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# Woodlands for Wales indicators 2026

## Chapter 3: woodlands for people

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

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# Woodlands for Wales indicators 2026

## Chapter 3: woodlands for people

Statistical release number 47/2026.

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Production of these indicators has been led by Forest Research, on behalf of Welsh Government. Views expressed in this report are those of the researcher and not necessarily those of the Welsh Government.

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## **Introduction**

Chapter 3 of the Woodlands for Wales strategy sets out the Welsh Government's desire to ensure that the population of Wales has equitable access to good quality woodland and the benefits derived from this. There are 4 outcomes set out in this chapter. The indicators and additional contextual data used to track progress towards these strategic outcomes are set out below.

### **Outcome 8: more communities are involved with, and benefit from their local woodlands and trees**

Indicator 8a: visits to woodland

Indicator 8b: perceived benefits and disadvantages of woodland

Additional data and context: public opinion of forestry survey: visits to woodland

### **Outcome 9: more people benefit from education and learning opportunities provided in, and by, woodlands and trees**

Indicator 9: attendance at woodland-based learning activities

Additional data and context: National Forest site initiatives and activities

### **Outcome 10: more people live healthier lives as a result of using, enjoying, and living in proximity to, woodlands and trees**

Indicator 10a: health benefits from woodlands

Indicator 10b: access to woodlands

### **Outcome 11: more people benefit from woodland-related enterprises and associated employment**

Not directly tracked here, see chapter 4 for employment and skills data.

## Trends

Trends have been calculated for the indicators using the criteria set out in table 1.

**Table 1: description of trend analysis for the Woodlands for Wales indicators**

Category	Symbol	Threshold
Improving	↑	>3% positive change since the last WfW indicators
Stable ( <i>i.e.</i> , little or no overall change)	=	≤3% change since the last WfW indicators
Deteriorating	↓	>3% negative change since the last WfW indicators
Not assessed due to insufficient comparable data	<b>N/A</b>	Not applicable

Where appropriate data are available, the most recent data point is compared with the value from the last WfW indicators report (or with data from that time period, if that indicator was not previously reported), smoothed using a 3-year average.

For example, a data point from 2025 would be compared to the 3-year average around 2018 (2017, 2018 and 2019). The purpose of this is to reduce the likely impact of individual annual anomalies.

The chapter 3 indicators and the associated trends since the last indicators report are shown in table 2.

**Table 2: trends for the Woodlands for Wales indicators**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Trend since the last WfW indicators report</b>
8a: Recreational visits to woodlands	=
8b: Perceived benefit identified	↓
8b: Perceived disadvantage identified	↓
9: Attendance at woodland-based learning activities	↑
10a: Value of health benefits (£ million) of woodland	↑
10b: Access to woodland without a car	↓

## Outcome 8: more communities are involved with, and benefit from their local woodlands and trees

This outcome is assessed by 2 indicators: recreational visits to woodlands and perceived benefits and disadvantages of woodlands.

