



Forestry England

Mortimer Forest Community survey

Summary

April 2020



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1. Context

The Marches Beat team carried out a community survey exercise for Mortimer Forest to help develop ten-year community and recreation plans. These plans are supporting documents of the Forest Plan and should be read together.

It is important to note that Forestry England was not able to respond to each individual idea or opinion received during the consultation exercise.

2. Forestry England aims and objectives

Overarching organisation aim:

Connecting everyone with the nation's forests by creating and caring for our forests for people to enjoy, wildlife to flourish and business to grow.

Organisation objectives:

1. Superb forests - The Nation's forests are at the forefront of contemporary Worldwide forestry management.
2. Increasing natural capital - The Nation's Forests natural capital value is increasing.
3. Being an outstanding organisation - We are excellently led, motivated and skilled people. We are supported to deliver and act with integrity.
4. High quality investments and sustainable finance - The Nation's forest estate is financially sustainable, standing on its own feet.
5. Telling our story - What we do has a positive influence beyond the Nation's forests and is recognised as being first class.

3. West district aims and objectives

The Marches beat sits within the West England Forest District which has developed sub-objectives to deliver the organisation objectives. The activity in the community and recreation plans will be aligned to deliver the following objectives.

National objective	West District sub-objective
Increasing natural capital	Support and encourage healthy lifestyles
	Widen participation in woodland recreation for all abilities
	Increase our capacity and effectiveness through partnership working
	Increase volunteering opportunities across a diverse community
	Give space for nature to protect and enhance biodiversity
High quality investments and sustainable finance The Nation's forest estate is financially sustainable, standing on its own feet	Provide a built estate that is fit for purpose for all users
	Increase our value for money, and maximise opportunities to increase income
Telling our story	Raise awareness and understanding of sustainable forestry
	Increase engagement with and understanding of Forest Plans

4. Survey methodology

a. Individuals

619 people completed the Community Survey on Mortimer Forest between Monday 2 September and Sunday 13 October 2019.

The survey was built around a set of 20 questions in the following categories:

1. Your relationship to Mortimer Forest
2. Visiting the woodland
3. Community woodland
4. Working woodland
5. About you

The survey questions were promoted in the following formats:

1. Online survey distributed through social media, staff email contact lists, community groups
2. Face to face survey in the three car parks at different times of the week and day
3. A stall at Ludlow market and a stand at Ludlow Tesco
4. Paper versions of the survey were available in eight community outlets: two local churches in Pipe Aston and Elton, two local pubs in Brimfield and Orleton, a hairdressers in Ludlow, Monkey Mania on the business park in Ludlow, Ludlow library and Wigmore village hall community café

b. Communities of interest

The views of communities of interest were invited via an email sent to around 70 organisations in the following sectors:

- Wildlife and conservation
- Education and learning
- Health and wellbeing
- Sports and recreation
- Tourism and business

Over 80 groups and organisations (including local schools) were emailed with an invitation to get involved with developing the community and recreation plan.

14 groups contributed towards plan development - notes from the meetings are available from the local Forestry England office. New groups can still get involved with community activity at any point in time.

One secondary and one primary school provided feedback by email.

Save Mortimer Forest campaign group explored ideas for forming a 'Friends of' Group but the individuals involved felt that their efforts would be better placed establishing a separate charity covering woodland in the South Shropshire/ North Herefordshire area. Notes to meetings available from Forestry England.

c. Drop in sessions

Two drop-in sessions were held for people to come and discuss their ideas and opinions of the forest and its management.

Thursday 9 January at Mortimer Forest Offices, around 30 people attended.

Friday 10 January at Ludlow Library, around 40 people attended.

d. Tourism survey

A Survey Monkey link to a short survey aimed at tourism related organisations was sent out via the Visit Shropshire Hills network and Leominster Tourism. 8 organisations responded.

5. Key findings: individuals

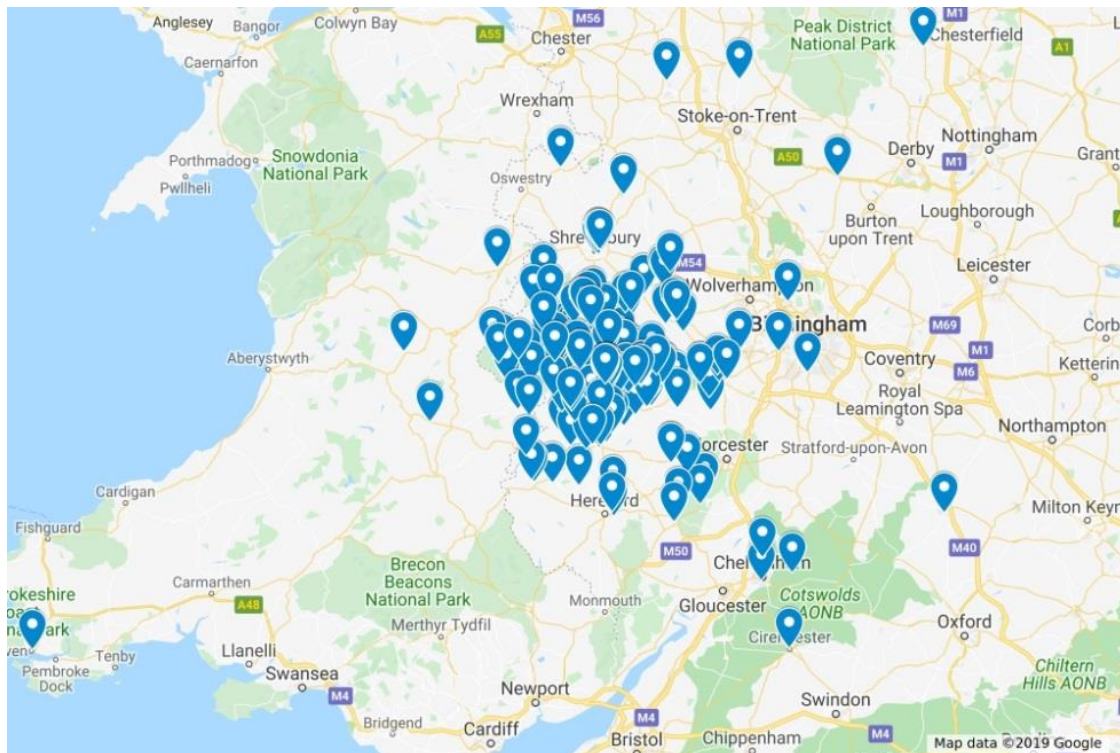
We have provided the graphs from Survey Monkey, which include online and paper responses. We have been through the hundreds of comments to look for themes and put key themes from each comments section below the graphs. This process is subjective and intended as an overview.

a. Where are you from?

Survey respondents came from up to four hours' drive from the site, showing that the forest is important to locals and visitors.

