

**MONITORING THE QUALITY
OF EXPERIENCE IN FORESTS
WESTONBIRT, GLOUCESTERSHIRE**

April 2004



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Prepared by:

TNS

19 Atholl Crescent
Edinburgh, EH3 8HQ

Telephone: 0131 656 4000
Facsimile: 0131 656 4001
e-mail: enquiries@tns-global.com

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A. Background and introduction

Background

This report contains the results of a survey and focus group undertaken by TNS Travel and Tourism at Westonbirt Arboretum in Gloucestershire.

The survey approach used was specifically 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 were also undertaken at Grizedale Forest Park and Whiston Woods between August and October 2003. The results of these surveys are presented separately.

Methods

Quantitative survey

A total of 321 visitors were interviewed at Westonbirt Arboretum between 25th August and 30th 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 Westonbirt. 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 after their visit, using a reply-paid envelope. Copies of the questionnaires used are appended.

Section B of this report provides the results of the survey undertaken at Westonbirt Arboretum. Results of the surveys undertaken at Grizedale Forest Park and Whiston Woods have been presented separately.

A total of 321 visitors were interviewed and 162 self completion questionnaires were returned (64% of the 221 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.

Qualitative research

The quantitative survey identified a number of issues and possible improvements which could be made at Westonbirt Arboretum. To find out about these issues and to investigate the possibilities for development in more detail, a focus group was held on 31 March 2004.

This focus group was attended by 8 frequent users of the site and took place in the Great Oak Hall within the site grounds. These respondents had all agreed to take part in further research when they were interviewed as part of the quantitative survey in 2003.

The results of this qualitative stage of the study are provided in Section C of this report.

B. Main results

Visitor profile

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

Demographics

Over three-fifths of visitors to Westonbirt Arboretum were female (63%). This majority was most notable amongst Families (74%), frequent visitors to the forest and Young Independents (69% each).

Some 63% of visitors were in the Empty Nester lifecycle group (over 45 years, no children in the household) while 23% were Families (children under 16 living in the household) and a smaller proportion (8%) were Young Independents (under 35 years, no children in household).

Table B-1 – Age and lifecycle (%)
Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	%
Age	
16 - 24	1
25 – 34	13
35 – 44	19
45 – 54	17
55 – 64	26
65+	23
Lifecycle	
Young Independents	8
Families	23
Empty Nesters	63
Other	6

Some 14% of all visitors were aged between 16 and 34 years, whilst 36% were aged between 35 and 54 years and the remaining 49% were aged 55 years or over.

Frequent visitors to Westonbirt were more likely to be Families than infrequent visitors (34% v 18%). Visitors on holiday or on a day trip lasting more than three hours were more likely to be Empty Nesters (78% and 70% respectively).

In terms of social class, as the table below illustrates, over two-fifths of visitors (43%) were in the AB social classes (higher and intermediate managerial, administrative or professional) and a similar proportion (40%) were C1s (supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional). Smaller proportions were in the C2 and DE classes (17%).

By comparison, in the UK population as a whole 43% of people are ABC1s while larger proportions are C2DEs.

Table B-2 – Social class (%)

Weighted base: All responses (321)

	Visitors	UK Population
AB – ‘upper middle class’ – higher/ intermediate managerial, administrative or professional	43	17
C1 – ‘lower middle class’ – supervisory or clerical, junior managerial, administrative or professional	40	26
C2 – ‘skilled working class’ – skilled manual workers	12	25
DE - ‘working class’ and unemployed – semi and unskilled manual workers, state pensioners, unemployed	5	32

All respondents categorised as Young Independents (24 in total) were in the AB or C1 social classes. Some 85% of Families were in the AB or C1 social classes, similar to the proportion amongst Empty Nesters (81%). A slightly larger proportion of visitors who were on holiday were C2s or DEs (20%).

Origin

The majority of visitors lived in the nearby local area with about half living in the South West (46%), 15% stating that they were from Bristol and 13% visiting from the South East. Places of residence mentioned by at least 2% of respondents are listed in the table below.

Table B-3 – Area of residence (%)
Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	%
South West	46
<i>Bristol</i>	15
<i>Malmesbury</i>	5
<i>Tetbury</i>	2
<i>Stroud</i>	2
<i>Swindon</i>	2
<i>Cirencester</i>	2
<i>Trowbridge</i>	1
<i>Framton</i>	1
<i>Calne</i>	1
<i>Sherston</i>	1
South East	13
West Midlands	9
East Midlands	4
Wales	3
North West	2
Cirencester	2
Swindon	2

Friends of Westonbirt

Just over a quarter of respondents were 'Friends of Westonbirt' (28%). Respondents more likely to be members included those aged 65+ (45% were members), those on a short trip from home (36%) and repeat visitors (36%).

Trip profile

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

Type of visit

Nearly two-thirds of visitors were on a short trip of less than 3 hours from home (64%) while a quarter were on a day trip of a longer duration (25%) and 11% were on holiday.

Table B-4 – Type of visit (%)

Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	%
On a short trip of less than 3 hours from home	64
On a day out for more than 3 hours from home	25
On holiday away from home	11

Visitors most likely to be on a short trip of less than 3 hours duration included frequent visitors (89%), Families (81%), visitors aged 25-44 years, those aged 45-54 years and people visiting the forest to walk (68%). On the other hand, infrequent visitors (31%), visitors over 55 years (29%), people engaged in a nature study (28%) and Empty Nesters (28%) were more likely to be on holiday.

Frequency of visits

Nearly three-quarters of all visitors had been to Westonbirt before (74%). Visitors on short trips from home (83%), Families (78%), male visitors and those going for a walk were most likely to be on repeat visits (77% each). Visitors on holiday and Young Independents were more likely than others to be on their first visit (68% and 46% respectively).

In terms of frequency of visits, most users visited the site fairly infrequently with over half visiting less than once a month (58%). Just over two-fifths (41%) visited once a month or more, with 29% visiting 1 to 3 times each month.

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

Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	%
Every day	1
4 to 6 times per week	1
1 to 3 times a week	10
1 to 3 times a month	29
4 to 6 times a year	5
1 to 3 times a year	30
Less often	23

Families (19%), people on short day trips (17%) and dog walkers (17%) were the most frequent visitors with just under a fifth in each category visiting at least once a week or more often.

Length of visits

Visitors spent an average of 3 hours in Westonbirt. The largest proportions of visitors stayed on the site for between 2 and 3 hours (38%) or 3 and 5 hours (32%). Only 2% stayed for less than 1 hour.

Table B-6 – Length of visit (%)

Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	%
Up to 15 minutes	-
15 – 30 minutes	<1
30 minutes – 1 hour	2
1 hour – 2 hours	19
2 hours – 3 hours	38
3 hours – 5 hours	32
More than 5 hours	7
<i>Average</i>	<i>3 hours</i>

- No responses

The average length of time spent varied between some of the different user groups with dog walkers typically spending around 2 and a half hours in the forest (av. 2 hours 26 minutes) while visitors engaged in nature studies typically spent just over 3 hours.

Families typically spent 2 hours and 42 minutes on site while Young Independents and Empty Nesters stayed for an average of 3 hours.

Activities undertaken

When asked what they did during their visit, the most frequently mentioned attraction was the Arboretum with 59% visiting it and 41% looking at something in the Arboretum. The second most common activity was walking either with (12%) or without (60%) a dog. Nearly a third of visitors were attending the International Festival of Gardens (31%), a quarter were doing photography (24%) and a fifth were having a picnic (20%). Other activities undertaken included: bird watching (12%), nature studies (7%), running (4%), visiting the café (3%), using the Autumn Trail or taking part in another event or organised activity (2% each).

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

Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	%
Walking	60
Visiting the Arboretum	59
Looking at something in the Arboretum (e.g. sculptures or an ancient tree)	41
Attending International Festival of Gardens	31
Photography	24
Picnic	20
Dog walking	12
Bird watching	12
Nature/ natural history visit	7
Running	4
Use of café	3
The Autumn Trail	2
Taking part in an event or organised activity	2

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

- *Walking without a dog (60% overall)* – visitors most likely to undertake this activity included C2DEs (69%), Young Independents (69%), those on a short day out (62%), visitors over 55 years (62%) and male respondents (62%).

- *Visiting the Arboretum (59% overall)* – a larger proportion of those involved in nature studies (77%), Young Independents (65%), visitors on a day out (65%), infrequent visitors (64%) and those aged 55 years and over (63%) took part in this activity.
- *Looking at something in the Arboretum (41% overall)* – visitors most likely to participate in this activity included: those involved in nature studies (54%), infrequent visitors (47%), Young Independents (46%) and those out on a day trip (45%).
- *Attending International Festival of Gardens (31% overall)* – visitors also engaged in walking (42%), those aged 45-54 years (37%), infrequent visitors (36%), day trippers (35%) and female visitors (35%) were more likely to have a take part in this activity during their visit.
- *Photography (24% overall)* – visitors on holiday (37%), Young Independents (35%) and those aged between 45 and 54 (33%) were most likely to take part in this activity.
- *Picnic (20% overall)* – visitors also engaged in walking (39%), dog walkers (27%), frequent visitors (27%), Families (27%) and those out on a short day trip (25%) were most likely to have a picnic during their visit to Westonbirt.

Importance of festival of gardens

Respondents who were attending the International Festival of Gardens were also asked to state how important the event had been in their decision to visit. As the table illustrates, the festival was important for the majority of these respondents (69%), with a quarter stating that it was the only reason for coming (25%) and a similar proportion considered it as 'very important' (25% each).

Table B-8 – Importance of festival of gardens (%)

Weighted base: Respondents attending the International Festival of Gardens (100)

	%
The only reason for coming	25
Very important	25
Quite important	19
Neither important nor unimportant	8
Not very important	9
Not important at all	11
Don't know/ not stated	2

The International Festival of Gardens was most important in their decision to visit amongst people out on a day trip (80%), infrequent visitors (77%) and Empty Nesters (75%).

Importance of different aspects of visit

To identify the drivers of quality, it was useful to ask visitors to rate how important different aspects were in their decision to visit the site. Visitors could rate each of a list of aspects as 'very important' (+2), 'quite important (+1), 'neither important not unimportant' (0), 'not very important' (-1) or 'not at all important' (-2). Scores were then applied to responses, allowing averages to be obtained across the whole sample - the higher the average score, the more important the aspect is across the sample as a whole.

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-9 – Importance of different aspects in decision to visit (mean score)
Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	Importance score
<i>Being able to enjoy scenery and views</i>	1.83
<i>Clean toilets</i>	1.74
<i>Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park</i>	1.57
<i>Being able to enjoy the wildlife</i>	1.52
<i>Enough car parking</i>	1.49
<i>Feeling safe in the Arboretum</i>	1.47
<i>Being able to spend time with family and friends</i>	1.41
<i>Choice of paths for walking</i>	1.35
<i>Being able to learn about trees and the environment</i>	1.33
<i>Value for money of your whole trip or day out</i>	1.32
<i>Solitude, peace and quiet</i>	1.21
<i>Clear signposting on footpaths</i>	1.18
<i>Information panels about the place you are visiting</i>	1.14
<i>Leaflets and information about the place you are visiting</i>	1.00
OVERALL AVERAGE	0.97
Outdoor cafeteria	0.78
Restaurant	0.68
Availability of staff at the site (e.g. shop staff, Friends of Westonbirt)	0.56
Undercover picnic/eating area	0.42
A shop	0.12
A plant centre	0.09
Baby changing facilities	-0.31
Children's play equipment	-0.61

This analysis suggests that the priorities amongst the majority of visitors to Westonbirt included 'Being able to enjoy scenery and views', 'Clean toilets', 'Being able to enjoy wildlife', 'Enough car parking' 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 children's play equipment (-0.61), baby changing facilities (-0.31), a plant centre (0.09) and a shop (0.12).

