

Cycling strategy

2023–28

This is Forestry England's first cycling strategy to help us in our work to connect everyone to the nation's forests.

It underlines Forestry England's commitment to maintain our position as England's favourite place to cycle whilst reflecting our ambition to embrace new opportunities and innovate to meet the exacting and emerging changes in society.

Our Growing the Future: 2021-26 strategy defines our long-term aspirations and it is clear that we need to retain the familiarity so valued by many of our core visitors whilst changing to reflect the needs of wider society.



Setting the scene

For over 100 years, we have provided forests for people to explore and be active. Since the 1990s we have created an extensive network of cycle trails which provide the broadest range and some of the best off-road cycling routes in England. Some are used for international competitions; all are used for social, recreational and wellbeing reasons. We have brought people and communities together, encouraging them to be active on their bikes.

We built a venue for the Commonwealth Games, Birmingham 2022, that led to one of the most-watched and successful events of the Games. This led to the first of its kind 'Pedal and Play' facility, leaving a legacy of an extensive and well received family-based activity in the forest.

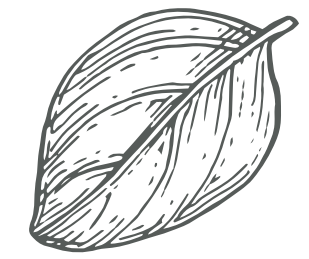
We have, and continue to, benefit from significant contributions from many passionate communities, cyclists

and volunteers, whose dedication and support improves our cycling offer and strengthens our day-to-day management. We have worked with a wide range of partners and employed a growing number of specialist recreation and cycle-based support staff to create our superb cycling offer. Cycling in the nation's forests contributes to rural businesses, employment and economies through our partner cycle centres, cafes and through the hosting of events, led rides and coaching.

Alongside shaping and influencing our cycling facilities, ongoing challenges include broadening the diversity of our visitors, capacity to resource recreational access to our local woods and managing unauthorised cycle trails.



Our current cycling offer includes:



1,300km
of purpose built
and waymarked
cycle trails

333km
of National
Cycle Network

24
Major visitor
centres with
waymarked
routes

11
cycle hire/bike
shops and
5
dedicated bike
shops

5
bike parks

£56.89
average visitor
spend on-site
and locally*



Additional **facilities and infrastructure** that support cycling activity (toilets/showers/bike washes/cycle stands/cafes).



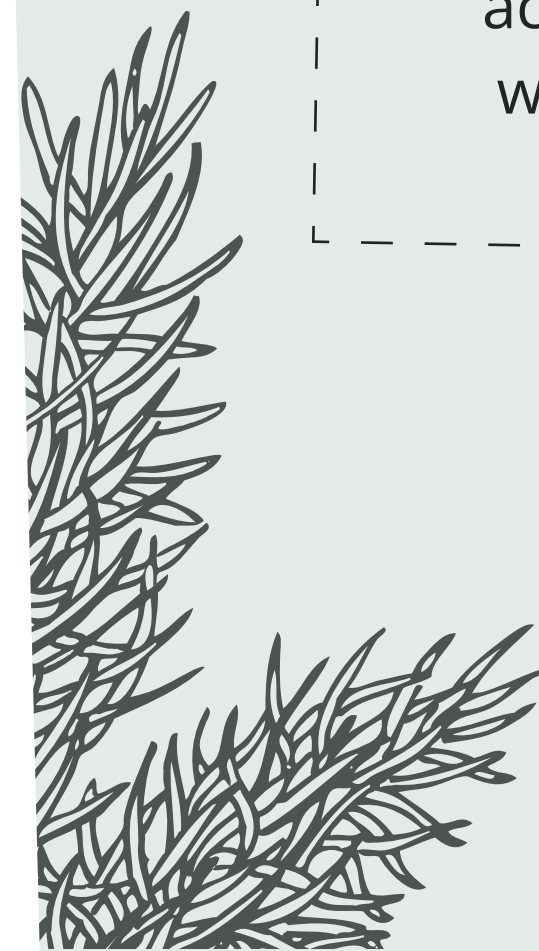
15 Active Forests sites run Breeze into the Forest programmes; **57%** of Breeze into the Forest participants are local to the forest visited; **85%** of Active Forests participants have sustained or increased their activity level over 3 months.