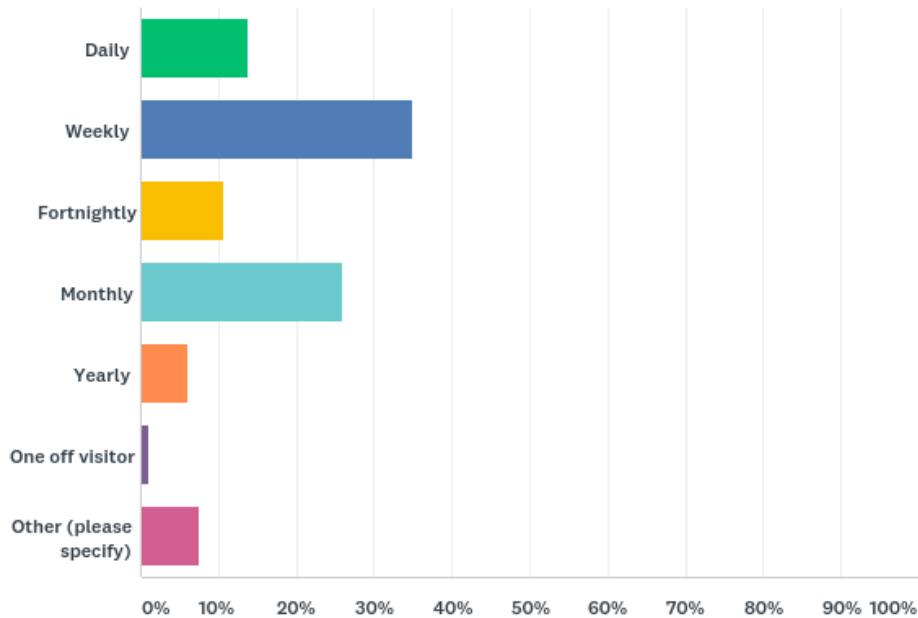


Most respondents came from within an hour's drive of the site.



593 respondents answered this question.

b. How often do people visit?



616 respondents answered this question.

c. What could we do to encourage people who don't visit the forest?

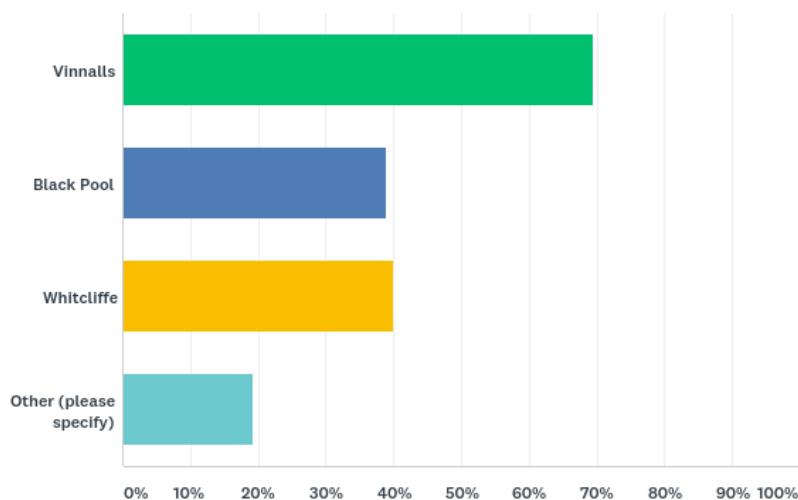
This question had a free text section for people to make suggestions. The key themes that emerged, in order of how frequently they were mentioned, were:

1. Facilities improvements: Café, toilets, visitor centre
2. Interpretation and signage improvements
3. More paths for specific users: bikes, horses
4. More events
5. Improve public transport links

26 respondents answered this question.

d. Which car parks do people use?

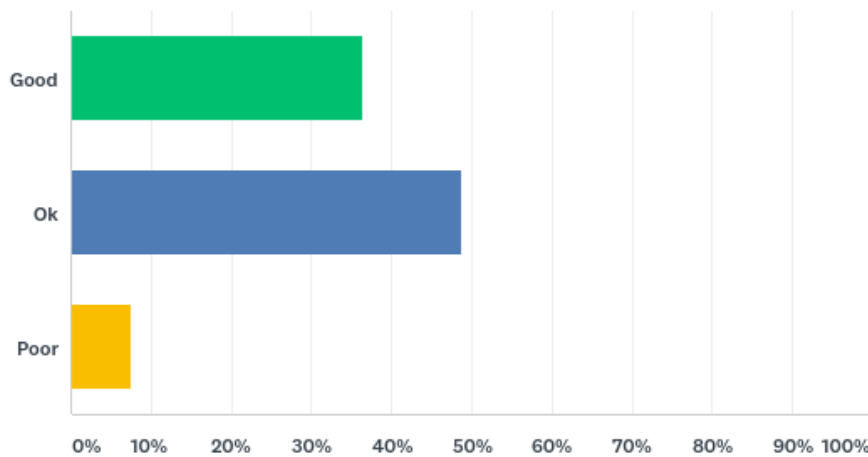
Vinnalls car park is the largest and most popular car park.



Other modes of transport	Number of respondents
Walk to forest	48
Cycle to forest	11
Horse ride to forest	3
Take public transport to forest	1

610 respondents answered.

e. How accessible is Mortimer Forest for people with additional requirements?

