

HEARTWOOD FOREST: RECREATIONAL DEMAND AND ACCESS ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

This paper discusses the issues surrounding the potential benefits of Heartwood Forest in St Albans District and then looks in detail at one of the key planning issues which is also a major factor for determining how the forest will develop in terms of recreation and access. Demand for recreation at the proposed Heartwood Forest and the implications and problems for providing access to the area are assessed.

Publicly accessible land is always in short supply in the south of England, so in general, an additional 850 acres of new woodland with more-or-less complete public access is to be regarded as a good thing. However, in a congested and highly populated area there is potential for localised conflicts if the numbers of visitors to an area puts additional loading onto an already overstretched road transport system or if pressures on available parking areas and other facilities on high days and holidays become too much. Therefore, it is necessary to be as realistic as possible in evaluating the magnitude of demand for recreation, what the sources and types of demand are and then to consider the implications of this demand on access and service provision.

St Alban's District, where Heartwood is located, has several priorities for the area and it is important to be able to demonstrate how Heartwood Forest and its use by people as a resource for recreation and, to a lesser extent, tourism, can contribute to these aims. The council, in a briefing paper, has recently stated the following:

Aims for the future

1. The council has been working with all local partners (through the Local Strategic Partnership) to revise the community strategy for the district, which sets out the long term (15 year) vision for the district's future:

“a progressive, unique and vibrant District, which values its heritage and cares for the future: an outstanding place to live where everyone can flourish.”

2. The strategy includes four key priorities:
 - Ensure the District is a great place to be
 - Keep the district healthy
 - Support an active community that has pride in itself and cares for the future
 - Create a diverse and sustainable economy for the 21st century
3. The council, as a leading partner, has set out its overall aims in its corporate plan, covering the three years from 2009-12. These are:
 - i. To safeguard the environment
 - ii. To build a community that is open, fair and inclusive

- iii. To work in partnership for the health and well being of the community
 - iv. To cherish and promote our heritage, arts and culture
 - v. To ensure the District is a desirable place to visit and in which to live, learn and work
4. In addition, the council has set four specific corporate priorities for this period. These are:
- Provide leisure facilities at Westminster Lodge and London Colney including youth provision
 - To develop the LDF, protect green belt and environment to ensure a sustainable and greener community
 - VFM, quality, efficiencies, below inflation Council Tax rises
 - Visible improvements to the street scene
5. The council has also a specific supporting priority in 2009-10 to tackle the impact of the current economic downturn and enable economic sustainability.

All of the four key priorities in the strategy can benefit from the development of Heartwood Forest:

- Ensuring the district is a great place to be includes landscape quality, green space and maintaining the rural character of the greenbelt. The forest, which will be well-designed and fitting with the landscape character as well as providing a significant boost to accessible green space will be a major green lung and key attractor for people in the district.
- To keep the district healthy (by which is assumed to mean the people) increasingly involves increasing the preventative side of health and well-being by encouraging better physical and mental health. Exercise in natural areas and being able to be close to nature are both increasingly supported as major cost effective contributors to improving health and well-being alongside a good diet etc. The forest will be able to accommodate large numbers of people participating in all kinds of exercise and de-stressing through being in a safe natural environment.
- To create and maintain active communities means that there needs to be a focus and the means to create and sustain community and social capital. Research has shown that green projects such as woodlands which grow and develop with and alongside people, providing many flexible opportunities for all the community – as free, democratic spaces where no one needs to be legitimised as a consumer to participate and where people from all sections of society can feel comfortable – are significant catalysts for building this capital. Woodlands are also places which are capable of being managed for different objectives over time as social conditions change.

- Creating a diverse and stable economy means broadening the economic base and spreading the economic eggs between several baskets. However, the knowledge economy – the hope for the future – relies on skilled, healthy and motivated people living in and working in the area. The presence of a high quality environment with good communications and a high quality of life is a necessary precondition, and Heartwood Forest will be a major contributor to this. In addition there will be local economic benefits to Sandridge as well as St Albans, Harpenden and Wheathampstead through increased use of local services and a number of entrepreneurial possibilities associated with recreation and/or tourism.

