

**Monitoring the quality of experience in forests
Thetford, Suffolk**

Final report

February 2005



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Forestry Commission
February, 2005

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Contents

A. Background and introduction	1
Background	1
Method.....	1
Report.....	2
B. Main results	3
Visitor profile.....	3
Trip profile.....	8
Frequency of visits.....	9
Length of visits.....	10
Length of visits.....	10
Importance of different aspects of visit	13
Favourite aspects of forest	18
Importance of Thetford Forest Park.....	19
Satisfaction with different aspects of visit	20
Identification of issues	26
Other visitors	27
Disturbances to visit.....	28
Expectations V Reality.....	30
Improvements.....	31
Expenditure	32
Key findings and conclusions	33
C. Appendices	34

A. Background and introduction

Background

This report contains the results of a survey undertaken by TNS Tourism & Leisure at Thetford Forest Park in Suffolk.

The survey approach was developed for use by the Forestry Commission and was piloted during February and March 2003 at sites in the New Forest and South Wales. Surveys using the same methods and questionnaires have since been undertaken at Grizedale Forest Park in Cumbria, Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire and Whiston Woods in Merseyside between August and October 2003 and, between July and October 2004, surveying took place at both Thetford Forest Park, Suffolk and Dalby Forest Park in North Yorkshire.

Method

A total of 316 visitors were interviewed at Thetford Forest Park between 19th July and 29th October during 22 days of interviewing.

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

Report

This report provides the results of the survey undertaken at Thetford Forest Park. As mentioned previously, similar surveys have also been undertaken in six other Forestry Commission sites to date, providing a total 'database' of some 1,644 interviews with forest users. Where appropriate, the results of the surveys undertaken at other sites have been used within this report to help draw comparisons and to highlight the key variations at Thetford. Fuller details of results obtained at the other sites are provided in the appendices.

A total of 316 visitors were interviewed and 79 self completion questionnaires were returned (33% of the 243 distributed). The following section provides the survey results across the total survey sample and, where appropriate, compares the responses provided by visitors in different demographic groups and those taking part in different activities. In the sections discussing importance and satisfaction results have been tested using ANOVA (analysis of variance) techniques and only statistically significant findings are discussed in the commentary.

Answers to open ended questions have been appended.

B. Main results

Visitor profile

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

Demographics

Just over half of visitors to Thetford were female (55%). This majority was most notable amongst dog walkers (74%) while a slightly larger proportion of cyclists were male (54%).

Just over half of visitors (54%) to Thetford Forest Park were in the Family lifecycle group (children under 16 living in the household) while 23% were Empty Nesters (over 45 years, no children in the household) and a smaller proportion (16%) were Young Independents (under 35 years, no children in household). Some 29% of all visitors were aged between 16 and 34, 38% were aged between 35 and 44 and the remaining third (32%) were aged 45 or over.

Table B-1 – Age and lifecycle (%)

Base: All respondents (316)

	%
Age	
16 – 24	9
25 – 34	20
35 – 44	38
45 – 54	16
55 – 64	8
65+	8
Lifecycle	
Young Independents	16
Families	54
Empty Nesters	23
Other	7

It is useful to compare these results with the averages obtained across all of the forests included in this programme of research (see appendices). Thetford is generally more likely

to attract Family visitors (54% v average of 37%) but is visited by a lower proportion of people aged 55+ (16% v 28% on average).

It is also useful to compare the age and lifecycle profiles of different types of visitors to Thetford. Compared to the overall profile, a larger proportion of cyclists were in the Young Independent group (22%) while visitors who were on holiday or dog walking were more likely to be Empty Nesters (34% and 36% respectively).

In terms of social class, as the table below illustrates, around a quarter of visitors (27%) were in the AB social classes (higher and intermediate managerial, administrative or professional) while a further 41% were C1s (supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional). The remaining third of visitors (32%) were in the C2 and DE classes.

By comparison, in the UK population as a whole 43% of people are ABs or C1s while larger proportions are C2s or DEs.

Table B-2 – Social class (%)

Base: All responses (316)

	Visitors	UK Population
AB – ‘upper middle class’ – higher/ intermediate managerial, administrative or professional	27	17
C1 – ‘lower middle class’ – supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional	41	26
C2 – ‘skilled working class’ – skilled manual workers	21	25
DE - ‘working class’ and unemployed – semi and unskilled manual workers, state pensioners, unemployed	11	32

Visitors most likely to be in the AB or C1 social classes included those in the Young Independent lifecycle group (85%) and female visitors (81%). Conversely, a larger proportion of Empty Nesters were C2s or DEs (32%).

The social class profile of visitors to Thetford was similar to the overall average recorded across the other sites included within this programme of research.

Origin

Visitors were asked to specify their home postcode, allowing an analysis of place of origin. As the table below illustrates, the largest proportions of visitors lived in the local Thetford postcode district (IP24) or other Suffolk (IP) or Norfolk (NR) postcodes. Other visitors travelled from further a field in the UK, mainly England, while less than 1% of respondents were from overseas. The table overleaf outlines the place of origin, divided by counties.

Table B-3 – Area of residence (%)

Base: All respondents (316)

	%	Town/ Area
Norfolk	35	
IP24	5	Thetford
IP27	4	Brandon
NR17	3	Attleborough
IP22	3	Diss
NR16	2	East Harling
NR18	2	Wymondham
NR9	2	Shipdham
IP26	2	Feltwell
Other NR	12	Other Norfolk
Suffolk	16	
IP28	2	Bury St Edmunds
IP31	2	Finningham
NR32	2	Lowestoft
Other IP	10	Other Suffolk
Cambridgeshire	14	
CB6	3	Ely
CB1	2	Cambridge
CB4	2	Cottenham
Other CB	7	Other Cambridgeshire
Peterborough	9	
Hertfordshire	4	
SG	3	Stevenage
HP	1	Hemel Hempstead
Essex	3	
CM	3	Chelmsford
Merseyside	1	
Worcestershire	1	
Kent	1	
Greater London	1	
Milton Keynes	1	
Northamptonshire	1	
Oxfordshire	1	
York	1	
Other UK	11	
Overseas	<1	

Season ticket ownership

Around 1 in 7 visitors indicated that they owned a season ticket (14%). As might be expected, visitors who came to the site at least once a month were the most likely to own a season ticket (53%) while none of the holidaymakers interviewed had one.

In terms of lifecycle group, Young Independents were the least likely to have a season ticket (6%) while the activity group most likely to hold one were the dog walkers (21%).

Some two-thirds of season ticket holders stated that they found it to be 'very good' value for money (67%) and 28% found it 'quite good' value. Encouragingly, none thought that it was poor value for money.

Trip profile

Visitors were also asked a number of questions about their current visit to Thetford Forest Park in terms of the length of time spent away from home, time spent in the wood and activities undertaken.

Type of visit

Around three-quarters of visitors were on a short trip from home of less than 3 hours duration (76%), 15% were on a longer day trip and 9% were on holiday.

Compared to all of the sites included in this programme of research a smaller proportion of visitors were on holiday (19% v 9%) while more were on a short trip (64% v 76%).

Table B-4 – Type of visit (%)

Base: All respondents (316)

	%
On a short trip of less than 3 hours from home	76
On a day out for more than 3 hours from home	15
On holiday away from home	9

Visitors most likely to be on a short trip of less than 3 hours duration included those who came to the site at least once a month (85% on a short trip), dog walkers (85%) and Young Independents (84%). On the other hand, Empty Nesters and visitors who took part in cycling were more likely than other visitors to be on day trips of more than 3 hours duration (20% and 19% respectively).

Frequency of visits

Over two-thirds of all visitors had been to Thetford Forest Park before (69%). Visitors on short trips from home, cyclists and male visitors were the most likely to be on repeat visits (75%, 74% and 74% respectively). Visitors who were on holiday and those aged between 16 and 24 years were more likely than others to be on their first visit (76% and 37%).

In terms of frequency of visits, most users visited the site fairly infrequently with three-quarters of visitors on their first visit or visiting less than once a month (75%) while only 7% visited once a week or more.