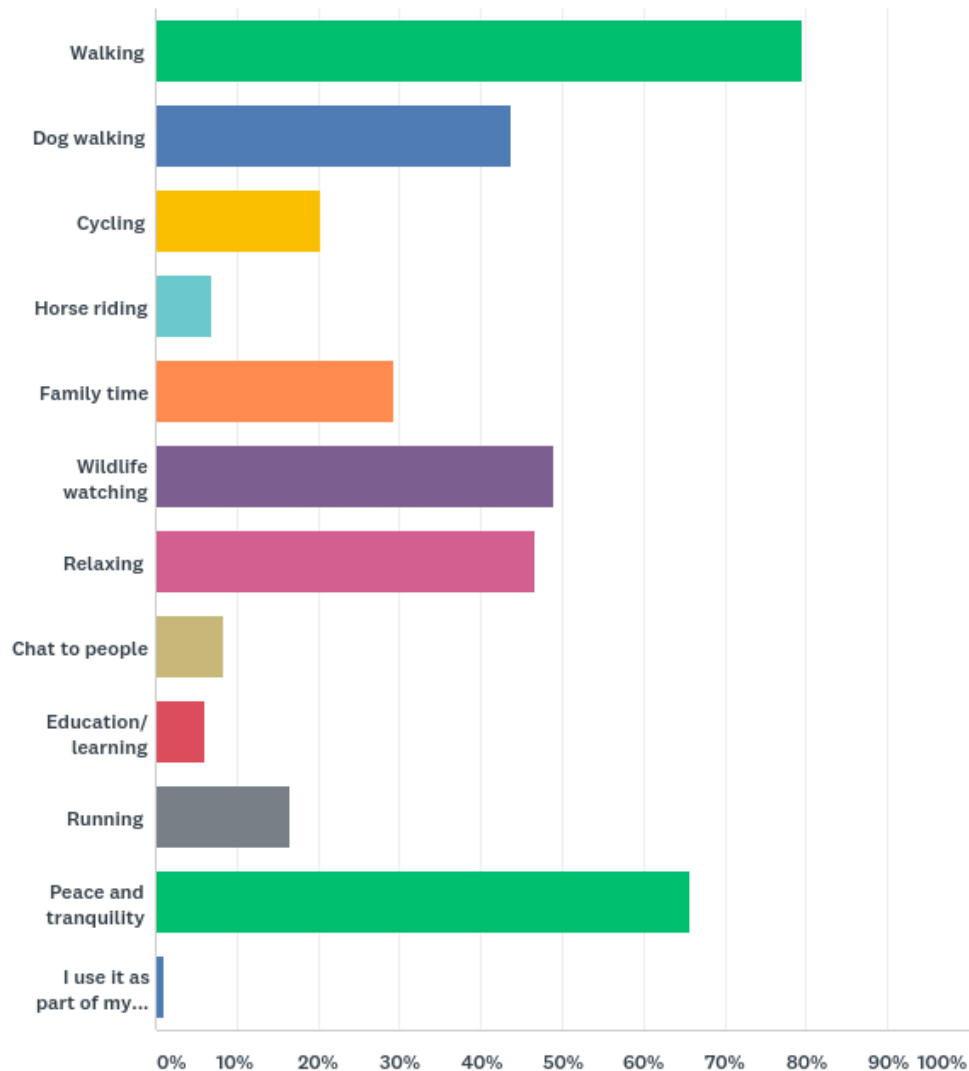


597 respondents answered this question and 66 went on to leave a comment.

The key themes that emerged in the comments, in order of how frequently they were mentioned, were:

1. Improve existing paths
2. Create paths outside of Vinnalls (Easy Access Trail)
3. Unsympathetic comments (access shouldn't be created)
4. Hadn't thought about it

f. Why do people visit Mortimer Forest?

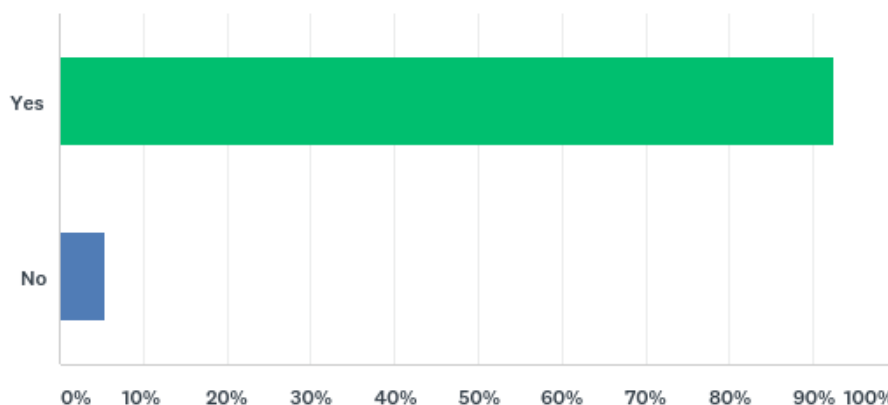


614 respondents answered this question and 38 went on to leave a comment.

The key themes that emerged in the comments, in order of how frequently they were mentioned, were:

1. Wildlife related interests
2. Health and well being
3. Organised events like parkun
4. Meeting friends
5. Art
6. Geology
7. Peace

g. Do people feel that different user groups get along sharing the forest?

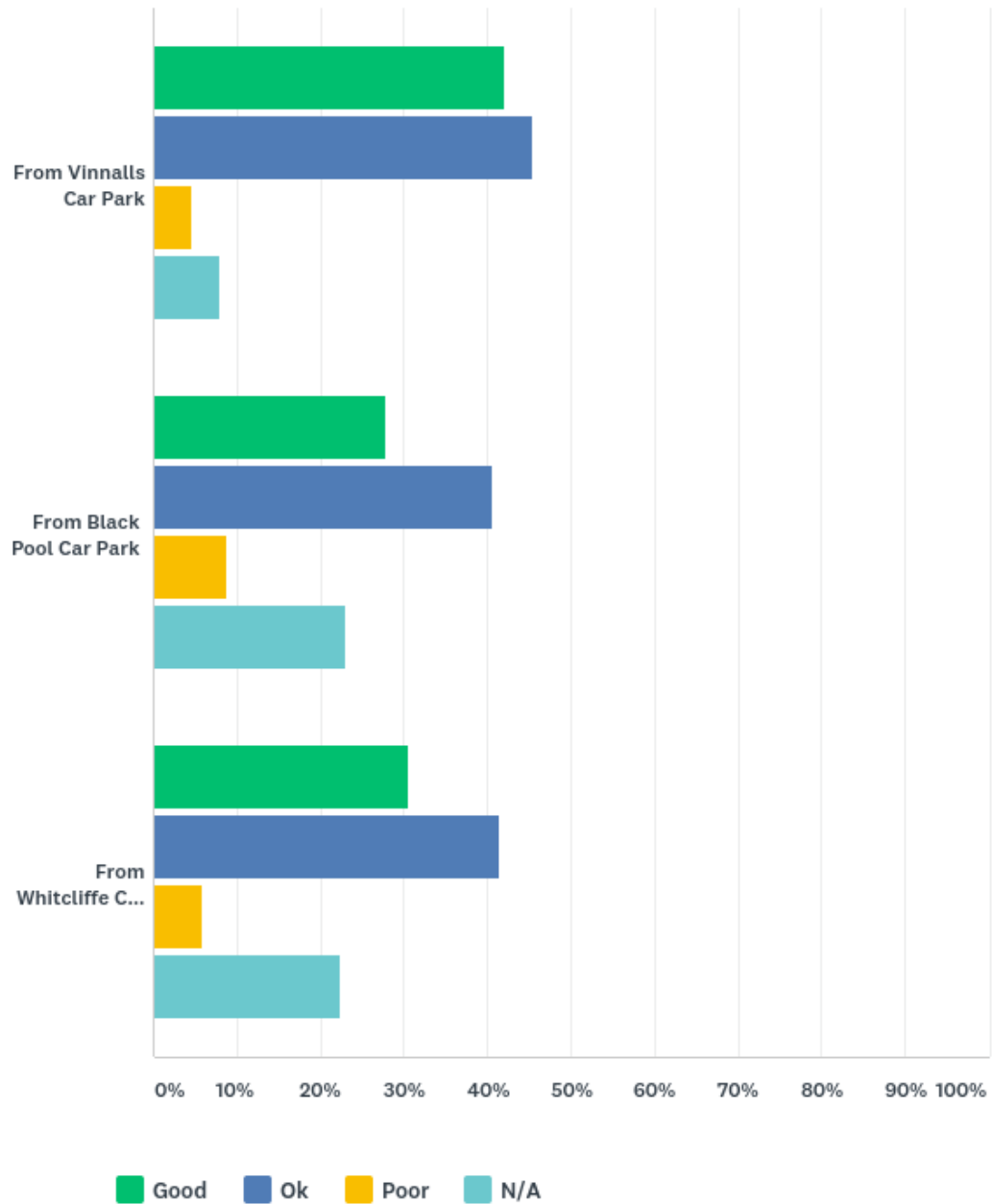


609 respondents answered this question and 131 went on to leave a comment.

