

Green spaces, healthy places



Health metrics interactive exercise led by Prof Alister Scott NERC KE fellow

The following questions were asked

- 1. What current health metrics do you use (if any) to inform decision making for better uptake of GI**
- 2. What particular metrics do you need to help your policy and decision making ?”**
- 3. How should we use health metrics in policy and decision making?”**
- 4. How can we better link GI characteristics and functions to health metrics?**

- 1. What current health metrics do you use (if any) to inform decision making for better uptake of GI**

The answers reveal use of established data sources (census: index of multiple deprivation Qalys; IDM) together with use of agreed standards (Angst, Green flag). Other surveys were mentioned as secondary data sources eg. Active lives survey; MENIE obesity survey

There was however a bias towards more bespoke metrics with site surveys featuring in terms of visitor numbers, usage and activities. Interestingly, there was also use of perception data including user self assessment.

Other answers clearly show the use of bespoke metrics on the way nature impacts upon peoples experience. It is unclear what these metrics are and how they are measured given the relatively few words used to describe them but this does warrant further investigation as all too often we reinvent wheels without spending time looking at what exists and has been used.

One interesting point is that the use of acronyms by respondents may get lost in translation at the health planning interface.

Post it notes as written (including acronyms)

- Location : re data on deprivation for a borough in London : household income, existing open space, ethnic information
- Index of multiple deprivation
- Index of multiple deprivation
- Index of multiple deprivation
- None just used common sense and received wisdom and policy that existed which we received must have an evidence base somewhere in a Whitehall filing cabinet.
- Public Health indicators
- Crime survey
- IDM
- IDM
- Qalys
- DASS
- Green Flag award
- Census
- Census
- Census
- Menie
- Visitor numbers
- Visitor numbers
- Well being scores
- Physical activity mins/day
- Angst
- People counter
- Surveys of opinion
- Qualitative metrics on community value of green space.
- Local retail turn over
- Completed improvement schemes.
- Loneliness
- Measures of self well being consistent with 5 ways to well being
- Benefits of walking on stress
- How nature effects health and well being.
- Physical inactivity
- Active lives survey
- Childhood obesity.
- Perception of character , safety and sociability.
- Open space access
- Demographic make up of users

- What the groups do /need
- length of life

2. What particular metrics do you need to help your policy and decision making?

The answers are diverse reflecting a diverse user group with varying needs. The answers and individual discussions I had also stressed the need to develop a bundle of metrics that collectively address the topic rather than rely on one or two metrics which may give a misleading view.

There was a clear need for more economic based metrics capturing the value of GI both in terms of the ecosystem services provided and consequential multiple/cobenefits, but also in terms of usage of specific spaces. Interestingly, as well as parks and sites linear GI eg PROW are identified as resources.

There is also the need to input current health metrics into GI assessments rather than create new ones. The link between trying to assess the NHS costs forgone by GI interventions also appear with stronger metrics to social prescribing.

There was also recognition of the value of nature as spaces for innovation and inspiration as reflected by agencies using such locations for away days but this can scale down to the individual level for a lunch break too. I can't remember the last time I went for a walk in green spaces to think through a problem at work.

The issue of metrics assessing quality became important in several answers in terms of green spaces quality and desirability with also metrics associated with its productivity and as a space for innovation. There was a clear concern that metrics are being used on quantity alone as they are easier to measure.

Post it notes as written

- Clear guide to what interventions being about change (good or bad)
- Total value of ecosystem services provided and value of each ecosystem service /function
- What types of habitats, environments, and management are more associated to health benefits than others
- Be careful about relying on one dominant metric; need a bundle
- Quality of life
- Happiness
- Enjoyment pleasure
- Value of green space in terms of the multiple of cobenefits
- Using the outcome indicators by health sector : hospital admissions, GP visits, mortality and life expectancy
- Economic ; money money money
- Economic value
- Monetising quantifying benefits of GI
- Quality measures for GI
- Public health data eg obesity by age group ; levels of physical activity
- Figures on green space usage
- I want metrics that will play into health authorities and other health exercise promoting organisations criteria for funding/prescribing that does of nature particularly the link

between health and walking /exploring rights of way and trails . Linear greenspace currently neglected as a resource.