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:

- *Enough car parking (1.49 overall)* – more important to those aged 25-44 years (1.63), Young Independents (1.62), those engaged in walking (1.62) and Families (1.61).
- *Clear signposting on footpaths (1.18 overall)* – more important to people on holiday (1.62), those on a day trip (1.47), infrequent visitors (1.43) and Young Independents (1.41).
- *Shop (0.12 overall)* – more likely to be rated as important by visitors in C2DE social classes (0.50), day trippers (0.26), those aged over 55 years (0.20) and on holiday (0.20).
- *A plant centre (0.09 overall)* – more important to C2DEs (0.49), day trippers (0.31), those aged over 55 years (0.21) and Empty Nesters (0.16).
- *Clean toilets (1.74 overall)* – more important to walkers (1.85), day trippers (1.84), C2DEs (1.84), Young Independents (1.82), frequent visitors (1.80) and those aged 25-44 years (1.80).
- *Baby changing facilities (-0.31 overall)* – more important to Families with children (0.74), those aged 25-44 years (0.64) and frequent visitors (0.38).
- *Children's play equipment (-0.61 overall)* – more important to Families with children (0.16), those aged 25-44 years (0.02) and C2DEs (0.01).
- *Leaflets and information about the place you are visiting (1.00 overall)* – more important to day trippers (1.37), visitors who were on holiday (1.33), C2DEs (1.32), Young Independents (1.30) and infrequent visitors (1.21).
- *Information panels about the place you are visiting (1.14 overall)* – more important to Young Independents (1.52), day trippers (1.44), visitors on holiday (1.41) and infrequent visitors (1.39).
- *Choice of paths for walking (1.35 overall)* – more important to those aged 45-54 years (1.60), C2DEs (1.50), Young Independents (1.48), visitors on holiday (1.46),

those out on day trip (1.42), visitors engaged in walking (1.41) and dog walkers (1.40).

- *Availability of staff at the site (0.56 overall)* – slightly more important to day trippers (0.93), Young Independents (0.93), C2DEs (0.84), visitors on holiday (0.73) and infrequent visitors (0.72).
- *Restaurant (0.68 overall)* – this facility was more important to day trippers (0.88), visitors aged 55 years and over (0.83), C2DEs (0.79), Empty Nesters (0.73) and dog walkers (0.73).
- *Outdoor cafeteria (0.78 overall)* – more important to dog walkers (0.98), those aged 25-44 years (0.92), walkers (0.92), Families (0.89), male visitors (0.86) and frequent visitors (0.84).
- *Feeling safe in the Arboretum (1.47 overall)* – this aspect was particularly important to Young Independents (1.79), dog walkers (1.66), those aged 25-44 years (1.59), female visitors (1.58) and C2DEs (1.57).
- *Feeling happy to leave your car park (1.57 overall)* – visitors more likely to rate this aspect as important included Young Independents (1.96), dog walkers (1.71), C2DEs (1.71) and those out on a day trip (1.66).
- *Solitude, peace and quiet (1.21 overall)* – most important to dog walkers (1.43), C2DEs (1.40), frequent visitors (1.34) and Young Independents (1.34).
- *Being able to spend time with family and friends (1.41 overall)* – more important to Families (1.80), dog walkers (1.65), frequent visitors (1.60) and those aged 25-44 years (1.60).
- *Being able to enjoy scenery and views (1.83 overall)* – more important to C2DEs (1.92) and dog walkers (1.90).
- *Being able to enjoy the wildlife (1.52 overall)* – more important to dog walkers (1.71), visitors over 55 years (1.67), C2DEs (1.65), frequent visitors (1.59), Empty Nesters (1.58), visitors taking part in nature studies (1.55) and walkers (1.55).

- *Value for money of your whole trip or day out (1.32 overall)* – more important to Young Independents (1.58), C2DEs (1.54), dog walkers (1.52), walkers (1.45) and those aged 25-44 years (1.42).
- *Being able to learn about trees and the environment (1.33 overall)* – of most importance to C2DEs (1.61), dog walkers (1.48), those over 55 years (1.42), those studying nature (1.40), frequent visitors (1.40) and day trippers (1.40).

These results demonstrate the varying levels of importance of different elements of the site to different types of visitors. Overall, visitors in the Empty Nester lifecycle perceive the plant centre, restaurant and being able to enjoy wildlife as more important while Families rated car parking, baby changing facilities, children's play equipment, the outdoor cafeteria and being able to spend time with family and friends as more important. Young Independents rated car parking, signposting, clean toilets, leaflets and information, choice of paths, safety in the forest for themselves and their car, solitude, peace and quiet and value for money as most important.

Respondents were also asked to specify what else, if anything, had influenced their decision to visit. The most frequently provided responses were: the weather and scenery (34%), to get some fresh air or for a day out (18%), the International Festival of Gardens (8%) and having been before and wanting to return (8%). Influencing factors mentioned by 2% or more of the respondents are listed in the table below.

Table B-10 – Other influences on decision to visit (%)

Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	%
Weather/ a day in the sun/ scenery	34
Just for some fresh air/ meeting/ bringing friends/ just for a day out	18
For garden festival	8
Been before	8
Come to walk the dog	6
Recommended by friends/ family	5
Quite/ peaceful	5
Exercise/ keeping fit/ good walks	5
Convenience/ close to home	4
Never been before	3
Just a day out for the children	3
The Autumn Trail	3
Saw advertised i.e. T.V. leaflets/ maps	2
A safe area	2

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

To see the wood carvings and the fact that it would be less busy then Bank Holiday Monday.

The fact that we can bring the dog and let her off the lead is an advantage. Walk dog and enjoy walk belong to woodland trust its relative quite and variety of walks.

The autumn colour absolutely superb.

Being able to bring the dogs and have “bags supplied.” Access for push chairs etc. We are friends of Westonbirt and can pop in when we like. We have a small garden so this is our garden.

Wanted to get away from town life and it is the end of the school holidays.

We enjoy bringing our dog and the "bacon buttie" was good.

Because its autumn, the colours are beautiful, the main reason I come here is that the dogs don't have to be on a lead in Silk Wood. I have donated trees to Silk Wood for my Mother, Father and previous dogs.

The fact that I saw it on Gardener's World influenced us to come today.

To see the Garden Festival which I saw advertised on Points West.

Favourite aspects of forest

When visitors were asked about what they liked most about Westonbirt Arboretum, the most frequently provided responses related to peace and quiet, tranquillity and scenery (31%) and nature related aspects such as wildlife and trees (24%).

Table B-11 – What like most about site (%)
Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	%
Peace/ tranquility/ lovely scenery	31
Wildlife/ trees	24
Open spaces	7
Walking/ good walks/ exercise/ fresh air	6
Walking area for dogs	3
Exhibitions/ festivals	3
Close to home	2
Safe to bring the kids	2
Children activities	1
Sculptures	1
Others	1
Don't know/ not stated	44

Other responses related to open spaces, opportunities for walking and exhibitions/festivals. Overall, 44% of respondents could not state what they liked most. Some of the specific answers provided included the following:

Peace and quiet and not yet commercialised.

“Freedom” to walk around and don’t have to keep to the paths.

The variety of trees and shrubs and the age of them.

The trees and it’s so well kept.

The trees and the peace and quiet are so enjoyable.

Tranquillity. The view/the colours are ever changing, never the same. A paradise for dogs. All the residents meet here, we socialise, the dogs know one another. We do appreciate their forbearance regarding dog messes some of us pick up that left by others because we hate to offend visitors.

Easy access, just park car and you are there. Not busy and plenty of space for the kids to round around.

The trees and information given out about them.

Information boards

Site management were keen to find out whether an increase in the number of information boards provided at Westonbirt National Arboretum would help to improve enjoyment for visitors. All respondents were therefore asked which types of information boards, if any, they would most like to see provided at the site.

Table B-12 – Information wanted (%)
Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	%
Information about trees	54
General information about all of the nature and wildlife here	46
Information about birds	30
Information about the history of this site	27
Information about other plants	25
Information about other animals	16
More sign posts i.e. paths/ car parks etc	1
Information boards for children	1
Others	3
Would not like to see any more information boards	20
Don't know/ not stated	3

The most requested information related to trees (54%), nature and wildlife (46%) and birds (30%). Around a quarter of visitors indicated that they would like to see information about the history of Westonbirt (27%) and about plants other than trees (25%). A further 16% wanted to find out more about other animals than birds (16%).

A fifth did not want to see any additional information boards (20%). Visitors most likely to state that they did not want more boards included those aged 55 or more (24%) and C2DEs (33%). Conversely, larger proportions of visitors who were on holiday, those aged under 45 and ABs wanted to see one or more type of additional information (95%, 89% and 85% respectively).

Satisfaction with different aspects of visit

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

Scores were then applied to responses, allowing averages to be obtained across the whole sample - the higher the average score, the more satisfied visitors were with this aspect. This analysis suggests that, overall, visitors were most likely to be satisfied with the scenery and views and car parking provision.

Table B-123 – Satisfaction with different aspects at forest (mean score)

Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	Satisfaction score
<i>Being able to enjoy scenery and views</i>	1.82
<i>Enough car parking</i>	1.77
<i>Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park</i>	1.75
<i>Feeling safe in the Arboretum</i>	1.74
<i>Being able to spend time with family and friends</i>	1.66
<i>Clean toilets</i>	1.53
<i>Choice of paths for walking</i>	1.54
<i>Being able to enjoy the wildlife</i>	1.51
<i>Solitude, peace and quiet</i>	1.46
<i>Being able to learn about trees and the environment</i>	1.34
<i>Value for money of your whole trip or day out</i>	1.34
<i>Clear signposting on footpaths</i>	1.34
OVERALL AVERAGE	1.34
Baby changing facilities	1.21
Outdoor cafeteria	1.20
Leaflets and information about the place you are visiting	1.19
A shop	1.17
Information panels about the place you are visiting	1.16
Availability of staff at the site (e.g. shop staff, Friends of Westonbirt)	1.13
Undercover picnic/eating area	1.12
A plant centre	1.09
Restaurant	0.98
Children's play equipment	0.45

An overall 'average' of all of the mean scores has been included in the ranking. Elements below this average include facilities such as children's play equipment, restaurant facilities,

the plant centre, the undercover picnic/ eating area, the shop, outdoor cafeteria and baby changing facilities. The availability of staff at the site and information panels also received a satisfaction score below this average.

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

- Becoming too commercialised (12)
- Café/restaurant expensive/queues (12)
- Need to improve walkways (2)
- Children not being able to bring cycles anymore (2)
- Would like it to be opened earlier (2)
- Poor sign posting (1)
- Grass neglected, i.e. overgrown (1)
- Play area for children (1).

Levels of satisfaction with each of the aspects included in table B-13 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:

- *Enough car parking (1.77 overall)* – Young Independents (1.92), those aged 25-44 years (1.88), frequent visitors (1.82) and walkers (1.82) were more likely to be satisfied with this aspect.

