



Commentary : Revised A-Z Policy Matrix for evaluating green infrastructure.

The final policy matrix has changed in response to feedback from the green infrastructure partnership sounding board (October 2018) and dedicated planning workshops for West Of England in July and November 2018 where the matrix was tested on forthcoming local plans.

Rationale

The final policy matrix is predicated upon capturing the principal functions of GI where there is most traction in terms of policy hooks and planning practice and where most impact can be made in policy development and delivery. This reflects the focus of the NERC projects Building with Nature¹ and Mainstreaming Green Infrastructure² Thus a degree of pragmatism has been involved in the final judgement of what changes have been made. In particular there were valid points made for extra elements in the matrix relating to function such as soils, it was felt that these were a step too far in terms of a core GI element to be included. Currently more effort is needed to get the functions of biodiversity, water, air and recreation mainstreamed in policy assessments allowing the other components to become included in mainstreaming and multifunctional criteria where particular authorities are excelling. This also becomes key when GI is viewed as part of a “constructed” and managed network of green and blue features thus giving Suds and water key prominence. Equally current GI discourse is heavily focused on improving air quality and health in urban centres and thus is included.

The following changes have been made as shown in the diagram above. .

The previous matrix had a range of must, should and will wordings which was confusing to the users. This type of wording has been changed to use consistent phrasing throughout the A to Z as criteria that need to be demonstrated.

A and B have incorporate health policies given the central importance of health to the GI and planning equation.

D and E retain the pre-planning fix as opposed to being proposed throughout all stages as our work has highlighted the key gap of GI being used in the initial stages which is where the key impetus for change is most needed. Of course it is hoped that consultation will occur throughout the development pipeline but this is where most impact will be delivered in response to stakeholder concerns. The stewardship section XYZ also has a measure of this in terms of future management approaches.

H and I have the inclusion of GI benefits. This is deemed important to improve understanding of how functions deliver benefits and also enables the user to relate benefits to these criteria. Often the policies that are written focus on the benefits understandably for their audiences rather than the functions.

¹ See <https://www.buildingwithnature.org.uk/>

² See <https://mainstreaminggreeninfrastructure.com/index.php>

K and L have been modified to include the NPPF hooks of net biodiversity gain and nature recovery networks. However when using this for Scotland and Wales their specific terms will need to be used. This means that the matrix is not a one size fits UK model.

M and N have had the term “explicit” added to ensure that water is ACTUALLY identified as part of the GI network.

O the naturalised design is complemented by the addition of enhancing natural capital.

S changed to active and healthy travel.

U added opportunities.

W and age groups added

Next Steps.

We are currently writing guidance for the use of the matrix with a suite of policy extracts with indicative scores given so that potential users can understand what good and weak looks like. In many ways the commentary around how the go and weak scores have been derived is key to using the tool. A final copy will be available in mid January for the next sounding board meeting