Table B-5 – Frequency of visits to forest (%)

Base: All respondents (316)

	%
Every day	1
4 to 6 times per week	2
1 to 3 times a week	4
1 to 3 times a month	17
4 to 6 times a year	12
1 to 3 times a year	23
Less often	10
First ever visit	31

By comparison, across all of the sites included in this programme of research, larger proportions of visitors visited forests at least once a week (23% v 7%) and fewer were on their first ever visit (20% v 31%).

Length of visits

Visitors spent an average of just under 3 and a half hours (3 hours 24 minutes) in Thetford Forest Park. The largest proportions of visitors stayed on the site for between 2 and 3 (31%) or 3 and 5 hours (39%). Only 4% stayed for less than 1 hour.

The average length of time spent varied between some of the different user groups with dog walkers typically spending 2 hours in the forest while Families spent slightly longer on site than members of the other lifecycle groups (average of 3 hours and 38 minutes).

Table B-6 – Length of visit (%)

Base: All respondents (316); All who walked (187); All who cycled (112)

	Total time on site %	Time spent walking %	Time spent cycling %
Up to 15 minutes	-	3	-
15 – 30 minutes	1	7	1
30 minutes – 1 hour	3	20	15
1 hour – 2 hours	9	39	19
2 hours – 3 hours	31	16	29
3 hours – 5 hours	39	5	17
More than 5 hours	14	3	9
<i>Average</i>	<i>3 hrs 24 mins</i>	<i>1hr 40 mins</i>	<i>2 hrs 40 mins</i>
<i>Proportion of time on site</i>	<i>100%</i>	<i>49%</i>	<i>71%</i>

- No responses

Table B-6 also illustrates the amount of time spent walking or cycling by those visitors who took part in each activity. Overall, visitors who took part in walking spent an average of 1 hour and 40 minutes undertaking this activity, approximately half of their time on site (49%). Visitors who took part in cycling spent an average of 2 hours and 40 minutes undertaking this activity, nearly three-quarters of their total time on site (71%).

Overall length of visit at Thetford Forest Park was longer than that recorded at any of the other sites included in this programme of research. By comparison, the average length of visit across all of the sites was 2 hours and 57 minutes.

Activities undertaken

When asked what they did during their visit, the most frequently mentioned activity was walking without a dog (52%). A further 12% of visitors took part in dog walking (12%) while 4% stated that they undertook hill walking or rambling.

Just over a third of visitors took part in cycling during their visit with most undertaking this activity on waymarked trails (34%) while a smaller proportion also cycled off trails (12%). Around 1 in 7 cyclists used the Bike Art cycle hire facilities (14%).

As the table below illustrates a quarter of visitors used the ‘go-ape’ course during their visit (24%) while a tenth or more visitors took part in children’s play activities (13%) or seeing something in the forest such as a sculpture of ancient tree (10%).

Table B-7 – Activities undertaken during visit to forest (%)

Base: All respondents (316)

	%
Walking without a dog	52
Cycling on waymarked trails	34
Picnic or barbecue	32
Using the ‘go ape’ high ropes course	24
Children’s play activities	13
Cycling off waymarked trails	12
Dog walking	12
Seeing something in the forest e.g. sculpture or ancient tree	10
Birdwatching	5
Using the Bike Art cycle hire facilities	5
Hill walking/ rambling	4
Nature/natural history visit	4
Climbing	4
Driving on forest drive	3
Photography	3
Running	2
Café	2
Horse riding/ pony trekking	1

Compared to the average across all of the sites included in this programme of research, visitors to Thetford Forest Park were less likely to take part in dog walking (12% compared to average of 25%) but more likely to cycle, have a picnic or BBQ or to take part in children's activities.

It is useful to compare levels of participation in the main activities amongst different user groups at Thetford:

- *Walking without a dog (52% overall)* – visitors most likely to undertake this activity included those aged 55 or over (63%) and C2DEs (57%).
- *Cycling on waymarked tracks (34% overall)* – a larger proportion of male visitors (40%), Young Independents (45%) and visitors on day trips of over 3 hours duration (43%) took part in this activity.
- *Picnic or barbecue (32% overall)* – visitors who were either on holiday or a longer day trip (40%), those who took part in walks without a dog (41%) and Families (39%) were the most likely to have picnic or barbecue during their visit.
- *Using the go-ape course (24% overall)* – a larger proportion of male visitors (28%), those aged between 16 and 24 years (37%) and first time or infrequent visitors to the site (29%) used this facility.
- *Children's play activities (13% overall)* – as might be expected, Families were the most likely to use these facilities (18%). Visitors who came to the site once a month or more and C2DEs were also more likely to do so (both 19%).
- *Dog walking (12% overall)* – most notably, female visitors were more likely than males to take part in dog walking (17% and 7% respectively). In terms of lifecycle group, Empty Nesters were the most likely to walk a dog (19%).

Importance of different aspects of visit

To identify the drivers of quality, it was useful to ask visitors to rate how important different aspects were in their decision to visit the site. Visitors could rate each of a list of aspects as '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 visitors while the other aspects may be of less importance overall or only important to certain groups of visitors.

Table B-8 – Importance of different aspects in decision to visit (mean score)

Base: All respondents (316)

	Importance score
<i>Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park</i>	4.48
<i>Clean toilets</i>	4.34
<i>Feeling safe in the forest</i>	4.32
<i>Being able to spend time with family and friends</i>	4.23
<i>Value for money of your whole trip or day out</i>	4.15
<i>Being able to enjoy scenery and views</i>	4.14
<i>Enough car parking</i>	4.04
<i>Being able to enjoy the wildlife</i>	3.93
<i>Clear signposting on footpaths</i>	3.89
<i>Choice of paths for walking</i>	3.68
<i>Being able to get fit and healthy</i>	3.68
<i>Solitude, peace and quiet</i>	3.65
<i>A cafe</i>	3.53
<i>Leaflets and information about the place you are visiting</i>	3.50
OVERALL AVERAGE	3.43
Availability of staff at the site	3.27
Choice of trails for cycling	3.26
Children's play equipment	3.17
A shop	3.15
A 'go ape' high rope course	2.82
Choice of trails for other activities	2.58
Availability of cycle hire on site	2.44
A forest drive	2.10
Baby changing	2.08

This analysis suggests that the overall priorities amongst the majority of visitors to Thetford Forest Park included 'Feeling happy to leave you car in the car park', 'Clean toilets', 'Feeling safe in the forest' and 'Being able to spend time with family and friends'.

On the other hand, facilities of less importance overall or only of importance to specific groups of visitors included the baby changing facilities, forest drive and cycle hire.

It is useful to compare the importance of the different facilities and elements of the site amongst different user groups. The following bullets highlight the groups *more* likely to indicate that specific aspects were of importance to them:

- *Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park (4.48 overall)* – more important to frequent visitors (4.56).
- *Clean toilets (4.34 overall)* – more important to frequent visitors (4.50) and Young Independents (4.46).
- *Feeling safe in the forest (4.32 overall)* – of most importance to cyclists (4.40) and Young Independents (4.41).
- *Being able to spend time with family or friends (4.23 overall)* – particularly important to female visitors (4.31) and Families (4.42).
- *Value for money of your whole trip or day out (4.15 overall)* – more important to frequent visitors (4.41), C2DEs (4.24) and Families (4.26).
- *Being able to enjoy scenery and views (4.14 overall)* – more important to frequent visitors (4.30), cyclists (4.22), females (4.17) and those aged 55 or more (4.29).
- *Enough car parking (4.04 overall)* – this aspect was of most importance to frequent visitors (4.26) and Young Independents (4.17).
- *Being able to enjoy the wildlife (3.93 overall)* – of most importance to frequent visitors (4.0) and visitors aged 55 years or over (4.12).
- *Clear signposting on footpaths (3.89 overall)* – signposting on paths was of most importance to dog walkers (4.05) and Young Independents (4.04).
- *Choice of paths for walking (3.68 overall)* – frequent visitors (3.82) and dog walkers (4.18) were most likely to rate this aspect as important in their decision to visit.
- *Being able to get fit and healthy (3.68 overall)* – more important amongst regular visitors (3.96), cyclists (3.91), C2DEs (3.72), males (3.78) and visitors aged 55 or more (3.75).