In relation to the aims of the corporate plan:

- To safeguard the environment – a well designed native forest linked into the green network of habitats is an excellent way to safeguard the environment.
- To build a community that is open, fair and inclusive – the contribution to social and community capital noted above contributes to this.
- To work in partnership for the health and well being of the community – the forest will provide the “green” element of the “green-white” partnership between nature and health, which is part of the emerging field of benefiting health and well-being through increased links with the natural world (sometimes referred to as “Vitamin G” or overcoming “nature deficit disorder”)
- To cherish and promote our heritage, arts and culture – the forest provides a huge outdoor venue for a wide range of arts and cultural possibilities.
- To ensure the District is a desirable place to visit and in which to live, learn and work – the forest will provide a massive green heart to the area and a unique attraction for recreation by the residents of the surrounding settlements.

Of the four corporate priorities, which are rather specific, only one, “To develop the LDF, protect green belt and environment to ensure a sustainable and greener community” will be aided by the proposed forest, but it will do so in a big way.

The council have also noted several synergies between the forest project and the plans discussed above.

However, amongst the key planning issues identified by the council are those concerned with access to the site, potential visitor demand, possible traffic congestion, access by means other than cars and demand for facilities. Archaeology and landscape are other issues but these are being considered in other specific reports for the Woodland Trust.

DEMAND ASSESSMENT

Heartwood Forest will offer a particular product to the public: an outdoor experience for informal recreation, exercise, fresh air, closeness to nature and escape from the urban realm and its demands. Hopefully many people would like to take up this offer. Who is likely to be the market? Who visits the countryside and what do they do there?

The recently published analysis of English leisure visits from Natural England (English leisure visits 2005) reinforces the traditional pattern of who tends to visit destinations such as Heartwood Forest. This analysis uses a newer set of socio-economic classes from the ACORN classification (Table 1).

Table 1: ACORN categories used in the leisure survey

ACORN Category	Acorn group
Wealthy achievers	Wealthy executives
	Affluent greys
	Flourishing families
Urban prosperity	Prosperous professionals
	Educated urbanites
	Aspiring singles
Comfortably off	Starting out
	Secure families
	Settled suburbia
Moderate means	Prudent pensioners
	Asian communities
	Post industrial families
Hard pressed	Blue collar roots
	Struggling families
	Burdened singles
	High rise hardship
	Inner city adversity

The survey concludes the following: “Trip takers to the countryside and to the seaside coast tended to be from the more affluent ACORN groups, Wealthy Achievers and Comfortably Off. Those taking trips to an inland town/city were more likely to be younger while those visiting the countryside were more likely to be older. Visitors to the countryside, the seaside coast and seaside town/city are more likely to be white. In addition, those with children in the household are slightly more likely to make leisure visits to an inland town/city and less likely to visit the countryside. The retired and those with no children in their household are more likely to visit a National Park or open access land. Those with a disability are less likely to take a leisure visit and even less likely to visit a National Park or open access land. In all, National Park visitors were more likely to be 45 and over, male and white than the population as a whole. Open access land visitors were twice as likely to be Wealthy Achievers as in the population as a whole.”

“Most of the survey respondents came from car owning households (74%), although the proportion who owned a car increased to 78% for all trip takers, 88% for

countryside trip takers, 87% and 93% for National Park and open access land trip takers respectively. In addition, it is of interest to observe that 17% of all respondents are classified within ACORN as Wealthy Achievers but that 29% of visitors to the countryside, 31% of visitors to National Parks and 34% of visitors to open access land had the Wealthy Achievers ACORN classification. This indicates that people in car-owning households and classified within ACORN as Wealthy Achievers are more likely to visit the countryside and open access land or National Parks in particular than the population as a whole.”

