



- **Community Green Space Grant**
- **Connecting People and Wildlife Grant**

Guidelines and Useful Contacts

Other forms also available:

Application Form for Community Green Space Grant	(CGA01)
Application Form for SGI Grant	(CGA02)
Guidelines for Private projects	(LWG03)
Application Form for Private projects	(LWG04)



The Stepping Stones Partnership is funded by:

Leicestershire County Council
 Blaby District Council
 Charnwood Borough Council
 Harborough District Council
 Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council
 Oadby and Wigston Borough Council

Community Green Space Grant is for applicants looking for funding of up to £500 for small scale environmental improvements with community benefit. School applications are eligible for this fund.

Connecting People and Wildlife Grant is for Applicants looking for funding of up to £2500 for larger projects that have significant community involvement and benefit for wildlife. Schemes are particularly encouraged where the applicant can demonstrate that the scheme helps connect existing green spaces and habitats.

Deadlines (Connecting People and Wildlife Grant only)

- **Application deadline 31st July or the Friday before if this is a Saturday/Sunday
This grant is competitive and will be assessed following the deadline**
- **Scheme completion deadline last day of February or the Friday before if this is a Saturday/Sunday**

***Schemes need to be located within the Project area. Stepping Stones cannot fund any works retrospectively. Please discuss your application with an officer before submitting your application**

Community Green Space and Strategic Green Infrastructure Grants (hereafter known as Grants) are assessed using a point scoring system. For your project to be considered for a grant, a minimum score must be achieved. Use the relevant sheets in this pack to assist you with scoring your project prior to sending in your application.

STEPPING STONES Grants are for parish/town councils, community groups and schools wishing to carry out environmental improvement schemes including:

- Creation or improvement of public open spaces
- Native tree and shrub planting
- Field pond creation or renovation
- Small woodland management
- Pollarding black poplars, waterside willows and alders
- Rural hedge planting
- Renovation of rural dry stone walls
- Ornamental planting
- Nature area creation
- Hedge laying

Who can apply and how much can I apply for?

Any parish, town or district council, school (Community Green Space Grant), charity or properly constituted community groups.

Applications submitted by parish or town councils, schools and community groups can be awarded grants of up to 75% of the total cost of the scheme. District Councils can apply for up to 50% of costs.

In any one financial year the maximum accumulated value of STEPPING STONES Grants awarded to any organisation or individual shall not exceed:

For funding of over £2,500 SHIRE Environmental Improvement Grants are available (Total of 50% of the total cost of the scheme). For information on SHIRE Grants please contact the Community Projects Officer on 0116 305 7269. The maximum allowable grant from any combination of County Council managed schemes shall not exceed 75% of the total cost of the scheme.

There is no minimum value for the works. However applicants must be able to provide the balance of the money for the works, either from their own funds or other grant schemes or a mixture of both. Applicants must be able to demonstrate on their application form how they intend to raise the balance of funding.

The **Connecting People and Wildlife Grant** applications must demonstrate and will be assessed against substantial community involvement at all stages of the scheme. The applicant must show clearly how the scheme will benefit the environment and community.

Community Green Space Grant applications need to demonstrate that the scheme will enhance the local environment and that it is of community benefit.

Please see Project Officer's Assessment Forms for further information

Consultancy fees incurred when professional advice is sought in preparing the application and implementing the project may also be payable (see page 12 for more details).

Guidelines for preparing your Application and carrying out the work

Plans and Specifications

You will need to supply the following, preferably drawn to scale:

Detailed drawings of your proposed scheme including its relationship to its immediate surroundings. Schedules of all the work to be carried out including specifications for materials and workmanship.

A plan, clearly showing the location of the works within the wider area, **must** be submitted with your application. This should show road names where possible. A grant offer cannot be made if a plan is not submitted. Please remember, however simply produced, the plan should enable our inspector to find the site of your project.

Quotations, Estimates and Tenders

The copies of quotations, estimates or tenders you enclose with your application must be fully itemised - single lump-sum figures are not acceptable. Please note that you must ensure this documentation covers **all** your anticipated costs. Once a grant is offered additional costs cannot be considered. **A minimum of two quotes are necessary for each element of the work where total cost of the scheme is more than £1,000.00.**

Volunteer Time

To gain points in the assessment system, the use of volunteer time can form part of your application. To calculate the percentage for the assessment form, the rate of £7 per hour is to be used. You will need to submit full details of the work to be done by volunteers at the time of submitting your application, using the Volunteer Time Schedule attached to the application form. You will also be required to show proof of how the volunteer time was accrued (e.g. signed time sheets) when the work is complete. **Please note volunteer time will not form any part of your grant payment.**

What Can I Apply For?