The key themes that emerged in the comments, in order of how frequently they were mentioned, were:

1. Mountain biker riders: speed, no bells, using walking paths, churning paths
2. Dogs/ dog walkers: dog poo, dogs out of control
3. Horse riders: using walking paths, poo on walking paths, churning up paths
4. Positive comments about other forest users
5. Negative feelings about the rally
6. Concerns about disturbance to wildlife
7. Wild trails: bikers using or walkers using

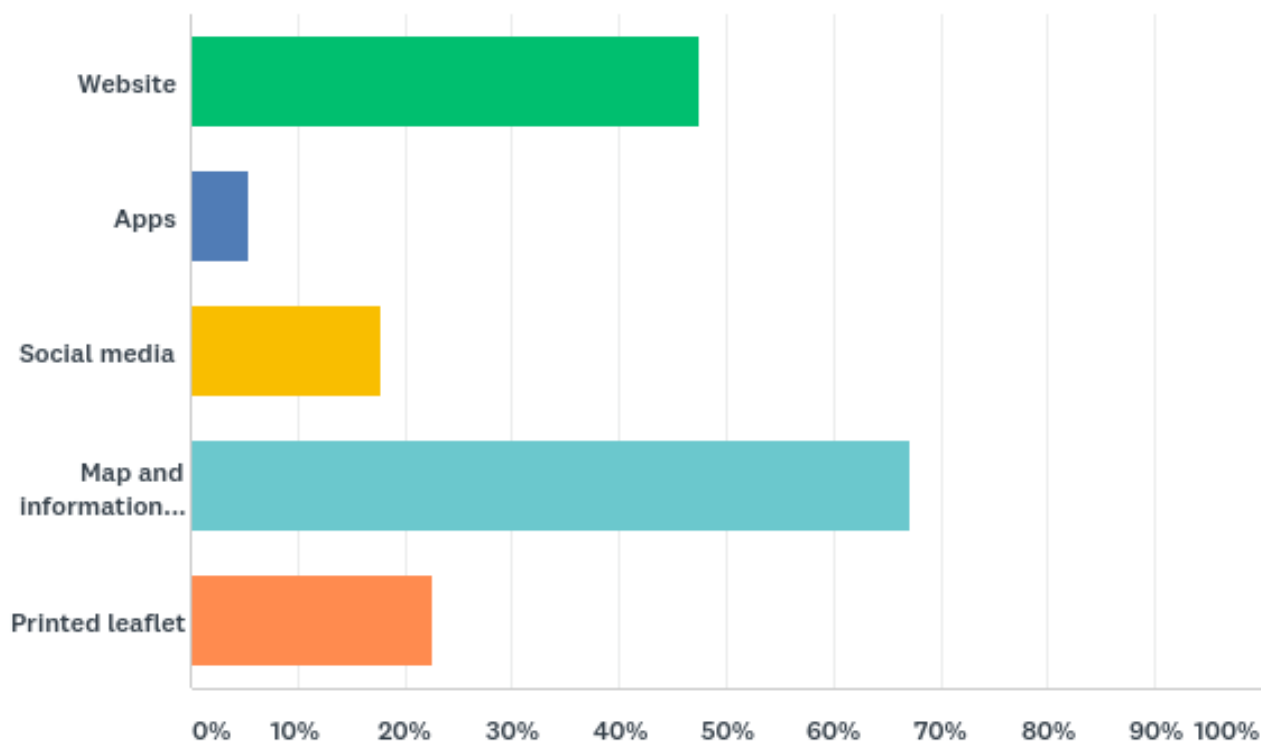
h. What do people think of the welcome signage, information and way marked trails?



597 respondents answered this question.

i. How do people prefer to get their information about visiting the woods?

Map and information boards in car parks are the most popular format for information, followed by the website.



582 respondents answered this question and 58 went on to leave comments.

The key themes that emerged in the comments, in order of how frequently they were mentioned, were:

1. Used own maps (OS explorer)
2. Found out information through word of mouth/ friends
3. Turned up and explored on their own
4. Got information through a third party e.g. tourist office
5. Would like to have an e-newsletter

j. What would improve the visitor experience in Mortimer Forest?

This question had a free text section for people to make suggestions. The key themes that emerged, in order of how frequently they were mentioned, were:

1. Improve facilities: toilets, café, visitor centre
2. Do nothing!
3. Less dog poo
4. More information on the wildlife
5. More wildlife/ support for wildlife
6. No cabins
7. No commercial activity
8. More paths/ walks/ way marked trails
9. Maps showing waymarked routes, forest roads and other rights of way
10. Designated mountain bike routes

343 respondents answered this question.

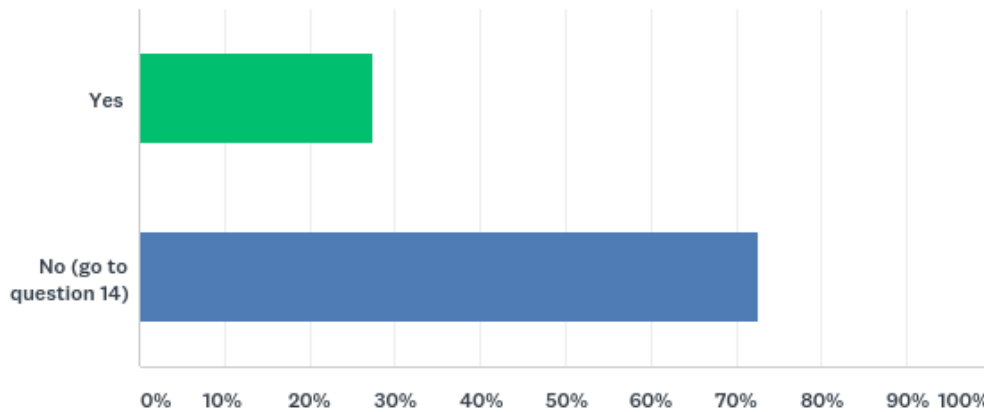
l. Existing volunteer groups

This question had a free text section for people to tell us about the groups, activities or events they attended in the forest.