When looking at open access land (such as Nomansland Common and Heartwood when it is fully open, or many public forests) the most common main activities according to the survey are as follows:

- Walk/hill walk/ramble (10.7 million trips – of which dog walking was 3.5 million trips)
- Eating/drinking out (1.1 million)
- Play sport (1.1 million)
- Driving (1.1 million)
- Cycling (1.0 million)
- Hobby 0.9 million)
- Visiting friends/relatives (0.7 million)
- Visiting attractions (0.6 million)

“The main activity on every Leisure Visit to open access land was classified into one of 15 categories. The most popular activity was walking, hill-walking and rambling (57%) which accounts for over half of total Leisure Visits to open access land. Other popular main activities on visits included eating/drinking out, driving and playing sport (all 6%).”

“The main form of transport refers to that used for the longest part of the trip, in terms of distance. The car was the main form of transport for just under two thirds of open access land trips (64%) and just fewer than six in every ten rural trips (58%). Across all trips, the car was the main mode of transport in 59% of trips. Walking was the next most common form of transport overall, accounting for a further 27% of trips to open access land. On rural trips as a whole it was more popular – some 31% of trips to the countryside/ seaside coast involved walking as the main form of transport.”

Since visiting patterns change over time, it is notable that visits to woodlands (40% of trips) have remained constant since the survey of 2002-2005. Woodlands are the most popular kind of outdoor location to visit

The characteristics of those who do not visit are also interesting:

“Non-trip takers were more likely to be younger and less wealthy than trips takers; they were less likely to be working full-time and to either own or have access to a car they could drive. Non-trip takers were more likely to be disabled than trip takers, were less likely to have children and also were more likely to be non-white.”

This reinforces the view that most visitors to the countryside are white, middle class, middle aged and male. The issue of diversity and the need to find ways of encouraging more of the non-visitors to start visiting has been recognized for a long

time (see the Diversity Review, for example). This means that while the latent demand for the opportunities to be provided by Heartwood Forest may be rather conventional, there is also an untapped potential demand if the offer and the marketing strategy are right. Given the issues of accessibility and problems of reaching the countryside by public transport (see the statistics on car-borne visits and the greater likelihood of non-visitors having no access to a car), these issues are particularly important to tackle in any access plan.

THE LOCAL AND REGIONAL MARKET

The picture described in the earlier section shows that the main market for countryside recreation is from a relatively narrow range of the population, one that is probably well represented in the local and regional area of Hertfordshire/Bedfordshire, being in the heart of prosperous Home County England.

According to the Office for National Statistics, the East of England Region is close to that of the South East in terms of the proportion of higher socio-economic groups (the “old” socio-economic classes, not ACORN classes) and similar to London. Statistical breakdowns of the socioeconomic groups for Hertfordshire, from the 2001 census, show a breakdown that is higher still in the upper socio-economic classes compared with the East of England generally (Table 2).

Table 2 Socio-economic breakdown of Hertfordshire population

All people aged 16 and over in households

	All people aged 16 and over in households	AB Higher and intermediate managerial/administrative/professional	C1 Supervisory; clerical; junior managerial/administrative/professional	C2 Skilled manual workers	D Semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers	E On state benefit; unemployed; lowest grade workers
ENGLAND AND WALES	100.00	21.97	29.67	15.12	17.16	16.08
ENGLAND	100.00	22.19	29.72	15.06	17.03	16.00
EAST OF ENGLAND REGION	100.00	23.53	30.44	15.58	15.49	14.97
Hertfordshire	100.00	29.50	31.18	12.77	13.31	13.24
Broxbourne	100.00	20.79	31.33	16.89	16.60	14.38
Dacorum	100.00	29.10	30.77	12.85	13.44	13.84
East Hertfordshire	100.00	33.04	31.54	12.82	11.09	11.51
Hertsmere	100.00	28.09	34.86	11.96	12.50	12.60
North Hertfordshire	100.00	30.39	29.33	12.63	13.80	13.85
St. Albans	100.00	39.63	30.82	8.90	9.63	11.02
Stevenage	100.00	21.94	28.80	16.01	17.70	15.55
Three Rivers	100.00	31.55	32.66	11.88	11.44	12.47
Watford	100.00	26.13	32.17	13.85	15.94	11.91
Welwyn Hatfield	100.00	27.20	30.15	12.21	14.08	16.35

From this it can be noted that the proportion in St Albans, for example, is very much greater in the higher groups than for Hertfordshire in general.

