

CHAPTER 3: DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

11.0 PRIMARY FOCUS OF THE COMMUNITY WOODLAND GREENSPACE PROJECT

Introduction

11.1 This section of the report discusses how the CWGP might establish and develop so that it champions and delivers green infrastructure for maximum public benefit. The following issues are addressed;

Vision and Mission

11.2 A Vision Statement was formulated for the purposes of the study by the client. It covers all the priorities for a CWGP.

"The Central Leicestershire area will become a mosaic of woodlands, farmland, open spaces and settlements that contributes to a dynamic and energetic multi-functional landscape for people and wildlife now and for the future".

11.3 We have reviewed Vision Statements for a number of similar projects (see Appendix 5). Common themes are:

- a geographical perspective;
- working with communities;
- an environment for economic/population growth/reference to future generations;
- creating a mosaic of landscapes/habitats;
- protecting/transforming landscapes;
- a vision of beauty/attractiveness/warmth;
- partnership-working;
- connecting people and greenspaces;
- a sense of 'mission'

Accordingly, we believe the Vision works well

11.4 There is also need for a 'strapline' expressing the CWGP's mission, to use on all communication media (letters, website, signboards, e-mails).

11.5 The box below lists some straplines for similar projects. We appreciate that there is uncertainty at this stage about the geographical scope of the project and the involvement of Leicester City, but possible straplines might be;

- “Better Greener Spaces in and around Leicester” ;
- “Green Spaces for Leicester’s⁶⁹ people, prosperity and wildlife”
- “Helping communities improve the environment for people, wildlife and the economy”
- “For Leicester*. For People. For Quality of Life. For Wildlife. For the Future”
- Woodlands and Greenspaces (from client group)

Straplines for Similar Projects

“Creating new woodlands for people, wildlife and a thriving economy”
(Mersey Forest).

“Open Spaces and sporting places”
(Lea Valley Regional Park)

“Using trees and woodlands to repair a damaged landscape”
(Marston Vale)

“Nottingham’s Community Forest – Bringing Sherwood Forest to your doorstep”
(Greenwood Forest)

“Live – Work – Invest – Visit”
Mersey Waterfront Regional Parks

“People, Places and Prosperity”
(Sustainable Communities Plan, ODPM)

Name & Logo

11.6 Some projects can communicate their mission through their name, e.g. “Trees for London”. It would be ideal if the CWGP’s mission could be communicated in this way. However, this may be difficult as;

- the term “green infrastructure” is the only short definition which embraces all we want to achieve but is clearly inaccessible to the general public;
- there is still uncertainty over the geographical scope of the project – specifically over the involvement of Leicester City.

11.7 The existing name ‘Stepping Stones’ could be retained. Advantages are that it has an established pedigree and local awareness. The disadvantages are that it does not communicate a geographical perspective or a green infrastructure vision.

⁶⁹ Or “Green Spaces for Leicester Shire’s people, prosperity and wildlife”.

11.8 The consultancy team would normally recommend the use of the term “community forest” e.g. Leicester Community Forest, but we understand the unease among various stakeholders over comparisons with the National Forest and the designated Community Forests (which have remit and funding to achieve what would be considered as a ‘Forest’ by the general public – 30% + woodland cover).

11.9 We do not feel the term ‘Regional Park’ is appropriate, as there is no geographically recognisable landscape unit such as a river or estuary.

11.10 If the CWGP’s name is to be changed to explicitly reflect the project’s vision, then it must define itself around Leicester – the term ‘central Leicester Shire’ is too long and obscure.

11.11 The term ‘Countryside Management Project’ which currently supports the Stepping Stones name could be reviewed to reflect the broader scope of a CWGP. Thus the options would be;

- a) Retain the name ‘Stepping Stones’ and add a supporting statement which provides a geographical and thematic focus e.g. “Greenspaces In and Around Leicester”, “Greenspaces for the heart of Leicestershire” etc.
- b) Devise a new name which summarises the geography and vision of the CWGP in one title – this may be very difficult if the term ‘Forest’ is not used – perhaps something on the lines of “Green Heart of Leicestershire”, “Leicester Shire’s Green Heart Project” or “Leicester’s Community Woodland & Greenspace Project”.

