

Greenspace for Communities Review

Response from Community Woodlands Association

Policy Context

Are we right in identifying the prime need as one of "mainstreaming" greenspace action within a wide range of programmes ?

R2 CWA feel that it is important that Greenspace action is mainstreamed into a range of programmes rather than being seen as a stand alone activity. Greenspace provision should not be seen merely within an environmental context but as a linked agenda involving regeneration, social and economic wellbeing, healthy lifestyles and quality of life. Networking with a diverse range of partner organisations including strong local community representation is the only way to develop this agenda.

Do you have views on the balance which should be sought as between improving greenspace in deprived areas and seeking improvements in greenspace more generally ?

R3 Whilst key programmes should focus on deprived areas it is important to improve the quality of greenspace provision more generally. This will help to attract inward investment and help promote the image and quality of life within Scotland in general. All too often new commercial, retail and housing developments (even in comparatively wealthy areas) lack poor quality design and integration of greenspace within development proposals. These considerations appear to be merely considered as an add on. The private sector developers and local authority planning departments need to be pushed more to raise standards and to be prepared to put greater emphasis on quality of life indicators. Often it appears to be social housing and regeneration initiatives that are leading the way at present.

How helpful will a state of Scottish Greenspace Report be for you ? In what ways would it be helpful ?

R4 CWA would be able to use the audit to assist us with advice to new and established community woodland groups. Such a report would be useful as an audit but also primarily to raise awareness of latest thinking in terms of greenspace design and management in a similar way to what has been achieved through PAN 65. Such a report should be widely circulated to private developers, local authorities, housing associations and healthy living initiatives. The "Greenspace and the partnership agreement" publication by Greenspace Scotland has been useful in terms of promoting this type

of awareness. This could be done with more case studies, critical analysis and guidelines.

Local Delivery

What will be the impact on your organisation if the initiative aims to work with a wide range of greenspace delivery organisations, rather than focus on local greenspace partnerships ?

R5 CWA believe this would have positive implications for our organisation and could help us to act as a facilitator through local community woodland groups of greenspace projects. To enable us to do this, funding streams would have to be in place to help develop the capacity to support groups as delivery agents. CWA still feels that a strategic approach to greenspace development within each area is required and that this is perhaps best achieved through community planning structures and local community groups' representation on these. This is particularly evident from issues arising from local authority boundaries and compartmentalised thinking which limit innovation. Future focus on strategic partnerships should therefore be focused more on the concept of the City Region rather than the existing local authority boundaries which do not consider the fact that greenspace provision for any given locality may not fall within the same local authority area. The tight boundaries of Dundee for example are a good illustration of this.

What organisation or organisations are most appropriate to develop a vision of greenspace needs within any area, and to take an overview of how these needs might be addressed ?

R7 We believe that there should be an integrated network of greenspace advisers and facilitators working closely with the local community who can also network across a wide range of partner organisations at a regional level. These should link in with community planning structures but effectively be able to work with or advise any local, regional or national group who comes forward. The advisors should set up regional subgroups and working groups in a similar way to the role performed by LBAP partnerships or Local Access Forums. Actions at a very local level should be delegated to individuals eg. Rangers, housing associations, community woodland groups etc. Regional advisers might be best employed directly through a national greenspace organisation but with a partnership "buy in".

National Delivery

Do you agree that a national greenspace organisation is worthwhile and should have the roles identified above ? Are there any other roles which it should perform ?

R13 Yes CWA would agree that a national greenspace organisation is essential and should act as a focus for activity within Scotland. We feel that that roles outlined are appropriate but that there should also be more outreach staff based at a regional level to act as a point of contact with local community groups and to network effectively with regional and national organisations such as CWA. CWA would welcome the chance to be involved with the co-ordination and delivery of greenspace projects with Greenspace Scotland and other partner organisations.

Are there any obvious gaps in advice, support, information or research which you would like to point to at this stage ?