The ethnic make-up of Hertfordshire is shown below (Table 3). The overwhelming majority of the population is white (87%).

Table 3 ethnic breakdown of Hertfordshire population

Table KS06 Ethnic Group (percentages)

All people

	All people	Percentage of people in ethnic groups						
		White			Mixed			
		British	Irish	Other White	White and Black Caribbean	White and Black African	White and Asian	Other Mixed
ENGLAND	49,138,831	86.99	1.27	2.66	0.47	0.16	0.37	0.31
EAST OF ENGLAND REGION	5,388,140	91.45	1.14	2.53	0.37	0.11	0.32	0.27
Hertfordshire	1,033,977	88.77	1.72	3.19	0.44	0.13	0.45	0.34
Broxbourne	87,054	90.22	1.40	4.50	0.36	0.09	0.33	0.27
Dacorum	137,799	91.67	1.49	2.28	0.40	0.12	0.35	0.29
East Hertfordshire	128,919	93.32	1.14	2.66	0.18	0.11	0.38	0.23
Hertsmere	94,450	88.17	2.19	4.15	0.42	0.15	0.54	0.44
North Hertfordshire	116,908	89.35	1.29	2.57	0.65	0.11	0.40	0.27
St. Albans	129,005	86.85	1.97	4.27	0.45	0.15	0.53	0.45
Stevenage	79,715	91.48	1.66	1.44	0.68	0.12	0.35	0.27
Three Rivers	82,848	87.12	1.99	3.24	0.30	0.11	0.50	0.35
Watford	79,726	79.12	2.89	3.94	0.69	0.23	0.70	0.47
Welwyn Hatfield	97,553	88.79	1.74	3.12	0.38	0.16	0.47	0.36

	All people	Percentage of people in ethnic groups								
		Asian or Asian British				Black or Black British			Chinese or other ethnic group	
		Indian	Pakistani	Bangladeshi	Other Asian	Caribbean	African	Other Black	Chinese	Other ethnic group
ENGLAND	49,138,831	2.09	1.44	0.56	0.48	1.14	0.97	0.19	0.45	0.44
EAST OF ENGLAND REGION	5,388,140	0.95	0.72	0.34	0.25	0.49	0.31	0.10	0.38	0.27
Hertfordshire	1,033,977	1.57	0.69	0.31	0.41	0.60	0.46	0.09	0.49	0.33
Broxbourne	87,054	0.66	0.10	0.13	0.30	0.64	0.45	0.09	0.29	0.20
Dacorum	137,799	0.96	0.82	0.08	0.19	0.37	0.27	0.07	0.39	0.23
East Hertfordshire	128,919	0.56	0.11	0.13	0.13	0.14	0.23	0.02	0.43	0.24
Hertsmere	94,450	2.41	0.24	0.12	0.54	0.45	0.88	0.08	0.69	0.52
North Hertfordshire	116,908	2.67	0.22	0.29	0.32	1.01	0.18	0.11	0.35	0.19
St. Albans	129,005	0.89	0.56	1.26	0.60	0.62	0.28	0.10	0.51	0.49
Stevenage	79,715	1.08	0.36	0.38	0.28	0.61	0.48	0.07	0.41	0.32
Three Rivers	82,848	3.51	0.42	0.11	0.62	0.54	0.40	0.06	0.48	0.26
Watford	79,726	2.36	4.65	0.26	0.93	1.46	0.98	0.22	0.58	0.50
Welwyn Hatfield	97,553	1.44	0.27	0.16	0.45	0.46	0.83	0.08	0.81	0.45

Cells in this table have been randomly adjusted to avoid the release of confidential data.

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Thus it is safe to conclude that there is a large potential market among the traditional countryside user social classes within Hertfordshire and from neighbouring areas, with a small latent group of those who are characterised as less likely to visit, such as lower socio-economic classes and ethnic minorities, but who could be targeted as important groups for social inclusion purposes, for whom accessibility and a different type of recreational experience are likely to be key requirements.