1. parkrun
2. Shropshire Wildlife Trust
3. Running events
4. Butterfly Conservation
5. Cycle events
6. Rally

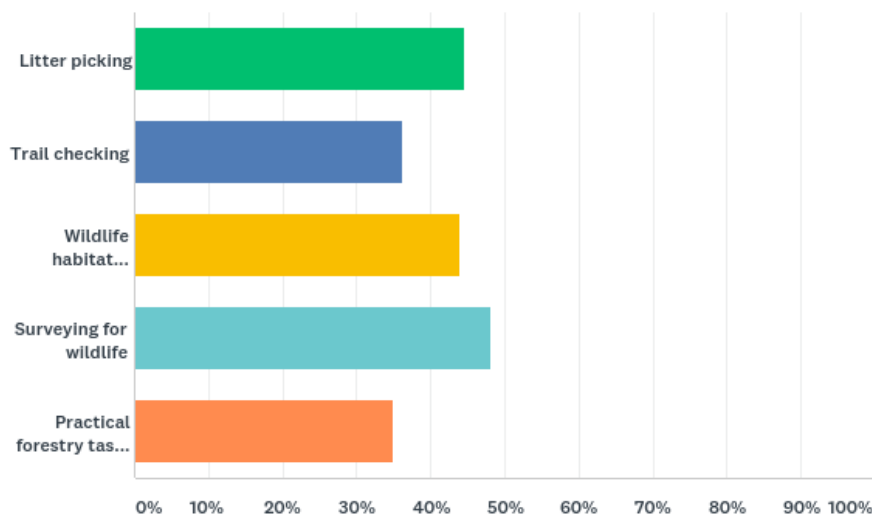
51 respondents answered this question.

k. Would people like to have volunteering opportunities in Mortimer Forest?



531 respondents answered this question.

m. What sort of volunteer opportunities are people interested in?

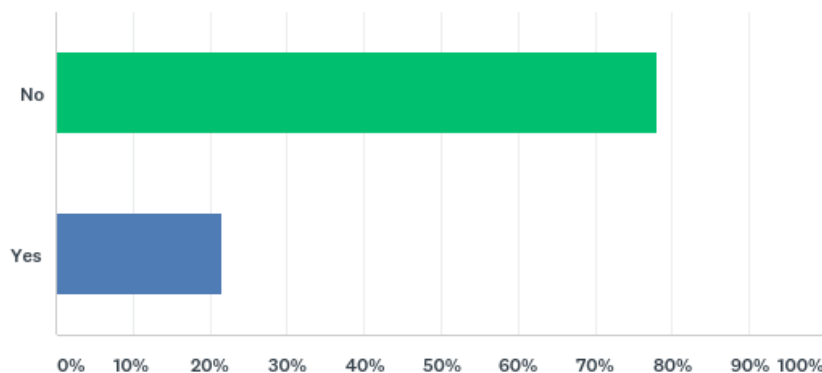


166 respondents answered this question and 30 went on to leave comments.

Themes that emerged from the comments:

1. Can't volunteer for a reason
2. Already pick other people's rubbish up

m. What groups, events and activities do people attend in Mortimer Forest?



585 respondents answered this question and 122 went on to leave comments.

The most popular events, activities and groups mentioned were:

1. parkrun
2. Shropshire Wildlife Trust
3. Running events
4. Butterfly Conservation
5. Cycle events
6. Rally

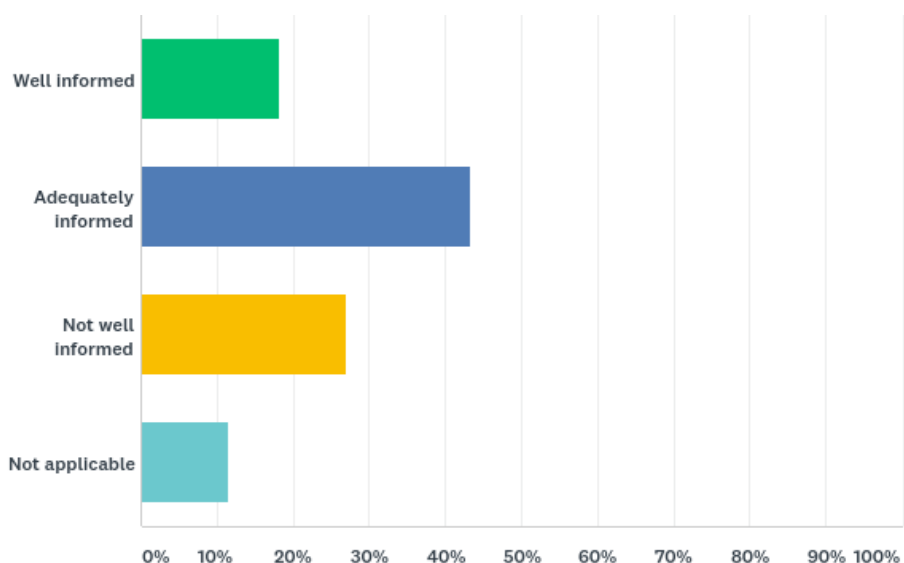
p. What else did people want to tell us about volunteering or community use of the forest?

This question had a free text section for people to provide comments. The key themes that emerged, in order of how frequently they were mentioned, were:

1. Health and wellbeing in the forest
2. Wildlife
3. No cabins
4. More education activity
5. Would like improved access
6. Would like improved communications

65 respondents answered this question.

q. How well informed do people feel about forestry operations?



r. What activities do people see as acceptable?

	Acceptable	Unacceptable
Sensory walks and accessible trails	96%	4%
Wildlife and history walks	95%	5%
Horse riding	88%	12%
Forest schools/ bushcraft	87%	13%
Art or sculpture trail	75%	25%
Kids wild play area(s)	74%	26%
Outdoor activity and education centre	68%	32%
Visitor centre	62%	38%
Gruffalo trail or similar family friendly arts activity	60%	40%
Mountain biking trails/ cycle centre (hire)	59%	41%
Café and toilets	57%	43%
Membership scheme	52%	48%
Commercial dog walking	48%	52%
Woodland weddings	43%	57%
Car parking charges to raise funds for other initiatives	37%	63%
Go Ape! or similar family friendly adventure activity	28%	72%
Forest camping/ yurts	19%	81%
Segway hire	15%	85%
Forest accommodation in cabins	13%	87%
4 x 4 off-roading	7%	93%

614 respondents answered this question.

s. What else did people want to tell us about woodland management or initiatives?

