bottles and you want to go up and say ‘what are you doing?’, but you can’t.”*

It is notable that while safety was primarily a concern amongst respondents who lived close to Mardyke Wood it was much less of an issue amongst those who lived close to Pages Wood. Many of these respondents felt that they were in no greater danger visiting a forest site than going to many of the other places they went to everyday life. However, they could understand why some, more ‘vulnerable’, people might be more concerned than themselves.

*“These sound like people who are terrified to go out after a certain time of day and don’t like parking their car in Tesco’s. That’s life!”*

*“The problem is the world we live in.”*

*“To be honest I’m more concerned with my safety at my local pub.”*

Activities for young people – another potential barrier to visiting Thames Chase sites which was mentioned amongst the respondents in the Mardyke Woods group, was the lack of things to do for children and teenagers. It was suggested that this was particularly likely to be the case when families with children in a range of ages visited together with at least one child likely to become bored quickly. It could therefore be more appealing for families to visit places such as Grays Beach where a wide range of entertainment facilities were available.

### Frequency of visits to local forests

Some 16% of those interviewed in the survey of local residents who lived close to Mardyke or Pages Wood had visited either one or both of these woodlands over the last year. Respondents who had taken visits to either of these sites were asked questions about the frequency and length of their visits. In terms of frequency of visits, most users visited fairly infrequently with nearly three out of five visiting less than once a month (62%) while 22% visited once a week or more.

It is important to interpreting these results with some degree of caution due to the small sample sizes.

**Table B-7 – Frequency of visits to forest (%)**

Base: Respondents who have been to Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood before (46)

	<b>Mardyke Woods</b>	<b>Pages Wood</b>	<b>Total</b>
Every day	-	3	2
4 to 6 times per week	-	-	-
1 to 3 times a week	38	16	20
1 to 3 times a month	25	13	15
4 to 6 times a year	13	18	17
1 to 3 times a year	25	45	41
Less often	-	5	4
<i>Base (Total respondents)</i>	<b>8</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>46</b>

- No responses

As might be expected, dog walkers tended to be most frequent visitors while those who engaged in watching nature, cycling or walking without a dog visited less often.

## Length of visits

Visits taken to either Mardyke or Pages Woods tended to last an average of around an hour and a quarter (1 hour 16 minutes). The largest proportions of visitors stayed on site for between 30 minutes and 1 hour (37%) or 1 to 2 hours (33%). Only 2% stayed for more than 3 hours. The table below shows the average times spent in Mardyke Woods, Pages Wood and the average across both locations.

**Table B-8 – Length of visit (%)**

Base: Respondents who have been to Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood before (46)

	<b>Mardyke Woods</b>	<b>Pages Wood</b>	<b>Total</b>
Up to 15 minutes	-	-	-
15 – 30 minutes	13	13	13
30 minutes – 1 hour	38	37	37
1 hour – 2 hours	38	32	33
2 hours – 3 hours	13	16	15
3 hours – 5 hours	-	3	2
More than 5 hours	-	-	-
<i>Average</i>	<i>1 hr 23 mins</i>	<i>1hr 17 mins</i>	<i>1hr 16 mins</i>
<i>Base (Total respondents)</i>	<b>8</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>46</b>

- No responses

As the table above shows, visitors to Mardyke Woods spent on average 1 hr 23mins, whilst to those visiting Pages Wood spent 1 hr 17mins.

Overall, length of visit at Thames Chase was the second shortest of those recorded at the other sites included in this programme of research. Only the survey at Whiston Wood, the other Community Forest included in the research programme, recorded a shorter dwell time (36mins).

### Importance of different aspects of visit

To identify the drivers of quality, it was useful to ask those respondents to the survey of local residents who had used either of the two woodlands to rate how important different aspects were in their decision to visit the site. Users could rate each of a list of aspects as 'extremely important' (5), 'very important' (4), 'fairly important' (3), 'fairly unimportant' (2) or 'not at all important' (1). 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.

In the table 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 being most important to the site across all users while the other aspects may be of less importance overall or only important to certain groups of users.

**Table B-11 – Importance of different aspects in decision to visit (mean score)**

Base: All respondents who have been to Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood before (46)

	Importance score
<i>Feeling safe in the wood</i>	4.28
<i>Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park</i>	4.02
<i>Being able to enjoy scenery and views</i>	4.00
<i>Being able to enjoy the wildlife</i>	4.00
<i>Being able to get fit and healthy</i>	3.96
<i>Solitude, peace and quiet</i>	3.93
<i>Value for money of your whole trip or day out</i>	3.91
<i>Being able to spend time with family and friends</i>	3.89
<i>Clear signposting on footpaths</i>	3.70
<i>Choice of paths for walking</i>	3.70
<b>OVERALL AVERAGE</b>	<b>3.63</b>
Enough car parking	3.43
Information about the site's history and conservation	3.41
Leaflets and maps to help you find your way around	3.22
Availability of staff at the site	3.20
Choice of trails for cycling	2.84
Choice of trails for other activities	2.51

This analysis suggests that the overall priorities amongst the majority of users of Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood included 'feeling safe in the wood'; 'feeling happy to leave your car in the car park'; 'being able to enjoy the scenery and views' and 'being able to enjoy the wildlife'.

On the other hand, facilities of least importance overall or only of importance to specific groups of visitors included the choice of trails for other activities than walking and cycling and the choice of trails for cycling;



The most important aspects of the visit to those going to Pages Wood were: 'feeling safe in the wood' (4.32); 'being able to get fit and healthy' (4.16); 'feeling happy to leave your car in the car park' (4.05) and 'being able to enjoy scenery and views' (4.03).

The most important aspects of the visit amongst users of Mardyke Woods were 'feeling safe in the wood' (4.09); 'being able to enjoy the wildlife' (3.82); 'feeling happy to leave your car in the car park' (3.82) and 'solitude, peace and quiet' (3.73).

Furthermore, the most important aspects to male visitors were 'solitude, peace and quiet' (4.21); 'being able to enjoy scenery and views' and 'being able to enjoy the wildlife' (4.18 each). Female users rated 'feeling safe in the wood' (4.50); 'value for money' (4.00) and 'feeling happy to leave your car in the car park' (4.00) most important.

For users from social classes C2DE, 'feeling happy to leave your car in the car park' (3.93) and 'feeling safe in the wood' (3.87) were the most important aspects, whilst ABC1s found 'feeling safe in the wood' (4.47) and 'value for money' (4.14) most important.

Visitors in the Family lifecycle perceived 'feeling safe in the wood' (4.50); 'feeling happy to leave you car in the car park' (4.33) and 'value for money' (4.20) as most important, whilst Empty Nesters found the following aspects most important: 'feeling safe in the wood' (4.26); 'being able to get fit and healthy' (4.11) and 'being able to enjoy wildlife' (4.04).

Users were also asked to specify in their own words what else, if anything, had influenced their decision to visit. The most frequently provided responses were: 'close to home/convenient' (13 out of 46), 'to walk the dog' (4 respondents) and 'a nice place for walking' (3 respondents).

Some of the specific responses provided are listed below. The full verbatim comments provided to all of the open ended questions are appended.

**Mardyke Woods**

*“It’s near my sons so we go there with dogs on the way to his house.”*

*“The parking’s free”*

*“Nice quiet place to walk around and it is very close.”*

**Pages Wood**

*“Because of easy parking and it was a nice open space for young and old.”*

*“It’s accessible greenland area; it’s near the town here.”*

*“Good place for children; pedestrian friendly; bikes no cars; children running around so nothing to worry about.”*

*“Support the planting they have done recently there and use the facilities.”*

*“It’s a nice big open space and it’s interesting to watch it develop.”*

### **Favourite aspects of forest**

When the visitors who participated in the survey of local residents were asked what they liked most about Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood, the most frequently provided responses related to 'close to home/convenience' (11 out of 46), 'scenery and views' (7 respondents), 'peace and tranquillity' (6 respondents) and 'open spaces' (5 respondents).

Other responses related to the wildlife, walks and pathways. Some of the specific answers provided included the following:

#### **Mardyke Woods**

*"Peaceful, away from hustle and bustle."*

*"Freedom to be able to go there and just walk."*

*"Getting into nature and getting the kids away from tv."*

*"It's peaceful, it is quite a big place so not loads of people walking about the same area."*

#### **Pages Wood**

*"Just somewhere to take the dogs, nice and peaceful."*

*"It's sort of countryside in the town."*

*"It's unusual to see country side so close to here."*

*"The footpaths are quite well maintained."*

*"It's local to us and very pleasant, the river, ease of walking, the links to environmental wood park for children's activities."*

*"It's near to home and I just like the whole concept of the open green for future use."*

### Satisfaction with different aspects of visit

Those respondents who had visited Mardyke Woods or Pages Wood 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 elements on a five point scale which included 'excellent' (5), 'very good' (4), 'good' (3), 'fair' (2) and 'poor' (1). If the respondent had no experience of a specific element they were asked to indicate that they did not know.

Scores were 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 to these sites were most likely to be satisfied with the solitude, peace and quiet; being able to get fit and healthy; value for money and being able to spend time with family and friends.