The potential size of the market does not, of course, mean that everyone out of the population living within relatively easy reach will want to visit Heartwood Forest. Data on the number of people actually visiting the countryside on a regular basis is not commonly available at an England or County level. However, in 2007 a survey was conducted in the neighbouring county of Bedfordshire which suggested that 57% of the population visits the countryside regularly while 33% use rights of way. Most people travel between 1 and 5 miles to go to a location for a walk, for example, fewer than 14% being willing to travel more than 10 miles. 17% cited lack of transport as the main reason for not visiting. These data may be comparable to Hertfordshire and they allow for some tentative analysis of numbers to be derived from the Hertfordshire data.

PREDICTING USEAGE AND PARKING REQUIREMENTS

Given that the radius of travel for recreational visitors is important, is it possible to estimate the potential countryside visitor market for Heartwood? This is a difficult task

and relies on a combination of hard data and a number of assumptions based on experience of other places as well as knowledge of visitor behaviour drawn from surveys. The following is an attempt to show how a calculation of visitor numbers and from this the possible size of a car park can be made.

The site lies in the centre of St Albans district which extends more than 5 miles around the site boundary, making the local market likely to be mainly from this district (there will be visitors from more widely afield, especially for special events, but this will probably be in the minority). The population of St Albans is approx 129 thousand, so if nearly 60% visit regularly (taking the figure from the 2007 survey of recreation in Bedfordshire as a guide), then 77.5 thousand people can be estimated to visit the countryside regularly (once a week at least) and to form the core of the potential visitors, with additional numbers arising from those groups who are not regular visitors but for whom accessibility and other barriers can be removed by various means. **This gives an estimate of the current total number of visits to the countryside by the residents of St Albans District as potentially just over 4 million per year to all outdoor and countryside areas (77.5k multiplied by 52).**

Many of these will be very short visits to local areas close to home, walking the dog etc. Of this potential number not all will visit the area of Heartwood, including Sandridge, Nomansland Common and other routes, for any of their trips. This is because there will be other local areas that they prefer to use, being more convenient or easier to get to from the other side of the city, for example, reducing the potential pool of those who would visit the area of Sandridge/Heartwood/Nomansland some of the time, perhaps to 10% of the total annual visits (considering the other places available and managed by St Albans, some 70 places in all, as well as the network of rights of way), **to around 400 thousand visits or so over the course of a year by people considered to be in the catchment for Heartwood (10% of 4 million).**

If these people also visit other places within the locality and only go to Heartwood occasionally, say 4 or 5 times a year (there will be those who visit very frequently and those who hardly ever visit, so a rough average is needed), **the basic total could therefore be 80 thousand visits a year to Heartwood (400 thousand divided by 5).**

However, as Heartwood is to be a large new attraction with a lot of publicity, especially in the early years, the visits are expected to be greater as a result of new visitors as well as some redistribution of the current visits. Future housing growth and other factors could also affect the potential visitor numbers over time. **Thus the number may be estimated to be between 100 thousand and 120 thousand annual visits.**

Of these visitors it may be assumed that roughly between 50 and 70% of these will be car borne (the traffic assessment assumes 70% of 100 thousand visitors to be on the safe side) but it is hoped that larger proportions will use alternative forms of transport if policies for getting people out of cars are successful in the medium to longer term. Patterns of visitor use vary considerably between weekdays, weekends and special holidays, suggesting that, at a car load of 2.4 people and an average visit duration of 2 hours, there may be 40-70 cars on the site at any one time at weekends once the site gets up and running. This figure may double at bank holidays and

special events but this could be accommodated by an overflow area, at least until the true pattern of visits emerges as the woodland matures and an extension can be constructed if necessary.

Therefore, it would be sensible to start with a car park of 50 spaces with extension phases designed in to allow planned expansion as and when the site develops and the demand pattern becomes clear in practice.

Local information from Nomansland Common suggests that the parking areas can cope most of the time but at busy periods they are overflowing and the cars end up along the road verges, something to be avoided at Heartwood.