Land Acquisition

Land purchase in order to allow a scheme to go ahead may be eligible for assistance. A copy of a valuation from the District Valuer must support your application. As well as the District Valuer, we can also accept valuations undertaken by members of the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS). All valuations must be undertaken in accordance with the guidelines laid down in the RICS 'Red Book'.

Ornamental Planting

Ornamental planting schemes comprising trees, shrubs or hedges should be carefully designed to take into consideration site conditions and long term maintenance. There is no minimum or maximum size of planting area nor are there any specific requirements with regard to species choice or size of planting stock, but such details should be clear in your proposals.

School Grounds

Applications for works to school grounds are acceptable under the Community Green Space Grant (max £500). Grant aid for works set within an enclosed courtyard is not available. If you are seeking to undertake works within school grounds there should be some wider community benefit to the scheme. This would normally mean at least one of the following:

- The school grounds are open for community use outside of normal school hours.
- The application site must be clearly seen from a public road, footpath or bridleway.
- The wider community is involved in the development and implementation of the scheme.

Consideration to applications will also be given where the school already has or is in the process of applying for Eco-Schools status or is involved in the Healthy Schools programme.

Access for All

Schemes including public access should be accessible at all reasonable times and should be so designed to be available for all abilities. Further information and advice is available from the Disability Discrimination Act Helpline on either Text Phone: 0345 622 644 or Telephone: 0345 622 633

Native Tree and Shrub Planting

For woodland creation, planting at 2 metre centres is recommended when using transplants, i.e. 40 - 90 cm in height. If larger trees are being used please seek advice from an LCC officer or the supplier. There is no minimum or maximum size of planting area.

Further information about native woodland types and principal native trees for Leicestershire can be found in the Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy, which is available at libraries and on the County Council website.

Applicants are encouraged to use planting stock of local provenance wherever possible.

Small Woodland Management

Grants are available to assist in managing small areas of woodland to enhance their biodiversity and to sustain them as landscape features. Assistance is available for the following operations:

- fencing against stock, deer or rabbits, but only as part of other funded works
- felling mature or over-mature trees to allow replanting or natural regeneration
- thinning operations
- coppicing of hazel, ash, willow or alder
- re-pollarding ancient boundary trees within the woodland area
- clearing open drains or ditches within the woodland area

It is important to seek professional advice on woodland management operations. Additional grants are available to help towards the cost of this.

Hedge Laying

If your scheme has an element of hedge laying then hedges should be laid in Midland Bullock style staked and bound in the traditional manner; grant may be withheld if this is not done. Gaps greater than 1 metre should be planted up with new hedging.

Pond Creation and Renovation

Grants are available for the management of ponds and the creation of new ponds, in order to maintain traditional field/dew ponds as landscape features and for wildlife conservation purposes.

It is important to contact the Project Officer first if you are considering a scheme that involves pond management. Pond management work should take place during the autumn and winter (ideally after 1st October)

Ponds should be:

- naturalistic in effect with gently shelving sides
- naturally filling
- not intended for commercial fishing or fish rearing
- not planned as a feature of a golf course or other sporting ground
- not part of a scheme of mineral extraction

The value of a pond is greatly increased when an area of non-intensive land use known as a buffer zone surrounds it. A buffer zone provides an essential terrestrial habitat for pond life and adds to the diversity of the habitat. An additional payment is available to assist with stock proof fencing to create a buffer zone. Fencing should be set at an average minimum distance of 5 metres from the top of the pond bank and should close off at least 50% of the pond's circumference from grazing or ploughing activities.

Please think carefully before carrying out work to renovate or create ponds. Your chosen site may already be of importance for wildlife. Digging a new pond, in particular, may adversely affect local drainage patterns. Poorly drained areas where the water is held close to the surface are known as flushes and are increasingly rare features forming significant wildlife habitats. Similarly, areas of damp meadow are frequently of high conservation value.

