

## 7. COMMUNITIES AND PLACES



Accessible trail in Bedgebury Forest

## 7.0 Communities and Places

### 7.1 Our Woodlands - A Recreation Resource within the High Weald

Forest Enterprise aims to improve the well-being of communities by providing stimulating, attractive and accessible environments for people to enjoy. Our priority is to improve people's health and quality of life by helping them to use and enjoy our woods, within the constraints of sustainable management. This includes work to provide access and recreation opportunities to communities most in need, and developing new partnerships associated with the provision of green infrastructure in and around the new development in Growth Areas. Underpinning much of this 'new' work will be our ongoing task of managing and developing the public forest estate to deliver quality recreational opportunities, and engaging widely with the public through events, media and a range of different consultations.

The woodlands managed by Forest Enterprise in the High Weald AONB offer a wealth of opportunity for people to explore the landscape, appreciate its wildlife and lead an active lifestyle. Every year, millions of visits are made to the AONB by local residents and also by people from London, the surrounding counties and abroad. In fact, our land features in over half of all accessible natural greenspace within the High Weald. (Source: McKernan, P. & Grose, M. 2007)

The majority of the woodlands in the High Weald that are owned by Forest Enterprise have been dedicated as access land, in perpetuity, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000). This means that there is an open access policy for walkers, in addition to the access provided by public rights of way. The main recreational activities within our woodlands are dog-walking and horse-riding. Cycling is becoming more popular and various clubs use the woods for specialist activities, such as orienteering and archery.



**Dog walking in the forest**

Public forests provide an excellent resource for learning and education and we will support the use of the woodlands for learning through Forest Schools, school visits and lifelong learning opportunities. We will also continue to promote a range of events and activities in the High Weald as part of our 'Active Woods' programme.

We aim to stimulate economic activity by providing quality environments and facilities to attract businesses and support the tourist economy. The Forestry Commission can have the greatest impact on economic development where it works in partnership with others, e.g. regional development agencies, individual entrepreneurs, small businesses or other parts of government. We will continue to deliver existing partnership arrangements and also develop new opportunities for private business in a number of areas, including catering, bike hire and adventure activities.



**Horse riding in the High Weald**

## 7.2 Bedgebury - Adventure in a World of Trees

Bedgebury Forest is located 10 miles to the south of Tunbridge Wells in Kent and is one of the seven visitor attractions known as the Seven Wonders of the Weald. It is the largest block of woodland in the area that is in single ownership and open to the public where people of all ages and abilities are encouraged to come and enjoy the outdoors in a safe and healthy environment.

The 850 hectare forest provides traffic-free way-marked trails, which include a 10 kilometre family cycle route and 12 kilometres of horse riding tracks with links to public bridleways. There are also 13 kilometres of mountain bike trails that include a long single-track cross-country loop and a Freeride area, which has built structures and obstacles designed to challenge a rider's ability and technical skills. Healthy living is further promoted through the provision of all-ability walking and running routes that include calorie-mapped trails.

The children's adventurous play trail runs through half a mile of woodland and is themed around the great plant-hunters of the Victorian era. There is also a high wire and ropes adventure course that is popular with teenagers and their families.

The multi-functional visitor centre forms the hub of the recreation experience at Bedgebury and features a café, cycle hire franchise (including disabled cycles), showers and bike wash area. The classroom/community room is used by the education to provide inspirational learning to all ages.



Family cycling



Natural play in the forest