

What's it all about?

The Visitor Survey began in 2010 and runs every summer.

Volunteers observe visitors along set routes around the Forest - who are you and how are you using the Forest?

1,395 visitors were mapped across eight sites over 60 hours, totalling 120 miles.

Questionnaire Surveys completed by over 1000 people, giving their views about the Forest.



Epping Forest Visitor Survey

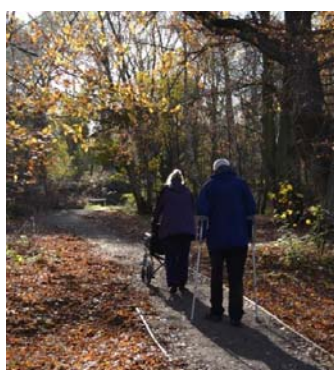


The Results: 2013

We estimate the total number of visits* to Epping Forest each year based on:

- Observation Surveys
- Statistics from events and activities, such as football matches and educational visits.

We have now carried out Observation Surveys on 25 out of 30 sites across the Forest, so every year the figure is getting more and more accurate.



The Visitor Survey results show that in **2013, Epping Forest received 4.4 million visits.**

By comparing Visitor Survey data to the Census data for the local area, we can see how our visitors reflect our local community. This ensures we are providing everybody with an opportunity to enjoy the Forest.

* Visits rather than visitors, as many people visit more than once.

The Site

Connaught Water is a popular 'honey pot' site in the centre of Epping Forest.

It is within walking distance of The View visitor hub.

First surveyed in 2010 the area underwent major works in 2012 as part of the HLF Branching Out project:

Car park resurfaced.

Accessible path with benches,

Two picnic areas and new litter bins,

A way marked trail and wild play area,

A boardwalk and three accessible angling platforms.



Epping Forest Visitor Survey Connaught Water



When originally surveyed in 2010, Connaught Water had an estimate of **205,469 visits** per year. In 2013, **330,698** visits were recorded which is an increase of nearly **61%**.

Factors such as the weather have an impact, but this large increase is likely to be from the access improvement works in 2012.

Figure 1: Change in observed visitor ethnicity at Connaught Water 2010-2013 compared to 2011 Census data for Forest centre

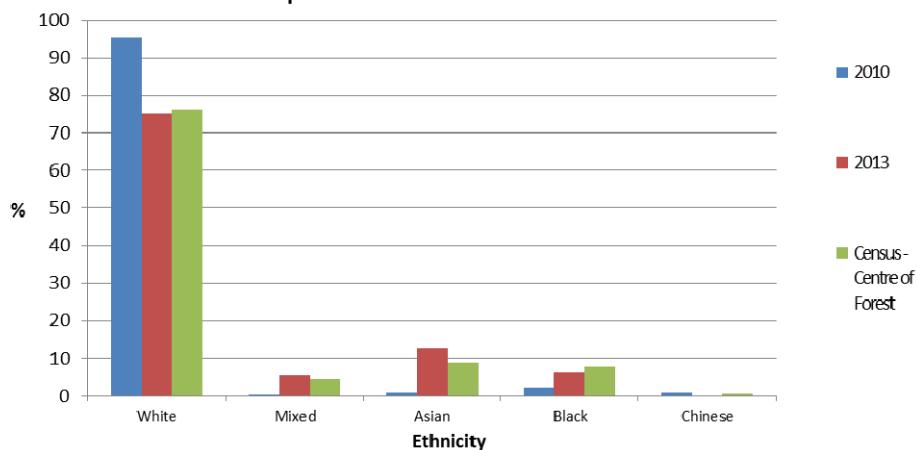


Figure 2 - Density distribution of visitors over 65 at Connaught Water



The 2013 survey shows almost double the number of visitors observed sitting around the site on the new benches. Visitors aged over 65 group around seating areas, as shown in Figure 2.

Plans for the development of Connaught Water

Connaught Water now has a much more diverse visitor profile, better reflecting the local community. Therefore no action is required to improve access in this area in the future.

The Site

Gilbert Slade is in the Southern part of Epping Forest.

It contains the most southerly pollarded trees on the Forest, which are hornbeams.

It is immediately south of the busy A406 and Waterworks roundabout.

To the east and west are densely populated residential areas.