Nearly half the population live within 6 miles and **100%** of the population live within one hour's drive of the nation's forests (Natural Capital Account).

In July 2020, the government released '**Gear change: a bold vision for cycling and walking**' which the nation's forests can play a key role in helping to achieve.

Our **e-MTB research** shows how we continue to identify and respond to emerging trends with 30% of bike sales being e-bikes (cyclingindustry.news, 24 Aug 2022) and some centres reporting 40% of riders on e-MTBs.





Strategy purpose

This strategy sets a clear direction for the next five years so we can enhance our cycling offer whilst still maintaining, growing, shaping and caring for our nation's forests. It will help us to:

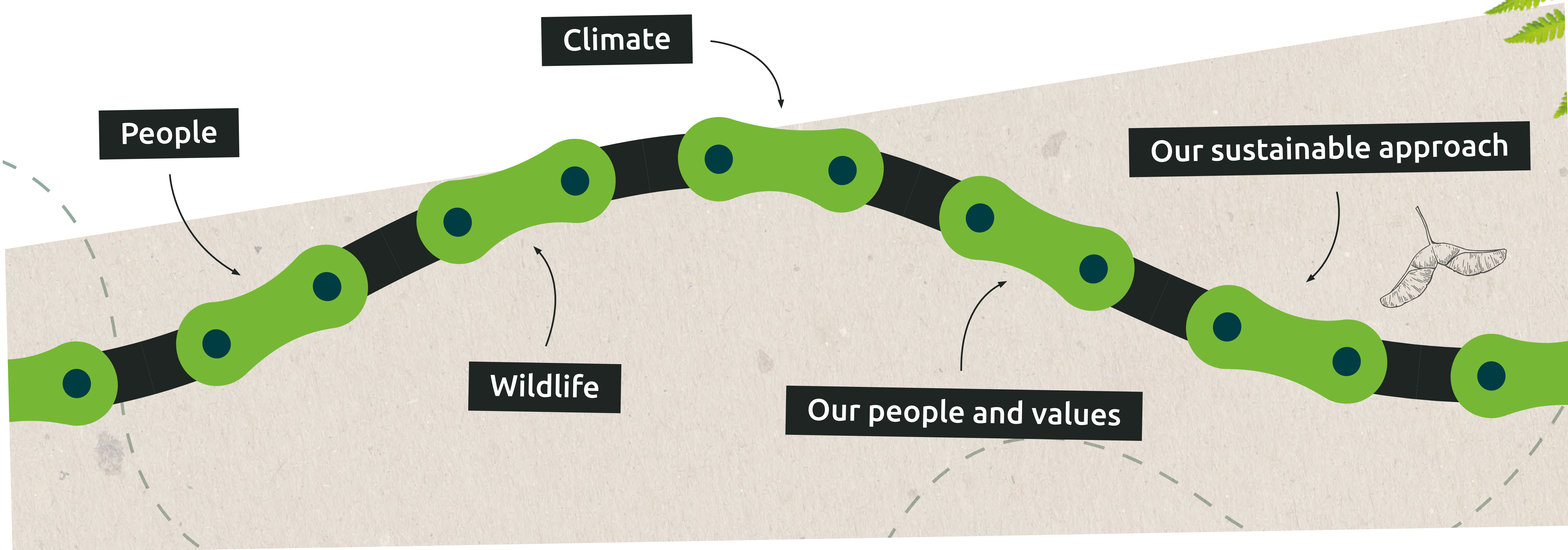
- **Support the government's agenda** by working with cross-sector partners to connect our shared strategies and goals for cycling.
- **Use our expertise** and the accessibility of the nation's forests to achieve a lasting behaviour change for recreational and active travel cycling.
- **Increase cycling activity** to help tackle health and well-being inequality.
- **Keep customers at the heart of what we do** enabling us to identify and address the barriers that prevent people from cycling.
- **Get maximum value** for Forestry England and society by focusing investments towards projects which support this strategy.
- **Use insight** to shape our cycling offer to meet the needs of current and future users.
- **Manage the growing opportunities** and challenges presented by unauthorised trails.