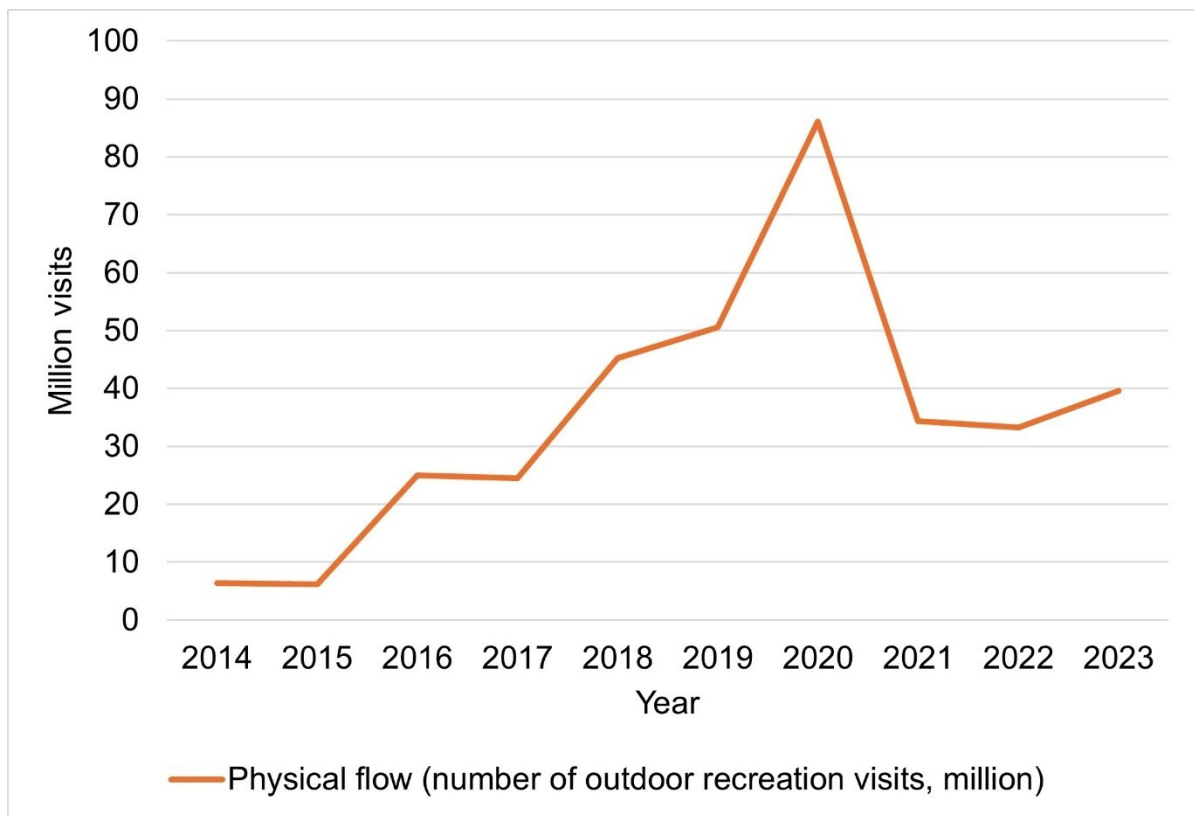
### Indicator 8a: recreational visits to woodlands

Indicator	Trend since the last WfW indicators report
8a: Recreational visits to woodlands	=

The woodland natural capital accounts, produced by ONS, provide estimates of the number of people visiting woodlands for recreation. These data are utilised here as a proxy for community and personal use of woodlands. It should be noted that the survey data which inform this estimation have changed over time. In Wales, [data from the Welsh Outdoor Recreation Survey](#) (WORS) for 2014 to 2015 were superseded by recreation-based questions in the [National Survey for Wales](#) (NSW) for 2016 to 2017, and 2018 to 2019. The [People and Nature Survey Wales](#) (PaNSW) provided comparable data for 2021 to 2023. Figure 1 shows the estimated number of recreation visits to woodlands in Wales between 2014 and 2023. Please refer to the [ONS methodology](#) for further details. The estimated number of recreational visits to woodlands in Wales peaked in 2020, most likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, although still higher than the corresponding figure in 2019, the number of recreational visits has fallen in subsequent years.

As reported in the Woodland Natural Capital accounts, since the last edition of the WfW indicators, there has been little change in the estimated number of outdoor recreational visits, despite a decrease in estimated visits since the peak in 2020.

**Figure 1: number of outdoor recreation visits to woodland, Wales, 2014-2023**



Description of figure 1: A line chart showing the trend in physical flow (number of recreational visits) to woodlands. The number of visits increased between 2014 and 2020, falling between 2020 and 2022.