**Table B-12 – Satisfaction with different aspects at forest (mean score)**

Base: All respondents who have been to Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood before (46)

	Satisfaction score
<i>Solitude, peace and quiet</i>	3.67
<i>Being able to get fit and healthy</i>	3.67
<i>Value for money of your whole trip or day out</i>	3.67
<i>Being able to spend time with family and friends</i>	3.65
<i>Being able to enjoy the wildlife</i>	3.61
<i>Being able to enjoy scenery and views</i>	3.59
<i>Feeling safe in the forest</i>	3.49
<i>Choice of paths for walking</i>	3.38
<i>Clear signposting on footpaths</i>	3.36
<b>OVERALL AVERAGE</b>	<b>3.29</b>
Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park	3.26
Enough car parking	3.25
Choice of trails for cycling	3.19
Leaflets and maps to help you find your way around	3.00
Information about the site's history and conservation	2.67
Choice of trails for other activities (e.g. horse riding)	2.89
Availability of staff at the site (e.g. rangers)	2.24

An overall 'average' of all of the mean scores has been included in the ranking. Elements ranked lowest on average include availability of staff at the site; choice of trails for other activities; information about the site's history and conservation and leaflets and maps.

When comparing these scores it is important to bear in mind that not all variations are statistically significant. This ranking should therefore be treated as providing an indication of what visitors are most and least satisfied with.

Visitors to Pages Wood were most satisfied with value for money (3.69); being able to get fit and healthy (3.68); solitude, peace and quiet (3.66) and feeling safe in the wood (3.63). Users of Mardyke Woods were most satisfied with being able to spend time with family and friends (3.60); being able to enjoy the wildlife (3.55) and solitude, peace and quiet (3.50).

Female visitors were most satisfied with the opportunities to get fit and healthy (3.72); being able to spend time with family and friends (3.67) and value for money (3.63). Male users were most satisfied with the solitude, peace and quiet (3.79); feeling safe in the wood (3.78) and value for money (3.70).

Users categorised as social class ABC1 were most satisfied with 'solitude, peace and quiet' (3.86); 'being able to spend time with family and friends' (3.86) and 'value for money' (3.86). Those in social class C2DE were most satisfied with 'being able to get fit and healthy' (3.43); 'value for money' (3.36) and 'feeling safe in the wood' (3.36).

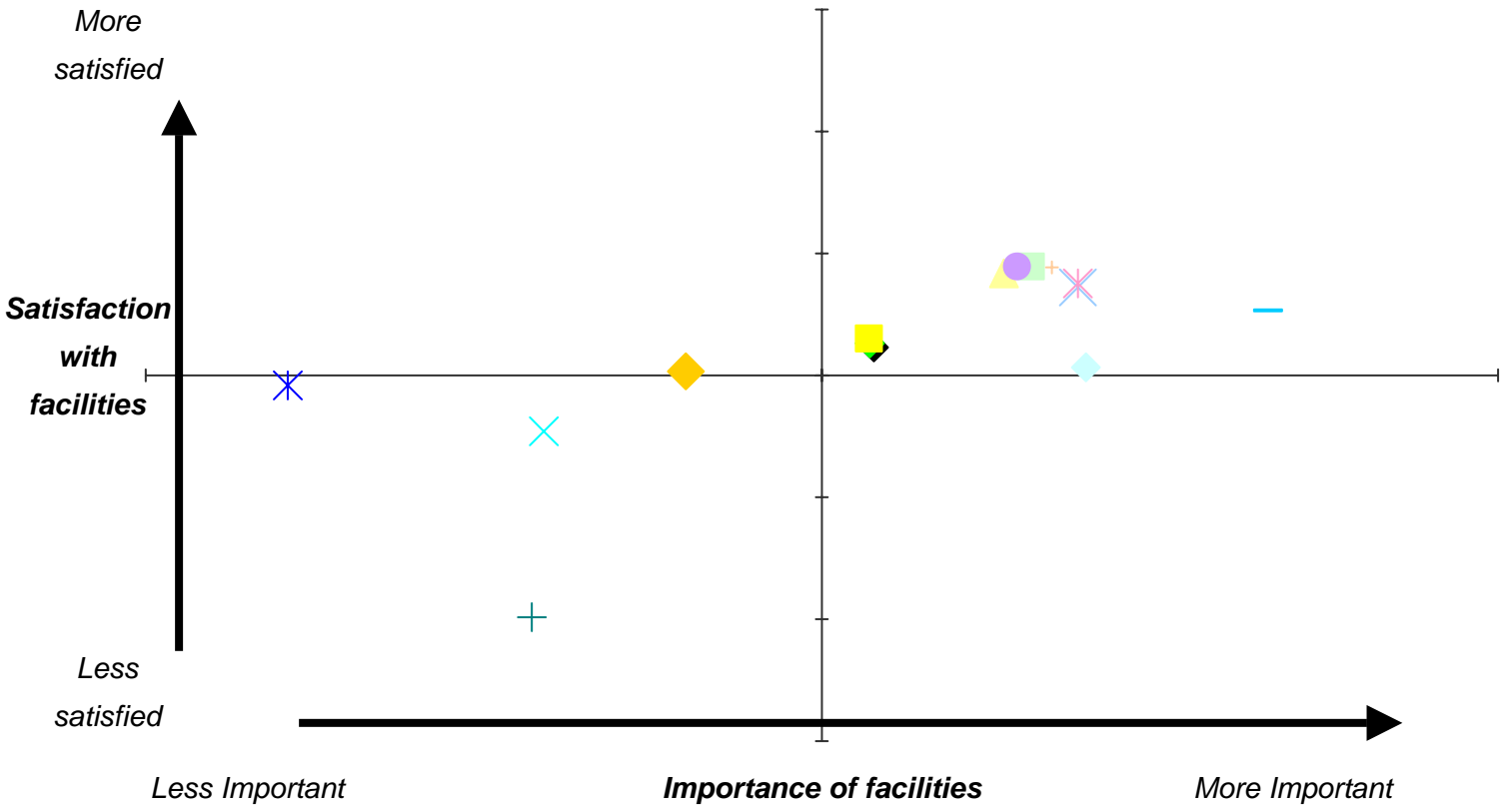
Empty Nesters were most satisfied with the following aspects: 'being able to enjoy the scenery and views' (3.59); 'clear signposting on footpaths' (3.54) and 'choice of trails for other activities than walking and cycling' (3.09). Families were most satisfied with 'solitude, peace and quiet' (3.83); 'being able to enjoy wildlife' (3.83) and 'being able to get fit and healthy' (3.83).

Visitors who stated that they were dissatisfied with any aspects of the wood (11 visitors in total) were asked to indicate why. Key reasons provided and the numbers of respondents providing each comment were as follows:

- No staff available (5)
- Vandalism (2)
- Height restrictions at car park; need more orientation leaflets to be able to visit different parts; would like to know more about the area and didn't see much wildlife (1 each)

Compared to the scores obtained at the other sites included in this programme of research, visitors to Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood were, on average, less satisfied with all the aspects listed, in particular 'availability of staff' (2.24 v 3.38 average across other forests); 'being able to enjoy scenery and views' (3.59 v 4.48) and 'choice of trails for other activities' (2.89 v 3.78).

**Analysis of importance of elements of visit V satisfaction with same elements – Thames Chase**  
 Base: All respondents who have been to Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood before (46)



- ◆ Enough car parking
- ◆ Clear signposting
- ✕ Leaflet and maps to find your way around
- ◆ Choice of paths for walking
- ✕ Choice of trails for cycling
- ◆ Choice of trails for other activities
- + Availability of staff on site
- Information about the site's history and conservation
- Feeling safe in the wood
- ◆ Feeling happy to leave you car in the car park
- Solitude, peace & quiet
- ▲ Being able to spend time with family and friends
- ✕ Being able to enjoy scenery and views
- ✕ Being able to enjoy wildlife
- Value for money of your whole trip
- + Being able to get fit and healthy

### Identification of issues

Tables B-9 and B-11 illustrated a ranking of the overall levels of importance and levels of satisfaction users have with different aspects of the 'visitor experience' at Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood. It is useful to combine these two measures to identify the elements which are most relevant to improving quality. Again, it is important to bear in mind, when comparing these scores, that not all variations are statistically significant. This ranking should therefore be treated as providing an indication of the importance of different aspects and what visitors are most and least satisfied with.

The chart on the previous page 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-9 and B-11). Each of the elements are plotted in the 4 quadrants as follows:

- Top right – *More Satisfied – More Important* – Feeling safe in the wood, solitude, peace and quiet, being able to enjoy scenery and views, value for money, clear signposting, choice of paths for walking, choice of trails for other activities, information about the site's history and conservation, being able to enjoy wildlife, being able to spend time with family and friends and being able to get fit and healthy. Elements in this quadrant are rated fairly highly in terms of both importance and satisfaction. These are the site's key strengths which should be maintained.
- Bottom right – *Less Satisfied – More Important* – Feeling happy to leave the car in the car park. Elements which are in or near this quadrant are rated as more important than 'average' but have received lower satisfaction scores. These are elements which possibly require further attention.
- Top left – *More Satisfied - Less Important* – Enough car parking. Visitors are generally satisfied with these elements although they are rated as less important on average.
- Bottom left – *Less Satisfied – Less Important* – Choice of trails for cycling, leaflets and maps to find the way around and availability of staff on site. Overall, visitors were less satisfied than average with these aspects but they are also seen as less important by most visitors.