Our cycling mission

To be successful, we must develop and demonstrate great performance aligned with Forestry England's 'Growing the Future' ambitions – the links connecting cycling to our organisational strategy.

“
Help connect everyone with the nation's forests by providing England's favourite off-road cycling experiences.
”



For people



We will:

- Facilitate and create cycling opportunities to help address health and well-being inequalities.
- Create environments which welcome a diverse range of people from our local communities, and beyond, into our forests.
- Work with national and local partners to deliver in new places and new ways, to agreed standards.
- Maintain a broad range of cycling infrastructure which encourages cycling as an activity, a mode of transport and a sport.
- Target future investment on projects which improve entry-level access to cycling.
- Take a risk based approach to managing unauthorised trails and desire lines enabling positive engagement in the right place and time and with the right people, knowledge and skills.
- Build on our varied and open volunteering programme. delivered across the nation's forests by our passionate volunteers, whether they are part of a Forestry England delivered programme, Friends of Groups, specialist interest, partnership or third party agreements.

For climate



We will:

- Design, link and build routes that help connect communities to the nation's forests, safely, whilst reducing the need for cars.
- Encourage more cycle journeys by providing excellent facilities, communications and outreach, designed for and engaging our target audiences.

For wildlife



We will:

- Create inspiring and inclusive trail networks that are in the right place for landscapes, wildlife and our historical environment.
- Encourage people to connect with nature, forests and wildlife, whilst cycling.

Our people & values



We will:

- Be clear and robust in the development of our cycling offer to benefit our customers and communities.
- Ensure our staff and volunteers have the expertise and training they need to support and deliver our cycling offer.
- Share insight and learning whilst continuing to innovate to improve the safety of cycling in the nation's forests.

Our sustainable approach



We will:

- Work with commercial partners to develop our cycling offer and improve environmental and financial stability.
- Know how much our cycling offer costs us, how much we invest and how much revenue we generate.
- Align investments with the government's aspirations and a focus on the needs of our key audiences; making best use of our available resources and delivering value for money for us and our customers.



Methodology

This strategy has been developed using a thorough evidence base and comprehensive engagement programme. Whilst creating this strategy we have undertaken:

- Desk research including analysis of our own Active Forests Monitoring & Evaluation data as well as sector wide insight.
- A series of internal engagement workshops, involving staff from across Forestry England.
- Review sessions with partners including Sport England and British Cycling.

Our insight

As England's largest land manager, we are unique in that we offer off-road cycling trails in environments that cater for cyclists of all ages and abilities.

Cycling UK reported in their [Rides of Way](#) research the top five "What people most value about the trails" as follows:



Traffic-free routes



Beautiful countryside / scenery through which they pass



Safe, family-friendly trails



The facilities provided for trail users



A well-maintained trail surface

This is reinforced by our own [insight from Forestry Research](#), with most people stating they cycle in our forests for the 'enjoyment of nature' and for 'safety' reasons. The [2022 e-MTB research study](#) also identified the majority of riders are looking for easy and moderate trails for social outdoor adventures.

The cycling landscape is changing

There are a wide variety of reasons causing this change including motivation, demographics, social drivers, and new trends. These provide us with a range of challenges and opportunities. For example, we know that:

Variety

Our visitors have **varying motivations and needs** which challenges our thinking around how we design our offers and the visitor experience to meet these different needs.

Accessibility

82.9% of the population live in **urban areas** and this proportion is forecast to grow. We also know that those from some socio-economic and ethnic groups living in urban settings are **less likely to travel** two miles from their doorstep. This challenges our thinking around **accessibility** to the nation's forests and the need to engage with partners to support a wider cycle network, from the cyclist's doorstep.

Demographics

Many off-road cyclists are **middle age** (35-54yrs), **white British men**. However, **women** are more likely to choose to cycle on trails to avoid traffic and engage in nature. This presents us with scope to provide **more opportunities** that appeal to **minority ethnic and religious communities**, which align to the Forests For Everyone programme.