Source: [Woodland natural capital accounts, UK: 2026 - Office for National Statistics](#)

## Indicator 8b: perceived benefits and disadvantages of woodlands

Indicator	Trend since the last WfW indicators report
8b: Perceived benefit identified	↓
8b: Perceived disadvantage identified	↓

The Public Opinion of Forestry survey is a key data source to explore how woodlands are impacting people. Forest Research (FR), and previously the Forestry Commission (FC), have conducted biennial surveys into opinions on forestry in the UK since 1995. In the initial surveys, a representative sample of 2,000 adults across Great Britain was surveyed. In 2001, with increased interest in country-level results, additional questions were asked of a representative sample of 1,000 adults in each of Scotland and Wales. Surveys until 2019 were conducted face-to-face, with surveys in Wales moving to an online format from 2021. Consequently, results for the 2021, 2023 and 2025 may not be fully consistent with previous surveys. Further details about data sources and methodology can be found in [annex 1 of the Welsh Public Opinion of Forestry report](#).

As part of the Public Opinion of Forestry survey, participants are asked to identify perceived benefits and disadvantages of woodlands for the local community. Table 3 and Table 4 show the proportion of respondents who identified with each of the benefits and disadvantages listed in the survey questionnaire. The most commonly identified benefit was that woodlands provide a place for wildlife, while the most commonly reported disadvantage was that woodlands are used for fly tipping.

Source: 2 shows the change in the percentage of respondents identifying at least one benefit or disadvantage between 2017 and 2025. Since the last WfW indicators report, the number of respondents identifying at least one benefit has declined slightly while the number of respondents identifying at least one disadvantage has increased slightly. These are contrary to desired trends and further investigation is needed to understand why this shift may be observed. It should be noted that most respondents (87%) identified at least one benefit of woodlands, whereas a lower

percentage of respondents (51%) identified at least one disadvantage in the most recent survey cycle. This suggests that the overall perception of woodlands in communities is positive.

**Table 3: percentage of respondents who identified benefits of woodlands for the local community, Wales, 2017 to 2025**

<b>Benefit</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2025</b>
They provide places for wildlife to live	77	83	85	65	56
They provide places for recreation (e.g., walking, cycling, horse riding, etc.)	68	67	77	57	52
They provide places for relaxation and stress relief	57	63	78	57	50
They improve the landscape	63	71	78	58	46
They help to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere helping to reduce the impact of climate change	54	59	74	48	45
They are accessible to all in the community	42	48	64	49	40
They are an important resource for us all	44	47	58	42	36
They help reduce air and noise pollution	43	52	66	43	35
They help soak up water in rainy weather	39	48	65	39	35
They can be used by local schools and other educational groups	47	56	62	43	34
They help attract visitors to the area	49	52	48	35	30
They give people in the community the opportunity to work together	24	32	27	16	18
They provide timber and other wood products	25	26	24	17	15
They support the local economy	25	29	24	17	14
They provide firewood	20	22	18	14	10
Other	0	[low]	1	[low]	[low]
At least one benefit identified	96	97	92	90	87

Source: [Public Opinion of Forestry, Forest Research, 2025](#).