- *Clear signposting on footpaths (1.34 overall)* – Young Independents (1.68), dog walkers (1.60), frequent visitors (1.57), walkers (1.38) and those aged 25-44 years (1.37) were more likely to be satisfied.
- *Shop (1.17 overall)* – highest satisfaction amongst frequent visitors (1.48), Young Independents (1.39), C2DEs (1.35) and those aged 25-44 years (1.26).
- *Plant centre (1.09 overall)* – C2DEs (1.42), Young Independents (1.38) and visitors on holiday (1.33) were generally more satisfied with this facility.
- *Clean toilets (1.53 overall)* – highest satisfaction with toilets was found amongst frequent visitors (1.77), people on a short day trip (1.66), those aged 55 years and over (1.64) and dog walkers (1.62).
- *Children's play equipment (0.45 overall)* – visitors with children provided the lowest score for this aspect (-0.01) with most of those that provided a rating stating that they were dissatisfied.
- *Leaflets and information about the place you are visiting (1.19 overall)* – visitors more likely to be satisfied with this aspect included frequent visitors (1.41), dog walkers (1.33), male visitors (1.33) and walkers (1.26).
- *Information panels about the place you are visiting (1.16 overall)* – higher satisfaction scores were provided by frequent visitors (1.36), those aged 55 years and over (1.36), dog walkers (1.31), members of Friends of Westonbirt (1.31) and Young Independents (1.30).
- *Choice of paths for walking (1.54 overall)* – scores for this element were highest amongst dog walkers (1.83), frequent visitors (1.67), Empty Nesters (1.65) and those aged 55 years and over (1.65).
- *Availability of staff at the site (1.13 overall)* – satisfaction with this element was highest amongst Young Independents (1.31) and frequent visitors (1.30).
- *Restaurant (0.98 overall)* – satisfaction with this facility was highest amongst frequent visitors (1.22), Young Independents (1.21) and those out on a short day trip (1.11).

- *Outdoor cafeteria (1.20 overall)* – regular visitors (1.43), C2DEs (1.29), visitors on short day trips (1.28) and male respondents (1.26) were the most satisfied with this aspect.
- *Undercover picnic/eating area (1.12 overall)* – satisfaction with this aspect was higher amongst Young Independents (1.67), male visitors (1.38), walkers (1.24) and people out on a short day trip (1.22).
- *Feeling safe in the Arboretum (1.74 overall)* – this aspect received high satisfaction scores amongst most groups, particularly Young Independents (1.92), frequent visitors (1.87), day trippers (1.82) and female visitors (1.77).
- *Feeling happy to leave your car in the car park (1.75 overall)* – visitors more likely to be satisfied with this aspect included frequent visitors (1.94), those aged 25-44 years (1.86), Families (1.84) and dog walkers (1.83).
- *Solitude, peace and quiet (1.46 overall)* – the highest satisfaction scores for this aspect were provided by frequent visitors (1.68) dog walkers (1.66), people out on a short day trip (1.56) and those aged 55 years and over (1.55).
- *Being able to spend time with family and friends (1.66 overall)* – this aspect was satisfactory to most visitors, especially those in the Family lifecycle (1.81), frequent visitors (1.74), those aged 25-44 years (1.74) and walkers (1.73).
- *Being able to enjoy scenery and views (1.82 overall)* – this, most satisfactory aspect overall, was rated most highly by dog walkers (1.92), frequent visitors (1.90) and Families (1.88).
- *Being able to enjoy the wildlife (1.51 overall)* – highest satisfaction scores were provided by dog walkers (1.84), regular visitors (1.77) and those aged 55 years and over (1.67).
- *Value for money of your whole trip or day out (1.34 overall)* – visitors most satisfied with value for money included dog walkers (1.61), those aged 55 and over (1.59), frequent visitors (1.49) and Empty Nesters (1.49).

- *Being able to learn about trees and the environment (1.34 overall)* – regular visitors (1.57), dog walkers (1.55), C2DEs (1.49) and Young Independents (1.47) were most likely to rate this aspect highly.

These differences in levels of satisfaction demonstrate how the quality of experience can vary between user groups. Overall, Younger Independents were more likely than the other lifecycle groups to be satisfied with many of the facilities including car parking, the shop, plant centre, restaurant, undercover eating area and information provision by staff and signs and information panels.

Families were more likely than visitors without children to state that they were satisfied with feeling safe to leave their car in the car park, the chance to spend time with their family and enjoy scenery and views. They were, however, least satisfied with the provision of children's play equipment.

Empty Nesters were more satisfied than Families or younger respondents with the choice of paths for walking and the value for money of the whole day out.

Identification of issues

Tables B-10 and B-13 illustrated a ranking of the overall levels of importance and levels of satisfaction visitors have with different aspects of the 'visitor experience' at Westonbirt Arboretum. 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-10 and B-13). Each of the elements are plotted in the 4 quadrants as follows:

- Top left – *More Satisfied - Less Important* – Information panels and leaflets and information. Visitors are generally very satisfied with these elements although they are rated as less important on average.
- Bottom left – *Less Satisfied – Less Important* – Availability of staff, outdoor cafeteria, plant centre, restaurant, undercover eating area, children's play equipment and baby changing facilities. 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 or only important to certain groups of visitors.

- Top right – *More Satisfied – More Important* – Enough car parking, clean toilets, feeling safe, solitude, being able to enjoy scenery and views, choice of paths for walking, feeling happy to leave car in car park, being able to spend time with family and friends and being able to enjoy wildlife. 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* – 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. In the case of Westonbirt Arboretum, there were no elements clearly in this category. However, availability of staff, outdoor cafeteria, plant centre, restaurant, undercover eating area and baby changing facilities were all close to being in this quadrant so may require some attention.

It is important to note that the scores presented in this chart are averages across *all visitors* during the period in which the survey took place. As discussed previously, the levels of importance attributed to different factors and levels of satisfaction vary between visitors in different user groups.

Other visitors

When asked which of a list of other users had been encountered during their visit, around three-fifths of visitors stated that they had seen other walkers (59%) or children (58%). Smaller proportions had seen cyclists (8%) or horse riders (8%).

Table B-134 – Other visitors encountered (%) and impact on enjoyment (row %)

Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	%	Increased enjoyment a lot +2	Increased enjoyment a little +1	Made no difference 0	Decreased a little -1	Decreased a lot -2	Score
Walkers	59	6	6	80	7	-	0.12
Children	58	7	8	71	12	1	0.08
Horse riders	8	4	-	74	10	-	-0.03
Cyclists	8	-	-	53	37	-	-0.41
None of these visitors	<1						

- No responses

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, encounters with other walkers or children usually had either no impact or a positive effect. However, encounters with cyclists and to some extent horse riders were more likely to be negative (37% and 10%).

Children disrupted the enjoyment of 25 respondents (8% of total). Their impact was mentioned by visitors in a variety of user groups with reasons for dissatisfaction given as the noise created (3) and vandalism or fear of security and safety (3).

13 respondents (4% of total) stated that walkers disturbed their enjoyment. These respondents stated that other walkers made the site too busy or too commercialised (6), that they created noise (2) or had a lack of consideration for other walkers (2).

A total of 9 respondents (3% of total) stated that cyclists had decreased their enjoyment. Their lack of consideration for walkers was the main reason for this dissatisfaction (6).

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 11% of visitors), noise from other users or motorised sports (7%) and litter or fly tipping (6%).

Table B-145 –Impact of potential issues on enjoyment (row %)

Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	Didn't reduce enjoyment 0	Decreased a little 1	Decreased a lot 2	Don't know	Score
Dogs and dog dirt	42	9	2	47	0.25
Litter or fly tipping	44	4	2	50	0.16
Noise from other users or motorised sports	44	7	<1	49	0.15
Vandalised missing or damaged signposts	46	4	1	49	0.12
Forest operations such as felling	49	4	<1	47	0.09
Muddy tracks	50	2	1	47	0.07

There were some variations in the levels of intrusion of each of the possible impacts, as follows:

- *Dogs and dog dirt* – respondents more likely to have stated that this impact negatively impacted on their enjoyment included Young Independents (0.51) and C2DEs (0.39).
- *Litter or fly tipping* – people aged 25-44 years (0.30), Families (0.29) and C2DEs (0.23) were more likely to state that this problem impacted upon their enjoyment.
- *Noise from other users or motorised sports* – visitors aged 25-44 years (0.25), families (0.24) and male visitors (0.20) were more likely to mention that this was an issue.
- *Forest operations such as felling* – people on holiday (0.19), those aged 25-44 years (0.15) and Families (0.14) were more likely than other visitors to mention this issue.

- *Vandalised, missing or damaged signposts* – again, visitors aged 25-44 years (0.19), Families (0.18) and people on holiday (0.17) were more likely to be unhappy with this aspect.
- *Muddy tracks* – visitors who were on holiday (0.20), Families (0.15) and those aged 25-44 years (0.15) were more likely to be unhappy with this aspect.

Respondents were asked to indicate what else, if anything had decreased their enjoyment. Encouragingly, most respondents could not think of anything. Some of the specific answers provided are reproduced below:

Too crowded.

The price we paid for coffee and cakes, food too expensive.

It is becoming more commercialised than when I first started coming during the last 25 years.

The numbers generally too busy, getting more crowded, lack of choice in café, no hot chocolate in autumn! No vegan or organic on menu, needs someone on hand for wheelchairs needs a representative solely for this.

Queuing for the restaurant. It is not big enough.

Too many people here. It's absolutely packed – they cram far too many people in here and they haven't got enough refreshments, toilets huge queues everywhere.

Coach loads of tourists from city.

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.

Some 21% of these respondents stated that the visit was 'much better' than they had expected, while 9% stated that it was 'a little better'. Two-fifths of respondents found the forest 'as expected' (42%) while 1% though that it was worse.

Table B-156 – Overall rating of visit to forest compared to expectations (%)

Weighted base: All self-completion respondents providing a response (130)

