

CHAPTER 4: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE ACTION

17.0 NEXT STEPS

17.1 The following actions are suggested. Steps 1 to 10 are set out in a roughly chronological order, although there will be overlaps. Steps A to G, listed at the end, are important whether or not the CWGP is established as indicated in this study – these are actions important for Stepping Stones to continue to deliver woodlands and greenspaces in a baseline situation.

1. Review of the Feasibility Study by the Stepping Stones Management Group, assessing implications for funding, human resourcing and relationships with existing partners.
2. External Review with key stakeholders. This includes existing and potential partners in central Leicester Shire, together with selected regional players whose support will be essential to the long-term success of the CWGP. The outcome of this review will be an idea of the level of funding and operational support the CWGP might secure if it were to be established.
3. Build political and corporate support for the CWGP amongst Senior Officers and Members – making reference to the ‘green infrastructure need’ and also the existing track record of Stepping Stones. This will include lobbying and championing of the concept – if a significant individual from the County or City business establishment can be recruited this may be helpful.
4. Discussions with Leicester City about joint-working arrangements.
5. Draw up an Action Plan for the CWGP, including Strategies, Funding Streams for Implementation, Thematic Targets and Business Planning; along with a provisional project list.
6. Secure commitments for investment in the Core Team from existing and potential partners.
7. Agree a name, strapline and logo for the CWGP.
8. Compile a database of potential supporters and complementary initiatives; for the purposes of publicity, awareness and partnership building.

9. Examine the most appropriate governance structure for the CWGP (e.g. remain as an unincorporated consortium under the County umbrella; formalise the partnership through incorporation; establish Trust status). This may not be time-critical if the review and action planning process indicate that the current arrangements are satisfactory for the time being.
10. Launch! – through a series of events and publications targeted at a range of stakeholders, including the public, elected members, funders, community groups, government and political bodies, etc.

17.2 Steps A to G will also be necessary to deliver green infrastructure in the project area. They have been separated from steps 1 to 10 above as they are needed irrespective of whether a decision is made to launch a CWGP – in other words they are steps which the Stepping Stones team should consider taking to maintain the momentum generated by the feasibility study.

- A. Make sure the need for green infrastructure (GI) in the central Leicester Shire area is embedded in Regional Economic and Spatial Strategy and in Local Development Documents. In relation to the former, it would be useful if Stepping Stones could actually be named as an Area-Based Initiative. In relation to the latter, it is vital to embed the Stepping Stones name and project boundary in Core Strategy – if possible it would also be useful to obtain specific land allocations for green infrastructure in LDFs. Just as importantly it will be vital for LDFs to be explicit and ambitious about Stepping Stones and/or green infrastructure in relation to any new developments in order to allow a legitimate means of channelling Planning Gain Supplements or Section 106 obligations towards GI. High standards of GI within new development should also be required through policy wording.

This issue is common to all local authorities, especially those in growth areas. Support to planning officers in the drafting and implementation of GI policy will be essential – this may be an issue for the Countryside Agency / Natural England.

- B. Secure reference to green infrastructure through the Leicestershire Local Area Agreement – again to embed the concept; and preferably to also secure the role of Stepping Stones as a delivery vehicle.

- C. Work with the Regional Rural Delivery Framework team to `bend` the targeting of agri-environment and rural diversification support towards landowners in the Stepping Stones area – citing the environmental deficit and the potential growth in the `consumer service` market as key drivers.
- D. Continue the development of the excellent community and neighbourhood greenspace management network – perhaps by securing funds for establishment of “Friends of” support networks to target areas where there is little current action. The ongoing support of the Green Wedge Forums is also vital.
- E. Carry out a landownership audit to identify scope for transformation of major corporate/authority holdings.
- F. Improve engagement with existing landowners, including small-holders and private individuals who have purchased fields for their own amenity – evidence suggests this is already significant and will be an increasing trend as traditional farmers look to derive income from other sources; including the scale of small parcels of land – often to people who are relatively pro-environment.
- G. Continue work to improve accessibility to natural greenspaces through targeted action in areas of deficit identified through the feasibility study. Irrespective of whether a large CWGP is established, there are continuing opportunities through lottery and Government funding to draw on resources for neighbourhood projects.