11.12 An appropriate logo will have to be developed which will suitably reflect the values of the proposed Community Woodland Greenspace Project.

Boundary

11.13 The brief required an assessment of an appropriate boundary for the project. The starting point was the current Stepping Stones boundary, which is based on parish boundaries just outside the City of Leicester. The boundary was analysed in the context of;

- the baseline survey which examined greenspace and community characteristics up to 500m from the Stepping Stones boundary and also took account of major woodlands within 4km of Stepping Stones;

- the views of stakeholders and community representatives;
- the principal drivers for the project, i.e. regional growth, green infrastructure, and the Countryside In and Around Towns priorities;
- The experience of the consultant and client teams of similar projects, such as Community Forests and the National Forest.

11.14 A firm boundary line is important as it helps to build identity and ensure planning policies and funding schemes can be targeted to areas of greatest public benefit. That said, there are some situations where a more 'fuzzy' approach to the boundary is appropriate e.g. assisting the creation of a new woodland outside the boundary but where the beneficiary is a community within it. This can be addressed in day-to-day guidelines for the way the CWGP operates, and does not diminish the importance of fixing a boundary.

Review of Existing Boundaries

11.15 The advantages of the existing boundary are;

- It is based on parish boundaries which have local resonance;
- It shows equity between the contributing partner and local authorities;
- It encompasses most of the drivers for the CWGP, i.e. areas of environmental deficit, development pressures, demands for access to natural greenspace from a large and growing population.

However there are several issues of concern;

- the relationship with the National Forest which includes significant parts of Groby, Ratby and Desford parishes in Hinckley and Bosworth Borough;
- the relationship with Leicester City, whose population and economy need, and benefit from, the quality of the greenspaces in and around the City –conversely the communities and land-based businesses in the project area benefit from the economic well-being of the city;
- the conclusions of the baseline analysis that certain parts of the existing project area are of greater priority for action to improve quality of life than others;

- the regional growth agenda for the “3 Cities” triangle means that some other areas presently just outside the project boundary might benefit from increased delivery of green infrastructure e.g. the M69 corridor to Hinckley and the River Soar corridor northwards from Leicester towards Loughborough.

National Forest

11.16 The National Forest has been highly successful in engaging landowners and transforming landscapes. To this end it has benefited from certainty of funding from Government sources, both for a core team and to assist landowners convert agricultural land to woodland. The National Forest is a genuine example of landscape transformation and gives clear evidence as to the ‘market value’ of interventions which take land out of agriculture for community woodland uses. The Forest has also introduced various techniques to promote woodland creation and land-based enterprise diversifications, such as the Tender Scheme and planning guidelines.

11.17 The success of the National Forest means that the Stepping Stones delivery priorities are much greater in other parts of the project area.

11.18 The CWGP does not need to exclude activity within the National Forest, but, to avoid duplication of effort and resources, activities may be best targeted only on priorities which are outside the remit of the Forest, e.g. support to Tree Wardens, neighbourhood greening and exclusively non-wooded habitat initiatives.

Leicester City

11.19 Historically, the Stepping Stones project included Leicester City, but it is understood the City underwent a financial review in the 1990s and felt unable to continue funding. However links at officer level remain good. The City is focusing very strongly on regeneration and values the quality of the environment very highly. Leicester City was declared Britain’s first Environment City in 1990 in recognition of the many environmental achievements made in the City together with the commitment to local sustainable development shown by a wide variety of local organisations. Leicester’s continuing environmental progress was further recognised in 1996 when it became one of just five cities to be given a European Sustainable City Award.