Quality experience

Modern consumer lifestyles are changing and with this comes a quest for convenience. They expect a **high-quality** customer experience, specific to their and their family and friends' needs. This challenges our thinking around how we use insight to design and deliver rich off-road cycling experiences which meet the needs of a changing society.

E-bikes

There is an upward trend for regular mountain bikers and leisure riders **using e-bikes**. This presents us with challenges and **opportunities** to provide an offer and infrastructure that makes us the destination of choice for e-bike riders. Our future trail developments and facilities can be guided by the outcomes of the **e-MTB research study (2022)**.



These trends present us with challenges and opportunities that mean we must work with cross-sector partners including Sport England to help meet their **10-year vision to transform lives through sport and physical activity (Uniting the Movement)**.

We must be welcoming to a diverse range of people from our local communities and beyond. We will do this by offering a mixture of people-oriented outreach, such as Breeze into the Forest and Forests for Everyone; by connecting with diverse communities, as well as infrastructure reviews and changes.

We will continue to use and develop our insight to help decide what programmes and activities to create, where best to deliver them and what infrastructure to invest in. This evidence-based decision making will allow us to evolve our offer ensuring we meet the government's vision and our own ambitions for cycling and the needs of society.

Target audiences and opportunities

We will continue to develop and tailor our offer, so cyclists and mountain bikers at all levels will engage and benefit. This includes being able to offer cycling activities for those from under-represented groups, novice cyclists and lapsed cyclists who are just starting or restarting their forest cycling journey.

There are new opportunities to promote the health and wellbeing benefits of cycling, and the nation's forests provide facilities and activities that cater for beginners through to those seeking to progress to more challenging environments. More people are visiting the outdoors to stay healthy and this provides Forestry England with an opportunity to promote the benefits and to increase levels of cycling in the nation's forests.



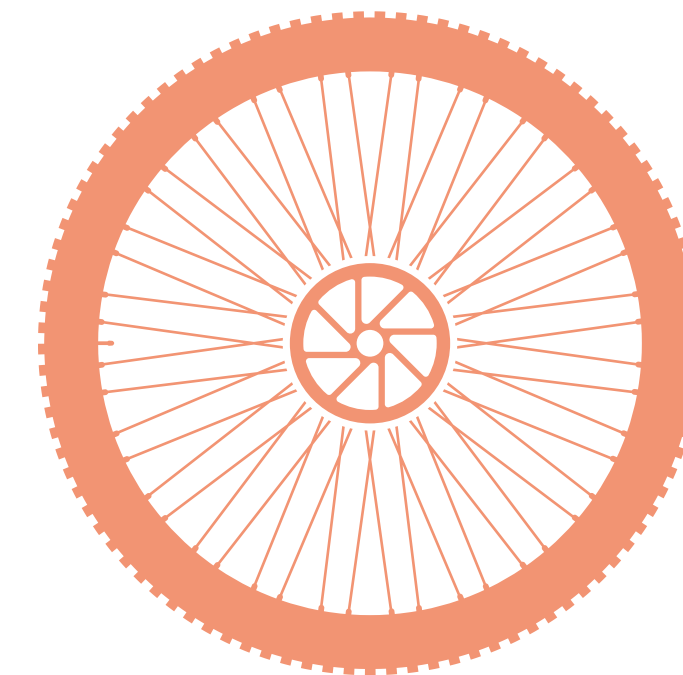
We want people that already love cycling and mountain biking to love the nation's forests just as much. We will positively engage with them so they can learn and appreciate how the nation's forests and our work benefits society in so many ways. We will support our brand and membership.