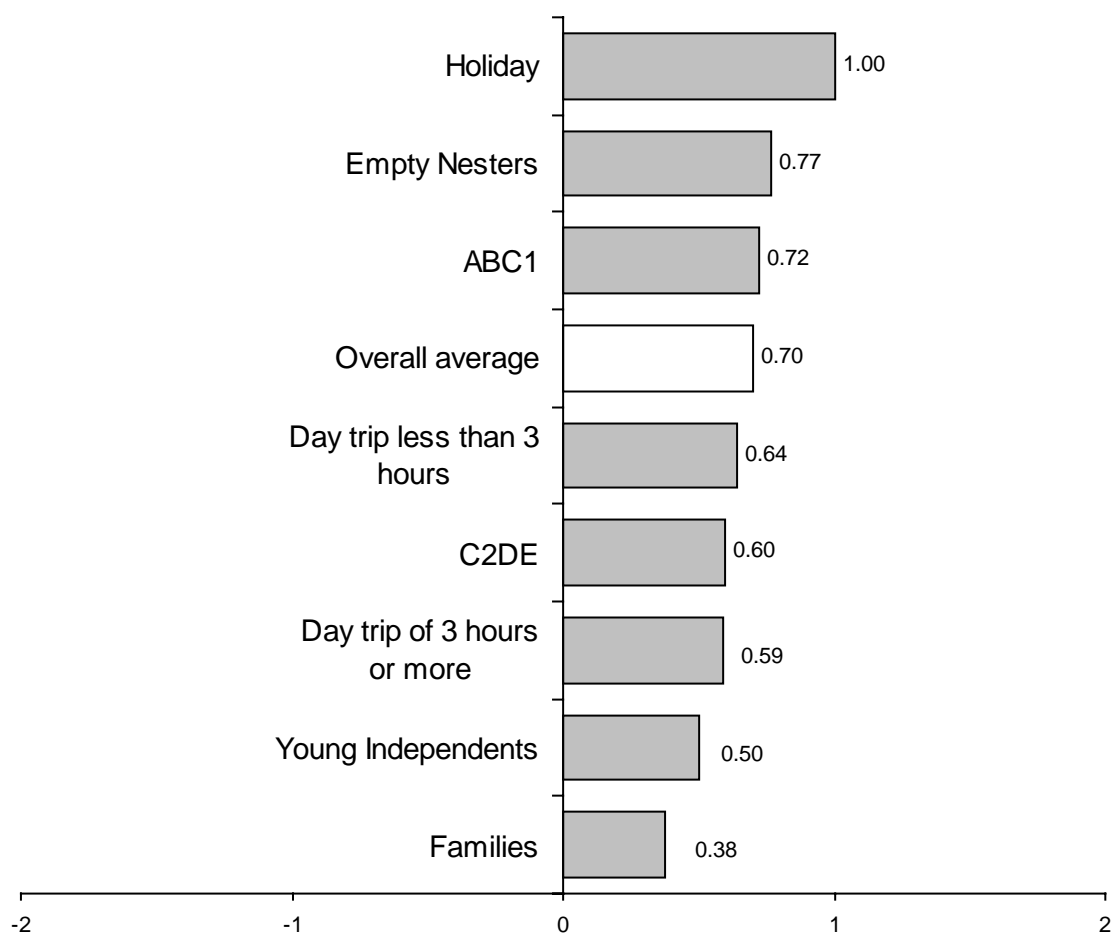
	%
Much better (+2)	21
A little better (+1)	9
As expected (0)	42
A little worse (-1)	1
Much worse (-2)	-

- No responses

When scores were applied to responses from +2 ('much better') to -2 ('much worse'), an overall, positive score of 0.70 was obtained.

The chart below compares the scores provided by different groups of visitors. Overall, visitors on holiday, Empty Nesters and people from the ABC1 social classes were most likely to find the site to be much better than expected. Families, Young Independents, C2DEs and visitors on short trips were less likely to do so.

Figure B-1 – Levels of satisfaction with the overall visit to Westonbirt Arboretum (mean scores)
Weighted base: All self-completion respondents providing a response (130)



When asked to state why they found the forest better than expected, responses mainly related to good paths (n=2), nice café/restaurant (1) and peaceful/quiet (1).

Those respondents who found the forest to be worse than expected were also asked to state why. One reason was given: the lack of children's play equipment (1).

Improvements

When asked what, if anything, needed to be improved at Westonbirt, nearly two-thirds of visitors either stated that nothing should be improved or that they 'didn't know' what should be improved (66%).

The suggestions that were made are listed below. The most frequent suggestions related to more or improved maps and signs (6%), more children's activities or play areas (4%), more toilets (3%) and more trails and paths (3%).

Table B-167 – Suggested improvements (%)

Weighted base: All respondents (321)

	%
More/ improved maps/ signs	6
More children's activities/ play area	4
Need more toilets	3
More trails/ paths	3
More seating	2
Tidy up area i.e. cut trees/ cut grass/ clear weeds	2
Reduce ticket/ car parks etc. for "Friends of Westonbirt"	2
More fencing needed	1
More info on trees/ plants	1
Shop/ restaurant/ expensive	1
Plant more trees	1

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

The amount of catering at festival times – to avoid queues.

Better facilities when it's crowded, more toilets and catering.

Would like it to be kept rustic without any more buildings.

More equipment perhaps for children, like "tree house" or similar but must be natural products. Reduced entry charge for "friends of friends".

Reduce the tractors, very noisy, detracts from the atmosphere, need paper towels in toilet, reduce the people, perhaps by opening up more paths, reduce the entrance fee.

Improve bumpy ground on field car park.

More variety of shrubs, more about flowers.

More picnic tables particularly in the busy season.

More displays of the history of the trees here.

C. Focus group results

Introduction

In March 2004 a group of eight Westonbirt Arboretum visitors attended a focus group in the Great Oak Hall. All of these users had been interviewed during the survey of visitors which was undertaken in 2003.

Six of the eight respondents were Friends of Westonbirt and all lived within a 40 minute drive of the site. All were frequent visitors to the site. The discussion lasted for nearly 2 hours and was structured around the discussion guide provided in the appendices.

The following sections provide the main results of this focus group. In interpreting these results it is important to bear in mind the types of visitors included in the focus group i.e. frequent visiting, local residents.

Visitor profile

As mentioned above, all of the respondents attending the focus group lived within the local area and most were very frequent visitors to Westonbirt Arboretum, some making trips to the site on more the one occasion per week, throughout the year.

The age of the respondents ranged from late 30s to over 60 years with some tending to make visits with children while others usually visited alone or with their partner. Having visited the site regularly for many years, a number of the respondents had high levels of awareness of the facilities and changes that has taken place at the site over the previous decades. Reflecting the quantitative survey, nearly all of the comments made about the site were very positive.

“Westonbirt is our favourite place to go to. We absolutely love it and all our friends do too. We even come on Christmas Day with the children.”

“We’ve gone through the spectrum of just being two single people, to visiting with young children then teenagers.”

For all of the respondents, Westonbirt Arboretum was the place they visited most often on day trips or for shorter trips from home. Other places visited included National Trust sites,

Slimbridge Wetlands and, amongst those with children, places such as leisure centres where recreational activities could be undertaken.

Appeal of Westonbirt Arboretum

To obtain a greater understanding of the elements that attract visitors to the site, respondents were asked to specify what they liked most about visiting Westonbirt Arboretum.

The answers provided reflected those obtained in the quantitative survey with most of the visitors primarily seeking opportunities to enjoy a short walk in 'fresh air' and the chance to 'escape the crowds'. The solitude and peace and quiet that could be obtained, especially in Silk Wood was mentioned frequently and, for these regular visitors, a trip to Westonbirt Arboretum was a routine which they looked forward to.

It was also mentioned that this site was convenient for short trips from home. The easy road access and available car parking allowed visitors to effortlessly take a short, 2 hour trip from home to 'escape' and 'de-stress'.

The fact that Westonbirt Arboretum is open all year around was also seen as an advantage of the site over other places to visit (e.g. National Trust sites). The most regular visitors enjoyed and looked forward to the natural changes that took place at Westonbirt through the course of the year.

"It marks the change of the seasons."

The social aspect of visits was also mentioned. It was noted that other users tended to be friendly and 'say hello', especially in Silk Wood and amongst dog walkers. Indeed, some of the respondents who had been visiting for a number of years had developed friendships during trips to Westonbirt Arboretum.

"..we've got quite a few friends and we meet up here."

It was also mentioned that visitors could feel secure walking at this site and that this was a particularly important strength of this site over other places locally.

"This place is one of the few places where a woman can really walk by herself with no fear of any kind of abuse."

In this part of the discussion when respondents were asked (without any prompting) to name what they liked most about Westonbirt Arboretum, it was apparent that the natural elements of the site were its core appeals.

By comparison, the restaurant, café and shop facilities were seen as 'extras' that could be enjoyed during the visit rather than reasons for visiting. Most of the respondents would have at least a cup of tea or coffee from the restaurant at the end of a walk and some would browse in the shop.

"We tend to want to go somewhere we can get a cup of tea. Picnic days are something we don't do now."

"Sometimes in the winter they have a lovely fire in there!"

Interestingly, the smell in the shop, especially when the fire was lit in winter was mentioned as appealing as it seemed to reinforce the natural, woodland experience.

Strengths and weaknesses

Following the general discussion about the appeals of Westonbirt Arboretum, the respondents were shown a series of cards which listed the site's potential strengths and weaknesses. The following bullets summarise the reactions obtained to each card:

- *Scenery, backdrop, peace and quiet* – reflecting the earlier findings, these elements were confirmed as key appeals and strengths of Westonbirt Arboretum. These are amongst the key reasons for visiting.
- *Wildlife and nature* – this element was perceived as closely related to the first card '*scenery, backdrop and peace and quiet*' and therefore ranked as very important. For all of the respondents the trees, wildflowers and bird song were recognised as some of the most important elements of visits to Westonbirt Arboretum.

It was noted, however, that actual sightings of birds or animals (e.g. squirrels) were unusual because of the density of tree and plant coverage. Enjoyment of wildlife was therefore more likely to be obtained from hearing the background sound of birds singing. Also as sightings of birds or squirrels could be quite unusual this could add to the excitement when one was spotted.

“Actual birds and that...you don’t seem to see that many do you?”

- *Parking* – a detailed discussion was held on the availability and location of car parking facilities. Currently, the availability of parking in a central location close to the Old Arboretum, Silk Wood and the restaurant, café, picnic and shop facilities is liked. However, some of the respondents had heard rumours that the car park may be moved to a point further from the facilities and closer to the entrance.

“One of the beauties of being able to drive right the way up there is that it’s inviting because you’ve come right through to the arboretum. At the other end you’re on the periphery and you don’t get to feel that welcoming position which you do at the moment.”

All of the respondents were fairly concerned about this possible change and whether it would mean that visitors would have to walk a longer distance to reach the areas they enjoyed (i.e. Silk Wood and the Old Arboretum), an issue which would be a particular problem for the elderly. It was also mentioned that some visitors tended to like to sit near their cars, sometimes to have a picnic, but in the new car park location traffic noise might be audible and this would reduce their enjoyment.

The difficulties of parking during large events was also mentioned by a few of the respondents. This issue relates to the wider problems of large numbers when events take place (see page 39) with experiences of having to park further away from normal having inconvenienced some of the most regular visitors.

“..when there is a big event you tend to get lots of temporary attendants and they do have a nasty habit of trying to stop you, making you turn right”

It was suggested that when large events were taking place parking in the ‘normal’ locations could be reserved for visitors who were not attending the events (e.g. dog walkers going to Silk Wood).

- *Value for money* – a mixture of views were provided when this card was shown. It was generally agreed that as Friends of Westonbirt who visited the site frequently, very good value for money was obtained from membership. Furthermore, compared to membership of other organisations such as the National Trust or Woodland Trust, their Friends of Westonbirt membership provided good value.

There was less consensus on whether entrance fees for visitors who were not Friends of Westonbirt represented good value for money. It was generally agreed that the cost for a large party visiting would be high but that this was also likely to be the case at other visitor attractions.

“As a Friend, I think it’s extremely good value. I sometimes think that the entrance fee is probably a little bit higher than it needs to be or should be.”

In the discussions it was also recognised that the cost of maintaining the site must be high and that this would have to be reflected in the entrance charges.

“I don’t think they’re here to make money. I think they’re here just to keep the place in good order and to have enough money to do that.”

- *Educational value* – amongst the visitors spoken to the educational value of visits was seen as something which they would obtain subliminally through information provided on site. At this stage in the discussion the value of organised walks was mentioned and it was suggested that these should be developed to cover more subjects and areas of the site. Information provision is covered in more detail later in this report.
- *Children’s facilities* – while only two of the members of the discussion usually visited the site with children, others had done so in the past. It was felt that the types of children’s facilities currently provided (i.e. nature table, bird feeding area) were of a high quality and appropriate to the site as they were fitting to the natural surroundings. By comparison, a development such as an adventure playground would be seen as inappropriate as this could take away from the site’s unique and natural appeal.