11.20 In terms of economic development, the City and County collaborate in the Leicester Shire Economic Partnership (LSEP), a not-for-profit company which fosters and promotes economic development. The LSEP has six priority themes, of which three (“sustainable

communities”, “land and buildings” and “people and skills”) are particularly relevant to the CWGP. The LSEP has a clear commitment to environmental regeneration and supports rural and land-based enterprise; and has a track record in sourcing and delivering funds to support CWGP outcomes, e.g. the recent securing of £230k funding to help rural businesses in the Leicestershire part of the National Forest to diversify.

11.21 There are obvious synergies between the Stepping Stones area and Leicester City. The City benefits from the quality of the environment around it - and its population will benefit from the opportunities for healthy lifestyles, recreation, sense of place and identity that the CWGP can deliver. Future growth of the City as an economic destination will depend on the quality of the environment around it, both immediately (in terms of a sense of place for high-value businesses) and in the longer-term, as Leicester can retain and attract graduates if the quality of the environment for leisure and family life is high.

11.22 The environment around the City also has a role to play in tackling some of the deprivation and social inclusion issues the City faces. Promotion of activity in **multi-functional** greenspaces brings particular health benefits and encourages meeting and collaboration across social and ethnic boundaries – the key is to ensure greenspaces can accommodate as many different uses and functions as possible.

11.23 There are various existing or potential cross-boundary greenspace projects where the greatest benefit will be achieved through collaborative working across boundaries e.g. access, flood management and habitat improvements along the corridor of the Rivers Soar and Sence and Grand Union Canal; strategic multi-user routes connecting City and County.

11.24 The CWGP will only be able to access certain funding streams if it can demonstrate benefit to neighbourhoods which have relatively high levels of multiple deprivation. In a regional and national context, there are several neighbourhoods of concern within Leicester City; but none which are in the “top 20%” of deprivation lie in the existing Stepping Stones area. In terms of health, the greatest needs are within the City.

11.25 It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the CWGP must encompass the City if it is to deliver maximum public benefit. As a regional exemplar of the Countryside In and Around Towns policy priority, it is clear that a collaboration between the City and the existing Stepping Stones partners is vital at Steering Group/Management Board level. This sort of collaboration is being demonstrated through the LSEP and there is no reason to suspect that it would not work for a CWGP.

Prioritisation within the existing boundary

11.26 The baseline assessment and landscape character assessment shows that certain areas of the existing project are less capable of delivering multi-functional greenspaces than other areas. This is primarily because they are relatively remote from settlements or river/transport corridors.

11.27 However the great majority of parishes have the ability and capacity to contribute to the Vision, so it seems sensible to avoid contraction of the existing boundary. However, the CWGP team will need to prioritise actions and resources according to an assessment of public benefit; so it is inevitable that the parishes with greatest population concentration and/or environmental deficit must command more resources.

11.28 This calls for a careful and thoughtful partnership at Steering Group level – which appears to be in evidence now. Inevitably some districts and parishes may feel, from time to time, that a disproportionate amount of time is being spent on other areas. Problems arising from this can be overcome to some extent by;

- ensuring that the core team (i.e. staff funded by the partnership) balance their time as equitably as possible – leaving project-based staff (whose funding will be secured from outside ‘pots’) free to operate according to the priorities of the funding streams they are delivering.
- good leadership and patronage at executive level.

Outward extension of the Project Boundary

11.29 The regional growth agenda for the ‘3 Cities’ area means that future economic and population growth is expected around Leicester, including growth of market towns. Options for Growth are being explored in 2006/07 through the Regional Spatial Strategy process so it is premature to identify where, and how rapidly, growth may occur.

11.30 Nevertheless, it is possible that the westwards M69/A47 corridor to Earl Shilton and Hinckley (in Hinckley and Bosworth District) and the northwards A6/A46/A607 corridors (in Charnwood and possibly Melton Districts) may become more in need of green infrastructure to accommodate growth and improve image. This study has not involved a detailed assessment of green spaces and socio-economic needs in these areas. However, these areas could become ‘Areas of Search’ for future CWGP activity, depending on the outcome of the “Options for Growth” study.