The Hornbeam Trail, a way marked route, links this area with Hollow Ponds.



Epping Forest Visitor Survey Gilbert Slade



The survey results provided an estimate of **76,663 visits** annually. The high level of visitors with a dog (35.5%) and the use of the site by cyclists (18%), runners (4.7%) and young people playing (6%) would indicate that the site is used as an amenity site by the local community rather than as a destination for visitors.

Figure 3 – Cyclists and all visitors at Gilbert Slade



However, when comparing the visitor survey data to that of the census data, under 20's and over 65's were underrepresented at this site.

This could be due to the limited accessibility of the site, the lack of amenities and also the close proximity of Hollow Ponds, one of Epping Forest's busiest sites.

Plans for the development of Gilbert Slade

New access facilities are not required. Gilbert Slade does not have a unique feature to draw visitors, resulting in a lower than expected visitor usage.

It is well used as an amenity site and we will seek to sustain this through the routine management of the area. Any opportunity to improve access should be directed to more popular sites where more people would benefit.

The Site

In the north of the Forest, Hangboy Slade and Jacks Hill have large areas of pollarded Beech, Hornbeam and Oak trees with some heathland.

The site is close to Debden campsite, the Deer Sanctuary and Loughton golf course.

It has a number of bus routes and a couple of car parks for visitors.

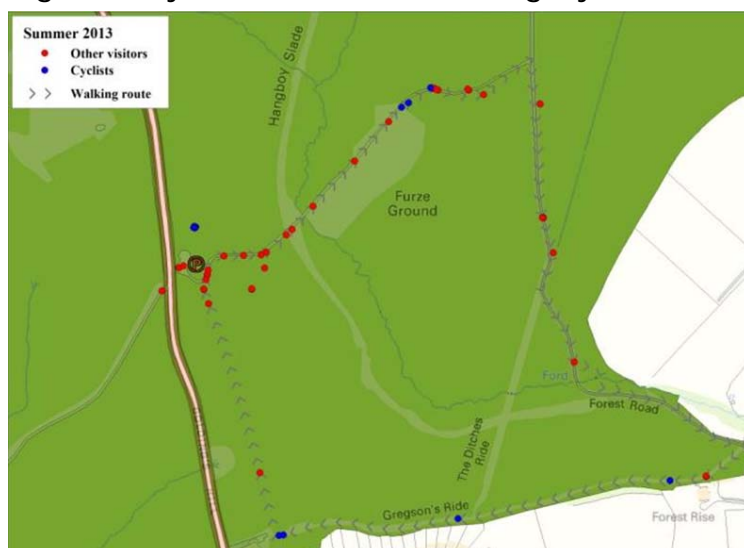


Epping Forest Visitor Survey Hangboy Slade



Results showed the site to be one of the lesser used (bottom 25%), with **56,176** estimated visits per annum. The site was three times busier during the weekend, visitors were largely white (96.6%), which reflects the census data and between 20 - 44 years old (63.6%).

Figure 4 – Cyclists and all visitors at Hangboy Slade



The busiest areas of the site were Broad Strood car park and the junction of Ditches Ride and Green Ride.

Cycling was a hugely popular

activity on this site (33%) along with running (17%). There were also a large number of young people playing on the site and climbing trees (14.8%). These figures could be classed as anomalies as one large group of young people and cyclists were recorded during a weekend survey. For less busy sites a large group can skew the final results.

Plans for the development of Hangboy Slade

New access facilities are not required. Hangboy Slade is a quieter, wilder part of Epping Forest. It is important for wildlife that sites like this remain undisturbed.

We will seek to sustain this through carrying out essential maintenance work with minimum disturbance to the area.

The Site

Hatch Forest is an area of Hornbeam coppice in the centre of Epping Forest, through which the River Ching flows.

There is a sports ground to the west and Woodford Golf Course to the south.

To the north is Whitehall Plain, an open grassland area with scrub and gorse. It links to the popular Barn Hoppitt area.

Several buses routes run around the site.



Epping Forest Visitor Survey



Hatch Forest & Whitehall Plain

The estimate was slightly lower than expected at **72,818 visits** per annum, with weekend visits three times higher. The use of the site by cyclists (39.9%), dog walkers (29%) and runners (11.6%) shows it has a variety of uses for recreational and amenity activities.