R14 As discussed, contact points at a regional level who could provide more detailed networking opportunities with organisations such as ourselves would be useful. More detailed case studies, exchange and twinning opportunities for our member organisations would also be advantageous.

Funding

Would having more comprehensive information on spend on greenspace be helpful ? Do you have information to contribute ?

R15 This might be useful but might prove difficult to collect and quantify as outputs would be spread across such a wide range of partnership organizations. An assessment of this should be built in but we should steer away from "bean counting" for its own sake and instead be looking more at quality outcomes. Spend in itself is no indication of quality of outputs as some of the best projects do not necessarily consume large resources. It is spend on delivery rather than process that is most important and budgets should reflect this. Lessons should be learned from the Greenspace Scotland LEAP framework and Central Scotland Forest Social Impact Survey when evaluating success of initiatives.

Do you agree that the main funding challenge is to ensure that greenspace action is supported by a range of mainstream funding programmes ?

R 17 CWA feels that funding streams need to be simpler and clearer. At present there exists a plethora of overlapping grants and funding initiatives.. Processes should be clearer, more transparent and should be developed by experienced greenspace and community development practitioners. Many of the main stream funding agencies have limited understanding of how community development processes really function on the ground.

In addition there appear to be considerable regional inequalities between the emphasis that agencies place upon delivery of Greenspace objectives and funding distribution. This could be clarified and a standard imposed across all regions.

In short funding streams need to be simplified, more equitable, flexible and easier for members of the public to understand. There needs to be a departure from "funder led" short termism to a real understanding that community led approaches to greenspace development evolve over longer timescales and may not always lead to implementation of tangible project outputs on the ground.

How would it affect your organisation if the costs of community engagement were always explicit and included in project budgets ?

R18 This would be useful as often this can form the main cost of a project with relatively little spend on capital items occurring. This would benefit CWA as it could help our organisation to provide a greater role in facilitation of greenspace training and capacity building on the ground.

What are the consequences of SNH phasing out support for local greenspace partnerships in favour of more general support for greenspace outcomes ?

R20 We believe as in answer R5 that there is still a need for a strategic approach to greenspace at a regional level and that this might best be done through a network of Greenspace advisors who would network with organisations such as CWA and Community Planning Partnerships. This should be publicly funded. The question is whether SNH should be the agency with the lead role in this process. The role for example could be taken on through other agencies such as Communities Scotland with input from LBAP partnerships to preserve a Natural Heritage angle.

Do these funding principles provide a sound foundation for a national greenspace organisation over the next 5 years ?

R22 The interdisciplinary nature of greenspace activity and the requirement for community development experience would require a long term view. Including and consulting widely with local community involvement may take longer than expected and may mean that other agencies would require to become involved to bring in expertise to fully engage communities in the process. Either this or SNH must look to acquire more suitably skilled personnel within its organisational structure.

Role of SNH

What kind of input or advice in relation to greenspace do you find helpful to obtain from SNH local staff ?

R24 Area staff are able to provide guidance within their field of expertise but in some cases may not have sufficient knowledge of greenspace and community development related work to be fully effective.. SNH area staff could be more informed about the existing networks available for advice and guidance and know whom to contact.. Staff could be encouraged to outsource such work to organisations such as CWA and local greenspace partnerships.

Do you agree that SNH should continue to support a Greenspace for Communities Initiative with priorities broadly as presented in this review ?

R25 CWA believes that significant progress has been made through the Greenspace for Communities Initiative and particularly through the launch of Greenspace Scotland. This process needs to continue to provide Scotland with the high quality urban environment which is essential for the development of all the country's citizens.

CWA agrees that the Greenspace for Communities Initiative needs to be supported by the Scottish Executive as broadly as presented in the review.. CWA believes that SNH would require further expertise in community engagement and greenspace aims to evolve as an organisation to continue this remit. The Scottish Executive may need to consider whether this is appropriate for SNH and whether the funding is available to achieve this or perhaps transfer the remit to another more suitable agency able to lead this process.