- *Solitude, peace and quiet (3.65 overall)* – this aspect was of most importance to frequent visitors (3.97), dog walkers (3.79), males (3.74) and those aged 55 years or over (3.84).
- *Café (3.53 overall)* – the provision of this facility was more important to frequent visitors (3.65), female visitors (3.59), C2DEs (3.64) and visitors aged 55 years or over (3.96).
- *Leaflets and information about the place you are visiting (3.50 overall)* – more important to infrequent and first time visitors (3.55), cyclists (3.72), C2DEs (3.60) and Empty Nesters (3.59).
- *Availability of staff at the site, for example rangers (3.27 overall)* – the availability of staff such as rangers was of more importance to infrequent visitors (3.31), female visitors (3.39) and Families (3.36).
- *Choice of trails for cycling (3.26 overall)* – as would be expected this element was particularly important to cyclists (4.21).
- *Children’s play equipment (3.17 overall)* – these facilities were especially important to Families (3.71) but of less relevance to other lifecycle groups.
- *Shop (3.15 overall)* – the shop was of more importance in the decision to visit for regular visitors (3.34), cyclists (3.35) and those aged 16 to 24 years (3.37).
- *‘Go-ape’ high rope course (2.82 overall)* – of more importance in decision to visit amongst Young Independents (3.43) and first time or infrequent visitors (2.94).
- *Availability of cycle hire on site (2.44 overall)* – visitors who took part in cycling (2.94) and Young Independents (2.88) were the most likely to rate this element as important in their decision to visit.
- *Forest drive (2.10 overall)* – the provision of a forest drive was of slightly more importance to visitors aged 16 to 24 years (2.22) and C2DEs (2.28).
- *Baby changing facility (2.08 overall)* – this facility was slightly more important to visitors who took walks without a dog (2.36), female visitors (2.23) and Families (2.34).

These results demonstrate the varying levels of importance of different elements of the forest to different types of visitors. Overall, visitors in the Empty Nester lifecycle perceive

the café and solitude, peace and quiet as more important while Young Independents rated the go-ape course, choice of cycling routes, shop, cycle hire and signposting as more important. Families rated play equipment, cycle routes, baby changing facilities and being able to spend time together as most important to them.

Respondents were also asked to specify what else, if anything, had influenced their decision to visit. The most frequently provided responses were: the chance to have a day out (27%), the go-ape course (13%) and the convenience of the site to the visitor's home or holiday accommodation (10%).

Table B-9 – Other influences on decision to visit (%)

Base: All respondents (316)

	%
A day out	27
Go-ape course	13
Convenient/ close to home/ holiday accommodation	10
Good trails for walking or cycling	7
Like the area	7
Been before	7
Nice weather	6
Recommended by friends or family	5
Children's play area	5
A safe area	4
Scenery	3
Quiet/ peaceful	3
Others	3
Never been before	2
Exercise/ keep fit	2
En-route	2
Saw advertisement	2
Came to walk the dog	1
No nothing else	24

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

I cycle over a pre-prepared route and time myself over this. I do this on regular occasions to try and beat my time (the route is always the same).

It wasn't raining. Collecting conkers to give my nephew a treat.

It's a day out away from people, you can walk in the forest or Go-Ape, and they offer good activities.

My son said to come and act as a babysitter while he cycled. The "Go Ape" is what they like and to have a barbeque – even though it was not available.

Simplicity of access. It was an easy drive from Cambridge, not too far away.

Something for the kids to do, have different places to play, so many activities.

The fact that it was a works day out organised by my employers (though I have been many times before myself).

Favourite aspects of forest

When visitors were asked what they liked most about Thetford Forest Park, the most frequently provided responses related to peace and quiet, tranquillity and scenery (23%), the open spaces (12%) and the fact that everybody enjoys going there (11%).

Table B-10 – What like most about site (%)

Base: All respondents (316)

	%
Peace/ tranquillity/ scenery	23
Open spaces	12
Everybody enjoys coming here	11
Wildlife/ trees	8
Walking/ good walks/ exercise	7
Children's activities	7
The Go-Ape course	7
Safe to bring children/ good place for children	6
Close to home	3
The cycle trails	3
Walking area for dogs	2
Everything well signed	1
Play sculpture trail	1
Don't know/ not stated	11

Other frequently provided answers related to the wildlife and trees (8%), opportunities for good walks and exercising (7%), children's activities (7%) and the Go-Ape course (7%). Some of the specific answers provided included the following:

Able to walk dog off the lead. Litter bins allowing me to dispose of necessary after cleaning it up.

Excellent mountain bike track. I don't know of anywhere else in Norfolk or Suffolk you can do this.

Go-Ape – Great fun in a picturesque environment.

It's a good place to get fit. A lovely space for serious cycling.

The imaginative placing of structures and facilities for children placed within the forest, at unexpected intervals, not all in one area.

Importance of Thetford Forest Park

To help determine the influence of Thetford Forest Park in decisions to visit the local area, all visitors who did not live in Norfolk or Suffolk were asked to indicate how important the site had been in their decision to come:

Table B-11 – Importance of site and its facilities in decision to visit Norfolk and Suffolk (%)
Base: All respondents (51)

	%
The only reason for coming	43
Very important	18
Quite important	10
Neither important nor unimportant	12
Not very important	4
Not at all important	8
Don't know	6

More than half of visitors who lived outside of Norfolk and Suffolk indicated that Thetford Forest Park was either 'very important' (18%) or their 'only reason' (43%) for visiting the area. In contrast only 1 in 8 stated that the site was 'not very' or 'not at all' important (12%).

Satisfaction with different aspects of visit

Visitors were provided with a list of different elements of the site and asked to rate how satisfied they had been with each during their visit. Respondents could rate each of the elements on a five point scale which included 'excellent' (5), 'very good' (4), 'good' (3), 'fair' (2) and 'poor' (1). Also, if visitors had no experience of a specific element they were asked to indicate that they did not know.

Scores were then applied to responses, allowing averages to be obtained across the whole sample - the higher the average score, the more satisfied visitors were with this aspect. This analysis suggests that, overall, visitors were most likely to be satisfied with the scenery and views, being able to spend time with family and friends and feeling safe in the forest.

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

Base: All respondents (316)

	Satisfaction score
<i>The 'go-ape' high rope course</i>	4.36
<i>Your visit as a whole</i>	4.34
<i>Being able to spend time with family and friends</i>	4.32
<i>Feeling safe in the forest</i>	4.16
<i>Being able to enjoy scenery and views</i>	4.15
<i>Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park</i>	4.15
<i>Value for money of your whole trip or day out</i>	4.09
<i>Choice of trails for cycling</i>	4.09
<i>Enough car parking</i>	4.09
<i>Being able to get fit and healthy</i>	4.06
<i>Children's play equipment</i>	4.05
<i>Choice of paths for walking</i>	4.00
OVERALL AVERAGE	3.95
Clean toilets	3.94
Solitude, peace and quiet	3.93
Being able to enjoy the wildlife	3.89
Cafe	3.85
Bike Art cycle hire facilities	3.83
Availability of cycle hire on-site	3.81
Baby changing facilities	3.81
Shop	3.71
Leaflets and information about the place you are visiting	3.71
Choice of trails for other activities (e.g. horse riding)	3.70
Forest Drive	3.70
Clear signposting on footpaths	3.69
Availability of staff at the site (e.g. rangers)	3.40

An overall 'average' of all of the mean scores has been included in the ranking. Elements below this average include the forest drive, clear signposting on footpaths and availability of staff at the site.

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.

Compared to the scores obtained at the other sites included in this programme of research, visitors to Thetford Country Park were generally more likely to be satisfied with the children's play equipment, safety and security but less satisfied with the solitude, peace and quiet, value for money and café.