As the location and restoration of ponds is such a sensitive issue, **we strongly recommend you seek professional advice before making an application – it is possible they support legally protected species**. An enhanced grant towards consultant's fees is available to assist with this.

Renovation of Rural Dry Stone Walls

The renovation of rural dry stone walls is eligible. Schemes should comprise the renovation of an area averaging at least half the height of the wall. Walls must be of a traditional dry stone construction and restoration should be carried out in a sympathetic manner.

The Use of Peat

The use of peat or peat based products is not acceptable.

The Use of Timber

All hardwoods should be British grown. Imported hardwoods will only be considered in exceptional circumstances and then only from certified sustainable sources.

Softwoods should be pressure treated with preservatives to the appropriate British Standard. Your timber merchant will be able to advise you on the most appropriate treatment.

All timber must be from certified sustainable sources e.g. Forestry Stewardship Council (FSC).

Maintenance

It is a requirement of the grant offer that all assisted works be maintained in good order for at least 10 years. The works may be subject to a spot check at any time during that period. Failure to maintain the works may result in the grant being reclaimed. You must provide details of how the scheme will be maintained each year for the minimum 10 years. For landscape works this should include items such as frequency of weed control, pruning, watering, replacement of failed plants and adjustment of tree ties or rabbit guards. For play equipment and other structures, evidence of provision for regular checks in accordance with recommended standards should be presented.

STEPPING STONES Grants cannot be claimed to cover any maintenance costs of your scheme or any routine maintenance works to existing facilities.

Where can I get more advice about these grants?

You must discuss your proposals with an officer from Leicestershire County Council before submitting an application. Officers will be happy to give verbal advice and, if necessary, meet you to discuss the development of your scheme.

For advice on other environmental improvement projects telephone the Project on 0116 305 7264/7221.

What conditions apply to STEPPING STONES Grants?

- A grant application **must** be made in advance of any work being carried out.
- The site must be within the Stepping Stones Project area (see map front page).
- Where the site does not belong to the applicant, the applicant must hold a lease, licence or other written agreement with the owner for access to the land for a minimum of 10 years.
- The work should not be required either as part of a condition of planning permission or as a legal agreement associated with planning permission.
- All permissions necessary to enable the work to go ahead must have been obtained from the relevant authorities before a grant can be offered. These might include planning permission, conservation area consent, listed building consent, appropriate ecclesiastical permission, tree preservation order consent and the obtaining of a felling licence, or the approval of English Nature or the Environment Agency.
- Where the works are close to the highway the proposals must be agreed with Leicestershire County Council's Highways Divisional Engineer before a grant can be offered.
- The project should not include proposals for the removal of any hedgerow unless you have the prior consent of your district council.
- If your proposed works are within or close to a flood plain or an existing watercourse, they **must** be approved by the Environment Agency before a grant can be offered.
- If your proposed works are within or close to a Site of Specific Scientific Interest (SSSI), they must be approved by English Nature.
- Statutory undertakers such as the electricity, cable, gas and water companies should be consulted where any of the proposed works are in proximity to their services.
- The project must not include any commercial advertising.
- The site must not be located in a private garden.
- Stepping Stones Grants can be used to "top-up" grants received from other organisations, provided the grant does not lead to double funding or the scheme making a profit.
- Your County Councillor will be consulted for their views on your scheme. You are therefore strongly recommended to contact them prior to submitting the application form.

The following conditions apply when claiming payment towards a Stepping Stones grant:

- Where the applicant has stated on the application form that they can reclaim VAT, the grant offer is based on the net value of the eligible scheme costs.
- Before grant payment can be made, the applicant must supply copies of relevant invoices to support their claim.
- Grant payments can only contribute towards work that has previously been agreed as eligible for STEPPING STONES funding and on which the grant offer has been based.
- Grant payments will be made on inspection of completed work. In cases where the applicant is employing professionals such as architect(s), quantity surveyor(s) or consultant(s) to oversee work carried out by contractor(s), a copy of the professional certificate of progress or completion must also be supplied.
- Invoices and professional certificates (where relevant) must be made out to the applicant. If for any reason a contractor or professional is employed by an individual, organisation or group other than the applicant, we require a letter from the applicant explaining the reasons for this, and stating that the applicant intends to forward the grant payment(s) to that individual, organisation or group. **In such cases, each invoice or professional certificate submitted in support of a claim for grant payment must contain a declaration that the work is being carried out on behalf of the applicant.**

How will the application be assessed?