It is important to note that the scores presented in this chart are averages across *all visitors*. It should be remembered that the scores for satisfaction and importance varied between different types of visitors so their priorities will also differ.

### Other visitors

When asked which other users had been encountered during their visit, nearly all of the visitors interviewed in the survey of local residents stated that they had seen other walkers (98%), whilst 85% had seen children and 65% had encountered cyclists during their most recent trip. Two out of five had seen horse riders (37%), whilst smaller proportions had seen motorbikers (15%) or vehicles driving in the forest (1%). None of those interviewed had actually taken part in horseriding or motorsports at Mardyke or Pages Wood.

Respondents who had encountered each of the different user groups were asked to indicate how this had impacted on 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’. Again, it is important to take the small sample sizes into account when interpreting these figures.

**Table B-13 – Other visitors encountered (%) and impact on enjoyment (row %)**

Base: All respondents who have been to Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood before (46)

	Total	Increased enjoyment a lot <b>+2</b>	Increased enjoyment a little <b>+1</b>	Made no difference <b>0</b>	Decreased a little <b>-1</b>	Decreased a lot <b>-2</b>	Score
Walkers	98	27	11	62	-	-	0.64
Children	85	18	18	64	-	-	0.54
Cyclists	65	20	13	63	-	3	0.50
Horse riders	37	24	24	41	6	6	0.53
Motorbikers/moto cross	15	29	-	14	29	14	0.00

As the table illustrates, while encounters with other walkers, children and cyclists usually were predominantly positive or had no impact, encounters with motorbikers and, to some extent, horse riders were more likely to have a negative impact (43% and 12%).

Motorbikes or motocross disrupted the enjoyment of 3 respondents (7% of all users). The reason for dissatisfaction given was the noise created. The pattern of encounters of other visitors and their impact seen at Thames Chase was broadly similar to those across the 7



other sites included in this programme of research; although visitors to Thames Chase were less likely to be negatively influenced by other visitors.

#### *Focus group responses*

The impact of encountering other visitors and user groups whilst visiting sites in Thames Chase Community Forest was also discussed in the focus groups. As in the survey of local residents, most respondents had few, if any, negative experiences caused by other users.

However, it was mentioned that on occasion cyclists could be a nuisance when walking in a park or forest, especially if they were travelling at speed and suddenly appeared.

*“Cyclists can be a bit of a pain if you’re walking. You don’t expect to be diving to the side to get out of the way when you’re out for a quiet stroll.”*

It was also mentioned that at some locations it was unclear whether cyclists, walkers or other users had priority on certain paths and this could cause problems.

*“..when you’ve got lots of small kids on bikes and there’s a great big horse in the front of them it can be a problem!”*

However, the signage at some of the local sites, including Pages Wood was praised for being clear and easy to understand as was the information provided in the Out and About in Thames Chase pack of leaflets.

*“The bridle paths are specifically for horses, the rest of the paths are for anybody to use.”*

Reflecting the results of the survey of local residents, it was very unusual to encounter motorbikes when visiting local forests but when they were present they usually had a major impact on enjoyment with visitors concerned about their own safety, the safety of the motorbike riders and generally inconvenienced by the noise and mud created (impacts which could affect enjoyment from further afield or after the motorcyclists had left).

*“It’s a terrible issue at Bells Park, the motorbikes there are terrible.”*

It was recognised by one respondent that the problem could only be solved by providing places for people to ride motorbikes. Otherwise stopping them from using one forest location might only shift the problem to another.

*“It wouldn’t be a problem if the kids has somewhere to ride their bikes.”*

### Other disturbances to visits

Respondents in the survey of local residents 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 indicated that the potential impacts either ‘didn’t reduce their enjoyment’ or that they did not know (suggesting the impact had not been encountered).

However, the disruptions most likely to have any negative effect were dogs and dog dirt (decreased the enjoyment of 35% of visitors), litter or fly tipping (21%) and vandalised, missing or damaged signposts (22%).

**Table B-14 –Impact of potential issues on enjoyment (row %)**

Base: All respondents who have been to Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood before (46)

	Didn’t reduce enjoyment <b>0</b>	Decreased a little <b>1</b>	Decreased a lot <b>2</b>	Don't know	Score
Dogs and dog dirt	61	13	22	4	0.57
Litter or fly tipping	70	4	17	9	0.39
Vandalised, missing or damaged signposts	59	7	15	20	0.37
Noise from other users or motorised sports	67	11	4	17	0.20
Muddy tracks	85	4	4	7	0.13
Forest operations such as felling	76	-	2	22	0.04

Respondents were asked to indicate what else, if anything had decreased their enjoyment. Encouragingly, nearly all of the respondents could not think of anything or did not state any other issues (93%). Issues that were mentioned were the need for a café, shelters for when it rained and cutting of the grass (1 respondent each).

## Improvements

### *Survey of local residents*

During the survey of local residents users of Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood were also asked what, if anything they would like to see changed or improved to make future visits more enjoyable. Nearly two out of five visitors either stated that nothing should be improved or that the areas are fine as they are (41%).

The suggestions that were made are listed below. The most frequent suggestions related to more staff and/or security staff (11%), encouragement of more wildlife, more variety of trees, a café and more facilities in general (7% each).

**Table B-15 – Suggested improvements (%)**

Base: All respondents who have been to Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood before (46)

	<b>Total</b>
More staff/security staff	11
Encourage more wildlife	7
Need variety of trees	7
Need café	7
More facilities (unspecified)	7
Need/more toilets	4
Litter bins	4
Cut the grass	4
More wild flowers	2
Others	9
Don't know	2
Nothing else/fine as it is	41
<i>Base (Total respondents)</i>	<b>46</b>

Some of the specific suggestions provided are reproduced below. Full listings of the responses to open-ended questions are appended.

*“Cut the grass so that it is easier to walk on.”*

*“Just the orientation leaflets, i.e. being more and more detailed.”*

*“More staff would be nice.”*

*“It's in the process of improving.”*

*“Somewhere to get something to eat or drink.”*

*“It needs time to mature.”*

*“More variety for children.”*

*“Raise the height restriction on the car park.”*

*“Still needs more improvement, cleaning, staff, more bins.”*

*“I suppose a bit more security, a little bit of attendance by rangers perhaps, I think they should be more advertised and more open days in a year.”*

### *Focus groups*

The focus group discussions provided a further opportunity to discuss possible solutions to issues and other improvements and developments which could be made in Thames Chase Community Forest.

### *Increasing awareness of forest sites*

Increasing awareness of forest sites was seen as being the most important action for Thames Chase Community Forest. As discussed in the previous sections, most of the focus group respondents had fairly low levels of awareness of the opportunities available in their area for outdoor recreation and had been very positive about the information given in the Out and About leaflets. However the dissemination of this information to the local community was seen as an area which must be improved.

*“It has to be publicised, that’s the big thing.”*

*“You only find about it if you actually know a bit about it anyway and go there. It’s a sort of enclosed area of knowledge.”*

When asked their opinions on the best ways of ‘spreading the word’ about places to visit in Thames Chase, the most popular suggestion was to use local newspapers. Reflecting the earlier discussions on the local nature of ‘communities’, it would be important to ensure that information was carried in the correct newspapers with appropriate local readerships (i.e. focusing on sites within close proximity to the homes of readers).

One approach to distributing information using local papers which was discussed was the inclusion of leaflets such as those in the Out and About pack as inserts.

*“That should be put into the local paper.”*

While this option was initially seen as a good way to distribute details to potential users, on further discussion it was agreed that this would be an expensive way to promote the site with a lot of leaflets wasted.

*“I think most people would put it in the bin but you would get the minority that would like to take the kids out to do this, do that.”*

A more positive response was obtained to the alternative of local papers including editorial regarding the local Thames Chase Community Forest sites, possibly in the format of a regular column covering different locations each month/week, together with a picture of the site, details of upcoming events and updates on relevant volunteer initiatives, etc.

Another option which was suggested by a respondent was to advertise details of the sites in the local press in a similar format to the adverts included annually by the local authority to list leisure facilities.

*“Each year after Christmas, in the Thurrock Gazette the council advertise all the local sports facilities on the front and back page. It’s a pull out type of thing. It covers all the different swimming pools and gymnasiums and they only do it one time each year – right on the front page.”*

As mentioned previously, respondents were very positive about the Out and About leaflets. It was felt that making these leaflets more widely available to local residents would help to increase awareness and use of the Thames Chase sites and the likely effectiveness of alternative ways of distributing the leaflets was discussed. While distributing leaflets as inserts in local press or as direct mail was seen to be very inefficient, it was suggested that more ‘targeted’ approaches such as providing them to pick up in local libraries or health centres may be more effective.

A method of communicating which was seen as a further opportunity for spreading awareness across the whole community was engagement with children, especially at primary school age.

Examples were given of children having encouraged parents to visit other sites they had learnt about at school or visited on field trips, with parents keen to return due to educational value of the visit.

*“I didn’t know about Harl Court Woods until the children brought the card back from school so thats why we went up there.”*

Another way of increasing awareness of sites which was suggested by respondents in both of the focus groups was events to be held on site which would make the site more appealing to groups who currently have low awareness levels.