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

- Expensive (9)
- Not enough signs/ no signs (7)
- Not much wildlife to be seen (4)
- Choice of paths (2)
- Car might get damaged, need security cameras (2)

Levels of satisfaction with each of the aspects included in table B-12 varied between different groups of visitors. The following bullets summarise the groups that were more likely than average to be satisfied with each of the elements that were rated:

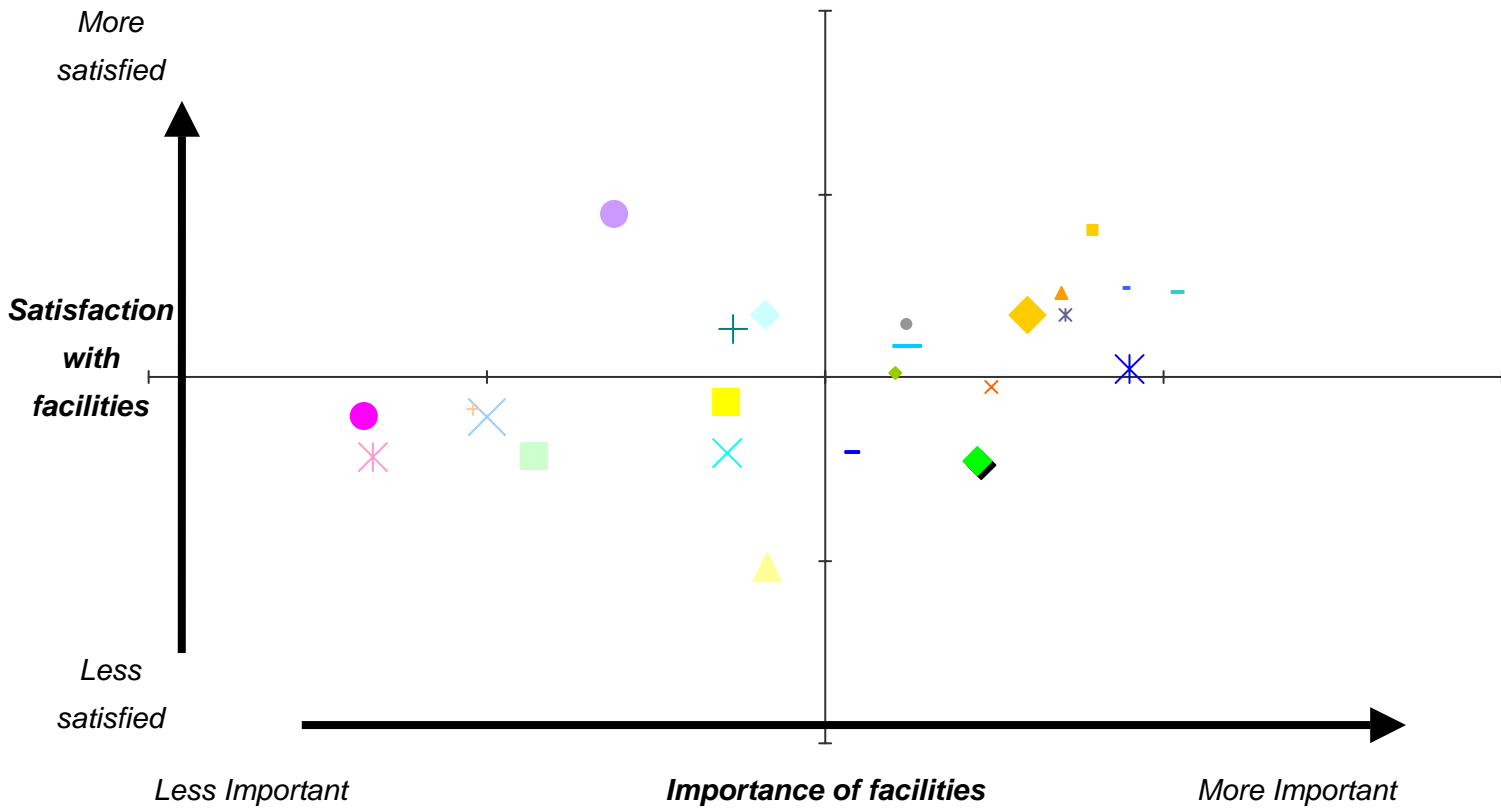
- *The 'go-ape' high rope course (4.36 overall)* – levels of satisfaction with this aspect were particularly high amongst infrequent visitors (4.61) and male visitors (4.45).
- *Your visit as a whole (4.34 overall)* – the overall visit received the highest ratings from those who took part in cycling (4.46), female visitors (4.38) and ABC1s (4.38).
- *Being able to spend time with family and friends (4.32 overall)* – regular visitors to the site (4.40) and cyclists (4.43) were more likely to rate this aspect highly.
- *Feeling safe in the forest (4.16 overall)* – higher satisfaction scores for this aspect were provided by C2DEs (4.28).
- *Being able to enjoy scenery and views (4.15 overall)* – visitors most likely to provide the highest satisfaction scores for this aspect included regular visitors (4.36).
- *Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park (4.15 overall)* – the highest scores were provided for this aspect by visitors on short trips of under 3 hours duration (4.21) and regular visitors (4.36).

- *Value for money of your whole trip of day out (4.09 overall)* – visitors most likely to rate the value for money highly included regular visitors (4.37), cyclists (4.18) and Empty Nesters (4.21).
- *Choice of trails for cycling (4.09 overall)* – there were no significant differences in the scores provided for this aspect amongst different groups of visitors.
- *Enough car parking (4.09 overall)* – highest levels of satisfaction with this element were recorded amongst visitors on a short trip of under 3 hours (4.16), female visitors (4.16) and C2DEs (4.17).
- *Being able to get fit and healthy (4.06 overall)* – visitors who took part in cycling (4.20) and ABC1s (4.16) provided higher scores than average for this aspect.
- *Children’s play equipment (4.05 overall)* – the highest scores for this facility were provided by female visitors (4.18).
- *Choice of paths for walking (4.00 overall)* – respondents in the C2DE social classes provided higher scores for this aspect (4.18).
- *Clean toilets (3.94 overall)* – visitors most likely to be satisfied with the cleanliness of toilets included regular visitors to the site (4.19).
- *Solitude, peace and quiet (3.93 overall)* – regular visitors to the site (4.11) and cyclists (4.10) were most likely to be satisfied with the solitude, peace and quiet.
- *Being able to enjoy the wildlife (3.89 overall)* – the highest scores for this aspect were provided by regular visitors (4.19) and cyclists (4.00).
- *Café (3.85 overall)* – regular visitors to the site (4.08), walkers (3.88) and Empty Nesters (3.94) were most satisfied with the café.
- *Bike Art cycle hire facilities (3.83 overall)* – the majority of respondents did not provide a rating of this facility because they had not experienced it (64%).
- *Availability of cycle hire on-site (3.81 overall)* – as might be expected, the highest scores for this aspect were provided by cyclists (3.97).

- *Baby changing facilities (3.81 overall)* – less than a third of visitors provided a rating for this facility (28%).
- *Shop (3.69 overall)* – visitors most likely to be satisfied with the shop included females (3.73), Empty Nesters (3.94), C2DEs (3.98) and frequent visitors (3.94).
- *Leaflets and information about the place you are visiting (3.71)* – visitors who regularly come to the site (3.85), dog walkers (3.86), C2DEs (3.86) and Empty Nesters (3.91) were most likely to be satisfied with the information provided.
- *Choice of trails for other activities (3.70)* – the majority of respondents did not provide a rating for this facility (65%).
- *Forest Drive (3.70)* – under half of visitors provided a rating for the forest drive (43%).
- *Clear signposting on footpaths (3.69)* – visitors most likely to be satisfied with the signposting on footpaths included regular visitors (3.77), visitors walking without a dog (3.80), C2DEs (3.98) and Empty Nesters (3.94).
- *Availability of staff on site (3.40)* – around two-thirds of visitors did not provide a rating for this element of their visit as they had no experience of did not know (65%).

These differences in levels of satisfaction demonstrate how the quality of experience can vary between user groups.

Analysis of importance of elements of visit V satisfaction with same elements - Thetford
 Base: All respondents (316)



- ◆ Enough car parking
- × Shop
- × Clean toilets
- + Children's play equipment
- Choice of paths for walking
- Choice of trails for other activities
- × Availability of cycle hire on site
- The 'go-ape' high rope course
- Feeling safe in the forest
- ◆ Solitude, peace & quiet
- ▲ Being able to enjoy scenery and views
- × Value for money of your whole trip
- ◆ Clear signposting
- Café
- Baby changing facilities
- Leaflets & information about the place you are visiting
- ◆ Choice of trails for cycling
- ▲ Availability of staff on site
- × The forest drive
- + The Bike Art cycle hire facilities
- Feeling happy to leave you car in the car park
- Being able to spend time with family and friends
- × Being able to enjoy wildlife
- Being able to get fit and healthy

Identification of issues

Tables B-9 and B-12 illustrated a ranking of the overall levels of importance and levels of satisfaction visitors have with different aspects of the 'visitor experience' at Thetford Forest Park. It is useful to combine these two measures to identify the elements which are most relevant to improving quality.