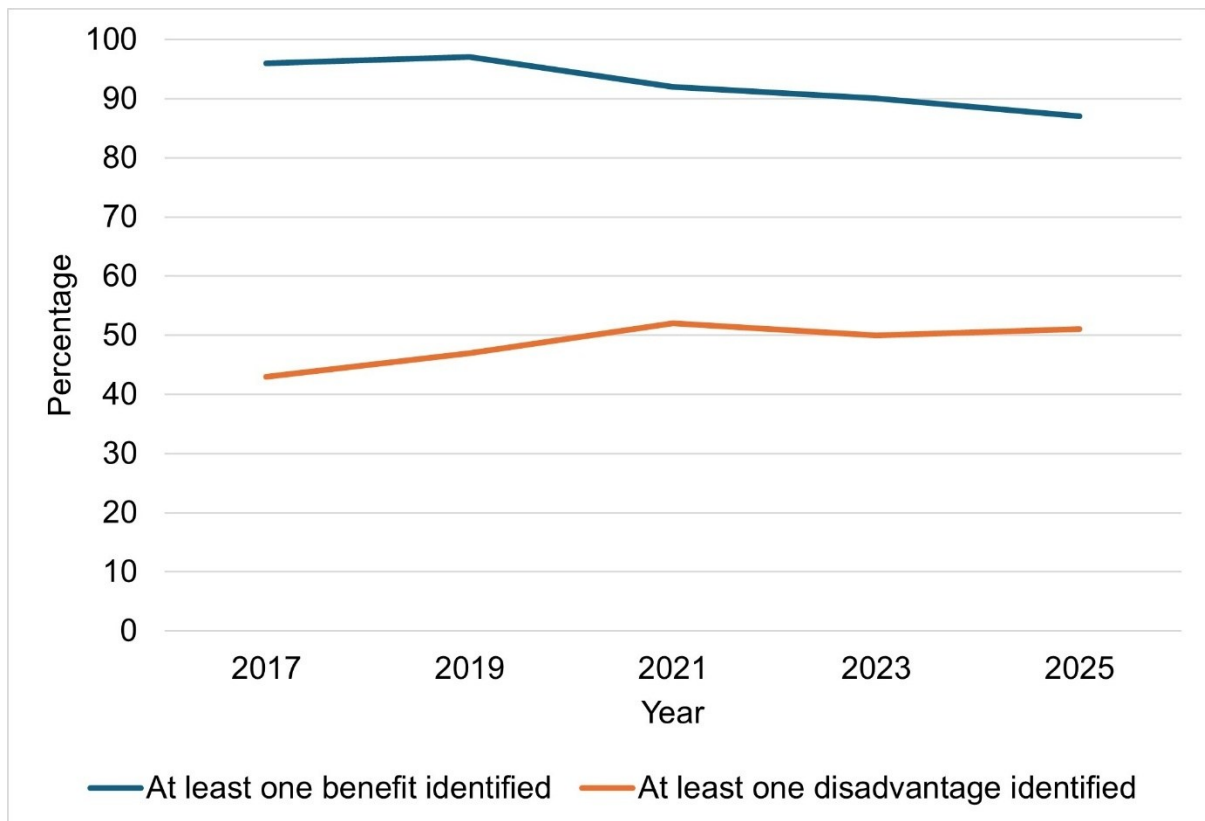
**Table 4: percentage of respondents who identified disadvantages of woodlands for the local community, Wales, 2017 to 2025**

<b>Disadvantage</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2025</b>
The woodlands near us are used for fly tipping	22	26	23	16	16
We can't control what happens in our local woodlands	9	10	19	15	11
The woodlands near us can't be easily accessed (e.g., limited footpaths, private land, etc.)	3	2	13	9	10
Woodlands near us provide a place for criminal activity to occur	15	15	11	10	8
The woodlands near us aren't good for wildlife (e.g., not enough wildlife, not enough variety of wildlife, etc.)	1	1	7	5	7
The woodlands don't provide enough local jobs	6	6	10	7	7
The woodlands near us get in the way of developments around the community (e.g., the building of new homes, etc.)	1	2	2	3	7
It's difficult to get firewood and timber from our local woodlands	2	3	5	6	6
Timber lorries make me feel unsafe walking/driving on the roads	7	6	2	5	6
Woodland operations and visitors create noise pollution	2	2	3	3	5
The woodlands near us aren't nice places to visit	2	2	3	4	5
Timber lorries/visitors to woodlands make the roads busy	7	5	2	4	5

Disadvantage	2017	2019	2021	2023	2025
The woodlands make our landscape worse	1	1	1	2	5
Managing woodlands pollutes the air/water/soil	1	1	2	3	4
Woodland operations create carbon dioxide contributing to making climate change worse	2	2	3	2	4
Other	0	2	3	2	1
At least one disadvantage identified	43	47	52	50	51

Source: [Public Opinion of Forestry, Forest Research, 2025](#).

