

Stepping Stones to Nature - Project Summary

The *Stepping Stones to Nature* project is a £1.065 million partnership project seeking to deliver improved opportunities to access green space in and around the city. Stepping Stones to Nature seeks a future where local urban green spaces are promoted as the first step on a journey to experiencing the wide ranging benefits of accessing nature. *Stepping Stones* brings a fresh approach to delivering the 'Outdoors for All' agenda. Efforts are focused at where new users come from, rather than green space destinations. It will use each green space 'step' as an opportunity to increase confidence, and build enthusiasm for exploring natural environments further afield.

Stepping Stones brings together for the first time green space managers, with community engagement and health professionals. This unique partnership brings together expertise from public health, parks, protected landscapes, neighbourhood renewal, play, rights of way, and outdoor education. Using the *Stepping Stone* approach, the partnership aims to ensure that people of all ages and backgrounds have the opportunity to access Plymouth's natural spaces and take advantage of the extensive benefits.

The *Stepping Stones to Nature* vision has three components:

Step 1: Local urban green spaces. It encourages local communities to contribute to improvements, and to develop and participate in activities within these spaces.

Step 2: Encourage exploration and build confidence in accessing natural areas within the city but outside of the 'comfort zone', e.g. Local Nature Reserves.

Step 3: Opportunities to experience, encourage exploration, and build confidence in visiting one of the many unique natural environments that surround the city. e.g. Dartmoor National Park, the Tamar Estuaries.

Project Aims:

To deliver this vision, the project has five aims

Aim 1 – To promote a new approach to accessing natural spaces which places **Inclusive Participation** at its heart. This work will be targeted at six of Plymouth's most deprived areas, delivering innovative approaches to engaging people with natural spaces and overcoming perceptual barriers.

Aim 2 – To facilitate lasting **Organisational Change** in the way green space managers and community and health professionals work together.

Aim 3 – To deliver **Quality** improvements that ensure natural spaces are more welcoming and accessible.

Aim 4 – To deliver a step change in the quality and focus of **Communications** that provide information on opportunities to access natural spaces. The project will also broaden the appeal of natural spaces to new audiences city-wide by promoting opportunities through high profile community led events.

Aim 5 – To support a **Research** programme that will report the benefits and changes evoked by this unique project.

Project Management:

The Council's Planning Services are leading the development and delivery of this partnership project. Parks Services, Childrens Services and the Transport Infrastructure & Engineering Service are also significant contributors from within the Council.

The external funding partners are BTCV (British Trust for Conservation Volunteers), Dartmoor National Park, Groundwork South West, OPAL (Open Air Laboratories network), the Plymouth NHS Trust Public Health Development Unit, University of Plymouth, and the Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Stepping Stones will employ two Project Officers to work with the partnership to deliver this ambitious project. The officers will be hosted within Planning Services but will work very closely with the local communities and project partners.

Project Benefits:

Over the four years of the project it will deliver:

- A step change in public awareness of the opportunities to access natural spaces within and around the city.
- Green space consultation events in each priority neighbourhoods.
- A minimum of 50 events on natural spaces across the city.
- A minimum of 30 trips to green space 'Stepping Stones'.
- Ten capacity building events for health, community and natural space professionals, to engender new relationships and ways of working.
- Quality improvements on a minimum of one local natural space within each priority neighbourhood.
- Significant quality improvements to the accessibility and welcome of four Local Nature Reserves.
- Four new natural play spaces.
- A minimum of four new Public Rights of Way.
- In excess of 2000 volunteering days on green spaces.
- The production of comprehensive research into the changes and benefits of the project.