

CHAPTER 12 - Countryside Sport and Outdoor Recreation

Aims:

PROVISION

- Extend existing facilities and provide new ones for outdoor recreation and countryside sport on a sustainable and well-managed basis.
- Create a well-wooded countryside equipped, managed and promoted to cater for a wide range of appropriate sport activities.

PROMOTION

- Broaden to all sectors of the community the use of the countryside and woodland for outdoor recreation and sport.
- Increase participation as the basis for health, fun and progression;
- Promote and support Sport England's strategy based on More People, More Places and More Medals.
- Focus on participation amongst young people.

Provision

12.1 Whilst informal recreation such as walking (which has by far the highest participation levels of all sports and activities [Source: General Household Survey 1996]) horse-riding and cycling (see Chapter 11) can be seen as a primary goal of the Community Forest, offering opportunities to the greatest number of people, it will be desirable to accommodate more formal sport and recreation within the Forest's diverse and developing landscape.

12.2 A number of countryside sports are listed in A Countryside for Sport (Sports Council 1992) from which some can be identified within the Forest of Avon. This list is not exhaustive and will change. These sports are not exclusive to rural areas and many will be applicable in open spaces and woods within urban areas:

- rambling, hiking and walking at all levels
- cycling, including on-road cycling and off-road mountain biking
- climbing
- orienteering
- cross-country running, running and jogging at all levels

- horse-riding of all types
- golf
- water sports
- motor sports
- outdoor activities (age 10 years and over)
- angling
- air sports
- archery and shooting of all types.

Some of these sports will need facilities requiring planning permission, as indicated in local plans. Facilities for play and adventure for those under 10 years of age should also be accommodated by the Forest; gateway sites would be the most appropriate locations.

12.3 Demand for countryside sports and recreation has grown substantially over the past decade and is likely to continue. This is largely due to increasing leisure time, widespread mobility, increased publicity and promotion of the countryside, increased media coverage, interest in healthy lifestyles, increased awareness of the environment and the development of new activities based on technological advances, for example mountain bikes and hang gliders. The Community Forest will need to play its part in accommodating some of these demands.

12.4 A greater impetus and profile is being given to the need to increase the level of physical activity in the population from a health promotion viewpoint, and the growth of the Forest will be an opportunity for existing Forest partners to work closely with the health sector.

12.5 Maximising sport and recreation opportunities should not be taken to imply that every activity should be catered for. Opportunities should be sought with respect to known demand and the availability and suitability of sites. The countryside is a finite natural resource and all activities promoted within it should have regard to sustaining that resource in the long term. There may be a case for bringing certain sports together and investigating the concept of 'massing', where facilities can be shared. This reduces the need for small facilities to be replicated throughout the area. Sports where this approach may be appropriate include motor sports and country sports (angling, shooting, equestrian). Such focus centres would need to be identified over the long term at a strategic and local planning level, through structure plans and local plans.