Figure 5 – Dog walkers and all visitors at Hatch Forest & Whitehall Plain



As with other survey areas, Figure 5 shows dog walkers mainly using the open grassland areas of the site. Visits to the site by those aged under 20 were significantly lower than the local census data and there was a gender disparity with 65.2% of visits by males.

The busy Whitehall Road bisects the two areas and the

bridge over the River Ching floods during the winter months both of these issues restrict access for all visitors.

Plans for the development of Hatch Forest & Whitehall Plain

As part of the Forest Transport Strategy improvements to the crossing of Whitehall Road are being investigated by the London Borough of Redbridge to improve safety. The bridge over the River Ching will be inspected and improved to allow year round access. Hatch Forest and Whitehall Plain are well used as an amenity site and we will seek to sustain this through the routine management of the area.

The Site

Situated in the north of the Forest, Honey Lane Quarter is a steeply-sloping west-facing site.

It is made up of mainly pollarded woodland with a grassy plain to the south.

The site has two well-surfaced multi-user trails and a prominent viewing point.

Several bus routes service this area and there are car parks at the northwest and south of the site.



Epping Forest Visitor Survey Honey Lane Quarters



We estimate **54,203 visits** per year to Honey Lane Quarters. The highest density along this route was at the car park and was mainly pub users.

As with most of our sites, it is over three times busier at weekends. Cycling was very popular here (35.2%) and they tended to use the Forest track parallel to Wake Road instead of cycling along the road. Visitors appeared diverse, 22% of whom were Asian. The site was slightly underused by those under 20.

Figure 6 – Density of all visitors at Honey Lane Quarters



Figure 6 demonstrates how visitors tend to stick to the surfaced trails and paths around the Forest.

It shows that very few people using the unsurfaced tracks in woodland areas in the northern part of the survey route.

Plans for the development of Honey Lane Quarters

During 2014 the Epping Forest Car Park Review will address the use of Honey Lane Car Park along with the rest of the car parks on the Forest with an aim to improve access for visitors. Honey Lane Quarters is a quieter, wilder part of Epping Forest. It is important for wildlife that sites like this remain undisturbed. We will seek to sustain this through carrying out essential maintenance work with minimum disturbance to the area.

The Site

Situated in the north of the Forest, St Thomas's Quarter borders Honey Lane Quarter.

Made up of mature beech woodland and, as a quieter part of the Forest, a popular refuge for timid fallow deer.

There is a riding school and stables nearby.

A bus route services this area and there is also a car park



Epping Forest Visitor Survey St Thomas's Quarter



Figure 7 - the distribution of all visitors at St Thomas's Quarter



St Thomas's Quarter has a very low annual visitor estimate of **32,654**. With a riding school and stables nearby, the site is popular with horse riders (15.3%) and the presence of cyclists (22.2%) and visitors with dogs (15.3%) shows that the area is well used by a diverse range of visitors.

34.7% of observed visitors are aged under 20. This is higher than the local census data and presumably a result of the nearby riding school, as the majority of under 20s were also horse riders. The ethnicity of observed visitors was also quite diverse compared to similar sites in the north of the Forest. Again, probably a result of the riding stables.

Lodge Road car park has been closed intermittently to discourage fly-tipping, which occurs regularly at this site. This may have reduced the visitor numbers to the area.

Plans for the development of St Thomas's Quarter

St Thomas's Quarter is a quieter, wilder part of Epping Forest. It is important for wildlife that sites like this remain undisturbed. We will seek to sustain this through carrying out essential maintenance work with minimum disturbance to the area.

The Site

Wake Valley in the north of the Forest is made up of beech woodland and heathland habitats.

It is within the Special Area of Conservation, designated as a special habitat with a high number of beech pollards.

There are no public transport links for this area but there is a car park just across the busy Epping New Road.



Epping Forest Visitor Survey Wake Valley



With an estimate of **41,364** annual visits, Wake Valley has a similarly low level of visits to the nearby Honey Lane Quarter and St Thomas Quarter.

Figure 8 - Density Distribution of all visitors at Wake Valley



The highest areas of use were around the car parks, at Rushey Plain and Wake Valley Pond, as shown in Figure 8.