“Ours very often find things and they pick them up and then up and put them on the table at the end.”

“You can go to other places for playgrounds.”

How the facilities could be improved for children was discussed and the need to provide educational and fun facilities which were relevant to the site was reinforced.

“Big barrels full of acorns. Big barrels of sycamore seeds. So you can plunge your hands in and feel the difference. Barks and those kinds of things. To do with trees. The arboretum.”

Issues and improvements

In the next part of the group discussion more time was spent discussing some of the key issues that had arisen in the 2003 survey and any improvements that could be made.

Other users

During the survey, some respondents had indicated that other users had decreased their enjoyment of Westonbirt Arboretum. Amongst the members of the focus group it was felt that such incidents were very unusual.

Examples of incidents involving children and/or cyclists were mentioned but these were generally unusual.

“On a few occasions we have been confronted by a few children on their bikes and I’ve been quite irritated by them. But to me there are areas elsewhere for cycle rides and when you come to the arboretum, you should be immersed into the arboretum.”

A more general issue for some was that the site could become crowded at times such as weekends or bank holidays. The presence of large numbers of visitors could take away from the main appeals of the site (solitude, peace and quiet, etc.) but as regular visitors it was possible to predict the busy periods and take visits at other times.

“...it’s a lot more pleasant, one has to say, away from the weekend. It’s quieter which really to me is the function..”

It was also mentioned that a strength of Westonbirt Arboretum was that it was possible to find quiet spots, especially within Silk Wood, even on the busiest days.

Indeed, the differences between the Old Arboretum and Silk Wood were mentioned frequently. Generally, the Silk Wood area was seen as more natural and generally used more by regular, local and friendly visitors (e.g. dog walkers) while the Old Arboretum was used more by day trippers and holiday visitors.

Silk Wood was also described as more peaceful and natural while the Old Arboretum was seen as being more ‘manicured’.

"I have to say that we have never, ever yet gone to Silk Wood and found it busy in all of the time we've been coming. Whereas on this side it's totally different."

Events

The events which take place at Westonbirt Arboretum were also discussed. Amongst most of the visitors in the group it was felt that while some of the events were appropriate and complemented the natural appeals of the site, others were less appropriate.

The exhibition of sculptures was described very positively. The sculptures added to the enjoyment of visits (particularly amongst those with children) and the use of local wood in their production was liked. This event was seen as very appropriate to Westonbirt.

"They had an exhibition of sculptures and my children loved that. That again was something to do with wood and they can see it, they can smell it and they can feel it. They can even sit in it and they loved that."

Reactions to the International Festival of the Garden were more varied. It was suggested that this event lasted too long and that the people who visited the festival were not 'normal' Westonbirt visitors.

"..I don't think that people who are coming specifically to see that are going to be the sort who normally come...and they won't come back for the arboretum."

For some of the respondents this festival was given as an example of the site becoming 'too commercialised' as site management appeared to be focusing on attracting large numbers of visitors through television adverts, publicity, etc. It was also commented upon that the content of the festival was quite unusual and not likely to appeal to 'traditional' gardeners.

"..they're not really gardens in the normal sense of the word."

"..it's provocative, pushing boundaries.."

Despite their reservations about this event, most of the respondents were happy enough to accept its on-going presence as they realise that it was likely to create revenue that would help with the longer term maintenance of the site. Also, as discussed previously, even when

events such as this were taking place other visitors could still find peace and quiet by walking in Silk Woods so the negative impacts were mainly limited to the built facilities and car parking area.

Commercialisation

During the quantitative survey a number of respondents suggested that Westonbirt Arboretum had changed over the previous years to become more commercial in a way that took away from its original appeal.

When asked to provide their thoughts on this issue the group respondents were generally of the opinion that Westonbirt had not yet been spoilt in this way but it was important that any developments that were made in future were fitting to the natural environment.

“You come for nature. To see the birds and the trees and the plants. The nature rather than a theme park.”

“..if you want an adventure playground, you go somewhere else. This is for nature and to hear the birds and maybe spot a squirrel.....It’s an anti-theme park!”

When visitors spoke of the site becoming too commercial, their concerns related to increased numbers of visitors or the development of facilities or services which would be inappropriate to the site.

Examples of appropriate ‘facilities’ included the sculptures and the children’s nature table whilst more than one respondent stated that the use of plastic cups in the restaurant was inappropriate and did not fit with the ‘green’ environment.

Other issues

In addition to the above issues, respondents were prompted and asked to comment upon a number of other possible concerns, as summarised in the following bullets:

- *Toilets* – when asked about the quality of toilet facilities, it was agreed that the provision in Silk Wood was inadequate:

“They do have a big problem there. There’s only one or two there and it’s always out of order. It’s not working. It’s disgusting. I think it’s to do with the drainage, not the people who use it but it needs something.”

By comparison, the toilets at the restaurant and next to the Great Oak Hall were generally seen as satisfactory, apart from on very busy occasions when their capacity was insufficient and queues could form.

- *Muddy tracks* – generally this was not seen an issue as, for most of the respondents, muddy tracks were to be expected in the outdoors when it had been raining. However, in some situations it was felt that paths could become excessively muddy especially after large events when areas could become a ‘quagmire’.

“Sometimes you see foot-holes which are about 6 inches deep.”

It was recognised that work had been undertaken recently to improve the path surfaces and agreed that this was not usually a major issue. Indeed, a related issue mentioned by one respondent was that some parts of the site could appear overly ‘manicured’ at times.

- *Dogs and dog dirt* – dogs and dog dirt were not seen as being a major issue at Westonbirt Arboretum. The provision of bins for dog dirt was seen as a very positive measure and it was suggested that a few more bins would be helpful. It was mentioned by a dog owner that on some occasions there would be problems in this area but this tended to be because of other irresponsible owners.

“I know my wife in particular is very fastidious about this but there’s plenty of people who aren’t. That can be a setback.”

- *Noise* – with peace and quiet forming such an important part of Westonbirt’s appeal, noise ‘pollution’ could potentially have a very negative impact on a visit. Generally, however, peace and quiet could always be found, especially within the Silk Wood area.

On occasion noise would be heard but this was usually from outside of the site, for example the noise of shooting or aeroplanes.

“The most irritating thing is it seems that virtually every time you come here there is an aerobatic plane.”

- *Facilities* – as mentioned previously the catering and shop facilities were generally well liked by the members of the focus group. However, some possibilities for improvements were suggested.

It was suggested that the current selection of food provided in the restaurant was of a good quality but that the choice was fairly limited. This reflected some of the comments obtained in the survey.

“They have a meat dish, a fish dish and a vegetarian dish. But only one of each.”

One respondent also suggested that restaurant should be opened in the evenings for dinner. This idea was liked by most of the other respondents.

“It would be a really good restaurant. It’s in a superb spot. If they lit the trees up as well it’s be tremendous. Absolutely tremendous. I would support that.”

When asked to specify dislikes or possible improvements that could be made to the shop it was suggested that some items could be quite ‘pricey’ but this was also seen as a reflection of the quality of the products.

“..a lot of people visit garden centres and this is not a garden centre. They do sell plants when they have the international festival and they are very, very expensive.”

- *Litter* – while this had been raised as an issue by a small proportion of respondents to the quantitative survey, it was not perceived as a problem by any of the focus group members. Indeed, it was suggested that the lack of litter at Westonbirt Arboretum was a strength of the site over other places to visit.

“..the kind of people who come here tend to take their rubbish home with them.”

Information and interpretation

The provision of information, signage and interpretation to visitors at Westonbirt Arboretum was investigated in some detail to determine views towards current provision and possible changes.

Current situation

First of all, respondents were asked about the information currently provided for visitors. A number of the respondents suggested that the small black signs which are attached to trees were the main source of information for visitors. While these signs were found to be of use it was also commented that they were often inadequately detailed and sometimes they were missing or hard to locate.

“There are far too many trees and shrubs where either there is no sign at all, or it’s very difficult to find.”

Another type of information source that had been noticed by some, but not all of the respondents, was the ‘topical boards’. The provision of information explaining why forestry/arboretum operations were being undertaken was appreciated as it was of interest and helped to explain why changes were required.

“You just want to know why they’re taking things down. For example, there is a notice where some yew trees have been cut down and it explains that yew trees were put there as a backdrop for specimen trees. But, over the years they have become far too big and have taken away the vistas, and so they need to be cut down to bring them back to what was originally planned. Information like that is invaluable.”

All of the respondents were aware of the seasonal trails. As regular visitors they did not normally follow these trails but they recognised their value to other, less frequent, visitors. It was commented that these trails provided valuable information but they sometimes covered too long a period of time (i.e. 2 or 3 months). It was suggested that more current information would be preferable and this possibility is discussed in more detail on page 45.

As frequent visitors to the site most of the respondents did not regularly use the leaflets and map which are provided but all were aware of their presence and some had noted changes to their content over the years. Indeed, one respondent mentioned that some items had been removed from the map and this had recently caused him some inconvenience.

Overall, it was felt that there was scope to provide more information to visitors, and this would be especially beneficial to less regular visitors and holiday makers who, unlike the respondents, were less inclined to read the more detailed, lengthy books about the site's history, origins, etc.

"I feel there's a distinct lack of peripheral education and material. When I first used to come they used to have a video."

Permanent information boards

The respondents were shown copies of a series of information boards which, at the time of the discussion, were situated adjacent to the Great Oak Hall (to be moved after the completion of building work). As these boards were relatively new and not yet in their final position, it was not surprising that most of the respondents had not seen them before.

The types of information provided on the boards and the layout were generally liked and seen as providing some of what had previously been lacking. Also, while there was a lot to read on each board the sectional approach could let the reader chose the sections of most interest.

"..if you go to Canada or the States and their national parks, you have to pass through a whole lot of that. It's good to have it."

It was felt that while these types of boards should be provided in the central area close to the restaurant and shop, they should not be positioned in the more 'unspoilt' areas such as Silk Wood or the Old Arboretum. Information provided in these locations should be more limited and appropriate to the natural setting.

Subjects

When asked about the subjects that should be covered in the information provided to visitors, a number of possibilities were suggested including the following:

- *Trees* – the actual woodland is one of the central attractions at Westonbirt Arboretum, especially the unusual species which cannot be found elsewhere. As such, it was suggested that information provided should always be related to this element.

"A lot of people ask 'What's the biggest tree here?'. You could have a trail of big trees"

- *Other plants* – while the leaflets already provided give general details of trees and plants, some of the respondents would like to be able to find out more about particular species.
- *Seasons, climate, the weather* – as mentioned previously, it was noted by some of the respondents that the natural changes which take place at Westonbirt Arboretum through the year can be fascinating. More information on these changes and the weather and climate affecting them would be of interest (e.g. rainfall charts).
- *History of the Arboretum* – some of the respondents were particularly interested in Westonbirt Arboretum and had read about it in the books written about the site. While information on the history could be found in this format, it was suggested that more accessible information should be provided for less frequent visitors to improve their experience. For example, the screening of a short film about the site was seen as a possible improvement that could add greatly to the first time visitor's enjoyment.

Immediacy and relevance of information

As mentioned previously, one of the appeals of Westonbirt Arboretum is the way that the trees and plants are constantly changing, reflecting the coming and going of seasons. In the discussion of information needs it was suggested that it would be desirable if 'up-to-date' details on these changes could be provided. While the seasonal trails go a long way to providing this type of information, it was suggested that, as the changes to trees and plants happened so quickly, this information should be updated more often.

