

Green Infrastructure for Sustainable Communities

In response to the high levels of growth projected for the Milton Keynes and South Midlands (MKSM) Sub-Region, a number of organisations have come together to focus on the need for a strategic approach to planning Green Infrastructure. The Growth Area provides an opportunity to protect and enhance environmental assets.

The MKSM Environment & Quality of Life (EQOL) Sub Group has been set up to put together a set of principles and standards to ensure consistency and co-ordination in the delivery of environment and quality of life initiatives across the Sub-Region.

This leaflet is aimed at a wide audience including chief executives and board/member representatives of local authorities and local delivery vehicles.



The principles and guidance contained in this leaflet are discussed in more detail in "Planning Sustainable Communities - A Green Infrastructure Guide for Milton Keynes & the South Midlands". It is available from the sponsoring organisations listed on the back page.



What is it?

Green Infrastructure (GI) is a network of multi-functional greenspace that contributes to the high quality natural and built environment required for existing and new sustainable communities in the future. It consists of both public and private assets, with and without public access, and in both urban and rural locations.

Sustainable communities balance and integrate the social, economic and environmental components of the community.

Why is it important?

A network of greenspaces is essential for sustainable communities - to provide "liveability" for present and future residents.

The concept of GI has been endorsed by the MKSM Sub-Regional Strategy, March 2005, and therefore has policy status.

What are the benefits?

Well-designed and integrated GI can promote a sense of community and place and help to reduce crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour, as well as provide opportunities for community involvement and cultural diversity. It can provide opportunities for exercise, sport, active recreation and improve health as a result of increased physical activity, such as walking and cycling.

Improvements in environmental quality can facilitate better air and water quality and contribute to sustainable drainage and flood mitigation. GI is also essential to help protect, recreate or rehabilitate landscapes, historic sites and habitats damaged or lost by previous development or agricultural change and help maintain and enhance biodiversity.

GI can provide an enhanced environmental backdrop that will attract business and inward investment.

What are Green Infrastructure assets?

- Allotments.
- Amenity space, including communal greenspaces within housing areas.
- Green corridors, including hedgerows, ditches, disused railways and verges.
- Brownfield and greenfield sites.
- Urban parks and gardens.
- Registered commons and village and town greens.
- Children's play space.
- Natural and semi-natural habitat for wildlife.
- Playing fields.
- Cemeteries.
- Pocket parks.
- Country parks.
- Woodland.
- Historic parks and gardens and historic landscapes.
- Nature reserves.
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Scheduled Monuments.
- Locally designated heritage sites, including county wildlife sites.
- Waterways and waterbodies, including flooded quarries.
- Development sites with potential for openspace and links.
- Land in agri-environmental management.
- Public rights of way, cycleways and other recreational routes.

Why do we need a set of principles?

The ultimate goal is to achieve an overarching, interrelated framework which links existing and planned communities through a connected, easily accessible greenspace network, whilst also respecting the ecological and cultural heritage of the region, and the promotion of local distinctiveness.

In adopting these principles, all stakeholders can ensure that they share a common purpose and find ways of combining skills and other resources in order to maximise their impact on the delivery of growth and regeneration.

What are the main principles?

Green Infrastructure should

- Contribute to the management, conservation and improvement of the local landscape.
- Contribute to the protection, conservation and management of historic landscapes, archaeological and built heritage assets.
- Maintain and enhance biodiversity to ensure that development and implementation results in a net gain of Biodiversity Action Plan habitats.
- Be delivered through the enhancement of existing woodlands and also by the creation of new woodlands and forest areas.
- Create new recreational facilities, particularly those that present opportunities to link urban and countryside areas.
- Take account of and integrate with natural processes and systems.
- Be managed and funded in urban areas to accommodate nature, wildlife and historic and cultural assets, and provide for sport and recreation.
- Be designed to high standards of quality and sustainability to deliver social and economic as well as environmental benefits.
- Provide focus for social inclusion, community development and lifelong learning.

Why do we need a strategic approach?