To help reach our audiences and maximise opportunities we have identified the following four themes:



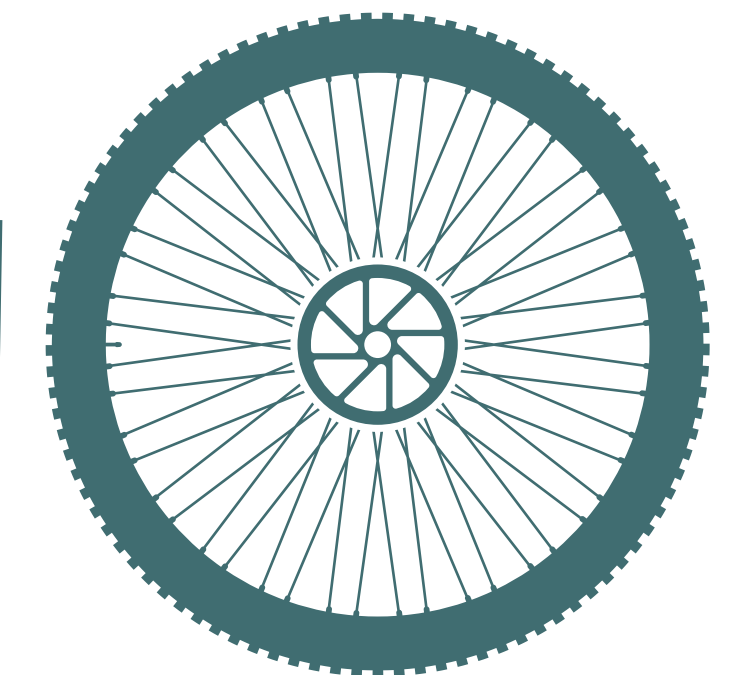
Theme 1: Priority audiences

Our core visitors



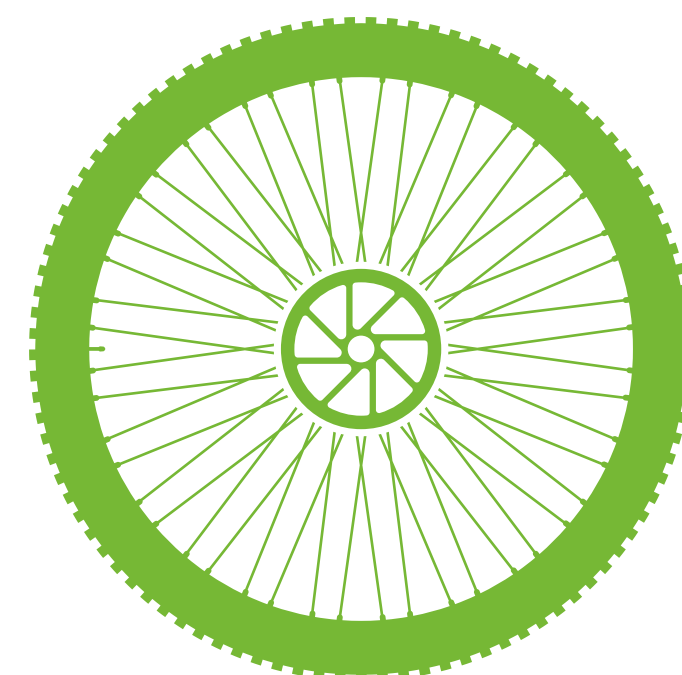
Theme 2: Communities

Pulling together from different directions



Theme 3: Partnerships

Strengthening our cycling offer

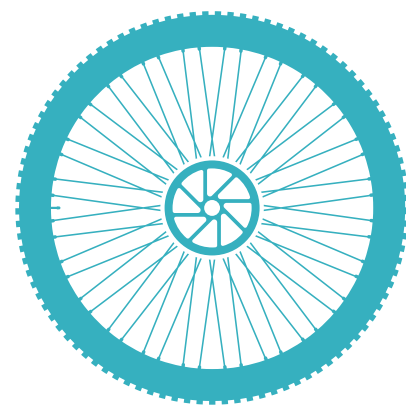


Theme 4: Sustainability and currency

The principles surrounding our work

What we will do and measuring success to 2028

Theme 1: Priority audiences



These include our three primary marketing segments: Activity Hunters, Den Builders and Hipster Followers, but also acknowledging our additional cycling audiences within Easy Pacers and Fair-Weather Families.