This estimate is calculated for general visitation by people going on their own or in small groups, not for organised trips or to attend special events. These may include much larger numbers in total. For example 3 school parties of 50 children - a bus load - per week would account for another 7800 visitors a year while special seasonal events could pull in many more. However, these would need to be specially catered for and require special bus parking areas (for school parties) and overflow parking (for events) not factored into the car spaces calculated for the general visits. It is not inconceivable that the total number of visits could be doubled. In the early years of the project, while the site is being developed and promoted there are likely to be many special events needing large amounts of parking, which can be accommodated by temporary overflow parking of reinforced grass. Later on, when the forest is growing and most of the site is fully developed with paths etc the visiting and parking pattern should settle down.

COMPETITION AND VISITATION IN THE AREA

The recreational opportunities to be offered at the proposed Heartwood Forest are not the only outdoor recreation opportunities available in the county. There are a number of other attractions which are of the type likely to attract a similar type of visit to the profile described earlier in this note. However, many are also destinations of choice for tourists and visitors from further afield. Some of them have significant numbers of visitors, including coach parties and the like. Clearly, Heartwood Forest does not aim to provide the same type of visit experience as many of these and therefore should not anticipate the same levels of use. Table 4 presents some data on visitor numbers and the means of transport for the main alternative visitor attractions in Hertfordshire. This was collected by telephoning each location, the information being provided by staff from the attraction, so it can be considered up to date. The visitor estimate of 80 thousand for Heartwood stands in comparison with the other attractions many of which have significantly more visits, being established urban parks, for example.

Table 4. Visitor numbers at some Hertfordshire visitor attractions in 2008

Attraction	Opening Times	Toilet Facilities	No. Of Car Parking Spaces	Food and Drink	Visitor No.'s for 2008	By Car	By Train or Bus	By Bicycle or Foot
Hatfield House	Easter-Sept	Yes	250 in front of house, 100 across drive and 5,000 for larger events	Yes	95,000	Majority	Unknown	Unknown
Shepreth Wildlife Park	All year round	Yes	125	Yes	70,000	Unknown	Actively promote use of train, close to Cambridge-Kings Cross line	Unknown
Ashridge Estate	All year round	Yes	36 car parks, can park 1,000's for larger events	Yes	750,000	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Lea Valley Park	All year round	In some car parks	Numerous and along adjacent roads	In some areas	4,348,274	75%	3% by train, 5% by bus	3% by bicycle, 14% by foot
Fairlands Valley Park	All year round	In cafe and savacentre	4 car parks- 650, 230, 50 and 25 spaces	Yes	200,000	Estimated that at least 80% come by car	Unknown	Unknown
Paradise Wildlife Park	All year round	Yes	450	Yes	330,000	Majority	Unknown	Unknown
RSPB Rye Meads Nature Reserve	All year round	Yes	25	No	17,373	Unknown	Unknown but train station is very close by	Unknown but bicycle rack is often full and very few car park spaces
Willows Farm	Most of the year	Yes	500 and over spill onto grass	Yes	500,000	Majority	No bus routes and difficult to get there without car	>1%
Benington Lordship Gardens	Closed for winter	Yes	100 on grass when not wet, 30 in adjacent village hall and overspill into village	Yes	10,000	Majority	Unknown	Unknown

This table shows that there are very different visitor numbers for apparently similar types of attraction – Hatfield House and Ashridge are both large estates but Hatfield,

with a grand mansion, has only 1/8th or so of the visitors to Ashridge, while Paradise Wildlife Park has four times the number that Shepreth Wildlife Park receives. Some are free – Fairlands Valley Park or Lea Valley Park (and receive vast numbers of visitors), while many charge hefty fees. The places receiving the largest numbers have the most facilities and enough to do to last a whole day or else have many special events and variety to ensure repeat visits.

The new Butterfly World project is also planned as a major visitor attraction with over 1 million visits per year. This is clearly planned to be a national-scale tourist attraction and while there may be some links with Heartwood, at the moment these seem to be catering for rather different markets.