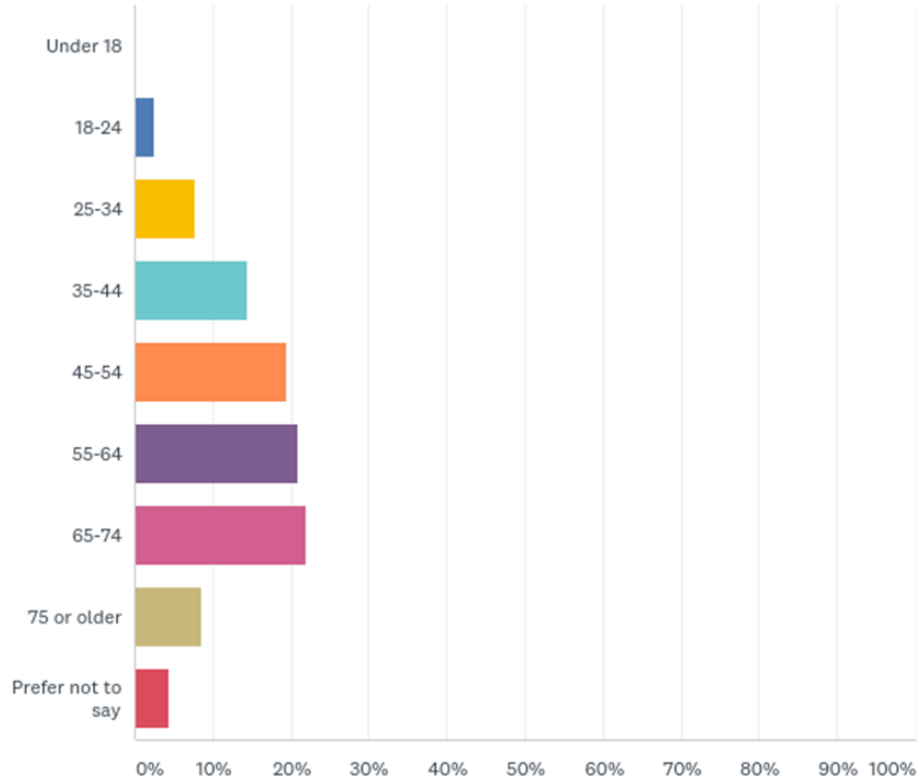
This question had a free text section for people to provide comments. The key themes that emerged, in order of how frequently they were mentioned, were:

1. Supporting wildlife in the forest
2. The forest is important for health and wellbeing
3. Commercial activity: is negative or opinions on what is acceptable
4. No cabins
5. Like the forest as it is
6. Would like visitor facilities or toilets
7. Don't want more people to come to the forest

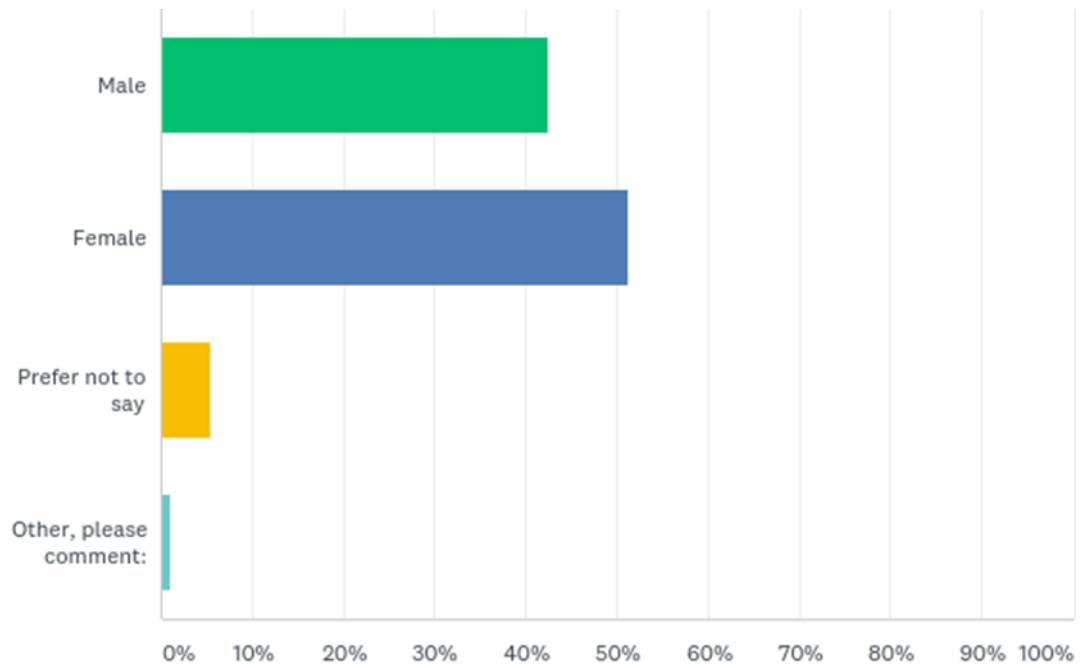
242 people answered this question.