Demonstration Projects outside the Project Boundary

11.31 Occasionally there may be projects outside the boundary where the CWGP team could act as a delivery vehicle or facilitator. This possibility should be allowed where the project can demonstrate a link, or benefit, or precedent of value to the CWGP itself. Typical examples might include;

- assistance to a cluster of "Friends" Groups, some of which may be outside the boundary.
- support of long-distance/strategic trails or green networks which benefit the environment or community within the boundary.
- assistance with funding of a project where it can demonstrate good practice – a good example is the Fleckney Millennium Woodland which was planted on land purchased by the community specifically to increase local access to greenspace.

Summary of Boundary Issues

11.32 There is a very strong case for the CWGP to include Leicester City, since the policy drivers and on-the-ground needs for green infrastructure are greatest in areas of highest population and economic activity.

11.33 The consultants recognise the important work already being carried out by the Stepping Stones team and the achievements of Leicester City in the management and regeneration of the City's open spaces. Bringing together the two areas under one umbrella will increase critical mass and lobbying power for regional green infrastructure funds from a variety of sources. It will also enable a co-ordinated approach to use of pots of money derived from development and regeneration planning obligations to increase the quality of life of residents in and around Leicester. Such an approach is also in line with the 'City-Region' concept of planning, the value of which is widely recognised.

11.34 There does not seem to be any immediate reason to expand the project area outwards, although a westward M69 corridor to Earl Shilton and Hinckley; and a northwards A6/A46/A607 corridor towards Loughborough and Melton, may become future 'Areas of Search' if the regional growth strategy results in these areas coming under particular pressure for population or economic growth. This can be re-visited in 2007.

11.35 There is not a need to re-draw the project boundary inwards, since the parish-oriented boundary works very well and has resulted in good levels of engagement by the communities with Stepping Stones.

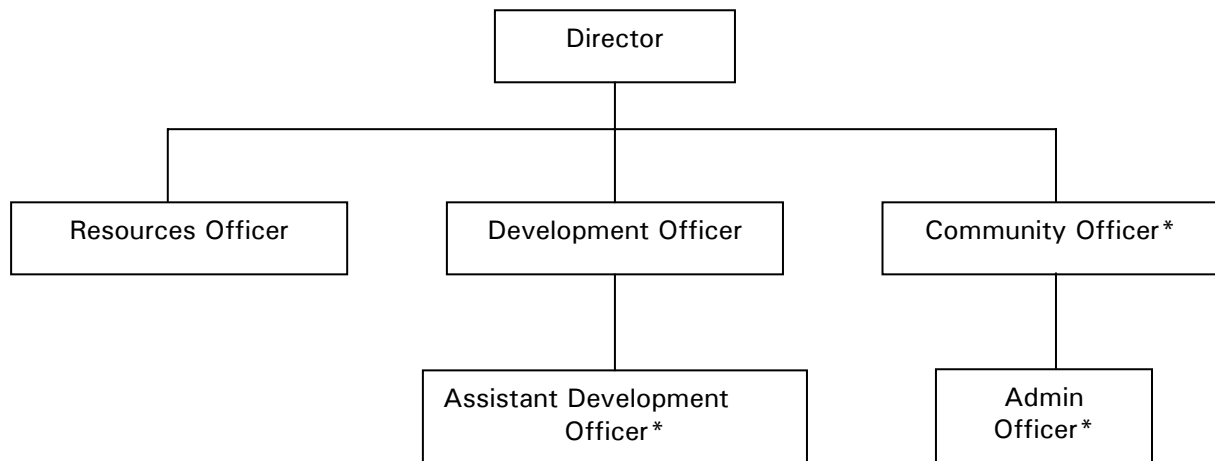
11.36 However, the CWGP project team will need to ensure that operational and funding priority is given to areas where there is greatest need (in terms of environmental/social deficit) and greatest opportunity (in terms of economic growth and population density). This means that remote areas, and the National Forest area, would need to be given a lower priority for action by the CWGP team. The baseline assessment indicates the areas where there is greatest public benefit from creation and management of community greenspace within the project area.