"..they should be more time relevant. Two months is too long to describe particular trails."

For example, it was suggested that daily information could be provided to let visitors know the progress and changes of particular species and where to go to see them.

"They had a booklet with trees but it's very static....I think they should have a rolling programme of interest."

It was mentioned that in the past a blackboard provided this sort of information.

"There used to be a blackboard and it was made of the square numbers of things that are happening now."

Guides and guided walks

A number of the respondents had been on guided walks of the site in the past. All had been very satisfied with these walks and suggested that was a good way of learning more about the site and its wildlife.

With guided walks the information was always current and an expert guide could point out features, species, etc. which even regular visitors would not have noticed otherwise.

“..they could have more guided walks because you do learn quite a lot when you’ve been on one. We have been on one round here and learnt about the different sorts of trees and the history of the place as well.”

It was suggested that the parts of the site included in the walks and the subjects covered should be increased.

The possibility of staff or guides in costumes relevant to the history of the site was also discussed with the focus group respondents. Amongst this group this idea was unpopular, as they perceived this type of development as going towards the ‘theme park’ experience. However, it was recognised that this may be more appealing to other visitors especially if undertaken tastefully.

Orientation

Despite being regular visitors to Westonbirt Arboretum, most of the respondents stated that during walks they would sometimes become disorientated about their location. Furthermore, they had all been asked for help by other visitors who had become lost.

“..you see them looking at their maps and then they’ll come along and say..’Where are we?’, ‘How do we got to X?’”

One of the respondents suggested that discrete, numbered orientation posts should be provided at the points in the site where the map grid lines intersect. These markers would help respondents to know where they were during walks and would be very helpful if linked with information on the whereabouts of specific plants, seasonal information, etc.

This idea was developed by other respondents who had experienced trails in other locations which were marked according to colours. These were particularly liked by the respondents with children who stated that trails likes this made the route more fun,

especially when they were accompanied by information about points of interest and details on how long the walk would take. It was suggested that these types of trails would particularly add to the enjoyment of first time and infrequent visitors at Westonbirt Arboretum.

“..you know before you set off how long you’re going to be walking, which is a great help..”

The provision of more detailed information on the whereabouts of particular species using a PC was also discussed. The possibilities of being able to look up a particular species and then locate it on a map were received positively, especially if a printout could be taken to use during a subsequent walk and if the species could then be found without too much effort.

“..If it was something in the middle of Silk Wood how do you find it? There are long distances on walks where you can just wander.”

However, some of the older respondents expected that they personally would not use this computerised system and that it would be more popular with younger visitors and families. For these visitors, media such as an updated blackboard or face to face guides were more appealing.

Information

Finally, a number of more general points were raised during the discussions about the provision of information at Westonbirt Arboretum.

On a small number of occasions respondents had found it difficult to reach staff at the site by telephone as it had not been answered after many calls. The reasons for their calls had included trying to book a wheel chair and checking whether the site was open after bad weather.

“At times when it’s been very windy we’ve tried to see if it’s closed...it’s very difficult to actually get through.”

As a result of their call not being answered one respondent had visited without booking a wheelchair only to find on their arrival that none were available.

“...there was no facility that day for that person to have a chair. Now we had tried to ring and there was no one there no one manning the information.”

Another specific comment made related to signage informing visitors of where dogs were allowed. Some of the respondents were unclear of the situation around the restaurant and outdoor eating area.

“You don’t know what the situation is. There’s signs at the beginning saying ‘Don’t take your dogs here.’ But you see plenty of dogs in there.”

It was suggested that information on where dogs are permitted should be clarified, especially in this area.

D. Key findings

Visitor profile

This survey indicated a relatively even split between regular and less frequent users at Westonbirt. Reflecting this pattern, a large proportion of visitors were on a short day trip and three-quarters of visitors had been to Westonbirt before. The average time spent on site was about 3 hours. The site was used for a variety of purposes including walking, visiting and looking at something special in the Arboretum, photography, having a picnic, dog walking and bird watching.

About three out of ten of the visitors were attending the International Festival of Gardens. The majority of these respondents stated that the festival was important or the only reason for visiting.

Information provision

Respondents were specifically asked about the types of information they would like to see more of. The most requested information related to trees, nature and wildlife and birds. During the focus groups more time was spent discussing the types of information that should be provided. Specific suggestions for improvements included more up-to-date/current information on the site's natural heritage, waymarked/ coloured trails, orientation posts and more guided walks. Respondents stressed that developments should be fitting to the natural environment and were less enthusiastic about the idea of costumed actors providing information.

Strengths

Most respondents to the survey were generally satisfied with the site and the forest's key strengths included the natural environment (scenery, wildlife and trees), safety and security and walking paths and areas, car parking and toilets. Key reasons for visiting the site related to peace and quiet, wildlife/trees, open spaces, good walks for people and dogs and exhibitions/festivals.

The focus group reinforced the importance of the site's natural aspects with the built facilities (restaurant, shop) and information provided enhancing the visit but not creating a reason to visit. Other appeals included the chance to socialise with other visitors.

Issues

Specific areas which obtained slightly lower satisfaction scores in the survey included children's play equipment, the restaurant, plant centre, undercover eating area and the availability of staff.

There was also found to be little conflict between different user groups at this site with only relatively small proportions experiencing any negative impacts from others. Children and cyclists were the groups most likely to reduce the enjoyment of others. Similarly, fairly small proportions of visitors had negative experiences with dog or dog dirt, litter/ fly tipping and noise from other users or motorised sports.

The focus group provided an opportunity to investigate these and other issues in more depth. Generally, incidents of visitors disrupting other user's enjoyment were perceived as very unusual. A more general issue related to the sheer numbers of visitors that could be present on site during special events, weekends and bank holidays. Regular visitors would either avoid visits on these occasions or would go to parts of the site where the impact was minimal.

The development of events was discussed in more detail in the focus group and it was agreed that these, in common with other changes at Westonbirt, must always be appropriate to the natural backdrop. The sculpture event was seen as very appropriate and in-keeping while The Festival of the Garden was less well received by some of the respondents.

Encouragingly, nearly a fifth of first time and infrequent visitors stated that Westonbirt had been better than they expected and only 1% found it to be worse.

In the survey, when respondents were asked to think of possible improvements, the most frequent suggestions included: more or improved maps, more children's play areas, more toilets and more trails and paths.

In the focus group these changes and others were discussed in more detail. Again the need to maintain the quality and strengths of Westonbirt were seen as vital to the planning of new developments. As such, a children's play area was seen as inappropriate but it was agreed that waymarked trails and accompanying information should be developed. It was also agreed that the toilets in Silk Wood should be improved.

E. Appendices

Answers to open-ended questions

What else, if anything, influenced your decision to visit Westonbirt Arboretum today?

WEATHER/ SUNSHINE

- The weather, it's sunny. I haven't got a garden so I can get out.
- Less traffic. Weather.
- The weather, countryside, near to where we have been staying.
- Nice day and wanted to go somewhere for a walk.
- Weather W/E. Chance to meet up with family members.
- A very nice sunny day.
- Local to bring the children and enjoy the nice weather. Whole environment is always a beautiful place to come.
- A nice day, the weather was good for this time of year.
- A nice day.
- The weather, it's sunny
- Weather was hot.
- The weather, it was dull early this morning but has now brightened up.
- Weather all available colours.
- Nice place to come on a sunny day but it is lovely at any time of the year, I like the spring and the autumn
- Weather, early autumn colours & we knew we could leave our car safely and have a cup of coffee
- The weather, it's a lovely day – bright and sunny. To see the autumn trail, the trees are at their prettiest this time of year.
- The weather, it's a gorgeous sunny day. The autumn trail, it's beautiful when the tree change their colours.
- Nice day.
- The weather, if it had been pouring with rain we wouldn't have come. Tried to come early to avoid crowds, wanted to come this time of year.
- Weather and time of year.
- Colour of trees, weather.
- Nice day.
- Friends recommended, weather, autumn colours, wonderful in sunshine
- Weather forecast, to see the colours.
- Autumn trail, the colours of the trees are beautiful, weather, beautiful on a sunny day perfect for walking, scenery
- Weather forecast was quiet good.

FRESH AIR/ DAY OUT

- Wanted to bring the kids out for the day.
- Got rid of the boys.
- Having the family around.
- Nice day to go out so though we would do just that.
- Out of city and in the fresh air of the countryside.

GARDEN FESTIVAL

- Mainly the Garden Festival.
- The Garden Festival, we are keen gardeners.
- Visit Festival of Gardens as we are garden designers should stay open longer.
- Yearly trip and come to see Festival.
- Just love it, last opportunity to see garden festival.
- To see garden festival wide open spaces for kids always something different going on.
- Flower Festival. We normally come down once a year and like to see the change of
- Garden Festival and the Sculptures.
- Garden centre.
- Festival on TV.
- Garden Festival.
- It was televised.
- Garden Festival.
- We have free tickets.
- International festival of gardens.
- Got new transport, so thought I come to the Festival.
- To see the Garden Festival which I saw advertised on Points West.
- Garden Festival.
- Festival.

BEEN BEFORE

- We are friends of Westonbirt and can pop in when we like we have a small garden so this is our garden.
- I know the place so well and I feel that it's like paradise I go away feeling better than when I arrived. A feeling of well being spiritual. Peace and quiet very pleasant. People are helpful and friendly.
- Like the fact that there is annual membership and it encourages us to come frequently.
- My wife brought us! She has been several times before.
- Have not been here for a long time. My birthday and wanted somewhere to go.
- Bringing my mum because she's never seen it before.
- Always something different to see, depending on time of year.
- Just like coming here and safe place to walk around on your own.
- The coach was coming here and we used to live here.
- To visit a friend who lives in the area and meet her here for a coffee.
- To visit a friend who is visiting the area and show them the Arboretum.
- Experience, we've been before, we don't live far away, use up some energy – the grandchildren.
- We've been here before visiting Wiltshire, being in the area.
- Visited last year and was very impressed so wanted to come again this year.
- "Handy" for the 3 hrs that I have "to kill" while my "other half" is playing polo at Beanfort.

WALKING DOG

- The fact that we can bring the dog and let her off the lead is an advantage.
- Walk dog and enjoy walk belong to woodland trust its relative quite and variety of walks.
- Be able to bring the dogs and have "bags supplied." Access for push chairs etc.
- We come every week with the dogs a lovely walk for them.
- Walk dogs and Festival and easy to get to.
- To walk the dog here and visit Autumn Trails.
- We enjoy bringing our dog and the "bacon buttie" was good.

- Bring the dogs for a good walk and they love it.
- Fact that can let the dog have some freedom.
- Like to walk the dog.
- Walk dog and walk before shopping usual Saturday activity.
- We saw it on TV last week and couldn't come until today. The colours, the autumn colour and having been before we knew we could bring the dogs.
- Because its autumn, the colours are beautiful, the main reason I come here is that the dogs don't have to be on a lead in Silk Wood. I have donated trees to Silk Wood for my Mother, Father and previous dogs.

PEACE AND QUIET

- A superb place to come. Everything contributes to it (and above). Peace amongst trees quiet atmosphere.
- Wanted to get away from town life and it is the end of the school holidays.
- It's a place where you can unwind and enjoy the beauty around you, relaxing, and always something different to see friendly staff.
- Just to come and relax get away from it all.
- Quiet place to walk.
- Safe, quiet and beautiful, nice people around.
- The freedom, just being able to walk around and the kids can walk unhindered and safe.
- It's very family friendly, the beautiful surroundings make it very relaxing.

