

# What kind of green infrastructure do we want? Building better bridges between research and practice

## **Policy practice briefing paper. (20 responses)**

This briefing paper crudely summarises and reflects on the responses received to the PART 1 material. I had a mountain of material so please excuse my cherry picking/reductionism. Some responses stretched to 3-4 pages and represent outstanding submissions with important insights which will feed into my work and will not be lost.

### **1. Challenges**

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| • Lack of definitional clarity on GI with multiple confusing terms | 6 |
| • Lack of suitable financial mechanisms and markets for GI         | 5 |
| • Lack of staff resources to develop good policy and deliver on GI | 4 |
| • Lack of GI standards and codes of Practice                       | 4 |
| • Policy silos prevent GI potential being delivered effectively    | 4 |
| • Quality and quantity of academic information and research        | 4 |
| • Lack of GI input at an early enough stage in planning processes  | 3 |
| • Changing government, agency and individual behaviours            | 4 |
| • NPPF and NPPG are too weak on GI                                 | 4 |
| • Adhoc good examples but difficult to transfer and mainstream     | 2 |

These challenges are not mutually exclusive and cover a diversity of well understood challenges. Many of the headings perhaps hide more than the responses actually revealed but it is worrying that lack of definitional clarity still continues to be a key feature. In particular the conflation of terms and concepts serve to confuse. This gets magnified as (environmental and NGO) agencies are perceived to have their own objectives/agendas for GI which do not always coincide. Hence a tension between some saying GI was too landscape focused and others saying it was too natural capital focussed! Whilst the benefits of GI were identified generally, the lack of financial tools and mechanisms to deliver real monies and budgets from GI investment was evident. Theoretical values and benefits were no good without establishing new financial markets. Concern was also evident about the lack of evidence about the quality and state of GI leading to demands for improved GI standards and codes of practice. There was also concern at the national (England) policy level about the lack of joined up government and policy making and the difficulty of changing established behaviours and approaches (eg HM Treasury Green Book). The silo mentality across government (national and local) was hindering progress on GI through their narrow focus on sectoral priorities although the 25 year environment plan was seen to offer a HM Government opportunity space. Several responses did mention the challenge of the current NPPF/NPPG priorities that consistently relegated GI (viability). This was magnified by councillors and decision makers in their decisions. There were concerns that this would be cemented further (pun intended) in the revised NPPF in March 2018.

The research effort was also seen to be generating a lot of evidence but it was difficult to access and had outputs that were not that usable given the lack of time and resources in agencies to understand and get skilled in such materials. The number of new tools was a particular problem with the inability for practice to simply take it off the shelf; often they were developed without understanding administrative systems and thus were not oven ready or needed specialist training

**2. GI deficit** (This section merges PART 1 priorities and where GI needs to be mainstreamed). The responses go to the heart of the mainstreaming challenge. In many ways it reveals multiple

areas of public policy and decision making where GI has yet to fulfil its potential. Infrastructure plans were singled out for special attention at a range of scales. Specific user groups were also targeted to help with mainstreaming ; business, councillors, MHCLG and devolved city region/combined authority staff and BIDS (local business innovation districts) were identified as key as were planning inspectors and building control officers. A sub plot here was the need for GI to better represented in building standards with BRREAM being cited for example. Collectively the results suggest there is a lot of work to do for effective mainstreaming, raising questions as to how existing and future research is connected in to this agenda. The points about MHCLG reflect a concern to get GI into the culture and agenda of the government department perceived to be focussed on housing and where there was a concern that GI was only seen as a defra responsibility leading to disconnected policy approaches and priorities. In terms of processes there was concern that GI was incorporated as early as possible into the planning processes for masterplans and planning applications and also in local plan site allocations. Equally here tools were needed to help give evidence of producing good GI outcomes. However could these be integrated within existing regulatory practices rather than something new.

- Institutional cultures that see GI as a cost 3
- Mainstreaming GI into other infrastructure plans (National Infrastructure Commission; highways, transport, community, ) 4
- Mainstreamed across all built environment professions in university courses 2
- Mainstreamed in devolution plans (combined authorities) 2
- Public Health and well being 5
- LEPS and BIDS 3
- Future design codes and building regulations 3
- Early discussions in planning processes 4
- Better monitoring and evaluation of GI in all stages of planning process 3
- Planning Obligations and Community infrastructure levy 2
- Duty to Cooperate (Localism Act) 3
- Working with councillors on value of GI 3
- Working with Planning Inspectors on value of GI 2
- Important to mainstream in neighbourhood plans and citizen led initiatives 2
- Building regs and BRREAM assessments 2
- Research that is practice led to generate usable tools 2
- MHCLG culture 2

**3. Lessons** There was a diversity of lessons learnt across the policy and practice responses. The most commonly cited related to the need for better communication of GI outcomes and value to key audiences. Here there was a need to adapt GI to the language and priorities of others rather than staying within a GI/natural capital silos. In addition, GI should draw upon current national plans (NPPF/Industrial Strategy and 25 year ev plan as an opportunity space rather than “drowning in a sea of negativity about their limitations. There was general concern too about the quantity of research and its inaccessibility. There was frustration that policy and practice priorities and systems were rarely embedded in research processes and outcomes. In some instances, this had led participants to undertake their own bespoke consultancies.

- Better communication of facts and research in public and political domains
- Need to engage with other audiences on GI on their terms, language and priorities
- Multiple Interpretations of GI confuse and alienate
- Flexible and adaptable (agency and individual)
- Too many tools confuse potential users

- Cross sector partnerships key to success but take time to build
- Lack of political or senior management GI champions can hinder progress
- Need better training in use of tools
- Avoid creating a GI silo
- Promote positive messages for GI linking existing national plans together including Brexit