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- 12.6** Only in a minority of cases is woodland essential or ideal for sporting activities, namely orienteering, field archery, sporting shooting and paintball activities, and even in these cases alternative settings may be acceptable, even though they may not be so testing or satisfactory to participants. Woodland, however, can add to the experience in other sports, for example on well- designed golf courses, and can also provide an attractive setting within the landscape and can provide an appropriate structure within which different sports can take place in proximity.
- 12.7** Trees and woodlands act as a screen in two ways: to exclude unsightly urban or other intrusions which would detract from the sporting experience and to screen against noise and visual intrusion generated by the sport. Sports pitches on the edge of towns and the city would benefit from screening, reducing wind and distraction. Diversity of experience can be enhanced by woodland, providing contrasts between enclosed and open routes for running, riding and cycling.
- 12.8** A number of adventure sports and outdoor activities are accessed, by young people in particular, through outdoor pursuit centres funded by local authorities. Demand will increase through requirements in the National Curriculum for children to participate in outdoor and adventurous activities and, whilst in the short term existing centres can satisfy demand, opportunities for increased provision will be presented in new woodland areas. These may be our opportunity to link these centres to the increasingly popular courses run as part of staff and management development.
- 12.9** Orienteering is popular, and demand is growing. As the Forest grows, new courses will be developed, helping to ensure a greater range of challenges and reducing familiarity.
- 12.10** Sporting shooting occurs in a number of private woodlands and can be an important motivator for farmers to consider creating new woods or coverts. There are conflicts regarding the extension of public access into woods where game is reared, due to problems of disturbance and poaching, and where shooting occurs, due to safety. Clay-pigeon shooting does not require a wooded setting, though this may help to mitigate against noise, as may technical modifications to guns. These sports should be located away from centres of population. Planning permission is required for clay-pigeon shooting sites that wish to operate for more than 14 days a year.
- 12.11** Motor sports are not catered for in the Forest area apart from on an infrequent basis, for example scrambles and trials, and it is difficult to assess how much this is a factor in encouraging casual off-roading and motor cycling. A combination of approaches ranging from defensive measures to a purpose-built facility may need to be considered, though illegal users may not be attracted to facilities unless they are close by. Noise is a particular problem associated with motor sports, though noise restrictions exist (87 DbA) and will be reduced further. Facilities may best be considered close to motorways where traffic noise is already high. Woodland planting would help reduce the visual and to a lesser degree the noise impact of such facilities where planning permission was obtained.
- 12.12** Sport England has identified a shortage of golf facilities in the County of Avon, in particular 'pay as you play' courses. The Community Forest will be a natural focus for courses, given its proximity to urban populations and the opportunity exists to create high quality locations using grants for woodland planting where planning permission is obtained. New courses should not interfere with existing rights of way and, indeed, these can be accommodated as at Mangotsfield Golf Course.
- 12.13** Sites for water sports are currently limited, though Bristol Water plc has planning permission to develop Barrow No. 2 reservoir (16 ha) as a water sports centre offering day-ticket dinghy sailing, windsurfing and canoeing. Bristol Water hopes to develop the site within the next few years. Creating additional new facilities is expensive and will probably only be feasible in association with other approved development, old quarries or minerals sites.
- 12.14** Countryside sport also offers farmers the opportunity for diversification, and the Sports Council and MAFF (1994) have published advice with practical examples: Success with Sporting Enterprises on Farms.
- 12.15** Although not officially recognised as sports, paintball and war games are popular woodland activities. They are potentially damaging to wildlife and nature conservation, ancient semi-natural woodlands being most sensitive. Guidance from English Nature is available to assist in deciding whether a wood is suitable. There is also a conflict with public access and the ethos of community woodlands. Local authorities, when considering planning applications, will be concerned to ensure that the nature

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conservation and other features of importance of a site are not damaged. Publicly owned woods are unlikely to be used for such activities.

12.16 A Sport and Recreation Strategy for the Forest, by Sportspartner (1994), commissioned by the Sports Council and the Countryside Commission provides a useful overview to sports provision in the Forest and needs to be re-evaluated by the Forest partners.

Promotion

12.17 Sport in the Community Forest can also help to create a commitment to the environment by fostering a greater understanding of the countryside and responsible use, particularly in sports whose governing bodies have adopted codes of conduct. All users of the Forest, whether affiliated to a club or not, will be encouraged to use it responsibly.

12.18 A key element in sport in the Forest will be the encouragement of and support for groups who are non-participants, those with limited mobility and those identified by local authorities as target groups.

12.19 Forest partners currently provide and promote a wide range of sports, activities and events and there is scope for much more, particularly when linked to other objectives, e.g. walking for health, cycling events which help reduce car use. Specific campaigns focused on particular target groups, e.g. Forest Fever (a national Community Forest promotion) aimed at young people have been particularly successful and this concept could easily be developed for other groups. From these initial steps, people's habits and interests can change, leading on to performance development and ultimately, excellence.

Proposals

12.20 A range of activities will be required to achieve the sport and recreation aims.

- Management of sites will be needed, particularly zoning in both space and time, to reduce conflicts between users and to avoid overuse and conflicts with the environment.
- Increased sporting and recreational provision will be sought through public, private and voluntary-sector partnerships.

- Opportunities will be sought to increase provision for water-based sports and motor sports, particularly through the after-use of mineral workings or derelict land.
- Woodland establishment should be encouraged in relation to new sports and recreational facilities.
- The concept of focus centres for certain sports will be considered by local authorities in their strategic and local plans.
- Sports equity will be promoted as widely as possible and particular encouragement will be given to groups currently underrepresented in using countryside sports. The design of new sporting and recreational facilities will take into account the needs of people with disabilities.
- Links will be made with the health sector to promote health through the use of the Forest.
- Safe practice and the adoption of recognised codes of conduct will be encouraged for all sports and activities.
- The Forest partners will work with education and community groups in organising participatory sporting and recreational events as a springboard to involve people in the Forest environment.