DEMAND FOR ACTIVITIES AT HEARTWOOD

In addition to the general demand levels for informal recreation, the main activities being walking with or without a dog, jogging, cycling, horse riding, family outings and picnics, there are many other types of activities which may be accommodated in a forest of the size of Heartwood, subject to good planning and management. It must be noted that recreation demand has become more specialised and segmented, with many groups pursuing different activities, many of which need specialised equipment. Not all are compatible with the ethos of a forest but many could be included. Depending on how these are developed they could increase total demand and therefore visitor numbers or could help to spread visitors across the seasons, days of the week and times of day.

As well as walking and jogging, Nordic walking is becoming popular and could be developed. Health walks with specific routes, lengths and gradients to stimulate cardiac activity are not perhaps seen as recreation but can easily be incorporated into a network. Access for disabled people should be considered for as much of the site as possible. Recent work on this for the Forestry Commission shows that it is a legal requirement but is not difficult to manage if thought out properly at the outset. Standards are now well-known and there are examples of good practice available to help providers. Improving accessibility for disabled people is a sure way to encourage their participation, especially when combined with good information targeted at the networks used by the different disabled communities (they rent to have their own networks and may make scant use of websites of other organisations). Older people are a group who have time to spend outdoors and are among the main groups of visitors but they also need special considerations, such as benches for resting, which allow them to follow longer routes. This group will tend to visit at any time, not just at weekends, many, if walking a dog as well, in the mornings and evenings.

Cycling means many things nowadays and there are several different classes of cycling, including extreme mountain biking, BMX biking and “normal” mountain or all-terrain cycling. Routes which are more demanding can be established, zoned away from normal cycle paths, which offer more challenges, although the potential at Heartwood is limited due to an absence of steep terrain. It might be feasible to develop a special centre where bikes can be hired and events managed and there is certainly scope for a small entrepreneur to become involved. Such a centre could be separate, with its own parking etc, located closer to the start of the trail network.

Horse riding is popular and an extension of the routes available to horses would not only get horses off the narrow lanes where it is dangerous for them but also enable different experiences to be obtained. As well as simple routes for hacking it may be possible, subject to insurance issues, to set up routes with jumps and obstacles for more experienced riders. Further consultation with riding groups is needed to establish if there is a demand for this. The site already has horse centres and livery establishments next to it, enabling direct access for many horse owners.

Children are a group who are less and less allowed out by themselves to play, for reasons of safety and risk aversion. However, play outdoors in natural environments is valuable for children and young people of all ages. There is no need to erect and manage complex and expensive structures if materials and space are provided instead. However, the play areas with sculpture-based structures provided by the Forestry Commission are immensely popular and can be designed and managed with low risk for managers. Managing the kind of self-constructed facilities beloved of children (dens, swings etc) is also something that the Forestry Commission have recently offered advice on. This could be tolerated if not encouraged, so that local children develop an association with nature that will carry on in to later life (an aspect revealed by research over the last decade). There is a recent increase in interest for “wild adventure space” for teenagers – see a report for Natural England about this.

While not considered recreation, activities for school children are also in demand, especially low-risk activities in local areas easy to reach by foot. There are 27 primary and 12 secondary schools in St Albans district, providing a large latent demand for all kinds of activities. Some are within walking distance while others would need transport to get there. This number of schools could support a visit of some kind every day in term time, so that the production of educational materials and the involvement of school staff in curriculum development could be highly valued. There will be implications for facilities to handle large numbers of school groups – coach parking, toilet facilities, an outdoor classroom and so on that will need to be taken into account in the planning.

Art events are also becoming popular, with the outdoors providing venues, sites, inspiration and materials for all kinds of arts. STARTS is the main focus in St Albans for the arts and their support for the development of art in the forest would be very useful.

This list is not exhaustive but it shows that existing demand for activities can be channelled towards Heartwood Forest as an ideal place for many to be located, enabling the forest to take a prominent role in the life of the locality and region.

CAR ACCESS, TRAFFIC AND PARKING

The site of Heartwood Forest is located close to Sandridge and is bisected by the B651, a busy, fast road where drivers clearly fail to observe the speed limit. This road is the only road connecting both halves of the area but it is also divisive as it is difficult for people to cross. The eastern half of the site can be accessed from several minor lanes which are quite quiet but this area has the least recreational potential. The main area with the most potential can only be accessed from the B651 road as it is otherwise surrounded by private land or Nomansland Common.