6. Who completed the survey?

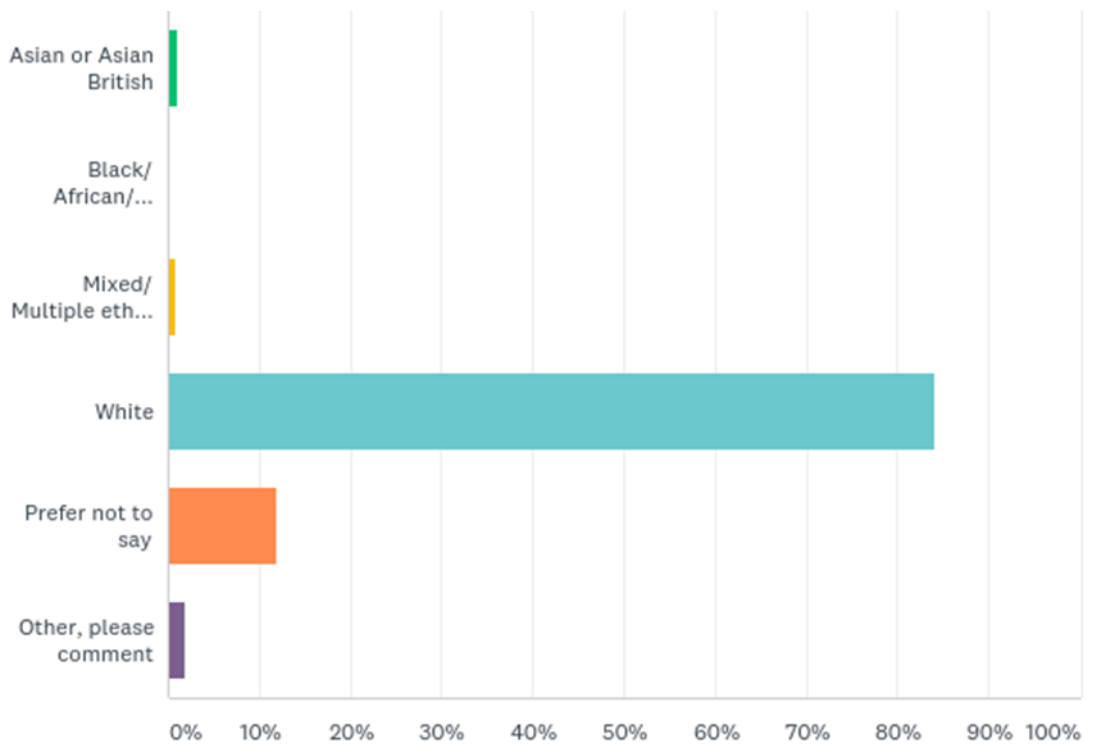
a. Age



b. Gender

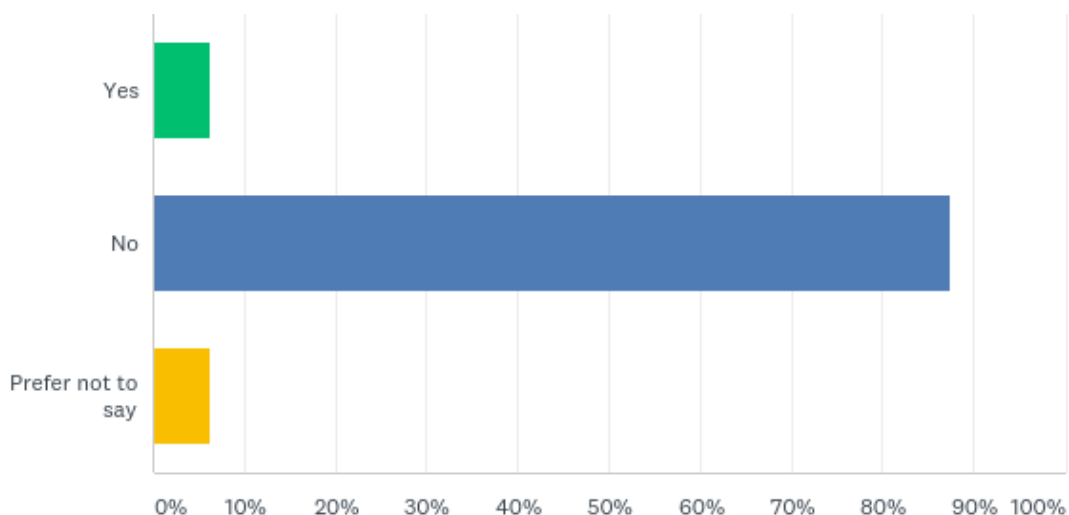


c. Ethnicity



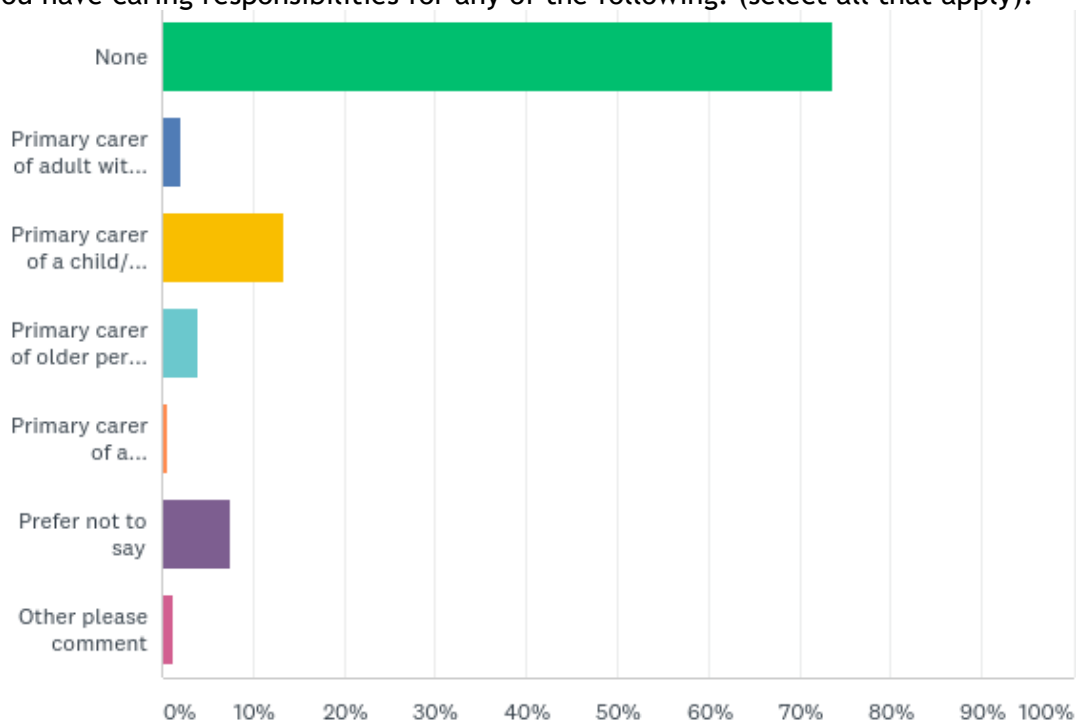
d. Disability

The Equality Act 2010 defines disability in the following way: “a person has a disability if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”. Having read the above, do you consider yourself to have a disability?