**Figure 2: percentage of people identifying at least one benefit or disadvantage of woodland for the local community, Wales, 2017 to 2025**



Description of figure 2: a line chart with 2 trend lines. At least one benefit being identified has declined. At least one disadvantage has increased. The percentage identifying a benefit remains higher than the percentage identifying a disadvantage.

Source: [Public Opinion of Forestry, Forest Research, 2025.](#)

## Additional data and context

### Public Opinion of Forestry survey: visits to woodland

The Public Opinion of Forestry survey is a key data source to explore how woodlands are impacting people. Forest Research (FR), and previously the Forestry Commission (FC), have conducted biennial surveys into opinions on forestry in the UK since 1995. In the initial surveys, a representative sample of 2,000 adults across Great Britain were surveyed. In 2001, with increased interest in country-level results, additional questions were asked of a representative sample of 1,000 adults in each of Scotland and Wales. Surveys until 2019 were conducted face-to-face, with surveys in Wales moving to an online format from 2021. Consequently, results for the 2021, 2023 and 2025 may not be fully consistent with previous surveys. Further details about data sources and methodology can be found in [annex 1 of the Welsh Public Opinion of Forestry report](#). Given the changes in methodology employed since 2017, this data is included to triangulate and add context to the ONS recreational visits to woodland data reported under the 'Visits to Woodland indicator' above.

Table 5 shows the number of respondents to the Public Opinion of Forestry survey in Wales who reported visiting woodland in the last 12 months. The percentage of respondents reporting this has remained consistent through time.

**Table 5: percentage of respondents who visited woodland in the last 12 months, Wales, 2017 to 2025**

Year	Percentage of respondents who reported visiting woodland in the last 12 months (%)
2017	72
2019	77
2021	63
2023	72
2025	68

Source: [Public Opinion of Forestry, Forest Research, 2025](#).

## **Outcome 9: more people benefit from education and learning opportunities provided in, and by, woodlands and trees**

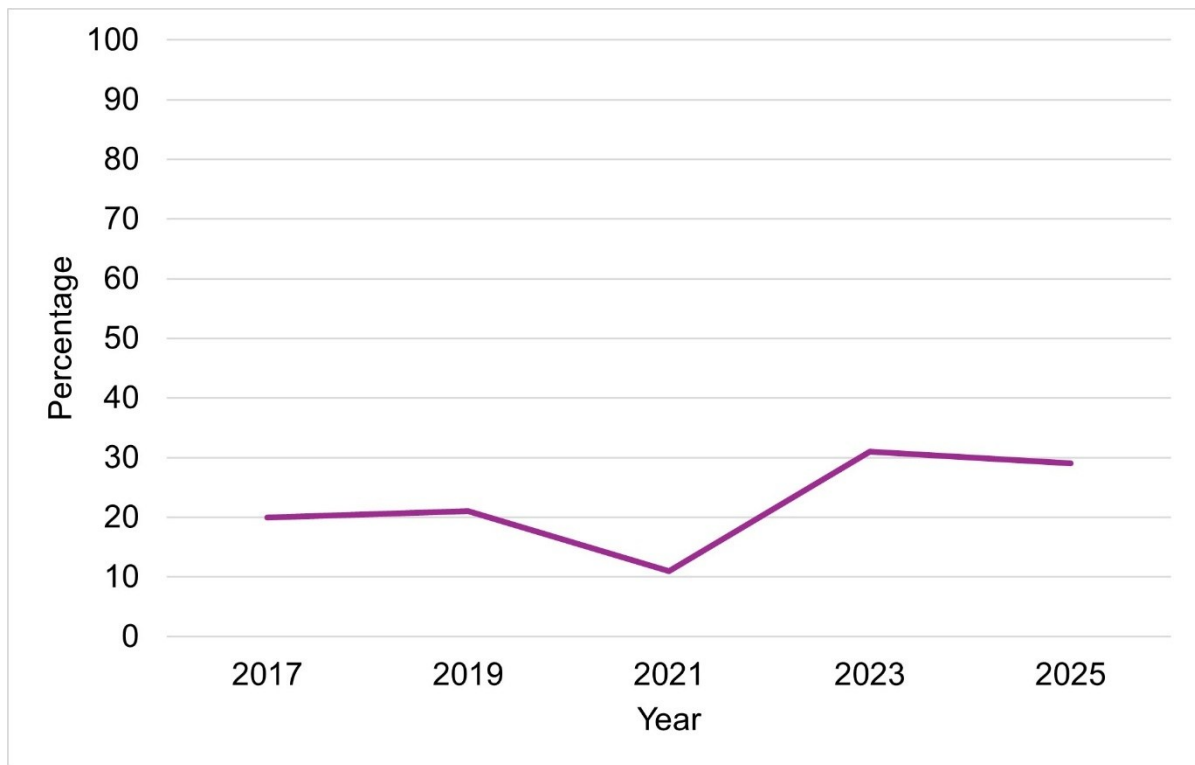
This outcome is assessed by one indicator: attendance at woodland-based learning activities. This does not capture the full breadth of learning and education opportunities delivered by woodlands and trees. Some additional data and context are obtained from analysis of applications from National Forest sites.