The separate report by Patrick Eggenton, the traffic consultant, has made estimates of the impact on traffic numbers for a scenario of visits similar to those described above and has concluded that the road capacity is adequate and that no extra strain will be placed on the B651 as a result. The location of parking has been examined and after several options were rejected the proposal is to locate the parking area in a field adjacent to the bridleway leading out of Sandridge by Pound Farm, following a short section of access road leading from the new junction off the B651. The main pedestrian issues related to reaching the sections of the proposed forest to the east of the B651 concern the dangers of crossing this road on foot from the parking area and the west side of the forest in general. The proposed car-park enables pedestrians to walk into Sandridge where the road crossing points already exist and to access the rest of the forest along a bridleway. This has several other benefits, being that any visitors would be close to the village facilities, such local shops, pubs, toilets etc (which are not provided by the Woodland Trust at any of its sites) and so contribute to the village.

Visitor information will be provided that shows these routes to be favoured options. Any school groups would also be required to follow this route and therefore would not cross the rural section of the B651. The master plan once fully developed will therefore discourage pedestrian movement along the access road from the car park on foot.

ACCESS BY OTHER METHODS

As part of the People Engagement plan for Heartwood the Woodland Trust want to see at least 50% of visitors arriving by other means than the car. For this to be achievable the green access routes to Heartwood need to be researched and promoted to visitors. The table below (Table 6) shows the existing transport links, opportunities for improvements and ways to encourage people to use them.

Table 6: Options for non-car transport/access to Heartwood

Transport	Existing service/routes	Opportunities for improvements	Ways to encourage use
Bus	There is a bus stop at the bottom of Pound Farm bridleway where two different bus services stop – the 304 from Hitchin to Potters Bar via St Albans and the 620 from Hemel Hempstead to Hatfield via Harpenden. Mon-Fri there are 9, 304 buses per day with 7 on Sat and 3 on Sun. There are 18, 620 buses Mon-Fri per day, 12 on Sat and 7 on Sun.	Encourage the council to retain and enhance these bus services.	Advertising on the Heartwood micro website, include details of these bus services when recruiting volunteers and inviting people to events.
Train	There is a good train service to St Albans station only 2.5 miles away from Heartwood. These include Bedford to Brighton via East Croydon, Luton to Sutton via Hackbridge and Luton to Sutton via Wimbledon. There is on average 9 trains per hour Mon-Fri with 6 trains per hour on Sat and 5 on Sun.	There are two cycling shops a few 100m from St Albans station which may serve as cycle hire.	Advertise how easy and frequent the trains are to St Albans even on the weekends. Approach the cycle shops to see if they are interested in providing hire facilities. Map an easy, safe route from the station to Heartwood, perhaps taking in Clarence Park and Wick Wood onto Jersey Lane to Sandridge. Offer this for download on the website.
Cycle	There are several good cycle approaches to Heartwood from each major village/town.	See separate paper on Cycling to Heartwood but in particular upgrade the B651 from Sandridge to Wheathampstead from a footpath to a bridleway and upgrade the Pound Farm to Ayres End Bridleway to an all weather surface. Also consider safe road crossing at House Lane and Nomansland Common	Advertising on the Heartwood micro website, include details of these routes when recruiting volunteers and inviting people to events. Install safe cycle racks at Heartwood for people to explore on foot.
Walk	There are good walking routes from each major village/town around Heartwood.	Increase the peripheral access points into the forest, see separate paper on Walking at Heartwood.	Advertising on the Heartwood micro website, include details of these access points when recruiting volunteers and inviting people to events.

This will need further discussion and development, especially in making connections using the existing routes to the proposed woodland.

NEXT STEPS

The next phase of development of this plan is to integrate all routes and access points into a comprehensive route network leading to the forest and then distributed within the forest, for users on foot, bike and horse. Some routes will be design with all-ability access principles in mind, using guidance provided by the Forestry Commission. The car park will be designed in detail along with planting, information, picnic areas and route access points as the main visitor hub for the forest.