The chart opposite presents each of the elements that were rated in terms of both importance and satisfaction. The centre point is where the 'average' importance crosses the 'average' satisfaction score (as in B-9 and B-12). Each of the elements are plotted in the 4 quadrants as follows:

- Top right – *More Satisfied – More Important* – Being able to enjoy scenery and views, spending time with friends, feeling safe, value for money, enough car parking, feeling happy to leave car in car park and being able to get fit and healthy. Elements in this quadrant are rated 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* – Solitude, peace and quiet, clean toilets, clear signposting and leaflets and information. 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* – The 'go-ape' high rope course, trails for cycling and children's play equipment. Visitors are generally very satisfied with these elements although they are often rated as less important in their decision to visit. These may be elements which have provided unexpectedly high levels of satisfaction.
- Bottom left – *Less Satisfied – Less Important* – Shop, café, staff on site, baby changing facilities, trails for other activities, forest drive and cycle hire. Overall, visitors were less satisfied than average with these aspects but they are also seen as less important by most visitors. These elements might therefore be considered as lower priorities for investment.

It is important to note that the scores presented in this chart are averages across *all visitors* during the period in which the survey took place. 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 of a list of other users had been encountered during their current and recent visits, the majority of visitors had encountered children (95%), cyclists (92%) and walkers (88%). Fairly large proportions had also seen horse riders (24%), vehicles driving in the forest (20%) or motorcyclists (14%).

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

Base: All respondents (152)

	%	Increased enjoyment a lot +2	Increased enjoyment a little +1	Made no difference 0	Decreased a little -1	Decreased a lot -2	Score
Motorcyclists/ moto cross	14	-	-	41	41	3	-0.71
Vehicles driving in the forest	20	-	-	83	13	3	-0.20
Cyclists	92	4	11	81	2	2	0.11
Walkers	88	4	9	84	3	-	0.13
Children	95	6	10	78	6	-	0.16
Horse riders	24	8	11	78	3	-	0.25
None of these visitors	-						

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

As the table illustrates, while encounters with walkers, children, cyclists or horse riders usually had no impact or were positive, encounters with motorcyclists or other vehicles were more likely to be negative.

A total of 6 respondents (4% of total) stated that cyclists had decreased their enjoyment. Reasons for dissatisfaction included: lack of consideration for walkers (3) and going too fast (1).

Motorbikes or motocross disrupted the enjoyment of 12 respondents (8% of total). Reasons for dissatisfaction was given as the noise created (5), going too fast (4) and their lack of consideration for walkers (1).

5 respondents (3% of total) stated that vehicles in the forest disturbed their enjoyment. These respondents stated that vehicles in the forest went too fast (2) or had a lack of consideration for walkers (1).

The results obtained at Thetford were broadly similar to those across all of the sites included in this programme of research.

Disturbances to visit

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

However, the disruptions most likely to have had any negative effect were dogs and dog dirt (decreased the enjoyment of 18% of visitors), litter or fly tipping (16%), vandalised, missing or damaged signposts (16%) and muddy tracks (15%).

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

Base: All respondents (152)

	Didn't reduce enjoyment 0	Decreased a little 1	Decreased a lot 2	Don't know	Score
Dogs and dog dirt	66	11	7	17	0.29
Litter or fly tipping	65	12	4	19	0.24
Vandalised, missing or damaged signposts	63	14	2	20	0.23
Muddy tracks	76	14	1	9	0.19
Noise from other users or motorised sports	75	5	3	16	0.14
Forest operations such as felling	69	1	-	30	0.01

At Thetford there were some variations in the levels of intrusion of each of the possible impacts, as follows:

- *Dogs and dog dirt* – families were more likely to mention that this was an issue.
- *Vandalised, missing or damaged signposts* – walkers were more likely to note this as an issue.

- *Muddy tracks* – this was slightly more likely to be an issue amongst families.

Respondents were asked to indicate what else, if anything had decreased their enjoyment. Encouragingly, most respondents could not think of anything. Amongst those who did provide comments the most frequent areas referred to were:

- Too much noise from children and vehicles (5%)
- Poor sign posting (3%)
- People letting dogs off lead (2%)
- Car park expensive (2%)

Some of the specific answers provided are reproduced below:

A bit of noise from Go Ape users

Dogs – Got dog poo on the wheels of my child’s buggy. Staff should enforce the “pick up the dog litter rule”.

Litter and fly tipping – unpleasant. Muddy tracks – damage to my bike. Vandalism – lose my way; depend on other cyclists to go the right way!

Way marker signs are often kicked down and destroyed makes it difficult for first-timers to find their way round.

People don’t always clean up their dog dirt especially in the children’s play area.

I have a young son and having dogs off the lead made me uncomfortable.

Expectations V Reality

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

A third of respondents stated that the visit was ‘much better’ than they had expected while a further 22% stated that it was ‘a little better’. Some 38% found the forest ‘as expected’ while 5% though that it was worse.

Table B-15 – Overall rating of visit to forest compared to expectations (%)

Base: All self-completion respondents providing a response (79)

	%
Much better (+2)	34
A little better (+1)	22
As expected (0)	38
A little worse (-1)	4
Much worse (-2)	1

When scores were applied to responses from +2 (‘much better’) to -2 (‘much worse’), an overall, positive score of 0.85 was obtained. This score is similar to that obtained across the other sites in which this question has been asked (0.81).

When asked to state why they found the forest better than expected, responses mainly related to the site being bigger than expected, the good cycle tracks and the play equipment and other facilities for children.

Those respondents who found the forest to be worse than expected were also asked to state why. Reasons given included the car park costing too much, a lack of wildlife to be seen and facilities not being open.

Improvements

When asked what, if anything, needed to be improved at Thetford Forest Park, around half of visitors either stated that nothing should be improved or that they ‘didn’t know’ what should be improved (46%).

The suggestions that were made are listed below. The most frequent suggestions related to improvements to trails and paths (7%), more children’s facilities (6%) and improved maps and signage (6%).

Table B-16 – Suggested improvements (%)

Base: All respondents (152)

	%
Better/ more trails and paths	7
More children’s activities/ play areas	6
More/ improved maps and signs	6
More bins	5
Lower prices in car park	3
More seating	2
More events	2
Larger car park	2
Dog owners should clean up mess	2
Clearer colour coding for cycle trails	2
More toilets	1
Plant more trees	1
Intermediate cycle track for children	1
Lower prices in shop/ restaurant	1
Longer opening hours	1

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

Build bird hides so we can photograph the birds. Get in more bird species.

Changing areas for after “Go Ape” as you can get very dirty. A certificate for completion would be appreciated.

I feel a shower or adult changing area would be useful. I drove from Hertfordshire to meet with friends for cycling and had to change in a toilet. We were then going out to lunch and wanted to freshen up.

More bins about for dogs and general rubbish. Not more kiosks as it would spoil scenery.

Plant some more trees of different foliage. Plant within the forest – there is adequate space, would encourage other birds.

Expenditure

To obtain an indication of the economic impact of visitors to Thetford Forest Park, respondents were asked to specify the amount they had personally spent during the day of their visit to the forest. Some 13% of all respondents stated that they did not spend anything during their visit. The table below presents the average expenditure per person for different elements of their visit. The overall average expenditure does not add up to the average amounts spent for each of the categories outlined below, as not all respondents were able to provide details of their expenditure beyond their total amount spent.

Table B-17 - Average expenditure per person per day (incl. day trip and overnight stay)

Base: All frequent visitors and self completion respondents (152)

	%
Accommodation (incl. food and drink)	£24*
Food and drink (excl. at accommodation)	£4
Admission fees	£3
Shopping (non-routine, souvenirs)	£2
Transport (incl. petrol, taxis, public transport)	£5
Equipment (e.g. hire of boat, horse-riding)	£2
Go-ape admission	£5
Miscellaneous	£1
Overall average spend	£21

* Based on 10 respondents who stayed away from home

In total, visitors to Thetford Forest Park spent an average £21 during the day of their visit. Expenditure was highest amongst Families (£23), infrequent visitors (£28) and dog walkers (£28) but lowest amongst frequent visitors (£14) and Empty Nesters (£14).

