



Shaping the future of Hatfield Forest together

Workshop 1 of 2: November 23rd 2017

Workshop Summary

About this workshop

This workshop brought together participants to deliberate on visitor management techniques that can protect the fragile environment of Hatfield Forest whilst also providing a place for people to enjoy. In order to achieve an equitable balance of interests in the room we invited equal numbers of stakeholders from across the following five categories – recreation, local community, business, environment/biodiversity, and heritage/education. 45 stakeholders were invited and 25 attended the workshop.

About this report

Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to enable stakeholders who took part in the deliberative workshop to communicate the outcomes of the first round of the Hatfield Forest community engagement with their community, organisation or interest. It draws out key points made in the workshop.

What it is based on

We have endeavoured to select out key points in a fair way. We do not rely on our own impressions as workshop facilitators to do this. Instead we first process everything said in the workshop and cluster similar points from within a conversation together. This 'word for word' report is available on the website and can be looked at to see the details of each conversation.

Given the wealth of comment and ideas shared in the events we are unable to summarise it all in a few short pages. Instead we have aimed to pick out the main points from each conversation.

We know that all humans see and notice things that match up with their own interests and way of seeing things (psychologists call this confirmation bias). So it may be that as you look at this summary it does not include things that stood out for you during the workshop.

Please be assured that the basis for further discussion is the full workshop report not this summary.

1 The vision

Its 2030 efforts to balance access and conservation for this special place have worked and you like what you see. What pleases you most?

People see the forest as green, lush and teeming with wildlife, a special place for people and for nature that is oozing with history, wildlife and atmosphere. It is full of happy, educated and inspired visitors. Car parking has been managed as has drainage.

2 About Hatfield Forest:

Where do you value now and why?

Many participants feel that the whole forest is of great value, with every area offering different walks, views and flora /fauna.

What do you see and do that you would like future generations to be able to see or do?

They would like to pass on a sense of the wonder of the forest to future generations, with children running freely and safely, educated and interested in nature.

What does Hatfield Forest provide that locals and visitors benefit from?

People benefit from the sense of place and the link to the past. It is a place of tranquillity and peace that brings health benefits as a 'green lung'.

3 Trends and changes

What are the current trends and changes?

The trends that people identified included soil compaction and a loss of biodiversity. There has been an increase in housing development which has resulted in increased visitor numbers – leading to parking issues.

4 Current Management

What is the current management and what is the reason for it?

Participants identified the following management techniques - Coppicing which is undertaken because it contributes to the historic landscape and biodiversity. Grazing controls the scrub and grass.

What are the constraints on management choices?

The main constraints were identified as financial, statutory and lack of staff resources.

What would happen if there is no management?

The historic landscape and biodiversity would be lost if there was no management, nature would take over and the site would lose its designations and protection.

5 Access and nature in Hatfield Forest

What is already being done that is going in the right direction? (By land managers, communities, volunteers)

Some people felt that events are being run well, as is information dissemination and education. People appreciate the National Trust's management approach - being open minded and adopting a sustainable approach. Management techniques in the forest, coppicing, grazing and species management are going well.

How could that be strengthened and enhanced?

Areas that need strengthening were identified as better availability of information, increased involvement in development planning and more impact surveys. People feel that active drainage management is needed. They also feel that visitors need to be communicated with more effectively, maybe using technology, to achieve the necessary education of visitors.

What else needs to happen?

Participants discussed the potential for technology to aid information giving and education – thus increasing visitor communication and understanding. Clarity around events would be welcomed as well as improved route management.

Any new ideas and solutions?

People suggested ideas about systems of closures and alternative routes, car parking management, drainage management, increased NT land holding, communication systems that embrace technology and improved education.

6 Considering solutions

Participants were asked to suggest 2 solutions out of everything they have heard. They then prioritised the following 4 solutions for in-depth consideration.

Route (Ride) closures and communication

The benefits of ride closure were seen as an opportunity for forest regeneration and recovery. The challenges were cited as increased pressure on other areas, poor communication causing public lack of regard for the closures. This system could work well if the community support it, possibly using turnstile gates and increased visitor information. People feel that the closed areas must be managed effectively and that there needs to be signage which is clear. More information was requested about the cost benefits of visitors and the possibility of residents' permits.

Off Forest Visitor Centre and Car Park

Visitor numbers are increasing and participants noted that many visitors do not move far from their vehicles. The benefits of an off-site car park and visitor centre would solve the limited parking currently available, give a sense of arrival to the visitors with an opportunity for education. It would reduce pressure on other areas. However it could attract even more visitors and put pressure on local infrastructures. Some felt that there could be a feeling of

disconnection to the forest if it was sited too far away, it needs to be near the forest and near to housing development.

Drainage

The issue is the drainage of the paths and rides, with possible solutions being mole drains that aerate the soil. Good drainage maintains the natural environment and increased biodiversity. However the challenges include compliance to legal restrictions, coppicing management and maintaining access. This could work well where there are existing ditches and at the right times of year. Participants would like to see a feasibility study.

Change priority/purpose of Hatfield Forest so that it doesn't have to be self-sustaining

Participants considered the question of whether the generation of income should come before conservation of Hatfield Forest? A change of priority would lead to a faster recovery of the habitats. However there is great sensitivity around this topic and multiple access points makes closure very difficult to achieve. Increased staff numbers could help with communication. Participants would like more information on other funding options, evidence to support forest closure – case studies of other organisations in similar locations.

Levels of support

The participants were then asked which of the above solutions they supported and why. Drainage came out with the greatest support, with one person voicing their concerns. People like this solution because it is cheap and effective, is a historical method and works with natural habitats.

A model for sustaining income at Hatfield not dependent on visitor numbers also had great support, with only 2 people voicing concerns. Participants feel that this solution will protect the forest and that the focus should be on conservation.

Path closures received good support but there were concerns – and an off-site visitor centre also received support but there were significant numbers of concerns.

7 Collaborative action, increased understanding and information requested

There were a great many offers of collaborative action which included funding, advice, networking and data.

Increased and better communication was seen as the way to help visitors understand and adapt to change. This could use the tools of social media, signage, traffic light systems and social inclusion projects.

Participants asked us to find out more visitor information, new resident information and case examples from the wider engagement.