Suggestions of types of event which might appeal included walks for children identifying wildlife or social events such as barbecues with local musicians attending, etc.

*“If they had events in the smaller places, closer to where we’re living then children s would know what they could go and look for on their own at another time.”*

### Access

Another area of possible improvement which was discussed in some detail was ways in which the accessibility of sites could be improved. As mentioned previously, when taking short trips from home many of the respondents would prefer to be able to walk to the place they were visiting. This was especially likely to be the case amongst respondents who live close to Mardyke Woods, a number of whom did not have access to their own car.

Correspondingly, these respondents suggested that it was important for sites to be safely accessible on foot, with no need to walk along or cross busy roads. For example, some of the respondents doubted whether they were likely to visit the site around the Thames Chase Forest Centre although it was within a 15 minute drive of their home and some perceived it as being in ‘the middle of nowhere’.

*“When I actually got the phone call about coming to this meeting I though that it was in Belhus Country Park and when the letter came I though ‘where is this place?’ I hadn’t a clue where it was.”*

### Staffing

Reflecting the findings of the survey of local residents, a frequently suggested improvement in the focus groups was an increased presence of staff at forest sites.

This suggestion obtained the greatest support from the respondents who had expressed concerns over their personal safety when visiting forest sites and those who felt the groups of youths 'hanging around' and vandalism was an issue.

While it was recognised that having a dedicated ranger for each of the sites was impractical, especially at the smaller places. An idea which was suggested was a roving warden who could visit specific sites at set times.

*“That is one of the things I was hoping to bring up, the lack of rangers to keep an eye on things. I’ve seen kids up there chasing the swans and pulling up the flowers and there are never any rangers around.”*

*“If you had a ranger on a push bike just going up and down the walkway so people would feel safe I think that would be marvellous, especially for women.”*

### Facilities for children

Mixed views were provided on the provision of more play facilities at Thames Chase Community Forest sites. This idea received a lot of support amongst respondents who lived close to Mardyke Woods who felt that young people needed play facilities to be entertained while respondents who lived near Pages Wood were less positive and expressed concerns that play areas would attract 'undesirables'. Some of these respondents also indicated that places such as local authority parks were already available if they wanted to use play equipment and that the forest sites should remain 'natural' without intrusive facilities.

*“We’ve got kids and kids are not going to only have a walk. They want to go on something, kids are kids!”*

### Other facilities

Respondents who lived in the area around Mardyke Woods also expressed a lot of support for the provision of facilities such as cafes, shops or visitor centres. These suggestions reflect the earlier findings that respondents in this focus group often preferred to visit places where facilities were provided while those who lived in the Pages Wood area were more satisfied with the natural environment and basic facilities such as footpaths.

*“..a café is always an added attraction, being able to have a cup of tea. And a centre where you can but book and get leaflets about the park.”*

### Waymarking and routes

Finally in this section, there were high levels of support in both focus groups for the development of waymarked paths in the forest sites. Places such as Belhus and Thorndon Country Parks with established routes were popular amongst respondents and the development of more paths to follow in other local sites would be supported.

Reasons for liking these routes included the confidence the markers provided (i.e. knowing you won't get lost, that you have a right of way, how far the walk is and how long it will take) which encouraged users to explore a site, the fact that they could make a visit more fun for children and act as target for people who were walking for health.

### **Engaging the community**

As well as asking respondents to provide their opinions on areas of improvement which should be priorities for Thames Chase Community Forest, reactions were obtained on some other potential ways of engaging the community. The main responses to each idea were as follows:

Ranger led walks – generally the idea of educational walks within the forest sites were supported. Giving walks a specific topic was liked with bird watching receiving positive feedback from most of the respondents in both groups, especially those who were inexperienced and thought that a very basic level introduction would help to make their subsequent visits to sites more enjoyable, possibly encouraging them to take up the hobby more 'seriously'.



Bat watching was not so positively received overall. While some respondents were quite enthusiastic and thought that it could be fun in the dark, most were wary about visiting the sites at night, especially if it meant they had to stay up late.

A mixed reaction was also received for walks with the topic of tree identification. While some of the respondents thought that this could be very interesting to a lot of people, including children and could even be developed to cover other topics such as fungi identification, other thought that it might be boring.

Generally, the idea of ranger led walks was received positively although it was recognised that different topics would have different levels of appeal to different audiences. It was also stated that 'investment' in a programme of walks might be better than wasting money on built facilities which could be vandalised.

*Bush craft skills* – this idea received some interest in both focus groups and it was generally agreed that it would be ideal for groups such as the Scouts. It was expected that the activity might involve sleeping 'under the stars', an idea which was appealing to some respondents (mainly male) but completely unappealing to others!

Generally, it was felt that there was a lot of scope for Thames Chase Community Forest to undertake activities with youth groups. One respondent stated that they led a local Scout group and would be very interested in finding out how they could volunteer to do work at the sites and learn skills, etc. This finding suggests that there is scope to send information about Thames Chase Community Forest to local groups such as his to help develop awareness and usage of the sites.

*Friends of Thames Chase* – while most of the respondents in both groups thought that this initiative was a good idea, few if any were interested in joining. This finding reflects that fact that none of the respondents tended to visit the site where the Forest Centre is so the free parking at the centre and 10% discount in the café did not appeal.

It was commented that it would be more appealing if free parking was provided at a wider variety of places although parking at many of the locations they visited was already free of charge.

## C. Postcode analysis

### Introduction

To ensure that the sample interviewed for the purposes of this survey was representative of local residents, an analysis of demographic characteristics was undertaken using CAMEO UK.

CAMEO UK is a geodemographic analysis system which matches postcodes to the results of the Census and other national sources, thereby providing a detailed demographic profile of residents in a predefined area. Using this profiling system all UK postcodes are categorized into one of the following 10 broad marketing groups:

Group 1	Affluent Singles & Couples in Exclusive Urban Neighbourhoods
Group 2	Wealthy Neighbourhoods Nearing & Enjoying Retirement
Group 3	Affluent Home Owning Couples & Families in Large Houses
Group 4	Suburban Homeowners in Smaller Private Family Homes
Group 5	Comfortable Mixed Tenure Neighbourhoods
Group 6	Less Affluent Family Neighbourhoods
Group 7	Less Affluent Singles & Students in Urban Areas
Group 8	Poorer White & Blue Collar Workers
Group 9	Poorer Family & Single Parent Households
Group 10	Poorer Council Tenants Including Many Single Parents

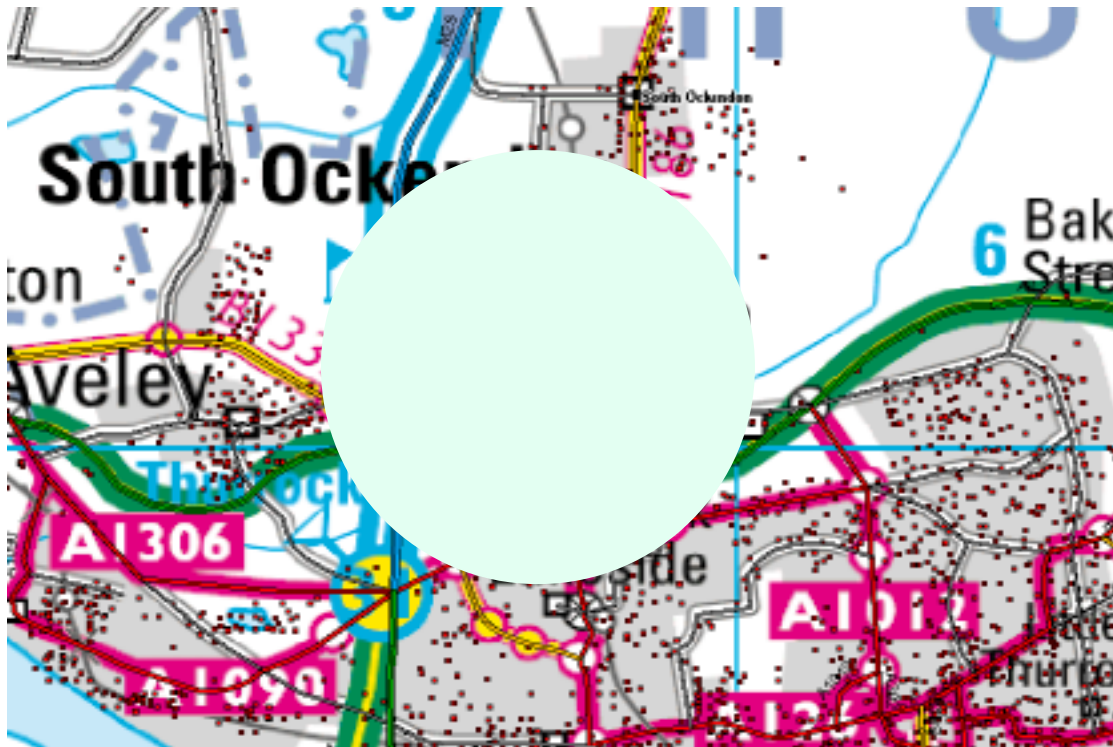
These 10 groups are divided further into 58 specific classifications, which are fully described in the CAMEO UK classifications table in the appendices.