Key findings and conclusions

This survey indicated that users at Thetford Forest Park tended to visit the site fairly infrequently and that a large proportion (three out of ten) were first time visitors. Just over half were in the Family lifecycle group, a higher proportion than in most of the other sites surveyed and the vast majority were on day trips.

The site was used for a wide variety of purposes, most notably walking, cycling, picnics, the 'go-ape' course and children's activities. On average, visitors spent almost 3 and a half hours on site, longer than the average recorded at most other Forestry Commission locations. The wide range of activities available attracted a variety of user types with older visitors more likely to take part in walking, younger males most likely to cycle, families taking picnics and infrequent and first time visitors using the 'go-ape' course.

Most users were generally satisfied with the site and the forest's key strengths included the 'go-ape' course, being able to spend time with family and friends and the views and scenery.

Possible issues ranked as important but of a lower quality overall included signposting on site, the provision of leaflets and information and peace and quiet. There is little conflict between different user groups but those mentioned most often related to the noise created by motorcyclists, the speed of cyclists and noise created by the users of the 'go-ape' course. Other issues mentioned by a minority of visitors included dog dirt, litter and missing waymarkers. Suggestions for improvements included additional or improved trails, more play areas for children and more information.

Overall, reflecting the very positive experiences reported by most visitors, more than half of first time and infrequent visitors stated that their visit to Thetford Forest Park was better than expected (56%) while only 5% thought that it was worse. Those who thought that it was worse provided reasons for their disappointment which included the cost of the car park.

C. Appendices

Questionnaires

Results obtained at other Forestry Commission sites

Responses to open-ended questions

Responses to open ended questions

Q.8b) What else, if anything, influenced your decision to visit Thetford Forest Park today?

A day out together with the family, here on holiday.

A family re-union. Have not seen family for a while. We have a family re-union once a year. Can be up to 40 of us!

A meeting of or mums and toddlers group.

A trip out by Thetford Guild – we were looking for something peaceful and pretty with nice scenery.

Advice from a friend.

A-level coursework on footpath erosion.

Arranged with friend to visit the Go Ape.

Bad weather, shelter under the trees.

Because it is a birthday party and birthday girl chose to go on the “Go Ape” course. Her treat was to choose to come here

Because it is a great place for a family day out. Good value for money.

Because it is fairly near. Good value for money. 2 boys enjoy day out – wide open area.

Because of the availability of the cycle tracks and other facilities.

Because other members of the Environment Agency staff were here. It was a works day out.

Been before – good fun, ideal for children. We are looking at trees for an autumn theme at playschool.

Been before and wanted to come back and go on the Go Ape.

Came here at the suggestion of a friend having a hen party, who has been here before.

Came here to relax for the day.

Came to do the 'Go Ape' course. One of the guys in our Running Club brought it to our attention and 12 of us came to do it.

Came to have a good day out.

Close proximity from home and the sunshine.

Close to home.

Closeness of the Lodge. Good reputations. Good past experiences. Good atmosphere. Came as friends gave a good description of area.

Company outing.

Convenience.

Convenient. Children always want to come here.

Covered it, very comprehensive.

Curiosity

Cycle tracks on black route very badly marked. Lack of signs.

Decent weather – because it is dry and quite pleasant.

Different scenery and peace and quiet.

Fairly easy to get to for us. We like the facilities laid on by the Forestry Commission as we know they are the ones, as cyclists, that we use.

Family time. Best facilities around. Best ever park I've been to.

First time to try it.

For exercise and the weather was not too bad. We've done our shopping and wanted to relax.

For historical reasons. Interest in local history.

For the children to get a good cycle on the marked trails and have fun.

Friends and dog.

Friends initially recommended place. We did not know it was here. By chance our friends gave number and we asked for directions.

Gets the kids running about in the fresh air – better than a Playstation.

Go Ape and the woods and walks.

Good for walking, the solitude, and paths are well maintained.

Good place to bring the grandchildren.

Good place to take friends.

Good value – the car park. Also have vouchers, money off to get in and children are free, we got it with the newspaper.

Grandchildren – somewhere for them to go. Just a nice place to be.

Had helpers here – entertainment to visitors.

Had something for everybody in the family.

Having been before and enjoyed it. Free and easy for the family.

Here to join up with other teachers (due to arrive soon) to surprise a school party.

I cycle over a pre-prepared route and time myself over this. I do this on regular occasions to try and beat my time (the route is always the same).

I got pushed into coming. We were going somewhere else with a pair of 11 year olds but they persuaded us to come here. Good compromise!!

I heard from family members about it and decided to come with my young family for a day out.

I like it. That is all I can say.

I like the Go Ape and the day out in the forest.

I wanted a coffee and it's conveniently placed.

I wanted to bring my grandson because it is safe for him to play here rather than in the roads. He likes the activities.

I was told I was coming here so I turned up.

I'm meeting a friend (Romantic day out).

I've been here as a child myself.

It is clean and friendly. It has everything for the family.

It is near to where I am staying.

It is quite close to home and knew from previous experience that it is a nice place.

It was a whim. We had the opportunity due to work being completed early.

It wasn't raining. Collecting conkers to give my nephew a treat.

It's a day out away from people, you can walk in the forest or Go-Ape, and they offer good activities.

It's a family day out.

It's a habit. I come here regularly.

It's a meeting point for the family and it's a great day out for children and adults alike.

It's habit. I come here nearly every day!

Its autumn leaves and colours on the change. I love the outdoors and woods which take me back to my childhood.

Its close by and the boys like the Squirrel Maze.

Just a day out for the children.

Just a day out.

Just a day out.

Just a day out.

Just a nice place to come, people are nice, the environment is pleasant,. More activities for children to do.

Just came back from Cornwall and we wanted a 'chilled-out day' before traveling to Scotland tomorrow.

Just convenient and we were passing and wanted something to do.

Just exercise, picnic and a day out.

Just peace and quiet. Wonderful walk in the rain.

Just that we heard from other people that enjoyed the trip. We thought us and our children would benefit also.

Just that we've seen it driving by. Here from USA and intend to live and work here.

Just the forest and the peace and quiet.

Just the Go Ape.

Just the quality of the cycle trails.

Just the tree climbing. A day out!

Just the weather, it's a nice day.

Just to come to the Go-Ape.

Just to cycle. To be in nature. To enjoy nature. Peace and quiet of the woods. Members because of the facilities.

Just to go on Ape course. Different experience to enjoy.

Just to go on the Ape rope course.

Just to have a day out.

Just to meet up with friends and have fun with friends. This is somewhere different. Heard through a friend of this place.

Killing time when car is being serviced in Thetford.

Know the park well.

Lack of equal facilities in Cambridgeshire. This is “peerless”. To bring my son cycling with me.

Last time we came it was easy to find our way – good signposts from Cambridge. Good weather and cycles.

Leaflet available on Caravan site.

Looking for an ice cream van.

Mainly for the changes of scenery and the fresh air. Relaxing time and activities for grandchildren.

Mountain bikes, the great tracks.

My daughter’s choice. Effectively a good value for money treat, with her friends and she can run around freely and independently in a safe environment.

My daughter’s idea. A day out.

My friends decided to come and I came as well. They wanted to go on the ‘Go Ape’. I decided not to as I am afraid of heights.

My son said to come and act as a babysitter while he cycled. The “Go Ape” is what they like and to have a barbeque – even though it was not available.

Need a well marked escape route in case of emergency i.e. feeling unwell (back to the car) beacons or something like that.

Need better signs and awareness of people using cycling tracks. People do not know the cycle code, could be dangerous. Some people were having a picnic on a cycle track.

Nice

Nice and near to home.

My season ticket makes it a cheap day out.

On holiday.

On my way back from Norwich.

On the way home.

Only the activities on offer like the Go Ape.

Only the Go Ape, always wanted to have a go.

Only the Go Ape.

Only the Go Ape.

Only the Go Ape.

Only the Go-Ape.

Only to Go Ape, always wanted to go on it.

Parent and toddler outing. (Due to bad weather – a poor turn out).

Peace and quiet.

Plan to bring the kids.

Plenty of room to cycle off road.