There are no surfaced paths through the majority of this site, which can make it difficult for visitors to cross, especially near to ponds or in wet weather.

Visitors were mainly White, but with an age range close to the census. Fishing and sitting were popular activities especially around the Pond or on the Plain enjoying picnics in the sun.

Plans for the development of Wake Valley

Wake Valley is a quieter, wilder part of Epping Forest. It is important for wildlife that sites like this remain undisturbed. We will seek to sustain this through carrying out essential maintenance work with minimum disturbance to the area.

The Site

Woodford Green in the central part of the Forest is a stretch of well-used amenity grassland running alongside the busy Woodford High Road.

The short mown grass is attractive to families and groups of young people for football, picnics and other social activities.

The area includes Woodford Cricket Club and is surrounded by housing with a school and shops nearby.

Well serviced by buses and a nearby tube station.

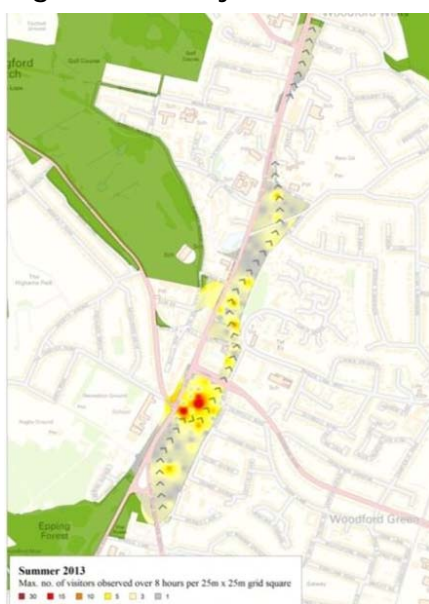


Epping Forest Visitor Survey Woodford Green



An estimated **283,270** visits were recorded at this site, the majority of which were functional rather than leisure related. The busiest period 7.30am – 9am on weekdays, consisted mainly of people crossing the Green on their way to work or schools, especially students at Woodford County High School for Girls. 5 - 15 year olds at this time of day accounted for 11.7% of the total visitor count for the whole eight hour survey period (or 46% of all observed). Unsurprisingly, most were female and a range of ethnicities.

Figure 9 - Density distribution of all visitors at Woodford Green



Recreational use is more apparent at the weekend. The cricket pitch accounted for the majority of visits with 24.2% of all visitors either watching or playing. Figure 9 shows the high distribution of visitors on and around the cricket pitch and of those through-routing to work or school.

Plans for the development of Woodford Green

With such a high number of visits Woodford Green is the ideal place to raise the profile of the Forest. This will be achieved through installing an information panel and through two events which will be held on the Green at a weekend.

Tracks and paths will be opened up and encroaching vegetation removed to encourage visitors to go around the Green as well as across it.

The Whole Forest

We have estimated the percentage of visits each area receives:

South 33%
Central 49%
North 18%

Visits to just six sites - Wanstead Flats, Wanstead Park, Chingford Plain, Connaught Water, High Beach Pillow Mounds and Hollow Ponds - account for **46%** of all visits.

20% of all visits include a dog.

Active pursuits (cycling, running, cricket, football, etc.) account for **21%** of all visits to the Forest, proving its value as a resource for improving health and fitness.



Epping Forest Visitor Survey Conclusions



We can compare the survey results from the last four years across the whole of the Forest. Areas to the south of the Forest, with a much higher local population, are predictably popular, as are areas around honey pot sites such as Connaught Water, High Beach and the Chingford Hub.

Most sites in the north of the Forest are low in visit numbers, a result of their remoteness, reduced accessibility by public transport and the sparser population in these areas.



The use and popularity of honeypot destinations on the Forest represents the success of visitor management measures as larger numbers of people were attracted to sites with improved facilities.

Increased seating and better paths, at Connaught Water for example, make sites much more resistant to erosion and damage from higher footfall than other more sensitive sites would be. The developments therefore help to conserve the wider Forest by attracting visitors to more accessible locations.

The success of the Visitor Survey project is due to the dedication and commitment of the volunteers who deliver it. A big thanks to them and long may it continue! The 2014 survey begins in April!

www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/eppingforestconsultations