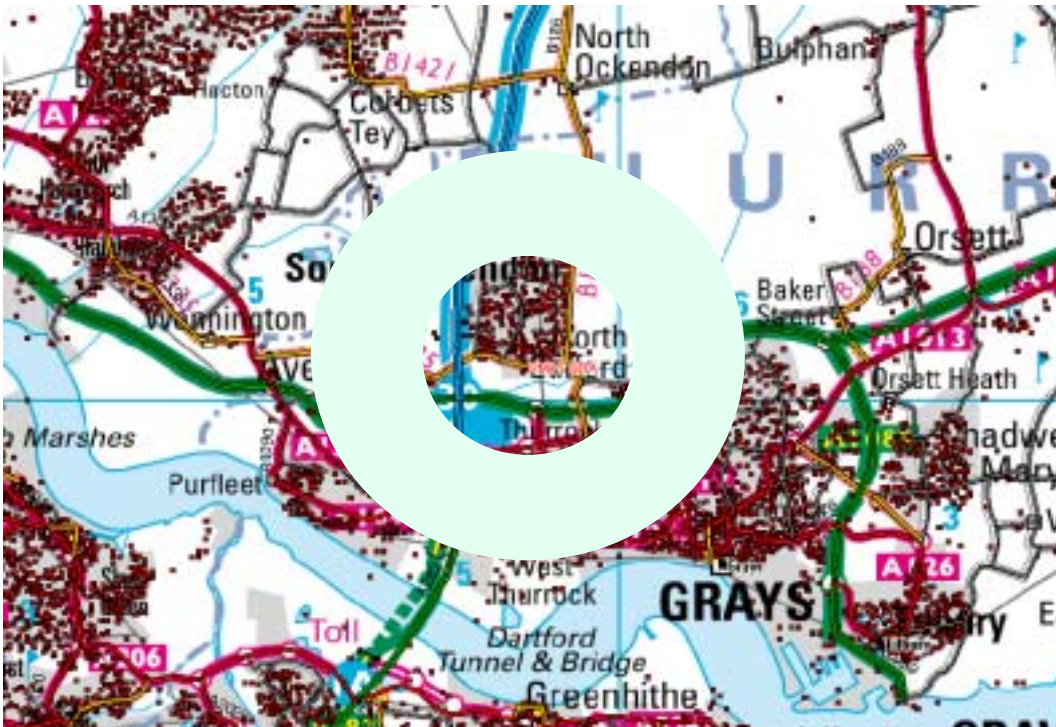
The focus of this study was households within a 2 mile radius of two woods in the Thames Chase area – Mardyke Wood and Pages Wood. The following sections provide the key results of the analyses of the population profile in each of these catchment areas.

### Mardyke Woods

The centre point for Mardyke Woods was taken as being RM15 6BA. The following maps illustrate the area within a 1 mile radius of the wood and within a wider 1 to 2 miles radius.

#### Up to 1 mile radius from Mardyke Woods



**1 to 2 mile radius from Mardyke Woods**

In each of these maps the red 'dots' represent individual postcodes in residential areas. Table C-1 overleaf details the full population profile of residents of each of the catchment areas.

There are some 21,645 households within the overall 2 mile radius of Mardyke Woods. Around a third are within 1 mile of the site (6,594 households) while the remaining 15,051 households are within the 1 to 2 mile band.

The CAMEO UK classification in greatest abundance in both of these catchment zones is 8C. This classification is described as 'Older households with school age children in towns and suburbs' and represents half of the population within 1 mile of Mardyke Woods (50%) and around a third within the 1 to 2 mile zone (31%). By comparison, this category represents just 4% of the UK population as a whole. Key characteristics of households defined as 8C include the following:

- A mix of family compositions, adults typically aged between 25 and 59.
- Homes likely to be smaller and less expensive than the national averages.

- Residents likely to be in C1, C2 or DE social classes with lower than average academic qualifications.
- Average car ownership, likely to travel to work by private or public transport.
- Predominantly white ethnic origins.
- Read mid-market and popular press, high usage of Internet.

The other categories in highest abundance within the catchment area population include:

*7A 'Single mortgagees and renters in pre-school family neighbourhoods'* – this group represents 18% of households in the total catchment area, compared to 3% in the UK population. Key traits include the likely presence of pre-school children, average adult age of 20 to 44 years, BC1C2 social classes, higher than average academic qualifications, average car ownership, mixed newspaper readership and mainly white ethnicity.

*4E 'Couples and families in modern rural and suburban developments'* – this group represents 9% of households in the overall catchment area compared to 2% in the UK as a whole. The main characteristics of this group includes ownership of larger than average homes, ABC1 and C2 social classes, higher than average academic qualifications, high car ownership, use of car to travel to work, quality newspaper readership, average internet usage and mainly white ethnicity.

*4F 'Mature couples and families in mortgaged detached houses and semis'* – some 7% of households within the overall 2 mile radius are in this category, more than double the proportion across the UK population (3%). Residents of these areas are likely to be aged between 30 and 59, have larger than average homes, ABC1 social classes, above average academic qualifications, high car ownership, use their car to travel to work, read mid market, quality and regional newspapers and are very high users of the Internet.

More details of the characteristics of each of the CAMEO classifications in contained in the appendices.

**Table C-1 – Residents of Mardyke catchment by CAMEO classification**

	CAMEO Description	<1 mile - Households		1-2 miles - Households		Total area - Households		UK
		N	%	N	%	N	%	%
8C	Older Households With School Age Children In Towns & Suburbs	3316	50%	4701	31%	8017	37%	4%
7A	Single Mortgagees & Renters In Pre-School Family Neighbourhoods	502	8%	3296	22%	3798	18%	3%
4E	Couples & Families In Modern Rural & Suburban Developments	724	11%	1138	8%	1862	9%	2%
4F	Mature Couples & Families In Mortgaged Detached & Semis	281	4%	1207	8%	1488	7%	3%
9E	Poorer Couples & School Age Families In Terraced & Semis	314	5%	813	5%	1127	5%	2%
5A	Singles, Couples & School Age Families In Mixed Housing	25	0%	748	5%	773	4%	0%
9B	Poorer Singles & Families In Mixed Tenure Older & Mature Households In Suburban Semis & Terraces	309	5%	282	2%	591	3%	2%
6B	Poorer Singles In Local Authority Family Neighbourhoods	89	1%	555	4%	644	3%	4%
10F		356	5%	16	0%	372	2%	3%
10E	Mature Households In Small Terraces & Semis	161	2%	354	2%	515	2%	3%
8A	Poorer Retired Households In Owned & Rented Accommodation	38	1%	402	3%	440	2%	2%
1C	Urban Living Professional Singles & Couples	158	2%	124	1%	282	1%	1%
8E	Mixed Mortgagees & Council Tenants In Outer Suburbs	140	2%	90	1%	230	1%	4%
4C	White Collar Home Owners In Outer Suburbs & Coastal Areas	55	1%	103	1%	158	1%	1%
8B	Older & Mature Households In Suburban Areas Of Mixed Tenure	36	1%	232	2%	268	1%	2%
4B	Professional Home Owners In Detached & Semi Suburbia	9	0%	199	1%	208	1%	3%
6G	Young Single & Family Communities In Small Terraces & Rented Flats	0	0%	159	1%	159	1%	1%
5C	Mature & Retired Singles In Areas Of Small Mixed Housing	36	1%	2	<1%	38	<1%	2%
10C	Poorer Mortgagees & Council Renters In Family Neighbourhoods	20	<1%	27	<1%	47	<1%	2%
6A	Less Affluent Communities In Areas Of Mixed Tenure	17	<1%	12	<1%	29	<1%	1%
6D	Couples & Families With School Age & Older Children In Spacious Semis	8	<1%	98	1%	106	<1%	3%
3A	Wealthy Older Families In Spacious Suburban & Rural Detached & Semis	0	0%	98	1%	98	<1%	3%
5G	Older Couples & Singles In Suburban Family Semis	0	0%	96	1%	96	<1%	3%
3C	Well-Off Older Couples & Families In Large Detached & Semis	0	0%	84	1%	84	<1%	4%
6F	Less Affluent Couples In Suburban Family Neighbourhoods	0	0%	78	1%	78	<1%	2%
6E	Mature Households In Less Affluent Suburban & Rural Areas	0	0%	48	<1%	48	<1%	3%
8F	Singles & Couples In Small Terraced Properties	0	0%	46	<1%	46	<1%	4%
4D	Mature Owner Occupiers In Rural & Coastal Neighbourhoods	0	0%	21	<1%	21	<1%	3%
2A	Opulent Older & Retired Households In Spacious Rural Properties	0	0%	20	<1%	20	<1%	1%
1A	Opulent Couples & Singles In Executive City & Suburban Areas	0	0%	1	<1%	1	<1%	0%
3D	Wealthy Mixed Households Living In Rural Communities	0	0%	1	<1%	1	<1%	3%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6594</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>15051</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>21645</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>71%</b>

In terms of levels of usage of Mardyke Woods, 5 of the 11 users interviewed lived in areas categorised as 8C and 2 lived in areas classed as 6B.