Goal:

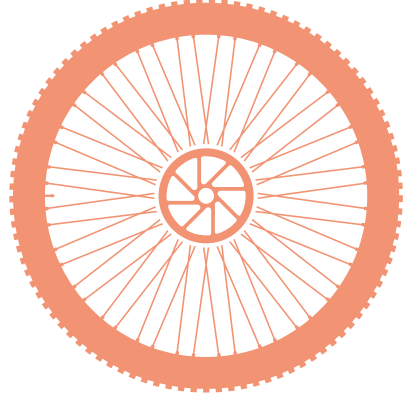
To continue to be, and to strengthen our position as the leading provider of off-road cycling experiences.

“Every day in the nation’s forests we see people get back on the bike or ride for the first time. They wobble a little and they return with a smile.”

Strategy	What you will see in five years:
Continue to expand and refine our core cycling offer with engaging trails offering more choice and tailoring to specific circumstances.	Cycling infrastructure and activities that embed, enhance and enrich visitors’ experiences including more Pedal and Play facilities, family and group trail option opt-ins and quality, accessible facilities, cycle hire, information, events and coaching across our forests. Forest plans at major sites ensuring activity progression.
Provide a nationwide membership offer that is relevant and valued, aiding transition of visitors up our supporter pyramid.	Our cycling visitors say we have a great offer and they have a strong brand awareness. More of our cycling visitors becoming members.
Promote our superb cycling offer to increase awareness of locations and facilities.	Cycling promoted to visitors across Forestry England destinations supported by on-site information and integrated online user journeys, including at off-peak times to appropriate segments.
Refine and clarify our trail grades, working with districts and national partners for consistency so they are understandable across all sites and contexts.	An inclusive, clear and consistent grading system, including user-friendly language and signs. Trail design and construction continues to reflect the best of the local environment, enabling access by the widest range of individuals, families and groups.

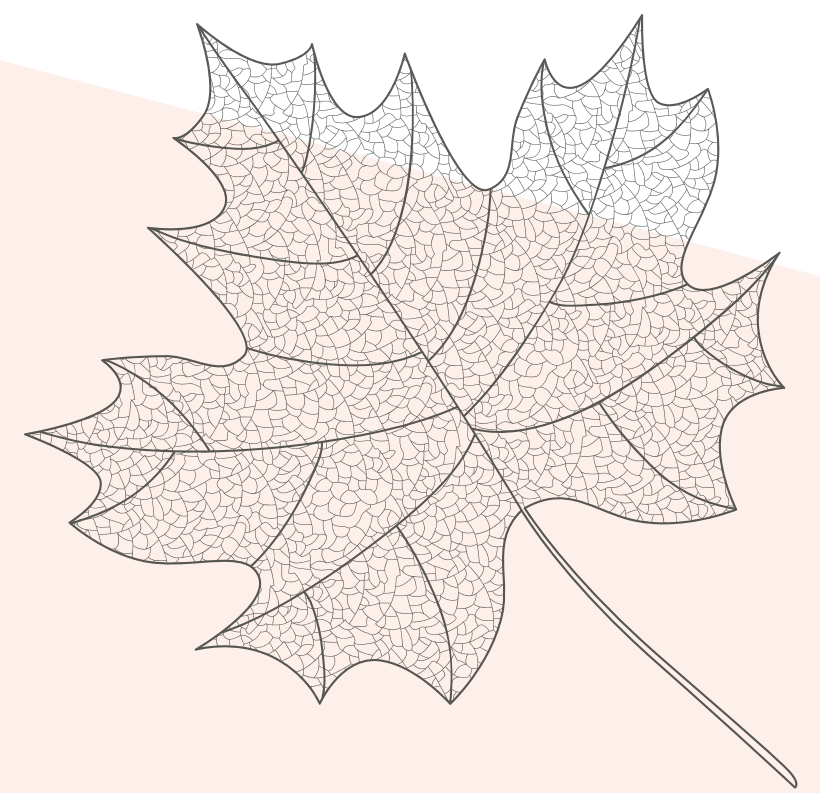


Theme 2: Communities



Communities are highly valued target groups that sit outside the priority audiences and will likely include a variety of the target marketing segments. Better supporting communities, so they engage positively with the forest environment and receive the associated benefits such as social engagement and improved health and wellbeing.