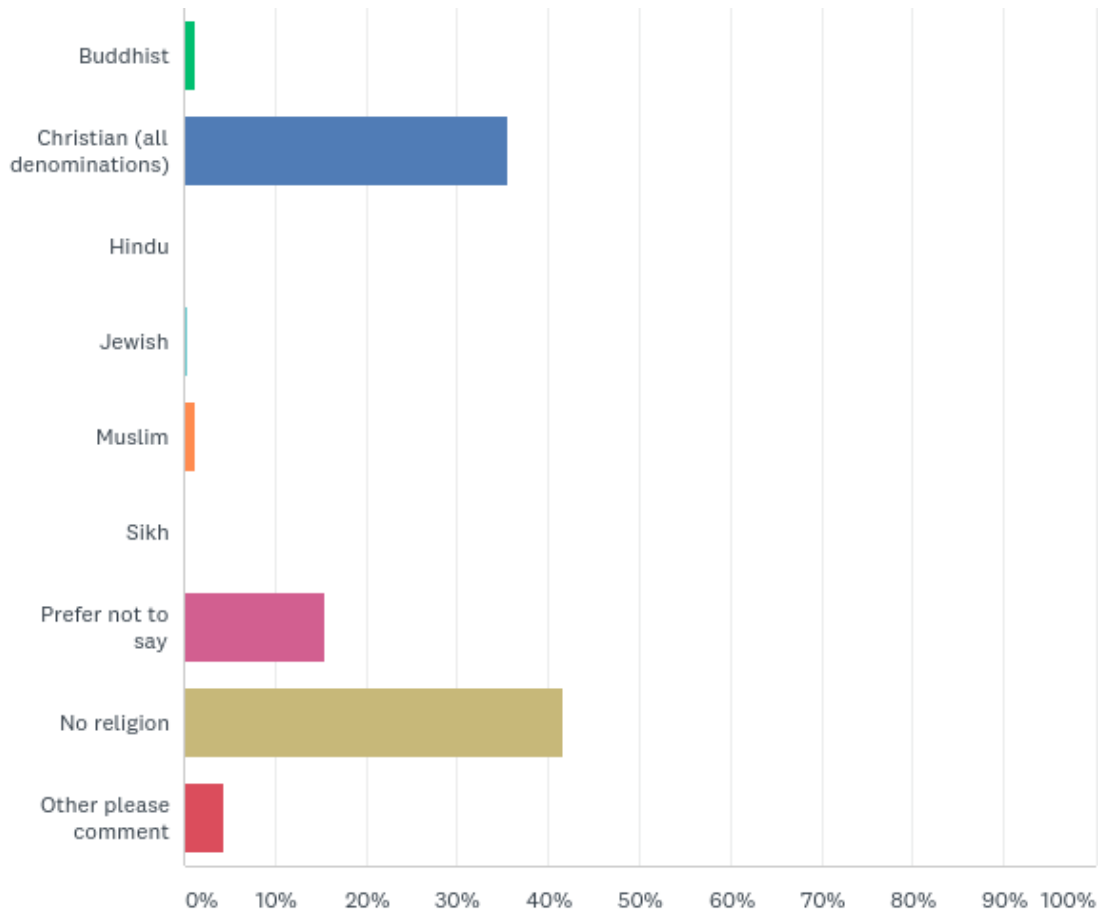


e. Care responsibilities

Do you have caring responsibilities for any of the following: (select all that apply)?



f. Religion



6. Key findings: Communities of interest

The Community Ranger met with groups to explore ideas for activities, these were tailored to the needs to each group. Activities will be developed with groups to meet their members' or service users' needs.

The groups that contributed were:

1. Alzheimer UK
2. Butterfly Conservation (continuing existing relationship)
3. David Lovelace - independent contributor
4. Herefordshire Amphibian and Reptile Team
5. Ludlow Foyer (Connexus Housing LTD)
6. Natural England (Geology SSSIs)
7. RSPB Shropshire
8. Save Mortimer Forest
9. Shropshire Wild Teams
10. Shropshire Clinical Commissioning Group
11. Shropshire Mammal Group
12. South Shropshire Youth Forum
13. Shropshire Wildlife Trust (Ludlow branch)
14. Working Together Ludlow

7. Key findings: drop in sessions

Forestry England Offices, Mortimer Forest, Ludlow, SY8 2HD on 9th of January 2020
Ludlow Library, 7-9 Parkway Ln, Ludlow SY8 2PG on 10th January 2020

Forestry England representatives:

- Sara Pearce - Community Ranger, Marches Beat
- Alan Reid - Wildlife Ranger, Marches Beat (Thursday 9th only)
- Stan Barnett - Area Supervisor, Marches Beat (Thursday 9th only)

Attendance:

- Over 70 people attended overall - roughly 30 at Ludlow and about 40 at the library
- 19 people put their names for more info on volunteering
- Conversations with Hereford College of Art, Hereford Voluntary Organisations Society and SureStart about potential activity, Community Ranger's business cards provided to representatives

Key themes for improvements that emerged from conversations:

-
- Volunteering - wildlife conservation and recreation side path sharing - horse riders and mountain bikers using the way marked trails is churning them up and making them almost impassable for walkers on Black Pool side of the forest and Bringewood
 - Maps - more detailed maps on site
 - Way marking - some people get lost a lot in Mortimer Forest and it is felt that we could make improvements to way marking
 - Dog control - a couple of people came to talk about some dog owners who assume everyone likes dogs and let their dogs run up to other people, but not everyone likes dogs. Discussions were held on whether there is some way of sharing that with dog owners?
 - Voluntary car parking was mentioned by a few people as a good compromise to raise some income
 - Dog poo was discussed and some people would like bins, especially at Vinnalls

Key issues emerging:

- Some feared that we may 'develop' the site in the future, but others felt that FE should be able to use the woodlands to raise money from visitors
- Some people don't like the idea of us promoting the forest to more visitors and don't want more visitors in the forest
- Some had an underlying fear that the cabins will come back and Forestry England are 'white washing' the issue, some people left lengthy written comments to this effect. Some people came to the meeting to talk about the cabins after receiving an email from Save Mortimer Forest group

Sustainable forestry

- During the library session, 'focus groups' type discussions took place with a couple of groups of six. Conversation topics included sustainable forestry and FE's position of trying to balance economics, people and wildlife and planning forests for the future in terms of climate change, as well as declining wildlife and expanding population
- Discussions took place around visitor facilities as a route to helping control access to the forest. Some people could understand that FE have a duty to try and accommodate visitors safely and revenue could help manage existing forests and create new ones. Others felt that people should be left to park on the roads if car parks were full and, if that situation arose, then double yellow lines should be painted on the roads to stop more people visiting
- Overall, most conversations were left on a positive note and even if people had opposed the cabins, most were keen to get to be more involved - whether through volunteering, helping to promote events or attending more events

8. Key findings: Tourism survey

Organisations that responded:

- 2 B&Bs
- 4 self-catering
- Tourist Information Centre
- Cycling holidays

How important is Mortimer Forest to your business?

- 7 - important or very important
- 1 - not important

What could we do to improve the visitor offer at Mortimer Forest?

- Keep it as it is - peaceful and unspoilt
- Maintain the trails, make trail maps more readily available and preserve the peace and tranquillity.
- Walks leaflets - if you have them, I haven't seen them easily available at TICs etc.
- We have a large proportion of disabled guests, many of them in wheelchairs. The all-ability trail in the forest is great, but many wheelchair users drive vans, and find it difficult to park because of the height limit at the entrance to the car park.
- Keep Mortimer Forest the way it is--quiet and unspoiled.
- Retain the peace and tranquillity for which it is known and valued.
- More promotional information
- Publicise Mortimer forest; the great walks, history, wildlife etc. Its a great resource, but is good to see a woodland that is not being overly commercialised ie by adding a built tourism infrastructure

Any other comments?

- Any chance of improving the roadway and car parking into Hazel Coppice? Also, a jogging circuit connecting to Ludlow, via Lower Wood Lane perhaps, would be fabulous - usable throughout the year, ideally wide enough for pushchairs. At the moment it's difficult, especially in winter, to access the forest from Ludlow without driving.
- Above all, no cabin developments
- Visitors to our holiday cottage frequently comment on the wonderful walks they have enjoyed from the cottage and in the surrounding forest.
- Keep it as wild as possible
- It is really important not to add extra traffic onto the public country lanes. Around Mortimer Forest, these are very narrow and badly kept. they do however provide great cycling/walking/riding for visitors and residents. I would not like to see this undermined (although mending the potholes would be good!).