- Package of metrics required please.
- Mechanistic data providing causality
- Physical activity, well being metrics based on sound theory and science.
- Better and more realistic evaluation of what works for who and why
- Embed in education
- Like metrics that demonstrate the importance of connections with nature not just the Kms of walking trials.
- Something that accounts for the complexities : context and experience
- How long do people stay within the green space as a measure of its quality and desirability.
- How many people are kept away from using front line NHS services because they use green space (savings in terms of HNS time and money (costs foregone)
- Social contact : combating loneliness and isolation
- Productivity eg after a lunch break outside
- Impact : active travel ; less vehicle use; reduced crime economic impact district centres.
- GI as spaces for innovation : away days etc.
- Access to private versus public spaces in different areas. Less access to private more needed for public.
- Showing developers that GI is an investment as they can get profits from it.
- Value and functionality of green space in relation to typology
- Rather than broad range of GI need to be able to asses value of a particular local greenspace in terms of how it contributes to NHS savings and health benefits.
- Total number of people using greenspaces and why they are there. We don't have this data
- Better integration of how GI quality (not just quantity and location) lead to better health outcomes.
- Levels of obesity in school age children at the borough ward level.
- Orchestrated experiences of open spaces eg nature walk on subsequent behaviour.

3. How should we use health metrics in policy and decision making?"

The most commonly encountered response were for metrics to be decision support tools to inform decision makers with extreme care needed over their design, use and interpretation. There was consistent support for them to be used to improve planning guidance (national NPPF/ PPW/ PPS), policy (local plans) and outcomes; planning decisions and housing developments in particular with reference also made to building regulations.

They were also seen as important for investment and securing more funding priorities.

There was concern that metrics also need to feed into existing decision systems such as appraisal (monetary valuation) and health investment. It was important to work with existing decision systems in design of metrics.

Key issues were also raised around the need to measure marginal change that targets those in most need as opposed to those who were already benefitting; a real danger with GI investment. How do you measure that? And to factor in both investment in new spaces as well as retrofitting GI in areas without sufficient access. Again the issue of identifying the costs foregone by provision and use of GI was seen as important to capture.

One really interesting issue was raised about need for improved training of decision makers (also extending to developers) so that they fully understand the value(s) and benefits of greenspace and thus can become future champions. A comment made verbally was that events like this conference attract those who have already bought into the concept. How you get the sceptics into the room.

Post it notes as written

- To justify local authority investment in green spaces
- To influence decision makers and secure championship of the countryside
- Evidence base for developing meaningful projects and attracting funding.
- Developing local plan policies that are robust
- Influencing planning policy
- Need to have evidence to persuade housebuilders to incorporate better GI and they can sell the health benefits in their marketing literature and use to get better housing developments.
- Embed in planning policy and be at the front of planning guidance and decisions.
- To guide policy and budgets
- Impact of greenspace on physical activity levels.
- As a decision support tool definitely not as answers.
- Link to monetary valuation so can be used in economic appraisal
- To have impacts on life chances for people in less well off communities.
- Develop and build green spaces in new towns and cities.
- Guide policy (national and local) change attitudes and perceptions.
- Inform decisions when deciding local planning issues , budgeting of a site and management.
- Need to be able to measure marginal change – people who do less active exercise can get a greater benefit from those who do it already. (How to get those into the equation) . Need to be able to represent that difference.
- Funding priorities
- To better target interventions
- To ensure what we do as a local authority (access to countryside) best meets local needs and addresses local wishes
- To convince health professionals and local authorities to invest in GI
- To achieve better planning decisions and negotiate higher quality developments.
- To influence decisions on animating GI with programmes and activity sessions.
- Where are the best places to include nature. Is there a difference between retrofitting spaces versus creating new ones.
- Guidance of systemic change in the planning and development codes that are based on health outcomes evidence.
- Need to know the costs/reduction of health care by incorporating nature
- Compare effectiveness of Natural England health and well being interventions with medical interventions.
- Cross cutting metrics to avoid silos syndrome
- To develop approaches to social prescribing deployment and management of green space.
- Funding and buy in
- Inform educate and train ward members/decision makers to get them on board.
- Target funding streams to guide our own policy making to target the right interventions.
- Whatever metrics you chose please publish in a language the decision makers and the public can understand easily.