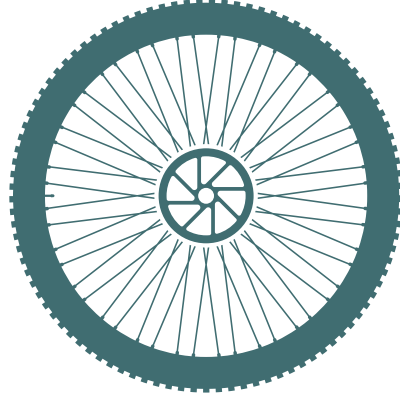
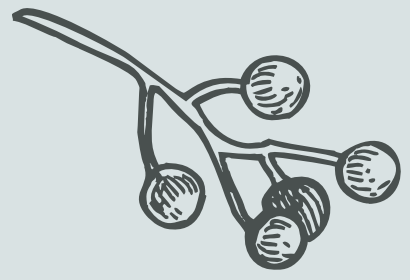
Goal:
To broaden our offer to meet the needs of a diverse audience; for our measurable visitor demographics to better reflect the communities that the nation's forests serve.



Strategy	What you will see in five years:
Create gender, cultural and disability-friendly infrastructure and environments that invite and encourage an inclusive and broad range of visitors.	Our infrastructure and activities are thoughtfully designed and delivered in ways that engage a more diverse audience. Information helps disabled visitors to self-evaluate suitability and represents diversity authentically. We will identify, recognise and celebrate the people and locations that champion access and diversity.
Use insight and evidence to implement approaches which broaden diversity and better meet the needs of new and existing visitors.	We will know which equality benchmarks are relevant to our cycle offer and be implementing measurable actions addressing barriers as determined by evidence-based research.
Improve understanding of and access to the nation's forests, among lower socio-economic groups and communities that are less able to travel to visitor centres.	Communications about routes to, from and within forests which link to local cycling and walking infrastructure plans, helping to enhance people's health and wellbeing and enabling communities to value, and use, their local woods.
Facilitate opportunities for partner mountain bike communities to create and manage additional authorised riding facilities.	Local groups partnering with us, creating and managing mountain bike trails in the right place and time, with the right people, skills and knowledge and where we have sufficient resources. We are recording additional third-party managed trails, adding to our total trail infrastructure. We take a risk-based approach to managing unauthorised trails, with pathways in place to build working relationships with communities.



Theme 3: Partnerships



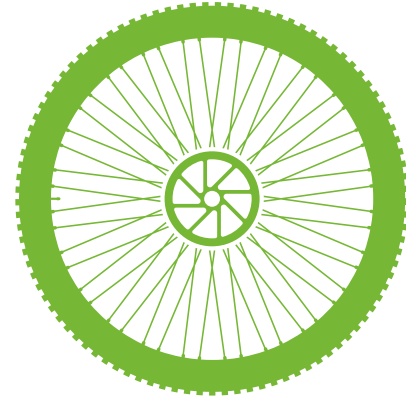
As England’s largest land manager, we are uniquely placed to provide extensive and varied cycling environments and in so doing support a multitude of partner organisations which may range from a group of committed volunteers to national influencers including Sport England. Helping our partners develop and implement their goals also helps us fulfil our strategic objectives of social purpose, benefits to society, increasing natural capital and more sustainable finances.

Goal:
To create new, and strengthen existing, partnerships with national and local organisations to enhance understanding, value, health and wellbeing and to benefit local economies.