### **Indicator 9: attendance at woodland-based learning activities**

<b>Indicator</b>	<b>Trend since the last WfW indicators report</b>
9: Attendance of woodland learning activities	↑

As part of the Public Opinion of Forestry survey respondents are asked to report attendance of woodland learning activities in the last 12 months. The activities included are guided walk or talk, forest school, school trip, organised tree planting event, and organised course or training event. Figure 3 shows the percentage of respondents identifying at least one learning activity attended in the previous 12 months. Since the last edition of the WfW indicators there has been an increase in the percentage of respondents who report engaging in woodland learning activities.

**Figure 3: percentage of respondents attending at least one woodland learning activity, Wales, 2017-2025**



Description of figure 3: a line chart showing a slight increase in the percentage of respondents to the public opinion of forestry survey who attended at least one woodland learning activity between 2017 and 2025.

Source: [Public Opinion of Forestry, Forest Research, 2025](#).

## Additional data and context

### National Forest sites providing community, education and research

As previously stated, the National Forest for Wales outcomes are:

- Good quality, well designed and managed resilient woodlands.
- Woodlands accessible to people.
- Community involvement in woodlands.
- Connected woodlands.
- Dynamic, multi-purpose woodlands and trees.
- Woodlands that demonstrate learning, research and innovation.

A thematic analysis of initiatives undertaken by National Forest sites identified key themes addressed by sites, relating to these 6 outcomes. Table 6 shows the percentage of sites in the National Forest (correct as of September 2025) that listed different community, education and research initiatives in their initial National Forest applications. As can be seen, 66% of National Forest sites were listed as undertaking community engagement and wellbeing activities, with 50% undertaking educational opportunities and outdoor learning, and 23% undertaking innovative research and collaboration.

**Table 6: results of a thematic analysis of National Forest site applications, 2025**

Themes	Percentage of total National Forest sites
Woodland Management and Restoration	37%
Educational Opportunities and Outdoor Learning	50%
Biodiversity Monitoring and Conservation	40%
Community Engagement and Wellbeing	66%
Innovative Research and Collaboration	23%
Environmental Management	20%

Source: Welsh Government, 2025.

## Outcome 10: more people live healthier lives as a result of using, enjoying, and living in proximity to, woodlands and trees

This outcome is assessed by 2 indicators: health benefits from woodlands and accessibility of woodlands.