**Table C-2 – CAMEO classification of Mardyke Woods users**

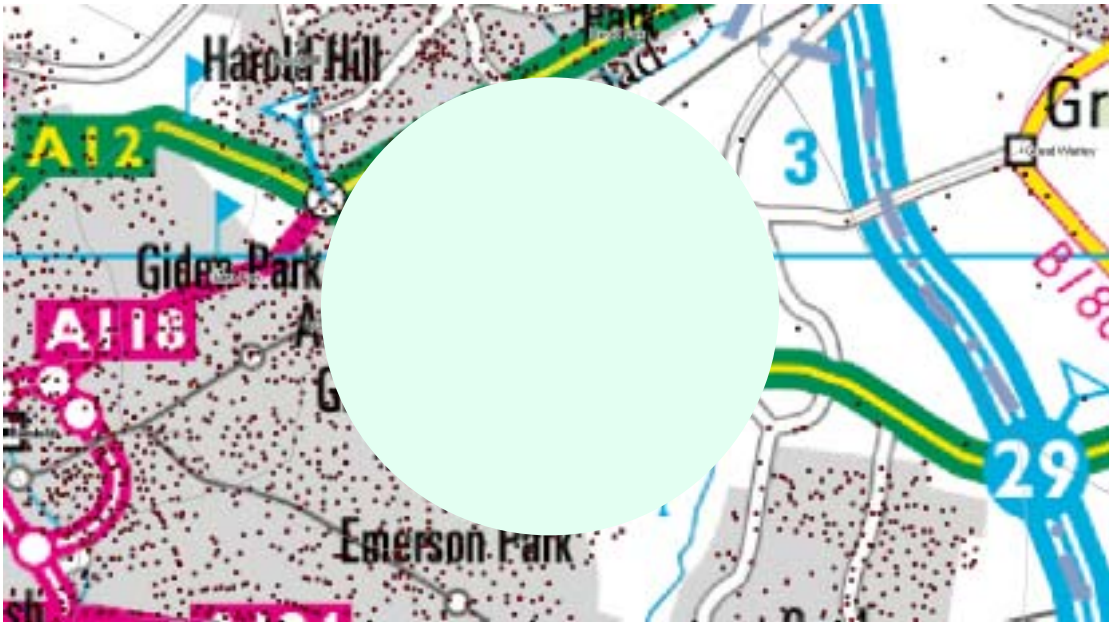
		Number of users within sample
<b>8C</b>	OLDER HOUSEHOLDS WITH SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN IN TOWNS & SUBURBS	5
<b>6B</b>	OLDER & MATURE HOUSEHOLDS IN SUBURBAN SEMIS & TERRACES	2
<b>3A</b>	WEALTHY OLDER FAMILIES IN SPACIOUS SUBURBAN & RURAL DETACHED & SEMIS	1
<b>7A</b>	SINGLE MORTGAGEES & RENTERS IN PRE-SCHOOL FAMILY NEIGHBOURHOODS	1
<b>3C</b>	WELL-OFF OLDER COUPLES & FAMILIES IN LARGE DETACHED & SEMIS	1
<b>8B</b>	OLDER & MATURE HOUSEHOLDS IN SUBURBAN AREAS OF MIXED TENURE	1



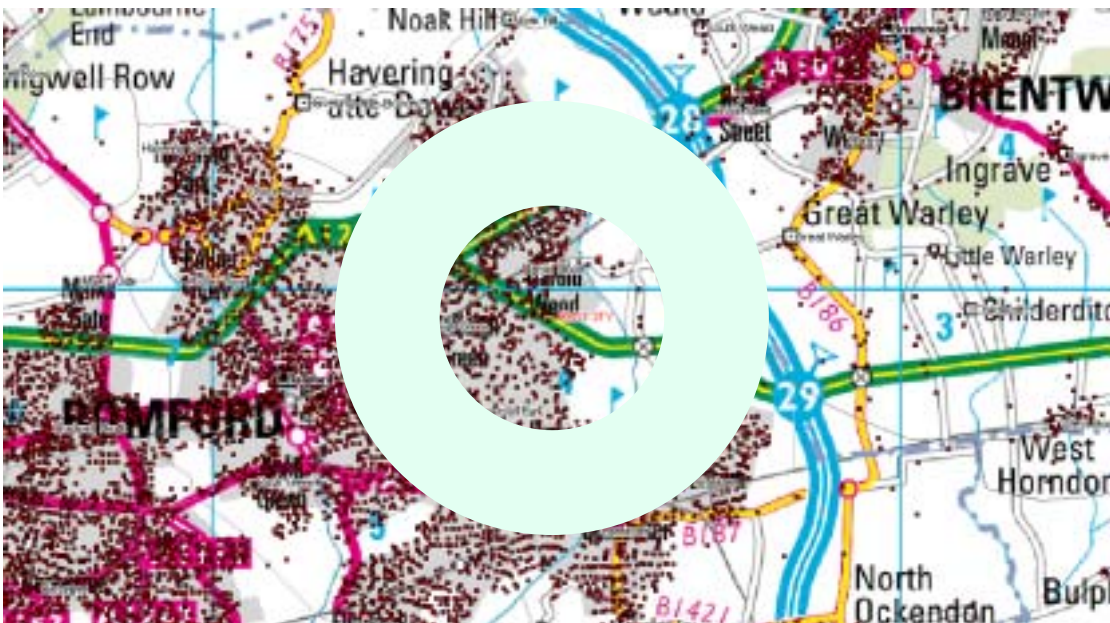
## Pages Wood

The centre point for Pages Wood was taken as being RM11 3TY. The maps below illustrate the areas covered within a 1 mile radius of the wood and within a wider 1 to 2 miles radius.

### Up to 1 mile radius from Pages Wood



### 1 to 2 mile radius from Pages Wood





In each of these maps the red 'dots' represent individual postcodes in residential areas. Table C-3 details the full population profile of residents of each of these catchment areas.

There are some 38,158 households within the overall 2 mile radius of Pages Wood, around a fifth with 1 mile of the site (7,305 households) while the remaining 30,853 households are within the 1 to 2 mile band.

The CAMEO UK classifications in greatest abundance in both of these catchment zones are 4B, 8C and 6B.

Almost a quarter of households are in areas defined as 4B (23%), a classification which covers only 3% of the UK population. Residents of 4B areas are described as 'Professional home owners in detached and semi suburbia' and their key traits include: home ownership, above average house price and larger than average house size, ABC1 social class, above average academic qualifications, high car ownership, mainly white ethnicity, readership of mid-market, quality and regional papers and high usage of the Internet.

A similar sized proportion of households in the total 2 mile catchment were defined as 8Cs (23%), a much larger proportion than across the UK population generally (4%). This classification is described as 'Older households with school age children in towns and suburbs' and key characteristics include: a mix of family compositions, homes likely to be smaller and less expensive than the national averages, C1, C2 and DE social classes, lower than average academic qualifications, average car ownership, travel to work by private or public transport, predominantly white ethnic origin, readership of mid-market and popular press, high usage of Internet.

The third most abundant classification, 6B, is described as 'Older and mature households in suburban semis and terraces' and represents 22% of the population within the overall 2 mile catchment area. The main characteristics of residents of 6B areas include: a mix of singles, couples and families, high ownership of larger than average houses, BC1C2 social classes, below average academic qualifications, above average car ownership, use of public and private transport to travel to work, mainly white ethnicity, mixed newspaper readership and very high Internet usage. This group is most abundant within the 1 mile radius of Pages Wood (30% of households).

More details of the characteristics of each of the CAMEO UK classifications are contained in the appendices.