EXERCISE

- Desire for a leisure activity, get out of the house, a peaceful natural setting.
- Good paths for running, traffic free.
- Opportunity and time to come and have a lovely walk

CLOSE TO HOME

- Close to home, its safe not busy.
- I live 3 minutes away, the weather being dry. We come regularly.
- My daughter lives nearby so thought I'd visit.
- The fact that it isn't far away and saw it featured in Gardener's World.
- Near home.

AUTUMN COLOURS/TREES

- Acer trees and others changing colours. Want to take photos.
- The autumn colour absolutely superb.
- Enjoy trees and colour.
- Very interested in the trees, the beauty of them. I work with wood I am a carpenter.
- October.
- Seasons.
- Autumn colours!
- To gather sweet chestnuts.
- Seasonal colours.
- Seasonal tree colours.
- Autumn colours.
- The time of year.
- Important visitors and colours.
- The autumn colours.
- The autumn colours of trees
- Autumn colours
- Came for a walk and autumn colours
- Autumn colours, everyone knows about the things you want to know about
- An interest in trees, have just returned from holiday in Kent and are on our way home to Cardiff
- The autumn colours and the autumn trail.
- The autumn colours and the autumn trail.
- The autumn trail – to see the colours of the trees
- To see the colours of the trees in autumn.

- The colours of the trees this time of year, the autumn colours.
- To see the autumn colours of the trees-friends said they were beautiful.
- Love the countryside and wanted to see the autumn colours.
- Time of year to see the leaves before they fall.
- Time of year to see the colours.
- Time of year, we like to come in the autumn, we hoped for colour and sun but missed out on the sun.
- We understand the colour is so beautiful, some time ago the TV brought to our notice how beautiful it is.
- To see the autumn colours, why go abroad when you can get such lovely colours in England.
- Because of the autumn colours we know that it's the best time to see the Acers, Glade and the Live Avenue.
- Relatives love it, and recommend it at this time of year, in autumn as colours are beautiful.
- The trees came from our village in Charmouth here. Door to door we've read about it and how attractive it is. The colours and the fact that they have buggies here. My husband and I don't walk well.
- We knew it would be a good time of the year for looking at the tree colours.
- To look at the colours and the trees to see them and learn which tree colours change – research in a way.
- Because its autumn and supposed to be looking really pretty, the trees changing colour.
- I've never been to an Arboretum, we wanted to see the colours. Anything that is coloured in nature is important I don't think this would turn me on , other than now in the autumn.
- Autumn colours.
- Autumn colours.
- Colour trees.
- The weather and friends and the autumn colours.
- Time of year. Seasonal
- Lovely weather, autumn tints, magical colours.
- Photography. Time of year colours of trees.
- Time of year.
- The fact that its autumn and we thought it would be a very good year to see the colours.
- Saw advertised and thought nice to come, close to where staying, to see the autumn leaves.

WOOD CARVINGS/SCUPTURES

- To see the wood carvings and the fact that it would be less busy than Bank Holiday Monday.
- My two children doing the craft activity session.
- Peaceful, nice setting and surrounding and sculpture and events.
- Brought grandson to see the wood carvings.

RECOMMENDATION

- Heard about it and wanted to see what it was like easy by coach.
- We were staying with friends who recommended that we visit.
- I've never been here before and heard about it and camping near by.
- Recommendation
- Recommendation
- I have heard good things
- Had been to visit friends what a lovely to walk.
- Never been before, saw it advertised on TV.
- Never been before and see it on TV.
- The fact that I saw it on Gardener's World influenced us to come today.
- Good start to my holiday and seen garden on TV.
- Good reputation and hadn't been before.

OTHER

- May come again with Leicestershire County Council as a party – looking round.
- Wedding.
- Never been before so thought it was a good day to come.
- Visiting for the first time, so a good experience.
- Location
- Lecture.
- Bacon sandwiches.
- Someone to bring me.
- All part of our visit
- Nothing
- Photographs.
- Natural beauty.
- Planned trip.
- Activity for grandson.
- Bringing my friends who have never been before.
- Came with my family as I have never been before.

What, if anything, decreased your enjoyment?

DOGS AND DOG DIRT

- Sometimes dog owners DON'T clear up and take away dog dirt.
- Several dogs and did not see dog toilet bins.
- Dogs should be kept on leads.
- We took our own dog BUT she was on a lead. Other people's LOOSE dogs were a real nuisance. We feel all dogs should be on leads all of the time.
- Not all dog dirt picked up by owners although there were plenty of bins and bags available

LITTER

- Wasps from bins particularly in summer.

NOISE

- Motor vehicles used in the arboretum are noisy, affecting my enjoyment.
- Noisy grass mowing, loose running dogs, dog's dirt on paths.
- The woodcarver's equipment was quite noisy for those of us at the nearby picnic tables.
- Chainsaw's noise was intrusive but acceptable as part of a "working wood".
- Lots of dogs but not much poop scooping in evidence.
- People shouting, ruins the peace and blots out the bird songs.
- Noisy strimming while enjoying lunch outside

OTHER USERS/ TOO BUSY

- Too crowded.
- The numbers generally too busy, getting more crowded, lack of choice in café, no hot chocolate in autumn! No vegan or organic on menu, needs someone on hand for wheelchairs needs a representative solely for this.
- Too many people here. It's absolutely packed – they cram far too many people in here and they haven't got enough refreshments, toilets huge queues everywhere.
- Queuing for the restaurant. It is not big enough.
- Coach loads of tourists from city.
- It was a busy time and therefore there was not much wild life to be seen.
- Cyclists.
- Contractors taking away garden display

PRICES/ COMMERCIALISED

- Festival of gardens, better way making extra money, Chelsea garden type show, not like change in parking routine for festival.
- The price we paid for coffee and cakes, food too expensive.
- It is becoming more commercialised than when I first started coming during the last 25 years.

SIGNPOSTING

- Lack of signposts seemed to lead us round in a circle again and again.
- Found the signposts inadequate, needed more information boards and maps around Arboretum.
- Perhaps just couldn't find signpost, but regardless of reason, it was occasionally missed.

OTHER

- Pushing a pram through on muddy tracks would be difficult (when we visited it was dry).

If the forest was not as expected, why was it either better or worse? (Apart from the weather!)

DOGS AND DOG DIRT

- Dog owners shouting at their dogs.

OTHER USERS/ TOO BUSY

- We didn't have enough time. The queues for food were off putting so we went home early.
- Just the volume of visitors.
- No toilets in the Arboretum, long way to go between toilets
- Queues for toilets and food
- It was too busy, queues at toilets & for food/drink were very long

PRICES/ COMMERCIALISED

- Inflated prices of courtyard café for 2 cups of coffee and 2 slices of cake £6.00 – its cheaper in London! Quality of food not worth £6.00! So we can't get lunch here.
- Poor labelling form car park.
- Outdoor catering operatives hideously expensive. Could we have toilets at the other end of the Arboretum?
- Only the restaurant.
- Thought prices in shop were rather expensive
- Friends complained of the high prices of the restaurant

PATHS

- The walkways were very stoney in places, a pity there is not some tarseal or smoother surface
- This visit I brought my 85 year old mother in law with me. We were unable to use any of the mobility buggies for her which meant she had a very limited walk. I was unaware that you had to book this facility in advance. There didn't appear to be enough vehicles to care for the obvious demand
- Stone paths, awful to walk on, impossible for disabled or people with bad back, feet or legs
- Walks were level and clear with good visibility. Paths were also in good condition.

CHILDREN

- Lack of designated area for children.
- As I mentioned previously seeing disabled people on the road near the silk wood having to avoid large plant machinery, I had a 4 year old with me too, a bit threatening
- No facilities for children.

OTHER

- The free samples of comfort.
- It had a lot more facilities.
- More peaceful.
- Nice to have come across a work team member who helped identify a tree!
- It was the lovely day and the glorious colour that did it for me.
- Many more facilities than 10 years ago.
- Range of autumn colours – number of trees affected – size of Arboretum.

Thinking about your most recent visits to Westonbirt Arboretum 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?

MAPS/ SIGNS/ INTERPRETATIONS

- Much better information displays about trees and how to identify. When first come in no clear signs at entrance where to go or what to do left in a vacuum (where you get ticket).
- More signs for dog fouling when the arboretum is crowded for an event, would like to be given priority to park closer as we are Friends of Westonbirt.
- Keeping up the variety of exhibitions etc.
- More displays of the history of the trees here.
- Signs in the car park.
- More varied signage. Same signs are used at the same points throughout the year.
- Better signposting – we got lost – twice! Perhaps colour code routes.
- More signs and staff to give information about a tree and location on site.
- More information boards.
- Planting dates on specimen trees would be very useful.
- Trees – description i.e. name to be more visible (had to search). How about plates on the path?
- Better signposts.
- Identification of more individual trees.
- More information on species of trees and year of planting, age, height, etc.
- The beginning of the autumn trail could have been more clearly marked as such.
- Better signposts for quick route etc. still got lost with map.
- A few more notices
- More obvious signs at entrance for information to where dog walkers go.
- More boards with maps on and defined paths made into a circular walks.
- More detailed information about the trees.
- Extra porta-loos and food counters at such busy periods.
- We'd like to see the trees better labelled and more information, on smaller labels about them.
- Ensure that plant labels are correct and up to date.
- I would have liked more information about the lovely trees. A reference section somewhere?
- More signposting on the paths but done in the sensitive way that some were marked.
- More information on birds, plants, wildlife, perhaps a leaflet?
- Too much sign posting.
- More variety of shrubs, more about flowers.
- More precise labelling of trees.
- Compel dog owners to keep their dogs on leads.

PLAY AREA/ CHILDRENS ACTIVITIES

- Definite children's play area.
- Children's play area.
- Adventure play area for children.
- Something for the children, play area, trails for the children. Finding things and routes for them to do.
- Would like good quality wooden climbing equipment for the children.
- Play areas, educational.
- More equipment perhaps for children, like "tree house" or similar but must be natural products. Reduced entry charge for "friends of friends".
- Cheaper food in group (from child) and football pitch tucked away.
- Noisy children.

TOILETS

- The toilets not good. There is only one toilet in the café.
- The toilets only one in its restaurant.
- Toilets at main restaurant. Only one, that is for the disabled. Perhaps more toilets.
- Better facilities when it's crowded, more toilets and catering.
- Toilet in restaurant.
- Activities for children – will help like ones let off steam and probably enjoy the other parts more as a result.
- Trails for children e.g. wood carvings, more bird feeder centres.
- Porta-loos are always awful.
- More toilets for peak times
- Need paper towels in toilet

PATHS

- Improve bumpy ground on field car park.
- Use of a better material/surface for woodland pathways.
- Not for me - A narrow wheelchair only strip on the complete path way in the Old Arboretum.
- More routes, less people.
- Pathways paved.
- Signposts giving nearest way back to car park.
- Paths are awful to walk on. Double electric chairs.
- Area to ride bikes (bike trail).
- Reduce the people, perhaps by opening up more paths.
- The nettles could be taken out and the brambles
- A guided walk for dog lovers.
- Dead trees and dead branches should be removed, more shaded areas at restaurant.
- Motorised 'Train' to assist mobility handicapped visitors, is only running twice daily, to selected areas.

SEATS

- More picnic tables particularly in the busy season.
- A few more seats
- A few more seats spaced evenly throughout the forest.