Previous experience of the park.

Quite close to where we live.

Quite local, short trip. To be out in the green.

Recommendation about Go Ape.

Recommendation from family in Essex.

Recommendation from friends.

Recommendation to Go Ape.

Recommended by our friend.

Safety and freedom to get the kids off the road cycling.

Security of the surroundings.

Simplicity of access. It was an easy drive from Cambridge, not too far away.

Something for the kids to do, have different places to play, so many activities.

Something grandchildren can let off steam.

Somewhere different to bring the dog.

Somewhere safe for the little one to play and it is also local.

Spending quality time with my child.

Surprised that we were charged £4 admission as we did not know it would be that high.
Get away. Never been here before – new experience.

That we could have a picnic for free and I didn't have to buy food.

The availability of a decent mountain bike track, the black route.

The babes in the wood Toddler Group meeting (a regular thing).

The bike shop is open. It's one of our days off.

The children have plenty of things to do and there is no traffic.

The children love the open space to kick the ball around and use the equipment.

The children needed to get out and let off steam.

The children, a good day off for everybody.

The fact it is close by.

The fact that I was passing this area. I am on route to Kings Lynn (from London).

The fact that it is clean. No seating on walks and no dog bins.

The fact that it is easy to get to.

The fact that it was a works day out organised by my employers (though I have been many times before myself).

The forest – and it's good for all ages and the Go Ape.

The forest and the Go Ape.

The Go Ape and a good day out.

The Go Ape and the forest. Good place to come to.

The Go Ape and we have been before and I liked it.

The Go Ape attracts me and cycling.

The Go Ape was the only reason for coming today.

The Go Ape, that's the only reason I came.

The Go Ape. Could put the car parking price, it isn't mentioned on-line.

The lady driver on the coach suggested it.

The locality, 15 minutes drive. The river.

The location.

The open space for lively children.

The orienteering. All ways influence me.

The peace and quiet.

The play equipment.

The presence of out visitors – somewhere different.

The proximity to my house.

The scenery. Location. River.

The space of the trees and knowing what to expect as we have been before.

The weather and the fact we had a baby sitter.

The weather is nice and wanted fresh air.

The weather was good. Wanted somewhere for the children to roam freely. Not too expensive. Easily accessible. Not carry too much.

The weather was nice. Fairly close to where we live.

The weather.

The weather. Nice day. Having time to go.

To bring our visitors.

To bring the children.

To come with the children. Be at one with nature.

To give the youngster freedom to roam in safe environment. Came with a friend who is more a regular visitor.

To Go Ape and birthday party for my friend.

To take my child out to play.

To visit the Go Ape but we also like the wildlife and the scenery. Just to walk through the forest.

To walk the dog.

Very convenient to use.

Visiting from abroad and it is important for us to go out as a family with children.

Wanted to find some real beer.

We are camping locally. We had the children and they can run around here safely. Safety is important to us.

We are grandchild sitting. It uses up time in good surrounding.

We came because of the walks.

We came because there is a good campsite. Ideal for training for Duke of Edinburgh Award.

We came before and came with the family today.

We came especially for the 'Go-Ape' today. It is good for cycling.

We came for the Go Ape.

We came regularly.

We had overseas to entertain.

We had time to ourselves – We like the black route cycle track.

We have been before, we love it and the children love it. Good value for money.

We have passed this site many times and have always been curious about what is here.

We haven't been here for a long time and thought it would be a nice day out.

We head people talk about it so we decided to come and have a look.

We just like it here. Go biking with the kids. Safety. Good day out.

We just like it. Nowhere else better.

We know it and we love it.

We like it here, always have done. Away from the main area always peaceful.

We like the children's play area and my little girl can run around and still be in sight.

We looked at the website. Within a good distance.

We made an effort to come here today on our way to Norfolk. Should be better signposted.

We passed it on route.

We saw a leaflet in the hotel. It is on the way home from short holiday.

We saw a TV ad and we like biking.

We saw it on the map. We wanted to go to the Echo Centre. I have used other forests. £4.00 parking is a bit steep.

We wanted a picnic and activities for the child.

We wanted Go Ape and could fit it in.

We wanted to Go Ape.

We wanted to go cycling with the family in a safe place.

We were driving past, it wasn't planned.

We've been here before and can let the dog loose and there are dog bins.

We've just broken up and it's a complete change. Weather was dry

Weather – we decided against the coast because it looked iffy.

Weather, knew it would be dry and sunny and as going on Go Ape,, it was a pre-requisite.

Weather, the forecast was better towards the east. Slightly overcast and not too sunny.

Weather. It wasn't raining.

Q.13c) Why did other visitors decrease your enjoyment?

A dog off lead with owners and children in squirrel maze area.

Boys on motorbikes without helmets. I was concerned for their safety.

Children on cycle paths are often not controlled i.e. told to stay on one side if other cyclists about. Motor-bikes noisy.

Children, they were all inside milling about.

Cyclists – Children go round the one-way system the wrong way, you nearly bump into them.

Cyclists – Cyclists do not stick to the tracks.

Cyclists parked their bikes around litter bins. Could bike park be available?

Cyclists zoom along too fast in the picnic area especially child cyclists. Fear of being hit.

Don't like the noise and smell of cars/bikes.

Forestry Commission van drove through very fast and as I have a hearing problem found it quite unsettling.

Got in the way and a bit noisy.

Had to look where going due to heavy rainfall and a few dog dirts.

Horse riders – they didn't give me enough time to put my dog on a lead before moving up to me despite not asking.

Ideal place, safe, good parking, everything is lovely.

Moped riders going 30 mph where children are walking is very dangerous.

Motor bikes – They are intrusive into a natural environment.

Motor bikes seemed a little too fast, out of control and very noisy.

Motor-bikers – scrambles going at speed, unsafe.

Noise

Other cyclists, they don't always move. Some disregard cycle code when they are in groups.

Screaming children.

Unfortunately the Sugarbabes concert equipment was being dismantled – we just picked the wrong day.

Walkers on cycle track.

Walkers, children and cyclists. Since I have been coming here (over the years) I've noticed that the park has become more popular/busy so there are more of crap and shit to avoid.

Walks – smoking in the trees, very dangerous.

Q.14b) Why did issues decrease your enjoyment?

A bit of noise from Go Ape users

Although we didn't see too much litter we felt more bins would be helpful.

Ash paths single paths surface a bit unsteady, child fell off bike.

Black run especially muddy. Blue run had rabbit holes in it.

Bottles/broken bottles and cans found in heart of woods, don't expect it.

Children's play equipment had been vandalised.

Did not actually. Only potentially.

Dog dirt, dog owners disregard for walkers and cyclists. Not keeping them under control.

Dog mess – it's unhygienic and it smells.

Dog mess – should not have to look to where we tread. Require dog bins. Muddy tracks – more gravel to reduce muddy shoes.

Dogs – Got dog poo on the wheels of my child's buggy. Staff should enforce the "pick up the dog litter rule". Muddy tracks – Got mud on the wheel of my child's buggy.

Dogs and dog dirt, I don't like dogs.

Dogs and dog dirt, I have a toddler.

Dogs and dog dirt, mess on tracks gets on cycle tyres and splashes up.

Dogs and dog dirt. They are threatening and dog owners are rude. I feel that we should have a dog path (special area) just for them.

Dogs, they are let off leads too soon to public area.

Don't like litter but not much. Don't agree with vandals.

Go Ape noise.

I have a young son and having dogs off the lead made me uncomfortable.

It isn't pleasant Dog litter – who wants to look at dog litter.

It was wet when we came and the play area was very muddy.

Litter – Looks awful, no excuse for it.

Litter – Too much around play areas. Muddy tracks – Last time was more inconvenient for the kids.

Litter – Too much of it, not enough litter bins.

Litter and fly tipping – unpleasant. Muddy tracks – damage to my bike. Vandalism – lose my way; depend on other cyclists to go the right way!

Litter and fly tipping just looks a mess. Damage signpost, don't like to see it, unnecessary.

Litter and fly tipping, unsightly, danger also to wildlife i.e. plastic bottles. Vandalism, signposts being pulled off by young lads between here and Brandon Lodge.

Litter, just not necessary because otherwise the park is well looked after.