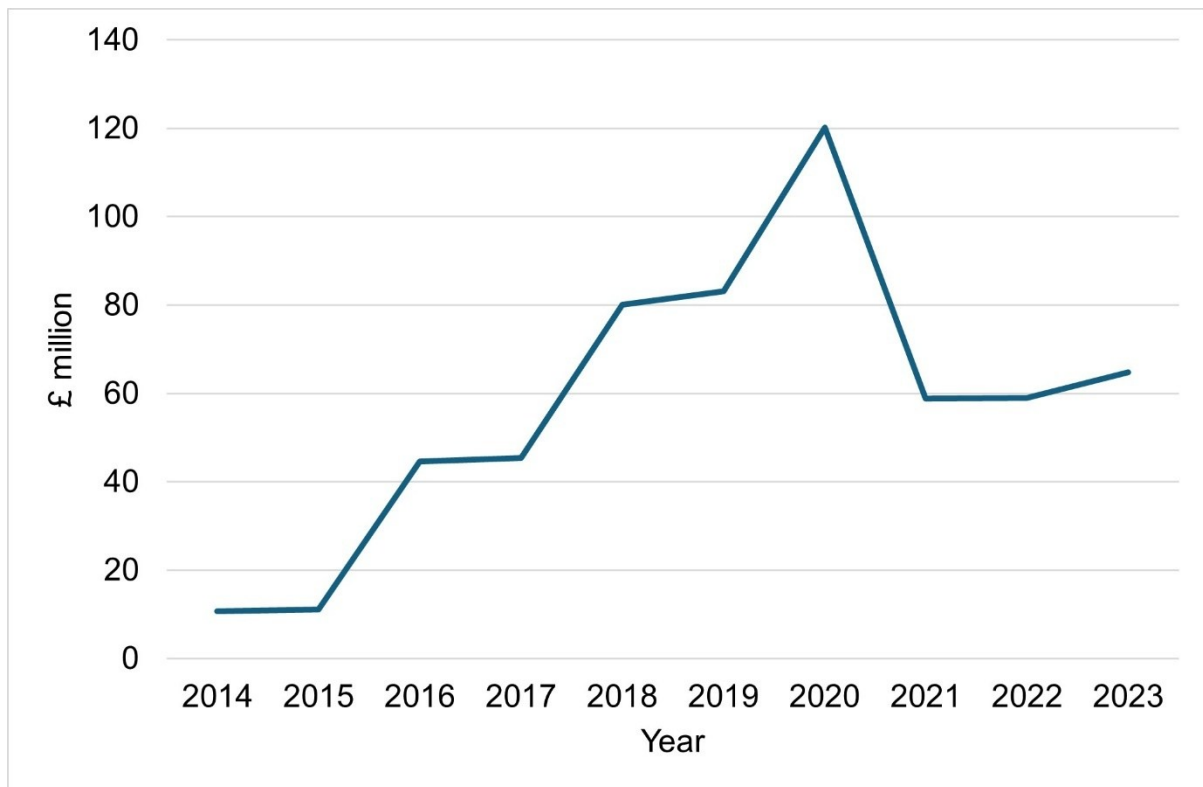
### Indicator 10a: health benefits from woodland

Indicator	Trend since the last WfW indicators report
10a: Value of health benefits (£ million) of woodland	↑

Studies show that [spending at least 120 minutes a week in nature is associated with health and wellbeing improvements](#). The ONS Woodland Natural Capital Accounts give estimates both of the number of people gaining health benefits from regular recreation in woodlands, and of the monetary value of this. Monetary estimates are derived using a cost-saving approach. The [UK natural capital accounts methodology](#) provides further detail about how estimates of woodland visits, and the associated monetary valuations, are derived. Figure 4 shows an estimate of the monetary value of health benefits derived from woodland recreation. Due to different source data for different time periods, data should not be too closely compared through time. However, the spike in economic value of health benefits in 2020 can most likely be attributed to more time being spent in nature during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Since the last edition of the WfW indicators, there has been an increase in the monetary value of health benefits obtained from woodland.

**Figure 4: recreation (health benefits), Wales, 2014-2023 (£ millions, 2024 prices)**



Description of figure 4: a line chart showing the trend, in millions of pounds, of recreational health benefits from woodland. The value increased between 2014 and 2020, then decreased between 2020 and 2021, before increasing again between 2021 and 2023.

