



Site visits

A Site visit offers the public an opportunity to get acquainted with the planning area or proposed projects. It can also be targeted to special groups, e.g. key stakeholders, advisory committee representatives or media. On guided visits, the attendees are able to discuss the different planning options and their implications and other related issues. Careful designing of a Site visit is always important and should include a demonstration (the preferred option) or a presentation. Participants should be encouraged to pose questions and comment on the topics in order to create genuine interaction and exchange ideas. When planning a Site visit, it is recommended to make a bad-weather plan, for instance by arranging a large enough indoor venue for presentations/ demonstrations and discussions. The organisers must also give due consideration to health and safety requirements of taking visitors on to work sites.



Darrochwids (Buchan Forest District). Site visits can stimulate interest and involvement in forest and woodland plans.



Clinkham Woods (The Mersey Forest).

Resources and requirements

Skills

- The group leader should have excellent presentation and overall communication skills.
- The leader must have adequate knowledge of the site to be able to answer participants' questions.

Equipment

- Transportation is needed for participants.
- If the visit is self-guided, facilities are required for producing maps, signs and brochures.
- Providing refreshments for participants is a good idea on longer trips.

Level of engagement

INFORMING: ★★

CONSULTING: ★★★

INVOLVING: ★★

PARTNERSHIP:

Strengths

- A Site visit can increase the public's awareness of the forestry planning and related issues.
- The discussion environment is more neutral compared to other options.
- The visit can provide an opportunity to create new interaction and rapport with stakeholders.
- Organisers can be made aware of the public's viewpoints.

Weaknesses

- The number of participants is fairly limited by logistics and other practical factors.
- Site visits may need to be repeated several times and this increases costs.
- There is a risk of creating a poor public image if the visit is not well designed and organised or the staff are unable to answer questions from participants.

Time

- Time is needed to make the arrangements such as transportation and possibly to acquire the materials for the demonstration/presentation.
- Enough time should be allocated so that the visit is not rushed.

Useful sources of information

Books

- Participatory approach to natural resource management: a guide book. T. Loikkanen (1999). Forest and Park Service, Finland.
- Public Involvement Guide – A desk guide to Public Involvement. USDA Forest Service (1998). Northern Region, Public and Governmental Relations.

Web

- The International Association for Public Participation: www.iap2.org
- Public involvement techniques for transportation decision-making by United States Department of Transportation: www.fhwa.dot.gov/reports/pittd/sitevis.htm



Forest district staff and community representatives at an on site planning meeting. Galloway Forest District.



Forestry Commission staff, members of the public and local residents at an onsite consultation meeting. Whitelee forest near East Kilbride.

This toolbox is designed to assist Forestry Commission staff when they are considering which tools they could use to involve the public in the forest and woodland planning process. For more information please visit the website at: www.forestry.gov.uk/toolbox