Litter, people are messy, there is a lot of it about. Vandalised signs, people get lost.

Missing signposts would have affected if no map available.

Motor bikes seemed a little too fast, out of control and very noisy.

Motor-bikers make a lot of noise. Dog dirt can be a nuisance if child picks it up.

Muddy paths, in the winter they can get muddy.

No bins for dog dirt. Plenty of litter not picked up.

Noise – band during beer festival.

Noise – children being noisy. Parents not controlling children. Muddy tracks – Had to go round them. Vandalism – got to fork, no signs, did not know which way to go.

Noise – Motor bikers just riding around and around.

Noise, sometimes a little noisy. Litter, a lot on the cycle tracks. Vandalism of the signs a little.

People don't always clean up their dog dirt especially in the children's play area.

Ram raiding of cycle shop previous night – no bikes.

Rope Walk broken in play area and dog dirt on paths.

Rubbish found by dog – had a vets bill for £100.

Soft muddy tracks made it difficult for kids.

Some litter around.

Some signposts on yellow route not clear.

Sweet wrappers and paths in some areas.

The muddy area is where children play equipment is.

Vandalised post, missing, damage – Unsightly.

Vandalism – Childs playground is vandalised (Has been closed).

Way marker signs are often kicked down and destroyed makes it difficult for first-timers to find their way round.

Yellow trail is not yellow in some areas.

Q.14c) What else, if anything, decreased your enjoyment of Thetford Forest Park during your most recent visits?

A car alarm going off at 3 min intervals from 11.30am – 3.30pm.

Bad signposting to the park – took a bit of finding.

Black mountain trail was badly maintained – too many nettles.

Black trail not well maintained. I have got lost on it in the past.

Cost of parking.

Cost to park.

Go-Ape Course: Separate sessions or more time to complete the course. Should be allowed for mixed groups of adults and children. Our party of 2 adults and 2 children were set off first around the course by the ranger who instructed our group on safety and we then came under immense pressure from a different male manager to bring the children down as in his view they were causing congestion on the course. We did not feel his views was justified and as the children were enjoying themselves we allowed them to finish the course. We should have started our safety instruction at 1.00 pm but this was postponed by Go Ape to 1.30 pm and in fact it did not begin until 1.45 pm. We finished the course just under 2 and a half hours, not an unreasonable length of time given the estimate in the Go Ape leaflet of 2 hours.

Having a coach party following me around. It was all kids.

It was a bit overcrowded in August.

It was raining on and off.

Lack of rubbish bins. None at all around car parks.

Lack of signs on walk trails. Need to be more accurate in there direction you are going.

Lack of toilet facilities.

More cycle trails. More technical, harder cycle trails.

Noise from jet engines made visit painful.

Nothing apart from the dogs. I am afraid of them and fear they approach my child.

Nothing else to add.

Nothing. Love it here.

One low flying plane, noise from the aircraft.

People letting dogs off lead to chase the deer (the deer are quite tame).

Playground is broken due to vandalism. Removed the Dutch Wheel.

Q.15 Thinking about your most recent visits to Thetford Forest Park and others you may have made in the past, what if anything would you like to see changed or improved to make any future visits more enjoyable?

A big chess set for people to play with.

A few more concerts needed (especially acts of 70's and 80's's) e.g. Paul Weller.

A soft play are for children. More than one baby changing facilities.

A speed limit for cyclists around the children's play are. Don't want dogs chasing deer.

A water feature or something like that so children can have fun playing with the water in hot weather.

Aircraft noise.

£4 fee okay but small map of routes should be in prices.

All tracks on map as cycle paths made orienteering difficult.

Allow more horse riding and provide separate parking/loading are for boxes and trailers.

Alter the trails a bit or add some new ones. Need a map especially on the black (one way) marked trails, make the posts 1 to 10 so you know where you are on the one way system.

An ice cream vendor/ice cream cones down by the Squirrel Maze would be good.

Banning automatic car alarms.

Better pathways (surface) on bike routes.

Better signage of paths, it is easy to get lost.

Bike was facility.

Build bird hides so we can photograph the birds. Get in more bird species.

Camp site? There may have been one but we did not see it.

Can't think of any.

Can't think of anything.

Car park charges reduced or waived is using Go Ape or cycling hire, Ads extra expense. Agree with charge if just walking.

Changing areas for after "Go Ape" as you can get very dirty. A certificate for completion would be appreciated.

Cheaper prices and many more litter bins – they were all full!

Clearer colour coding for cycle routes.

Clearer cycle routes (Black) and a hedgehog.

Cycle trails more clearly signposted.

Dog dirt bins. Seating for rest periods.

Dogs to be kept on leads.

Easier cross-country riding.

Far less gates. Less inhibitions on what people can do.

Free car parking.

Free cycling and walking leaflets.

Free parking.

Go-Ape Course: Separate sessions or more time to complete the course. Should be allowed for mixed groups of adults and children. Our party of 2 adults and 2 children were set off first around the course by the ranger who instructed our group on safety and we then came under immense pressure from a different male manager to bring the children down as in his view they were causing congestion on the course. We did not feel his views was justified and as the children were enjoying themselves we allowed them to finish the course. We should have started our safety instruction at 1.00 pm but this was postponed by Go Ape to 1.30 pm and in fact it did not begin until 1.45 pm. We finished the course just under 2 and a half hours, not an unreasonable length of time given the estimate in the Go Ape leaflet of 2 hours.

Have been visiting for 4 years and I am always noticing improvements which at same time do not detract from forest.

I feel a shower or adult changing area would be useful. I drove from Hertfordshire to meet with friends for cycling and had to change in a toilet. We were then going out to lunch and wanted to freshen up.

I like it as it is.

I wish people would behave better in the forest. I wish they would not drop things in the forest.

If anyone is caught with their dogs fouling the are to be fined on the spot. When I've gone cycling, I've noticed that there are no signs pointing the way back to the centre. Because children run all over, need signs to guide them back. Something big, colourful and obvious.

Indoor activity e.g. museum, play area.

It's fine as it is.

It's quiet (especially in the mornings). I like to come early in the morning.

Just better signposting.

Just better signs to make people aware of cycling code.

Less sand on tracks, large pits difficult to cycle through. Cheaper parking.

Loos spread out for the female population.

Lower toll.

Make it non-smoking, some worries about forest fires and the panic factor, not enough provision to get people out fast enough.

Might it be possible to organise 'canoe hire' from Santas down town?

More baby swings.

More bins about for dogs and general rubbish. Not more kiosks as it would spoil scenery.

More car parking at High Lodge. Single car park is expensive.

More cycle routes.

More dog bins. To have signs indicating where they are placed and asking dog owners to use!

More dog poo bins on walk.

More events, more concerts. More disabled car parking.

More extreme cycle tracks, more challenging ones!

More for younger children to do, that's all.

More forests created for future generations.

More hardwood trees planted and continue with Heath land restoration.

More humps in the cycle tracks, make them more adventurous.

More information on the cycle tracks.

More litter bins, that's it.

More litter collection on parks and picnic areas.

More marked cycle trails.

More picnic benches. Cheaper bike hire. Some kind of drainage for puddles when wet.

More play equipment for slightly older children (i.e. 10+ years).

More signs on cycle tracks needed.

More signs on the "black" paths. Signs numbered and for all signs which are numbered to be shown exactly where I am on the map.

More visible wildlife! Stop mopeds racing through the forest.

More way marked cycle tracks for different abilities (Black/Red/Blue etc).

Need a big hill, it is a challenge. Need the (black) extreme to be more extreme, I am an experienced cyclist.

Need an intermediate course (for the kids). Something in-between the blue and the black run.

Need more litter bins here. Need places to sit for parents where children are playing.

Nets – volleyball. Sandpit, more for little ones to play with.

No outdoor picnic area undercover so all tables very wet.

Not to be too developed in an outdoor activity and it shouldn't be overdeveloped, it would spoil it.

Nothing else would like to see.

Nothing, but please do not put in any 'Fairground Attractions'.

Nothing, leave it as it is, don't spoil it.

Nothing. There is plenty for everyone.

Parking charges.

Plant some more trees of different foliage. Plant within the forest – there is adequate space, would encourage other birds.

Possibly more play sculptures as they are popular with my kids!

Pressure washer to clean muddy bikes before going home.

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