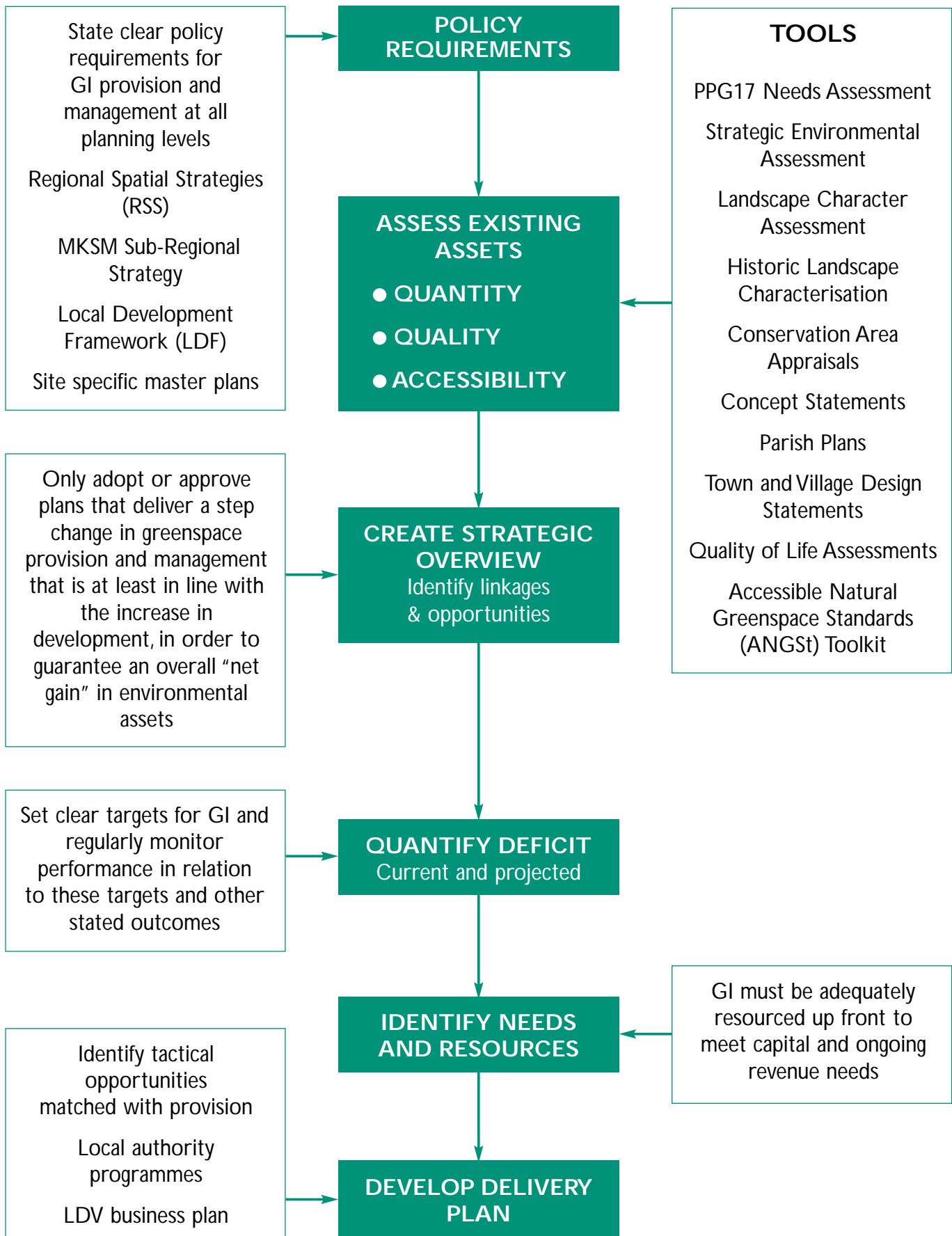
Today's scale and pace of development requires major changes to the traditional ways of providing GI. Previously, GI has been developed at the local level and often in an opportunistic way. At times, this has led to schemes failing as insufficient resources were committed to aftercare.

In order to achieve sustainable communities, GI must be planned strategically and delivered in an integrated way across the whole Sub-Region and at all spatial planning levels. The principles of GI should be integrated into Local Development Frameworks and the investment plans of those responsible for the planning and delivery of growth and environmental management within the Sub-Region.



Strategic Framework and Delivery Programme

The following diagram shows a model process for the successful planning and delivery of GI.



About EQOL

EQOL reports to the Growth Implementation Group, the main body supporting and advising the MKSM Inter-Regional Board, and has a broad-based membership of senior representatives drawn from key national and regional organisations.

EQOL has been set up to provide advice and guidance on environment and quality of life issues for local delivery vehicles and local planning authorities.

The information contained in this leaflet has been prepared by the EQOL Sub Group members and represents independent advice. It is not a statement of government policy.

For more information about the EQOL Sub Group, contact Louise Johnson, Environment Agency, on 0115 846 2619.

Case Studies

The following case studies appear in full in "Planning Sustainable Communities - A Green Infrastructure Guide for Milton Keynes & the South Midlands".

Landscape Character

- Northamptonshire Environmental Character Assessment
- Bedfordshire Landscape Character Assessment

Historic Environment

- MKSM SRS: Historic Environment Assessment

Biodiversity

- Summer Leys Local Nature Reserve
- Dunstable Downs and the Chilterns Gateway Project

Woodland

- Forest of Marston Vale
- Biggleswade Linear Wood

Sport and Recreation

- Milton Keynes - Bedford - Sandy Cycle Track
- Salcey Forest - River Nene Regional Park

Natural Processes and Environmental Systems

- Upton SuDS
- Marston Vale Surface Waters Plan

Managing Urban Greenspaces

- Milton Keynes Parks Trust
- Aylesbury Vale Park

Design

- Aylesbury Vale - Weedon Hill Design Code

Community Involvement

- Bellcote Meadow Millennium Green

Strategic Framework and Delivery Programme

- The Northamptonshire Green Infrastructure Project 2005, River Nene Regional Park

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