Your application will be assessed in accordance with the criteria listed elsewhere in these guidelines and with the aid of the self-assessment form sent with your application pack. These include reference to various Leicestershire County Council documents, which are summarised later on in these guidelines.

How will payment be made?

You should notify the Stepping Stones Project Officers (0116 305 7264/7221) at County Hall by letter, fax, telephone or e-mail when the work is complete. Payment is made following a site inspection and approval of the work by a County Council officer. You are strongly advised not to make payment until the work has been seen and approved by a County Council officer.

In addition the following payment provisions apply:

You will need to submit copies of all invoices and volunteer time sheets when claiming payment.

Applicants should note that if their scheme costs less than originally estimated, the amount of grant aid paid will not exceed the percentage stated in the offer letter.

Phased payments may be possible on larger schemes.

Help available in preparing the application

Employing a Consultant

Unless you are confident you can prepare the proposals yourself you will probably need to employ a consultant to give you advice and help in preparing the application. Grant is available towards the costs of professional fees incurred in this way. If you need help in finding a consultant you should contact the Project Officers at County Hall.

If you wish to include consultancy costs in your application:

- fees must have been charged
- the consultant concerned must be identified on the application form
- retained agents must have been required to carry out the work over and above their usual duties and to have incurred additional costs thereby

Grant aid is payable towards professional fees in two phases for successful applications only. The first payment is to assist with costs incurred in the development and submission of your application. The second payment is to cover the professional time spent overseeing the implementation of the scheme.

No more than 15% of the total value of the scheme can be claimed as fees. Payment is split equally between the two phases. The professional fee element must be identified in the costing submitted on your application form.

Disclaimer

The Stepping Stones Project Officers have the discretion to refuse to grant fund a scheme if it is felt that the proposed works conflict with the aims and objectives of the Stepping Stones Project's Delivery and Action Plan or any other strategies and documents to which the Stepping Stones Project and the County Council are in agreement with for example the Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan.

Stepping Stones Environmental Improvement Grants Background Documents

The policies set out in the following documents may be used in assessing your application:

Stepping Stones Project Delivery and Action Plan

This Green Infrastructure Delivery Plan provides guidance for the activity of the Stepping Stones Project and its partners for the next 20 years. For more information about the Project go to the Stepping Stones Project web pages on the Leicestershire County Council website. Schemes gain extra points on the assessment if they are within either a green wedge, a green corridor or an intervention area (see figure 6.1, section 6 of the Delivery Plan).

The Project Aims:

1. Working in partnership, there will be opportunities for community action and participation in green infrastructure issues;
2. Everyone will enjoy well planned, managed and biodiverse landscapes that are resilient to the effects of climate change;
3. Everyone will be able to participate in vibrant and competitive rural and urban economies;
4. Everyone will have opportunities to participate in a healthier lifestyle.

Achieving Excellence for Leicestershire – Leicestershire Community Strategy

This document can be found in libraries. The below mentioned sections are relevant to applicants, when self-assessing their applications. Please note that applicants should ideally be able to show that their application supports at least one of the following strategic aims.

A clean and green environment

Support the implementation of the Biodiversity Action Plan, work to priority habitats and opportunities for further habitats

Thriving market towns and village centres

Contribute to the enhancement of market towns through townscape improvements

The countryside and green spaces to be conserved and enhanced

Support the Biodiversity Action Plan

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy

This document can be found in libraries or is available to download from Leicestershire County Council's website. Leicestershire County Council, as a strategic planning authority, recognises the importance of the landscape character of Leicestershire and has published The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Landscape and Woodland Strategy. The aims and objectives of this strategy are:

- To conserve and enhance the character, diversity and local distinctiveness of the County's landscape
- To identify appropriate opportunities for new woodland planting to increase the woodland cover of the County
- To promote the sustainable management of the County's existing woodland resource to produce timber and provide environmental and social benefits

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan

This document can be found in libraries. The below mentioned sections are relevant to applicants who are undertaking relevant works. Leicestershire County Council recognises the importance of the biological diversity of the County and endorses the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Biodiversity Action Plan.