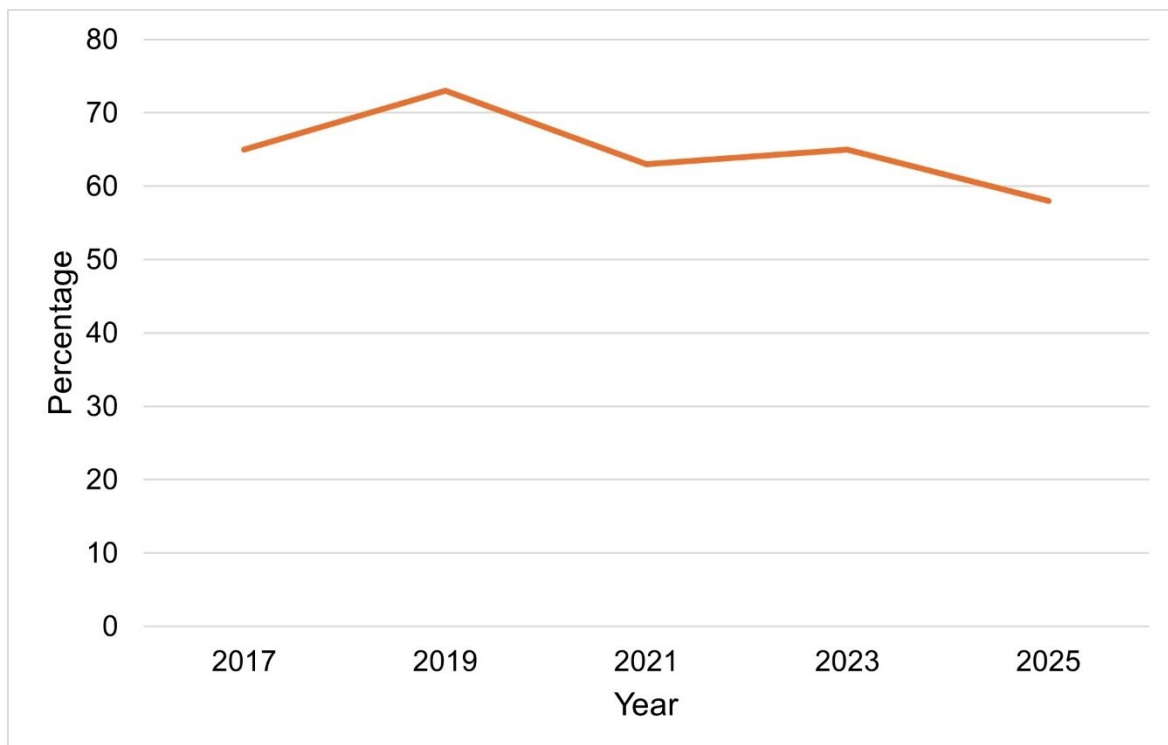
Source: [Woodland natural capital accounts, UK: 2026 - Office for National Statistics](#)

## Indicator 10b: accessibility of woodlands

Indicator	Trend since the last WfW indicators report
10b: Access to woodland without a car	↓

As an indicator of woodland accessibility, the proportion of respondents with access to woodland without the use of a car or other transport is used as a proxy for ease of access and proximity to woodland. **Error! Reference source not found.** shows the percentage of respondents to the Public Opinion of Forestry survey who reported having access to woodland without the use of a car or other transport. Since the last edition of the WfW indicators, there has been a decline in this indicator. This indicator does not address how accessible woodlands in Wales are to a range of users, with different needs.

**Figure 5: proportion of respondent who have access to woodland without the use of a car or other transport, Wales, 2017-2025**



Description of figure 5: A line chart showing a decrease in the percentage of respondents to the public opinion of forestry survey who have access to woodland without the use of a car, between 2017 and 2025.

Source: [Public Opinion of Forestry, Forest Research, 2025.](#)

## **Outcome 11: more people benefit from woodland-related enterprises and associated employment**

This outcome is not directly tracked by an indicator, however direct employment in the forest sector is addressed in chapter 4 under outcome 15. There is an evidence gap relating the breadth of woodland enterprises in Wales.