Table C-3 – Residents of Pages catchment by CAMEO classification

	CAMEO Description	<1 mile - Households		1-2 miles - Households		Total area - Households		UK %
		N	%	N	%	N	%	
4B	Professional Home Owners In Detached & Semi Suburbia	1874	26%	6930	23%	8,804	23%	3%
8C	Older Households With School Age Children In Towns & Suburbs	315	4%	8565	28%	8,880	23%	4%
6B	Older & Mature Households In Suburban Semis & Terraces	2159	30%	6424	21%	8,583	22%	4%
2B	Affluent Mature Families & Couples In Large Exclusive Detached Homes	731	10%	1113	4%	1,844	5%	1%
7A	Single Mortgagees & Renters In Pre-School Family Neighbourhoods	791	11%	885	3%	1,676	4%	3%
8A	Poorer Retired Households In Owned & Rented Accommodation	346	5%	1293	4%	1,639	4%	2%
4C	White Collar Home Owners In Outer Suburbs & Coastal Areas	95	1%	521	2%	616	2%	1%
10F	Poorer Singles In Local Authority Family Neighbourhoods	0	0%	601	2%	601	2%	3%
1C	Urban Living Professional Singles & Couples	184	3%	125	0%	309	1%	1%
5F	Young & Older Households In Areas Of Mixed Tenure	137	2%	245	1%	382	1%	1%
8B	Older & Mature Households In Suburban Areas Of Mixed Tenure	121	2%	356	1%	477	1%	2%
3A	Wealthy Older Families In Spacious Suburban & Rural Detached & Semis	119	2%	406	1%	525	1%	3%
5B	Young & Older Single Mortgagees & Renters In Terraces & Flats	116	2%	128	0%	244	1%	1%
5G	Older Couples & Singles In Suburban Family Semis	77	1%	289	1%	366	1%	3%
4D	Mature Owner Occupiers In Rural & Coastal Neighbourhoods	56	1%	241	1%	297	1%	3%
6E	Mature Households In Less Affluent Suburban & Rural Areas	53	1%	218	1%	271	1%	3%
9E	Poorer Couples & School Age Families In Terraced & Semis	29	0%	203	1%	232	1%	2%
4E	Couples & Families In Modern Rural & Suburban Developments	8	0%	209	1%	217	1%	2%
9B	Poorer Singles & Families In Mixed Tenure	4	0%	190	1%	194	1%	2%
10E	Mature Households In Small Terraces & Semis	0	0%	396	1%	396	1%	3%
5C	Mature & Retired Singles In Areas Of Small Mixed Housing	0	0%	359	1%	359	1%	2%
10G	Single Renters In Mixed Age Hi-Rise Communities	0	0%	201	1%	201	1%	1%
1A	Opulent Couples & Singles In Executive City & Suburban Areas	36	1%	52	0%	88	0%	0%
5A	Singles, Couples & School Age Families In Mixed Housing	24	0%	23	0%	47	0%	0%
6D	Couples & Families With School Age & Older Children In Spacious Semis	12	0%	172	1%	184	0%	3%
2A	Opulent Older & Retired Households In Spacious Rural Properties	12	0%	46	0%	58	0%	1%
2C	Affluent Mature Couples & Singles Some With School Age Children	6	0%	150	1%	156	0%	1%
9F	Flat Dwellers In Council & Housing Association Accommodation	0	0%	158	1%	158	0%	1%
1D	Wealthy & Educated Singles In Student Areas	0	0%	114	0%	114	0%	0%
6A	Less Affluent Communities In Areas Of Mixed Tenure	0	0%	87	0%	87	0%	1%
6G	Young Single & Family Communities In Small Terraces & Rented Flats	0	0%	83	0%	83	0%	1%
3D	Wealthy Mixed Households Living In Rural Communities	0	0%	27	0%	27	0%	3%
4F	Mature Couples & Families In Mortgaged Detached & Semis	0	0%	27	0%	27	0%	3%
9A	Poorer Singles In Outer Suburban Family Neighbourhoods	0	0%	16	0%	16	0%	2%
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>7305</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>30853</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>38158</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>65%</b>

In terms of levels of usage of Pages Woods, 16 of the 35 users interviewed lived in areas categorised as 6B and 10 lived in areas classed as 4B.

**Table C-4 – CAMEO classifications of Pages Wood users**

		Number of users in the sample
<b>6B</b>	OLDER & MATURE HOUSEHOLDS IN SUBURBAN SEMIS & TERRACES	16
<b>4B</b>	PROFESSIONAL HOME OWNERS IN DETACHED & SEMI SUBURBIA	10
<b>7A</b>	SINGLE MORTGAGEES & RENTERS IN PRE-SCHOOL FAMILY NEIGHBOURHOODS	5
<b>3A</b>	WEALTHY OLDER FAMILIES IN SPACIOUS SUBURBAN & RURAL DETACHED & SEMIS	1
<b>8C</b>	OLDER HOUSEHOLDS WITH SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN IN TOWNS & SUBURBS	1
<b>5G</b>	OLDER COUPLES & SINGLES IN SUBURBAN FAMILY SEMIS	1
<b>8A</b>	POORER RETIRED HOUSEHOLDS IN OWNED & RENTED ACCOMMODATION	1

### *Summary of main findings*

This report provides the results of the household survey undertaken in the vicinity of Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood within the Thames Chase Community Forest area.

Mardyke Woods are set within The Mardyke Valley, which is a river floodplain by the A13 and the M25 near West Thurrock. The Mardyke Valley with its flood meadows, ancient woods and open landscapes runs from the hills south of Brentwood to the River Thames. Mardyke Woods was acquired by the Forestry Commission in 2002 and consists of three separately named woods: Brannett's Wood, Millard's Garden and Low Well Wood.

Pages Wood is situated within the North of Upminster area and is, with its 74ha (180 acres), the largest of the Forestry Commission's new community woodlands. Pages Wood follows the River Ingrebourne on the north side of A127. There are two new bridges across the river within Pages Wood, which gives access to its extensive views, path network, developing woodlands and sculptures.

There are some 6,600 households within a one mile radius of Mardyke Woods and around 7,300 households within a similar distance of Pages Wood.

A much larger population lives within a 2 mile radius of each wood with nearly 22,000 households within this distance of Mardyke Woods and 38,000 within the same catchment of Pages Wood.

A large proportion of the population living within a mile of Mardyke Woods live in semi-detached and terrace homes and are in the C1, C2 or DE social classes (white & blue collar/ unskilled). The majority read mid-market and popular newspapers and make higher than average use of the Internet.

Residents of the area closest to Pages Wood were likely to be more affluent than those in the area around Mardyke Woods. Larger proportions are in the B, C1 and C2 social classes and houses are larger and more expensive. Readership of newspapers is mixed and Internet usage is high.

The profile of users of Mardyke Woods and Pages Wood generally reflected the local population profiles with the most visits taken by residents classified as 6B, 'Older and mature households in suburban semis and terraces'.

## **D. Appendices**

### **Questionnaires**

## Thames Chase map

## **CAMEO UK**

## **Results obtained at other Forestry Commission sites**



## **Estimate of visitor numbers**

By combining information available on the number of households within the 2 mile radius of each of the surveyed woodlands and survey results on levels of usage, it is possible to estimate the number of visits taken to the site per year, as detailed below:

### **1) Pages Wood**

- i) Approximately 38,000 households are within 2 miles of Pages Wood
- ii) 12% of households had taken at least one visit to Pages Wood in the previous year, equating to around 4,500 households.
- iii) Users of Pages Wood take an average of around 30 visits to the site per year. Therefore, it can be estimated that Pages Wood receives over 130,000 individual visits per year.

### **2) Mardyke Wood**

- i) Approximately 22,000 households are within 2 miles of Mardyke Wood
- ii) 4% of households had taken at least one visit to Mardyke Wood in the previous year, equating to around 850 households.
- iii) Users of Mardyke Wood take an average of around 40 visits to site per year. Therefore it can be estimated that Mardyke Wood receives over 30,000 visits per year.

## Responses to open-ended questions

*What else, if anything, influenced your decision to visit Mardyke Woods/Pages Wood today?*

### MARDYKE WOODS

- It's near my sons so we go there with dogs on the way to his house.
- It's local and can walk there.
- Somewhere we hadn't been for a while, fancied a change.
- Walking a sister's dog, one of nearest places.
- Parking's free.
- Nice quiet place to walk around and it is very close.
- Just for dog walking.
- Just to relax.

### PAGES WOOD

- Interesting for walking.
- Just somewhere I can let the dog off.
- Just passing by - dropped in.
- Because of easy parking and it was a nice open space for young and old.
- The location is easy to get to, the scenery, i.e. wildlife, woods.
- It's the nearest one to where I lived.
- Its accessible greenland area, it's near the town here.
- It was the open day to see exhibition on the day.
- I enjoy the open spaces, peace and tranquillity, nature.
- Just want to visit, nearer to our area.
- Location and they had activities for children at the time.
- Just go there 'cos it's nearby, new place to visit.
- Keeping fit is the main reason.
- Its location is nearer to my place.
- Good place for children, pedestrian friendly, bikes no cars, children running around so nothing to worry about.
- It's nearer to me.
- Countryside on your doorsteps.
- Support the planting they have done recently there and use the facilities.
- Because it was local, it bothers river in greybourn, interesting to see where it continues, the view, large expanse of openness.
- New home.
- It's a nice big open space and it's interesting to watch it developed.
- Availability near home.
- It's near to public transport, I like to have green areas near houses.
- Just saw the sign as I drove past it to see what it was like and take our granddaughters there to the playground, walking.

*Did any type of user decrease your enjoyment, and if so why?*

### MOTORBIKERS

- Noisy and loud.

- Worry about uncontrollable youngsters on motorbikes, I only heard them but didn't see them.
- Noise of motor bikes.

### HORSE RIDERS

- Wandering around.

*Why did this particular issue decrease your enjoyment?*

### MARDYKE WOODS

- Dog dirt - you have to avoid it all the time.
- Dog dirt - dog dirt was not being picked up by anybody horrible.
- Muddy tracks - unsteady on my feet so need firm ground.
- Muddy tracks - made me slip.
- Litter - looks horrible and unkempt.
- Noise - motor bikes are noisy and loud.

### PAGES WOOD

- Dog dirt – unhealthy.
- Dog dirt – dog bins are full up and not emptied.
- Dog dirt – because there is.
- Dog dirt – dogs running free.
- Dog dirt – unsightly.
- Dog dirt – unhygienic.
- Dog dirt – dirty.
- Dog dirt – I can't see very well and could step in it.
- Litter or fly tipping – for a start it's awful and dangerous to the environment.
- Litter or fly tipping – unhealthy.
- Litter or fly tipping – it makes the area look messy.
- Litter or fly tipping – health risk, kids.
- Litter or fly tipping – no litter pot.
- Litter or fly tipping – litter around.
- Litter or fly tipping – it's unsightly.
- Litter or fly tipping – they can pollute the environment.
- Vandalism – don't like seeing it.
- Vandalism – bridge burnt down and causing inconvenience.
- Vandalism – the danger (of missing signposts).
- Vandalism – because we lost our way (missing signposts).
- Vandalism – you can't find the way around (missing signposts).