PRICES

- Apart from the cost and the dog being excluded from the Old Arboretum.
- Very expensive not for many on low budgets as one off visit.
- Perhaps £7.50 being valid for a season's ticket?
- More realistic prices
- Shop was far too expensive.
- Less commercialised. So go back to the more natural state. Exclude the Festival of Gardens and the Festival of the Wood. I come here for trees peace solitude and space.
- Reduce the entrance fee.
- Make it less commercialised.
- Becoming too commercialised
- It's over commercialised now, too many attractions, they are getting away from nature and the trees. They allow too many people in, it's so crowded these days you can't always enjoy it on the weekends. Too many festivals and things going on.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

- Would like it to be kept rustic without any more buildings.
- I think it should have more branches dotted about the place very relevant to my age and recent operation. I love the place and am very happy with it.
- Like it to remain a natural environment, keep it natural.
- Earlier opening times on certain days. Against woodland ? on silk wood side line to see it opened up as well.
- Keep it as it is. I'm more than satisfied.
- It's perfect as it is.
- I cannot think of any changes that would make the visit more enjoyable.

RESTAURANT

- Improvement from last year with wood carvings and Gardens and restaurant so am satisfied.
- The amount of catering at festival times – to avoid queues.
- They have recently changed to disposable crockery and cutlery, not environmentally friendly or good to use. It detracts from its enjoyment of the visit.
- Would like more choice in the restaurant as I have to follow a low fat diet.
- Evening restaurant, entrance to channels if you have a membership card could go straight through not able to do that now have to go.
- The restaurant, it's not in keeping with Westonbirt.
- Better tearoom facilities.
- There was a long queue for the restaurant and the cafeteria was very cold.
- Restaurant enlarge counter area enlarge to facilitate quicker turn over to reduce queuing.
- More and better quality goods on sale. Full menu in café – no hot chocolate available.
- Improved catering.
- Faster service for meals
- We hoped to have lunch at Maples but found nothing suitable on the menu.

OTHER

- No garden festival in present form, costs less to come in.
- The bird watching area.
- Like to see an orienteering trail – discreet, perhaps in "silk wood".
- Longer duration for "Enchanted Wood" event.
- Rubbish bins cleared more to stop wasps.
- The garden festival was a disappointment to local people, not proper gardens but modern art statements.
- There is always something going on and that is why we are Friends of Westonbirt.
- Reduce the tractors, very noisy, detracts from the atmosphere
- To be open early, 9am would be nice to walk in here.
- It all alright.
- We're Friends and wild life ? obvious when routes available.
- Its all ok
- People control dogs more.
- Very satisfied.
- Ability to order small trees of any in the arboretum.
- As stated previously all dogs on leads.

Finally, what do you like the most about Westonbirt Arboretum?

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

- The trees and it's so well kept.
- The trees, enjoyable for all ages.

- The trees and the peace and quiet are so enjoyable.
- The trees.
- The beauty of the trees.
- The variety of trees and shrubs and the age of them.
- I like the chance to get away from things and walk amongst the trees.
- Trees, peace, solitude, space.
- The trees, no traffic unhindered.
- Trees liking out of site.
- The whole lot. I am very uncritical. I like it so much and enjoy coming here. The general effect on me. It is such a lovely place. A very beneficial effect.
- The trees.
- Like openness, like glory of it.
- The trees, simply the trees that's what it's all about.
- Trees and building fit in well.
- The trees, just all of it.
- Natural environment and freedom from traffic.
- The trees, simply just the beautiful trees.
- Lovely place to come and look at trees. Come every day of the year, to see trees grow naturally.
- The trees.
- The trees, they are so varied and so many different greens.
- Scenery.
- General abundance.
- Lots of trees.
- Trees
- The beauty of the mature trees.
- Varied tree varieties and cleanliness of whole area.
- The scenery, the trees basically, they are very pretty and such vivid colours.
- Trees
- Scale of site and setting.
- Majesty of trees, fantastic habitat of trees and birds.
- The size of the trees, space huge, few people, freedom to roam.
- The variety and number of wonderful trees.
- Age, size, variety of trees yet lots of space.
- Glorious views on every side.
- The variety of trees, the garden design idea.
- Trees and views
- The trees
- Trees.
- The trees.
- The freedom for all and the beauty of the trees.
- Environment.
- Peace open air – trees whole ambiance of place.
- The vast collection, variety, size and beauty.
- Variety, way that would of this is the some all different.
- Mainly the varieties of trees and being able to observe them
- I enjoyed seeing different types of trees in the arboretum.
- Space and variety of trees was terrific.
- The trees!
- Lots of space
- The joy of walking through the glades, exploring trees, leaves, conkers, fir cones, bamboo 'houses', birds, glorious tranquillity, space
- The Silk Wood – so beautiful and spaces so wide the crowds were “lost”.
- Variety of trees, colours,
- The collection of maples
- Most things are very good.
- The colour and peace and well kept surroundings.
- Clean and well maintained.
- Being such a large area, despite being very busy it did not feel too crowded.

- Variety of planting
- A good tree and shrub reference collection this is vital for people interested in trees like my wife and myself
- Photographic potential
- Variety of trees
- The size of the site and the wonderful Acer collection. Encounters with less common trees
- Variety of trees and atmosphere (peaceful).
- Not too commercialised.
- Variety of trees
- It was lovely
- Scenery and peaceful atmosphere.
- Lovely colour, nicely laid out peaceful,
- Natural beauty, peace and quiet, rural setting, wonderful trees.
- Variety of trees, enjoyment, planning and care of arboretum.
- There's so much of it! We've yet to explore huge areas.
- Beautiful trees and shrubs and colour, space, no pressure, carvings,
- The event variety of native trees and the obvious enjoyment of the visitors.
- Best day of life.

AUTUMN COLOURS

- The trees the colours.
- The autumn colours which were quite beautiful particularly in the warm sunshine
- Fantastic colours
- The variety types of trees and the colours starting to change for autumn
- Beautiful colours
- Autumn colours and variety of trees.
- The colours of course and the amount of space.
- Beautiful autumn colours.
- The glade, as the trees are turning into autumn colours it was spectacular
- Variation in colour of foliage.
- Despite bad weather the colours were beautiful without a long walk.
- The space, the beautiful trees, the autumn colours.
- The trees and colours of this time of year. Magnificent. A marvellous sight.
- The variety of species giving an array of colours in the autumn.
- Colours amazing this year.
- Autumn colours
- Colours of October and accessibility of trees.
- Autumn colour
- The natural beauty and colours of trees and leaves in autumn.
- Beautiful autumn colours of trees

WALKS/ PATHS/ SIGNPOSTS/ INFORMATION PLAQUES

- Well laid out paths, labelled tree names – good walking.
- Open spaces, like different trails and environment and scenery.
- “Freedom” to walk around and don’t have to keep to the paths.
- Walk freely about the place.
- Can wonder around as I like and have a good walk.
- Safe area to walk in lovely environment
- The environment and the feel you don’t have to stick to the paths.
- Like walks
- Walking
- Well managed walking routes/trails offering excellent view of the good planting.
- The walks, they are well signed and easy to do.
- Good walks.
- The walks
- The information plaque
- Information given out about the trees.
- Flat and easy walking – variety of tree information. Outstanding:
- Ideal for running. The freedom.
- Being able to walk amongst the trees not just on the paths, every tree having its name attached, being able to touch the trees.
- Lovely walks on pretty good paths.
- Name tags on trees
- Relaxing and peaceful walking
- Excellent specimen labelling
- Good value for an enjoyable day’s walking amongst some colourful scenery.

DOGS

- Trees solitude, spruce, dogs love it.
- The peace, solitude and freedom for us and the dogs. The beauty, a lovely place.
- Tranquillity. The view/the colours are ever changing, never the same. A paradise for dogs. All the residents meet here, we socialise, the dogs know one another. We do appreciate their forbearance regarding dog messes some of us pick up that left by others because we hate to offend visitors or have the rule ban dogs.
- The changing interest throughout the year, always a little bit different when you come. We enjoy the beauty of the place, the freedom that you can wonder where you like, there's one place that's dog free.
- Peace, quiet and being able to run my dogs off their leads.
- A place you can walk dogs peacefully
- Natural beauty and lovely place to take the dog.
- Freedom and the scenery, we just love it here and the dog does too.

CHILDREN

- Very safe environment for the children.
- Easy access just park car and you are there not busy, plenty space for kids to round around.
- The trees, the atmosphere, convenience for children, the natural play potential of the trees for children – without needing extra play equipment.
- To see kids have a wonderful time
- Walks were ideal length for young families. Lot of safe space.
- Seeing children enjoying themselves.

FESTIVALS/EXHIBITIONS

- Events.
- Great Garden festival.
- Tree sculptures,
- This time we enjoyed the garden designs exhibition.
- International Garden Festival.
- I liked the garden/art exhibitions
- Art exhibition added to visit.
- We liked the Garden Festival best.
- The garden exhibits and wood carvings.
- Exhibits.
- The international exhibits of wood carvings.
- The labelled autumn route, the garden expedition
- Spring and autumn and winter light show

FACILITIES

- Clean 'WC's' was a great surprise and very friendly staff and FOW.
- Cleanliness, staff pleasant and helpful.
- There was a good concentration of visitor facilities, shop, information, toilets, and then way from that, the peace & beauty of the trees
- Festival garden space, layout, facilities all built in keeping with surroundings
- We like to come though the year to see the changing scene, the staff are a delight - very organised, we really like the outside cafeteria
- Birdfeeder centre.
- Wild bird Feeding Centre.
- Good restaurant
- Plenty of seats available

- Knowledgeable plant centre staff – very helpful.
- Slow service for meals.
- The good food

BEEN BEFORE/CLOSE TO HOME

- Being able to come all through the year is lovely.
- Ten minutes down the road and can get what I want from each visit.
- Something different every time we come.
- Close to where I live.
- Learn things every time we come.
- Generally just to come here and get away as we only live 6 minutes away.
- Visited year ago & its wonderful
- Much improved on previous visits.

PEACE AND QUIET/RELAXATION

- Peacefulness & scenery
- Peace and quiet,
- It is such a wonderful place to walk around enjoying the trees and collecting my thoughts
- Peace and quiet
- Tranquillity.
- Able to find solitude.
- Solitude!
- Like peace of it.
- The peace and quiet, just being free.
- Peace and quiet – plenty of space so the number of people there was not apparent.
- The tranquillity.
- Solitude.
- Peaceful,
- Peace
- That it's quiet in midweek, like the solitude,
- Peacefulness and tranquillity. A lovely place to visit.
- Peace and quiet, a sense of freedom. Isolation even though there were a lot of visitors.
- Peace and quiet,
- Peace and quiet and not yet commercialised.
- Peaceful and natural.
- The peace.
- Peace and quiet.
- Peaceful solitude off the main paths.
- Peace in a splendid natural setting.
- Flexibility of the opportunities here, there's something here at every season to interest and you can all find solitude.
- The peace,
- The peace and quiet
- Calmness and space W/E. Don't feel it is over populated.
- The peace
- Relaxing
- Peace and tranquillity in the woods – identifying the various species.

- Peacefulness.
- Tranquillity,
- Peace and quiet but with lots of general noises of people.
- Over all ambience of the place over all feel. No intrusions of urban life i.e. litter installation of what ever in the background.
- Trees and tranquillity.

- **Questionnaires**

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