12.0 PROJECT TIMESCALE AND STAFF STRUCTURE

- 12.1 Stepping Stones has been operational since 1992 and has been successful in establishing and maintaining community networks concerned with management of the Green Wedges and neighbourhood open spaces. However, the rate of negative landscape change associated with development and agricultural management has been overwhelming so the project has not been able to secure a net positive landscape change. This is no reflection on the Project Team, since the National Forest has shown that positive landscape change can be effected over a similar period – provided there is adequate financial support available to fund a core team, engage landowners and implement works on the ground. The years since Stepping Stones started must be seen as positive, since it has established the necessary networks and range of projects as a launching-pad for future step-change in activity.
- 12.2 The National Forest and the twelve designated Community Forests have a thirty to forty year remit. Other greenspace projects such as the Lea Valley and Colne Valley Regional Parks were established some thirty years ago and continue to evolve in response to changing social and economic circumstances. There is no suggestion that these be wound up since they continue to meet local and sub-regional needs.
- 12.3 The growth agenda for the East Midlands and, in particular the 3 Cities area, is projected over a 10-15 year period. As this is a primary driver for the CWGP, it is probably realistic to presume the CWGP should have a 20 year timeframe from now. Throughout the 20 year period there will be a need for regular monitoring and strategic reviews (e.g. on a 5 year basis). The fact that Stepping Stones is already in place gives a head-start of at least 5 years worth of brand-building and network establishment – compared to a situation where there is no existing base of activity.
- 12.4 The existing Stepping Stones team consists of two officers (1 full-time and 1 part-time officer) with administrative support provided by the County. A project Steering Group guides the activity of the team with a management board of funding partners and regional stakeholders providing overall strategic direction and funding. There is a network of contacts in partner Local Authorities who add delivery capacity.
- 12.5 Although a CWGP differs slightly in emphasis from a community forest, the scale of the task and the types of activity do not differ. If this CWGP is to deliver the required multi-functional green infrastructure, then a step-change in staffing is needed. Staffing can be made up of dedicated ‘core’ staff engaged on secure (preferably permanent) contracts

plus a complement of 'project-based' staff who are engaged on time-limited or thematic projects.

12.6 In our view, and based on experience with similar initiatives, a CWGP operating in the existing Stepping Stones boundary would need the following core staff:



12.7 The posts marked with an asterisk could possibly be carried out on a part-time basis, although one of the strengths of Stepping Stones is its community programme and the positive work done in the Green Wedge Forums – and a full-time post is probably justified

12.8 It is essential to the success of a CWGP that the great majority of the cost of the core staff is met from investment funding rather than ring-fenced project-funding – once the baseline of funding shifts to the latter, the ethos and ability of the core team to innovate and invest in long-term strategies diminishes significantly.

12.9 This is not to say that **all** the core team funding needs to come from investment funds since there is scope for use of sponsorship, use of “displacement” funding (where a larger player such as DEFRA / FC / EA delivers its obligations through funding or seconding an officer to work in the Stepping Stones team); and matching of funds from other sources.

13.0 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

13.1 The existing organisation may be termed as an “unincorporated association” – a loose partnership of County and Districts. This structure works well and is a tried and tested model for delivery of community forests and similar projects.

13.2 Other models are available:

- semi-autonomous formal partnership (e.g. Greenwood Community Forest); and
- charitable trust/independent not-for-profit company (e.g. the National Forest).

13.3 It is beyond the scope of this study to examine these options and indeed it may be premature until the existing partners are content with the principle of a step-change to a CWGP and the possible re-inclusion of Leicester City has been addressed. Another factor which is relevant is the future (2006) formation of a Groundwork Trust to cover Leicester Shire (i.e. including the City). While the CWGP has a different remit from Groundwork, there are possible areas of overlap.

13.4 The existing arrangement is certainly capable of managing a CWGP, but the benefits of a semi-autonomous or full charitable status can be considerable in terms of attracting external funding, increased flexibility of working, freedom from political pressures and increased attractiveness to the private sector. It is possible for a trust to operate in parallel to the present arrangement; providing an outlet for certain private sector funding streams to invest in environmental improvements.