Strategy	What you will see in five years:
Initiate and build strong partnerships with larger national organisations, funders and commercial partners.	Strengthened and new partnerships creating effective, sustainable and mutually beneficial outcomes that are particularly impactful in supporting cycling activities and our volunteer, diversity and inclusion goals. Collaboration with corporate sponsors, partners and external funders generating new ways of achieving our goals and aspirations.
Initiate and build strong partnerships with local and smaller national organisations.	A broad range of community engagement partnerships creating activities and events that positively impact at a local level and support repeat forest visits, supporting our superb cycle offer and broadening the socio-demographic diversity of our visitors.
Explore hosting major third-party cycling events, where they meet our strategic objectives.	Impactful cycling, gravel and mountain biking events that are raising the profile of Forestry England and our cycling centres, providing valuable legacies to the sites and local economy and meeting our economic, natural and social benefit and sustainability goals.
Ensure our tenants deliver innovative and equitable products and services that meet the needs of our growing customer group.	Tenants providing high-quality experiences reflecting our aspirations for a superb cycling offer, diverse audiences and considering emerging trends. Mutually beneficial cross-promotion and collaboration between non-competing providers in broadening our visitor offer and increased brand awareness and membership.

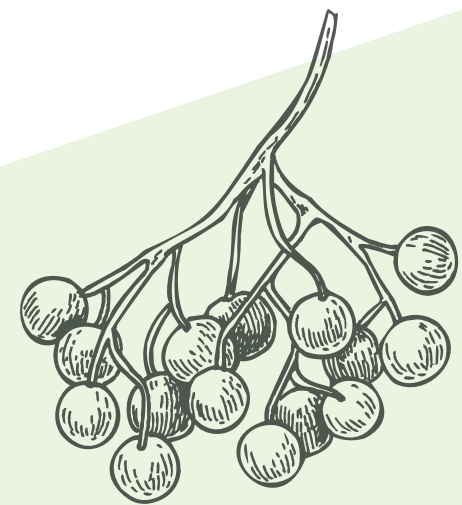
Theme 4: Sustainability and currency



Our offer must remain safe and consistent whilst being relevant, engaging, and viable. With increasing challenges to many visitors' time and living costs, we must continue to evolve using organisational self-awareness, evidence-based insight and prudent resourcing to effectively maintain our existing infrastructure whilst also providing inspiration and influence across our cycling offer.

Goal:

To maintain safe, high-quality provision; to identify and fill gaps in our knowledge; to make innovative and bold evidence-based decisions that ensure our cycling offer helps meet the needs of new and existing visitors, our staff, volunteers, local communities and society overall.



Strategy	What you will see in five years:
Demonstrate how cycling in the nation's forests supports our economic, social and natural capital ambitions.	Clear cost-benefit analysis of the financial and social benefits of our cycling offer. Robust monitoring and evaluation of our cycling offer. Improved safety from high-quality policies and infrastructure. Shared practice underpinned by better incident recording and monitoring.
Extend our organisational, staff and volunteer knowledge, understanding and skills.	We have identified the skills, knowledge, training and experience requirements of our staff and volunteers to implement our cycling offer, and we are implementing targeted and inspirational learning. Consistent, high-quality customer service through each stage of the visitor journey.
Maintain our emphasis and commitment to the provision of safe, consistent and high-quality infrastructure and activities.	We have robust standards for trail maintenance, construction and activity delivery, being applied consistently. Operating processes and resources seek to ensure activities and infrastructure meet these standards. Staff, contractor and volunteer resources, training and monitoring are identified with policies and plans in place to ensure effective delivery.
Identify trends and propose how we best utilise them.	We are working with the sector to identify and gauge long-lasting cycling trends, such as e-MTB and gravel cycling, and changing visitor needs. We are adapting our cycling offer to reflect these trends in line with our Growing the Future strategy and resource capacity.
Identify, support and use research and insight to offer high-quality cycling experiences in the nation's forests, have popular and profitable partnerships and increase our brand and membership.	We have identified gaps in our knowledge covering use, behaviours, health, wellbeing and cycling practices, connecting with researchers and partners to help us develop and implement tangible actions that address barriers and enhance our superb cycling offer.



Conclusion

This, our first cycling strategy, sets out our ambitious targets to identify and meet emerging demands whilst continuing to fulfil many of the existing cycling, health and wellbeing, and social needs of our society. Reflecting our wider organisational approach within Growing the Future, our cycling strategy will stretch us and our partners to meet our ambitions for people, wildlife, climate, values and sustainability. To support this strategy we have a working delivery plan that identifies our goals and will continually evolve with our interventions and actions over the next five years.