Biodiversity is the variety of life in all its forms and the habitats where it occurs. The aim of the plan is to prevent the decline of biodiversity in the County and to identify habitats of the rarest and most threatened species. The most cost-effective means of conserving biodiversity is by conserving habitats that occur in woodland, scrub, wetlands and farmland.

The principal Action Plans within the Biodiversity Action Plan are:

Habitat Action Plans

- Wet woodland
- Rocks and built structures
- Broadleaved woodland
- Urban habitat - Leicester
- Lowland wood pasture and Parkland
- Hedgerows
- Heath grassland
- Mature trees
- Calcareous grassland
- Neutral grassland
- Field margins
- Floodplain wetland
- Reedbeds
- Roadside verges
- Fast flowing streams
- Sphagnum ponds
- Springs and flushes
- Mesotrophic (narrow range of nutrient) lakes
- Eutrophic (nutrient rich) standing water

Species Action Plans

- Dormouse
- Violet Helleborine
- Bats
- Black Hairstreak Butterfly
- Barn Owl
- Purple Small Reed
- Black Poplar
- Nightingale
- Wood Vetch
- Sand Martin
- Otter
- Water Vole
- Redstart
- White Clawed Crayfish
- Dingy Skipper & Grizzled Skipper

Useful Contacts

There are various organisations who may be able to offer advice or additional financial assistance, or from whom you may need permission for certain works:

Environment Agency

The Environment Agency is the regulatory body with responsibility for the protection of natural water resources, conservation along waterways and water bodies, monitoring of water quality, pollution control and flood defence. You should contact them if you are undertaking works on or adjacent to any watercourse. For further information contact:

Lower Trent Area Office – covers most of Leicestershire with the exception of eastern and western margins – for those areas contact the Midlands or Anglian addresses.

Lower Trent Area Office
Trentside Offices
Scarrington Road
West Bridgford
Nottingham
NG2 5FA

Midlands Regional Office
Sapphire East
550, Streetsbrook Road
Solihull
West Midlands
B91 1QT

Anglian Regional Office
Kingfisher House
Goldhay Way
Orton Goldhay
Peterborough,
PE2 5ZR

Central telephone number 08708 506506

Forestry Commission

The Forestry Commission can assist landowners to carry out large-scale tree planting through the English Woodland Grant Scheme. It is also the body with responsibility for regulating the felling of trees. For further information contact:

Fine Shade Area Office
Top Lodge House
Fine Shade
Corby
Northants. NN17 3BB

Tel. 01780 444 934/933

The National Forest Company

Community groups within the area of the National Forest may benefit from assistance provided by the National Forest Company. Landowners considering large-scale tree planting within the area may also be eligible for additional assistance through the Tender Scheme. For further information contact:

The National Forest Company
Enterprise Glade
Bath Lane
Moirā
Swadlincote
Derbyshire DE12 6BD
Tel. 01283 551211

Historic and Natural Environment Section, Leicestershire County Council

For advice on biodiversity, Local Nature Reserves, Sites of Special Scientific Interest, and planning in relation to nature conservation.

216 Birstall Road,
Leicester,
LE4 4DG

Email - wildlife@leics.gov.uk

Tel. 0116 267 1950

Leicestershire & Rutland Wildlife Trust

The Wildlife Trust is an organisation promoting nature conservation. It owns and manages a number of ecologically important sites. The Trust has an officer in charge of the Biodiversity Action Plan who can offer advice and guidance upon improving biodiversity within Leicestershire. For more information contact:

Brocks Hill Environment Centre
Washbrook Lane
Oadby
Leicestershire
LE2 5JJ
Tel. 0116 272 0444

Leicestershire and Rutland Rural Community Council (LRRCC)

The L.R.R.C.C. produces an excellent information pack covering a very wide range of sources of grant aid. Contact the L.R.R.C.C. on 0116 266 2905 or view the information at www.ruralcc.org.uk

District Councils

For advice on planning permission, conservation area consent or tree preservation order consent and possible sources of additional financial assistance you should contact your district council:

Blaby District Council	Tel. 0116 275 0555
Charnwood Borough Council	Tel. 01509 263151
Harborough District Council	Tel. 01858 828282
Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council	Tel. 01455 238141
Oadby & Wigston Borough Council	Tel. 0116 288 8961

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