14.0 PATRONAGE AND NETWORKING

- 14.1 We feel that the CWGP would particularly benefit from a reasonably high-profile patron. Leicestershire is a settled and socially conservative county with established social networks. Leicester as a city has a number of corporate bodies and multi-national businesses, some of which may well have sizeable landholdings and/or significant budgets in the area of corporate social responsibility (CSR). The value of a patron (who is able to operate and make `deals' on behalf of a CWGP) in such an environment is very high.
- 14.2 It is also important that the CWGP is championed at senior political level within the County and the partner Districts. With some honourable exceptions, the very limited attendance by elected members at the consultation events suggests that the project is of little interest or perceived benefit.
- 14.3 The Councils are understood to have significant landholdings and purchasing powers. Innovative use of these could deliver green infrastructure on a significant scale – for example, Lancashire County Council have entered into a 20–year waste management PFI; one of the obligations on the private partner is to create a minimum of 20 hectares of woodland each year as a carbon-offset measure.
- 14.4 In order to attract a patron, it will be very important to have a clear mission and brand identity; a suitable name for the greenspace initiative will be key this process.

15.0 AIMS AND TARGETS

15.1 For the purpose of the study, a Key Aspiration and Aims were drafted by the client. These were subject to consultation comment and were also examined during the policy review and baseline assessment.

15.2 The Key Aspiration is based on the Woodland Trust's Woodland Access Standard⁷⁰ but given the particular circumstances of the area the term 'woodland' could be broadened to include 'natural greenspace' – thus –

“Everyone should live within walking distance (500m) of at least one area of accessible woodland or natural greenspace at least 2ha in size. There should be at least one area of 20 hectares within 4km of people's homes”.

15.3 We feel that this Aspiration is very ambitious given the low levels of woodland and natural greenspace. It may not be realistic given the very fragmented nature of the landscape. It could be “diluted” by amendment so the first requirement is not for a single parcel of 2ha size – i.e. 2ha total accessible greenspace in walking distance might be acceptable.

15.4 Nevertheless it is acceptable to retain it as a Key Aspiration because dilution will inevitably lead to less ability to negotiate significant greenspaces through planning and regeneration activity.

15.5 Clearly, the aims must:

- reflect the primary and secondary drivers for the CWGP
- reflect the Key Aspiration;
- be fairly 'high-level' allowing for detailed objectives to be formulated later; and
- be ambitious yet realistic.

15.6 The Project Aims and targets will need to be developed. The following paragraphs outline a number of important issues that should be covered.

⁷⁰ Woodland Trust (2004), Space for People: Targeting Action for Woodland Access.

Aim 1: Increasing Tree and Woodland Cover

- 15.7 We believe it will be difficult to set a target in terms of percentage cover of woodland and it must be recognised that planting of small groups of trees in hedges, verges, corporate land, schools, sports areas and residential areas can achieve a valuable visual effect.
- 15.8 To achieve an uplift of woodland cover to the English average of 9%, will require planting of 1,300ha of new woodland; much of which will inevitably be on farmland – this will only be feasible if grant-funding can be increased significantly and/or if corporate/public landholders, including County and Local Authorities, can be persuaded to release land for new woodland planting.
- 15.9 The typology mapping reported in Section 8 shows there is a considerable area of scrub and grassland which tends to be neglected land or “unusable” land (such as motorway verges, severed land). Together with planting of sports, amenity areas and street trees, a certain proportion of the necessary 1500 hectares could be delivered. However it must be recognised that many of the grassland / scrub parcels are on operational land, that may be held by disinterested landowners or may be of high ecological value in their own right. Many parcels are very small and may not deliver much strategic impact where they are distant from primary residential areas, transport corridors etc.
- 15.10 Table 13 provides a brief commentary on the feasibility and strategic value of transformation of different types of land.