*What else, if anything, decreased your enjoyment of Mardyke Woods/Pages Wood during your most recent visit?*

### MARDYKE WOODS

- It is very muddy also grass gets so long that it is difficult to walk in, needs to be cut.

PAGES WOOD

- Wanted a tea place, café.
- I don't think there's a shelter, if you get caught in the rain you don't know where to stay.

*What, if anything would you like to see changed or improved to make any future visits more enjoyable?*

MARDYKE WOODS

- Cut grass so easier to walk in.
- Café or tea bar.
- It's exactly as it should be.
- Just the orientation leaflets, i.e. being more and more detailed.
- Should cut the grass.

PAGES WOOD

- More wild flowers.
- Security.
- More staff would be nice.
- It's in the process of improving.
- Encourage more wildlife.
- See a bit more wildlife.
- More to attract different wildlife.
- Where to get something to eat or drink.
- Toilets.
- More staff.
- Better car parking.
- More signposted walks.
- It needs time to mature.
- More trees.
- Need of toilet.
- More varieties for children.
- More nature things.
- Raise height restriction on the car park.
- Not developed enough.
- Need of toilets.
- Toilets to be there.
- Two things dogs mess and vandalism.
- Put café there.
- Perhaps more area for litter bins.
- Still needs more improvement, cleaning, staff, more bins.
- It's quite nice as it is.
- If trees grow a bit faster, it will be nice to see the trees matured.
- I suppose a bit more security, a little bit of attendance by rangers perhaps, I think they should be more advertised and more open days in a year.
- The fresh air and getting out with the children.

- Few more sculptures for children.
- More facilities.
- Good parking, good atmosphere.

*What do you like the most about Mardyke Woods/Pages Wood?*

#### MARDYKE WOODS

- Convenient to use on way to sons.
- Peaceful, away from hustle and bustle.
- It's local.
- Trees.
- It's quiet.
- Freedom to be able to go there and just walk.
- The scenery is beautiful as well.
- Getting into nature and getting the kids away from tv.
- I don't like outdoor activities.
- Its peaceful, it is quite a big place so not loads of people walking about the same area.
- It is close to me and can use it frequently – handy, convenient.
- Quiet, good for birdwatching.

#### PAGES WOOD

- Environment, quiet easy walking.
- Variety of trees.
- Nice and local.
- Just somewhere to take the dogs, nice and peaceful.
- Convenience, free, local, distance.
- A nice country walk.
- Just there, countryside, nice open space.
- It's sort of countryside in the town.
- Been able to be with nature.
- The location easy to get to.
- Nice green area nearby.
- It's unusual to see country side so close to here.
- It's natural.
- It's close.
- It's nice to exploit the past see where it takes you.
- The hill is not too steep for the bike.
- The open aspect.
- It's quiet.
- Location.
- The trouble to do it for everybody.
- The footpaths are quite maintained.
- Things there are handy it is close to me, it is somewhere to walk without traffic.
- It's unspoilt.
- Good pathway.
- Its open spaces.
- Nice view.

- Its convenience.
- It's interesting to see new trees and wildlife develop in there.
- Openness.
- New place to go, somewhere different.
- Interesting bridges.
- Close to home.
- Nearer to home, scenery.
- Greenery.
- The wildlife and the birds, well the birds singing and doing their own thing.
- It's local to us and very pleasant, the river, ease of walking, the links to environment, wood park for children's activities.
- It's just a very lovely park, the fact that you can see clearly around from when on top of the mountain.
- The fact that it's up high and you can look down to the A12, such a lovely view.
- It's near to home and I just like the whole concept of the open green for future use.
- It's near to home and car parking availability.
- Not really thought of Pages Wood, Harold's Courts Wood we go to mainly.
- Able to walk in peace and quiet.
- Friendly environment, enjoyable for children.
- Like the location.

*Are there any other reasons for not having visited Mardyke Woods/Pages Wood over the last 12 months?*

#### MARDYKE WOODS

- I don't know much about it or even just where it really is - I just read about it in the papers.
- Not quite sure where it is.
- Haven't heard of it.
- Have not really heard of it.
- Have not heard of it.
- Don't know where it is.
- Don't know where it is.
- Don't know where it is.
- Don't know about it.
- Not sure where it is.
- Don't know where it is.
- Don't know where it is.
- It's not a place that I think about.
- Never thought of it as a wood/forest to go to.
- Have not got round to doing it, don't think about it.
- Don't think about going, have so many other things to do, probably not enough awareness.
- Just not thinking about, too involved in other things.
- Have not thought about it, busy life, family in USA, travel a lot.
- Prefer Avey Wood and Brentwood Area - we have now been cut off from Grange waters off south road.
- I don't know about Mardyke but at Belhus you have to pay for car parking, that puts me off.
- Other parks are nicer, e.g. Belhus park for the ducks etc.

- Getting very bad in this area - I get frightened going out with the jobs out back so wouldn't go to Mardyke woods.
- Not interesting; Essex marina there, motorbikes, cars, too noisy.
- It's too near, it's boring.
- It's thick with undergrowth and trees - I wouldn't want to go there.
- Few amenities at Mardyke Woods.
- It's a little bit too far.
- Too far away.
- A little too far away.
- Inconvenient parking with our small campervan, there is a height barrier, because of my walking problems I need the campervan for relaxing or painting outside whilst my husband goes for long walks.
- The Mardyke Woods are not as convenient (car parking) or interesting as the Belhus Area
- Not so near as Belhus Woods.
- Too far to walk.
- A bad place to go, really rough place, not safe.
- We quite often go in the summer for picnics but not Mardyke.
  
- Too old now.
- Other people not having the time off as well, I usually go in a group.
- Have a very demanding, challenging job and find myself busy with more important things and no time off.
- Mother died earlier in the year, have not been here too long.
- We work hard, have to visit my partner's mother every other weekend.
- Too busy at work, do other things in my spare time.
- Have not been in the country long enough.
- Have bad knees can't get out and about a lot.
- I would love to go but I work full time.
- Have Chinese shop, too busy.
- My wife has cancer, I had a heart attack but plan to go in the future when we are better.
- Can't walk very far.
- Been lazy, don't seem to make the time.
- No real reason, I am a child minder, can't get all children in car, have a big garden.
- Too busy at work and children.
- Too busy.
- Too busy.
- Just not interested.
- Work 6-7 days a week.
- Go to different one.
- No reason why I should.
- Do not like parks.
- No time, always at work.
- Never wanted to go.

### PAGES WOOD

- Don't know much about Pages Wood but I have heard of it.
- I don't even know where Pages Wood is, I am not aware of it.
- I don't even know where it is.
- Did know about it.
- I have never heard of Pages Wood.

- I have never heard of it.
  - Never heard of it.
  - Never heard of it until know.
  - Don't know about it.
  - Didn't know it was there.
  - Didn't know about it.
  - Because I haven't heard of it and don't know where it is.
  - If I knew where it is and it's quite a nice place I will go.
  - Didn't know where it is.
  - Never heard of it.
  - I would like a map because I drive past there, is this linked to Tylers Wood by part? Can you use them for cycling?
  - Apart from the fact that I don't know where it is I can't walk very far.
  - I have not heard of it and because I don't like creepy crawling things.
  - Have not heard of it.
  - Never heard of it.
  - Never heard of it, don't know where it is.
  - Never heard of it.
  - Don't know where it is.
  - Never heard of it.
  - Never heard of it.
  - Never heard of it.
  - Never heard of it.
  - Where is it?
  - Don't know where it is.
  - Don't know about it.
  - Never heard of it.
  - Don't know it.
  - Don't know where it is.
  - Never heard of it, needs a bit more publicity.
  - Leaflet through doors.
  - Not heard of it.
  - Not very well advertised.
  - Hard to get to, where it is exactly? Needs more publicity, leaflets through doors.
  - Not heard of it
  - Couldn't tell where it is and just moved into the area and because I have just had a baby.
  - Don't even know of it.
  - I don't know of where it is.
  - Don't even know of it.
  - Haven't heard of it.
  - Don't know of it.
  - Haven't heard of it.
  - Don't even know of it.
  - Never heard of it.
  - Never heard of Pages Wood.
  - Don't know where it is.
- 
- Vandalising cars.
  - 3 miles from here, recent acquisition.
  - Because it's not close to us enough.
  - If you find a particular place you like you tend to go back more than once. Like a place called Rye in Kent, it's quite nice and really old fashioned.



- Keep planting there.
- Too far away.
- Nice to see it developing, will go back.
- Not developed enough at present for walkers but do know horse riders use it.
- I am not aware of any facilities that younger children could play with.
- It's not near to my area.
- It's not really for visiting.
- It's new, not woodland yet, they charge for car parking which is very high.
- In the car park, cars are broken.
  
- Just too busy.
- Back problems, various health problems.
- Too far out and no car.
- Old age.
- Don't go to forest.
- Children in school now.
- Very busy and not have much time.
- Busy.
- Busy and don't have time.

Document	Quality of experience – Thames Chase
Last edited by	Laila Gibson
Version	1
Checked and approved	
Printed on	28/01/05

---