

Green Infrastructure Guide

GreenSpace North West response

Introduction

GreenSpace North West was established in 2004 to provide a united voice dedicated to promoting, advocating and lobbying for the regeneration and sustainable future of quality green spaces throughout the North West.

The Forum was established by a number of North West local authority parks and open spaces managers who recognised the need to work together to improve the quality of the region's green spaces and also to speak with one voice to strategy makers. 65% of the North West local authorities are now members of the Forum and the organisation runs networking meetings in each county. Facilitated by the Forum, teams of managers are developing projects around community involvement in the North West's green spaces and also training and skills in the region.

The Forum supports the guide and the concept of Green Infrastructure, however the document does need some clarification both in terms of processes and green infrastructure's role in relation to other strategies departments are working on.

The guide aims to be a very all-encompassing approach to green infrastructure planning; including regeneration professionals, developers, managers and many more peripheral sectors such as health. GreenSpace North West support this approach; however feel it is not carried through the document. The language is technical limiting accessibility, a more direct style and some summary flow charts highlighting linkages and process delivery would be useful. Consultation and coordination of different professions are not enshrined in the planning process and this is the only way to ensure that it occurs.

Page 18 states 'long term maintenance and management must not be forgotten'. Long term management and maintenance should be a fundamental consideration; without the capacity to deliver / sustain the green infrastructure it will remain an unfulfilled inspirational exercise, or worse a short term failure. Greater emphasis on the quality / condition of the green infrastructure is one way land managers could be included in the process.

Supplementary Question A

Do you agree that green infrastructure should be included in Local Development Framework strategies? If so, should it be addressed as a stand alone green infrastructure policy?
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The detail of the planning process should be tested and workable for planners before it becomes part of the framework. Otherwise it should be part of the local development framework if it is going to have the impact that it intends.

If it is a stand alone policy, it should be used to coordinate the wealth of strategies relating to green spaces – both management and planning. This is touched on in the text, however should be emphasised by clearly articulating the relationship of this policy to other strategies, for example green space, nature conservation, tourism etc...

Supplementary Question B

How should any green infrastructure policy be implemented; Supplementary Planning Document, Area Action Plan or something else? – Or, can it be done through existing guidance and delivery mechanisms?

Question One

Is green infrastructure a helpful concept and approach to planning the environmental elements of sustainable development in concert with economic and social factors?

Yes Green Infrastructure is a useful concept. The holistic approach and breaking down boundaries of ownership is significant; similarly there is a need to look beyond local authority boundaries. The difficulty will be the mechanism to deliver this approach, who leads and how to coordinate it to prevent duplication. The breadth and scale of green infrastructure will however make policy development resource hungry which is a concern for already overstretched departments.

The term itself needs to be explained as people's intuitive understanding of the words varies. Also the terms 'environmental' and 'sustainable' have various meanings depending upon the audience – and it is a wide audience. It is not clear how the processes proposed would deliver financial sustainability.

Question Two

Is using functions as the basis for green infrastructure planning and management:

- a) Consistent with the planning of other infrastructure?
- b) A basis for the sustainable management of the natural environment?

a) Direct comparisons with other types of infrastructure risk oversimplifying the role of green infrastructure. The educational, community liaison, nature conservation elements of it could be under-represented taking this type of approach.

b) Is this relating to long term financial sustainability or environmental sustainability? It is a useful approach for balancing the often contradicting needs of different functions of green space; for example nature conservation and accessibility. It does not however tackle the issue of adequate revenue for maintenance to a reasonable quality, which means that it would perpetuate the existing problems with green space planning. There is money for new features such as play areas, but funding their maintenance is much more of a challenge.

Question Three

There are already a wide range of assessments of functionality being used. Is there a need for a structured approach? If so what should this entail or does the range of approaches provide opportunities to be flexible and respond to different local requirements and circumstances.

The sector often suffers from lack of comparable data and variable data will also be a barrier to cross boundary working.

This given, the final approach should be pragmatic. Numerous typologies and functions are already in use as a result of local benchmarking, PPG 17 audits and writing of green space & other strategies. In reality if an authority is using a model that works well, making them change would not only be a waste of resources, it would cause frustration. Clarification is needed if data from existing (often expensive and time consuming) audits can be used, even if it is not as all-encompassing as Green Infrastructure's suggested data.

The emphasis in the text is on current functionality and more consideration should be given to potential functionality, for example if development is proposed adjacent to an element of green infrastructure.

Question Four

Do the attributes cover all the features of green infrastructure? – do you have any specific comments on any of these attributes?

Quality is briefly mentioned under resource mapping, and the only example given is using health walks as a measure of health benefits. Basic quality measures do not feature in the attributes list at all. There is a need for fundamental quality measures of the green infrastructure; if a site is of poor condition it will probably fail to deliver the majority of the functions it is intended to provide. By not emphasising quality / condition measures, the opportunity both to include the land managers in the process and to tackle issues of revenue to maintain provision are missed.

Clarification is needed on the objectives for identifying the context; it relates to typology and functionalities, however what more does it add? This would be clearer if it included the human as well as the physical geographical context such as population or deprivation.

Green Infrastructure scale is a complex issue and benefits often are delivered and managed at several scales. The guide introduction talks about the sub regional scale and the local authority scale. How are these going to relate to each other and how will it work?

Does the connectivity attribute include the accessibility for people ie transport links as well as connected habitats?

Question Five

Are the steps and methods identified a clear guide to compiling and synthesising information needed to produce a green infrastructure plan.

Clarification is needed on the points raised above.

Question Six

What other mechanisms exist for determining strategic priorities? Is the link to Local Strategic Partnerships and Community Plans significant?

Question Seven

Do these provide a robust framework for green infrastructure planning? Have any elements been omitted?

More emphasis is needed on the community and quality elements.

Question Eight

What do you consider the key strategic outcomes of effective green infrastructure planning should be? eg an agreed single plan for targeting of resources for environmental improvements.

A green infrastructure plan should be the mechanism to improve those parts of the environment –both physical and human - which green space impacts. These include:

- biodiversity
- social cohesion
- health
- quality of life
- play