Table 13: Scope for woodland planting within each land-use category

Land-Use	Area (ha)	Potential for Creation of Woodlands and Accessible Natural Greenspace
Agricultural fields (actively under cultivation / pasture)	13,816.4	Dependent on grant regime
Sports pitches and playing fields (incl. sports facilities with hard surfaces) – tend to be in semi-private situations such as schools	928.4	Very Limited scope for woodland, but individual trees, groups and meadows, ponds possible
Woodland / tree cover	732.5	Reasonable scope for improving access – need to prioritise where near significant population
Grassland and scrub	579.9	High scope for tree-planting, but many parcels of this land are operational verges or land perhaps held for development. Many parcels are very small and scattered. Need to prioritise activity where greatest impact can be gained
Grassland with 20 – 60% tree cover	381.2	

Land-Use	Area (ha)	Potential for Creation of Woodlands and Accessible Natural Greenspace
Amenity areas (public amenity and visual amenity), Parks and Gardens	574.6	Scope for 10-20% woodland planting and increase in accessibility of some areas
Amenity areas with 20 – 60% tree cover	226.3	
Water courses and water bodies	322.8	Scope for improvements in linear and recreational access
Derelict land, quarries and landfill	243.1	Good scope for planting and access, but maybe long-term and dependent on restoration agreements
Other (e.g. Leicester Airport lands, sewage treatment works)	127.9	Limited scope for new woodland – possibly 10%. Not suitable for access
Allotments	59.8	Very Limited scope for woodland, but individual trees may be possible
Cemeteries, churchyards and burial grounds	32.8	Very Limited scope for woodland, but individual trees may be possible
Private gardens	3,107.9	Street Tree & Neighbourhood planting Programmes can make a significant visual impact and greatly enhance biodiversity in urban areas– need to target on areas of environmental deficit
Buildings / Roads	3,143.1	
Total	24,276.7	

15.11 An option would be to define the target in terms of a number of trees which would be needed to create the perception of a wooded landscape in strategically-important areas – and then develop action plans for implementation in different situations;

- private farmland
- corporate land (including farmland)
- scrub/grassland areas on urban edge
- hedgerows and hedgerow tree planting
- street trees and residential areas
- operational land (highways etc)
- new development (industrial, commercial, residential)
- parks and amenity areas
- schools, hospitals and institutions
- rivers and floodplains

Aim 2: Achieving Good Levels of Access to Natural Greenspace

15.12 This key aspiration can be used as the basis for target-setting. The actual target will need to be set on the basis of analysis of which communities are in most deficit and suffer relatively high levels of health deprivation as shown on Maps in the report. The mitigating effect of private garden spaces may need to be taken into account in target-setting. However, given that over 75% of residents do not live in a place which meets basic ANGSt criteria it is evident that an ambitious target is needed. The target should also be incorporated into planning obligations for new developments. Action plans need to consider the opening-up of existing private land, making existing public spaces more attractive and creation of new spaces.

Aim 3: Transforming Land for Biodiversity

15.13 Targets can be set in terms of hectares of land transformed (including woodland uses) and also action plans need to be formulated for different situations – as listed above in relation to woodland. The use of targets related to those specified for priority habitats listed within the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan should be explored. The plans need to consider key biodiversity corridors and management of existing habitats of value.

Aim 4: Awareness and Participation in Management of Greenspaces

15.14 The Stepping Stones team already have a well-established network of local supporters. Action plans and targets can be set in relation to various themes;

- overall awareness of the CWGP in the project area;
- outreach work in schools, community groups, faith groups;
- support given to Parish Councils and other Neighbourhood Management bodies;
- events, festivals;
- work with landowners and business forums;
- social inclusion – i.e. ensuring groups such as the young, old, certain ethnic groups and these in disadvantaged areas are involved in an appropriate way.

Aim 5: Creating a Setting for Healthy Active Life

15.15 The consultation indicated that there is strong support for an aim and targets specifically in relation to healthy lifestyles. In practice, there will be a number of health, sports and community practitioners already engaged in this field (e.g. Walking the Way to Health initiatives within Leicester City and the Stepping Stones Project area – refer to paragraph 9.1.15), but it is clear that there is a role for the CWGP team to target activity to neighbourhoods and groups with health needs and to ensure that existing and proposed

greenspaces are managed and designed to facilitate active recreation by as many users as possible. Action plans and targets can be set in relation to;

- numbers of people/groups directly engaged
- health/sport events organised with a countryside theme
- support for neighbourhood groups, schools etc. improving their own land

Aim 6: Creating a Setting for Economic Growth

15.16 The action plan will need to include specific measures to work with landowners and businesses;

- support for businesses and corporate bodies to transform their own holdings;
- diversification of rural and land-based enterprises to meet the local demand for recreation;
- support for training in areas of employment or skills deficit.

16.0 SWOT ANALYSIS

Having demonstrated the social policy imperatives, and the need for a dramatic uplift in green infrastructure in central Leicester Shire, together with the various opportunities to deliver GI; the consultants considered how Stepping Stones might develop into a CWGP (refer to SWOT analysis on following page).

SWOT Analysis: Can Stepping Stones evolve into a Community Woodland Greenspace Project for central Leicester Shire?

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing Project team in place with good operational support History of project delivery Successful work in Green Wedges Networks with District Councils, Parishes and Community groups Leics. County grant scheme is well-funded Links to Leicester City at officer level Central, regional and County policy support Demonstrated success of community forests as a delivery tool for Govt policy in urban fringe Regional GI Coalition Leicester Shire reputation for environment and enviro-tech Success of National Forest in delivering landscape change Strong stakeholder support Likely funding from the Countryside Agency’s CIAT Programme for a further 2 years 	<p>Weaknesses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No funding from Leicester City Inertia of large landholders Lack of patronage / champion credible to private sector Lack of explicit policy framework for SS in adopted Local Plans Lack of engagement with economic sector Very low levels of accessible greenspace in Leics. urban fringe High ecological deficit and low landscape quality Low awareness of Stepping Stones brand among people outside the environmental sector Small project team, embedded in County Relatively low engagement with landowners Social policy justification largely based on Leicester City – no mechanism to work across boundary
<p>Opportunities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> RSS review promoting green infrastructure (GI) RSS promoting Economic & Population Growth for 3 – Cities Major Urban Area – need for GI Development may assist negotiating community greenspace Changing Planning framework may allow new activity High popn densities - increasing demand for access to greenspace Agricultural diversification / changes in farm support payments Corporate land (inc County) - social/ environmental responsibilities Greater numbers of smallholders with environmental aspirations Innovation skills of rural businesses Regional Rural Delivery Framework and Regional Rural Action Plan promote green infrastructure ANGSt agenda & Natural England start-up with a broadened socio-economic agenda and a central commitment to CIAT Catchment Management Planning National policy agenda re sports and healthy lifestyles BME communities – policy agenda to increase cohesion and neighbourhood involvement County Local Area Agreement may secure environment funds? Proposed Groundwork Trust may increase community engagement and project delivery capacity Carbon-offsetting agenda of corporate and Government bodies Green Infrastructure is likely to receive high priority within Natural England 	<p>Threats</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leicestershire’s County Grant Scheme vulnerable to squeeze Single Farm payment scheme may maintain farmer inertia Stepping Stones is a County initiative – many beneficiaries are Leicester City economy and residents Difficulty of embedding Stepping Stones into emerging LDF policy frameworks (timeframes and uncertainty over process) Development pressures on open spaces – landscape deterioration Lack of capital to “tip” land use change to community / woodland Trend to horsti-culture / private amenity land-owning may cause deterioration Relative affluence of County – lack of access to structural funds Lack of interest from emda County Local Area Agreement process may squeeze countryside management funds Proposed Leicester Shire Groundwork Trust may cause confusion over brand and objectives and dilute funds Success of National Forest may invite impossible comparisons Team’s ongoing commitments Green Wedge Forums restrict resources for new activity Lack of revenue funding for investment in “core” project team Countryside Agency’s transition to Natural England could potentially result in a delay, or complete disbandment, of the CIAT Programme