- Contrary to public opinion metrics do not make the world go round. They can be very dangerous if the wrong ones are chosen
- Accessibility /mobility and use of green space.

4 How can we better link GI characteristics and functions to health metrics?

This question attracted a great variety of responses/ideas and this crude summary narrative can't do justice to all the ideas voiced. Thus it is important to read them as they were written.

It was recognised that other audiences needed to get the message and there was a danger of preaching to a converted audience so other more subtle trojan horse approaches needed. Training and CPD on value of green spaces in green spaces was also suggested.

The issue of linking metrics within approved standards schemes such as BRREAM was seen as one way to promote change. It was important here not always to develop new metrics or associated tools but to consolidate and improve the existing ones. We often see more developed which merely confuses and becomes part of a fallacy of creeping data incrementalism without knowing the problems you want solved.

The same philosophy was recommended for tools and it was stressed that new tools were not wanted. However, the idea of developing standards for walking and cycling activity akin to the heat standard for WHO was interesting.

More economic metrics were also identified where GI investment had occurred so as to demonstrate its value., It was here that demonstration sites with longitudinal data and sensors were suggested as a way for people to see on the ground what good looks like with access to all evidence. Here points about physical activity rates, ecosystem services benefits commonly featured.

Evidence featured but not in the usual way ; rather than more it was about translating the evidence in more accessible formats to better influence decision makers. There was also support for using both quantitative and qualitative data where peoples experiences and stories equally mattered. Associated with this there were points about identifying the best hooks to engage diverse audiences. Wellness was seen as one.

Finally, there were some interesting points made about understanding and building upon peoples connections with nature and to find out what sparks improve such connections. Gardens were one area to engage.

Post it notes as written

- Beware of preaching to an already converted audience as evidenced today. Need a trojan horse approach to connect with other key audiences who are not here today
- A lot of this is common sense ; garden space needs to be a measure of development quality.
- Linking/amending BRREAM assessments into GI and health
- Agreed set of impact pathways : GI intervention – effect on people and economy – measurable impact (health metric) – benefits (cost savings)
- Physical activity benefits ; mental health outcomes using studies and research with stats and graphics to illustrate
- Translating the evidence in much more effective ways to decision makers.

- Having demonstration sites and examples that can show full data and evidence (over time) and visibility to show what good actually looks like.
- Highlight case studies that have realised co benefits of GI ; start the conversation from a wellness perspective.
- End user ownership and passion/pride for the green space
- Change: statistical approaches to emphasize multivariate aspects.
- Try to measure impact and outcomes ; need baselines for comparison and elapsed time to monitor change.
- Get the right kind of economics QALY done.
- Take a dose – response approach to data including spatial data
- Standardise existing metrics rather than create new ones.
- Cohort studies for demonstrating the impact of change to green space with respect to health
- Mixed methods and pilot studies.
- Number of visitors; footfall of shops around GI; biodiversity impacts ; land and house price trends.
- Need better training for decision makers
- Need to build hooks and bridges (Trojan horses) to get to those interests who currently don't see any value or purpose to GI.
- Comparison of NHS spending ; obesity levels ; park usage rates; geographically based.
- Master planning : eco health zones.
- Consolidate and extend use of existing tools like BEST GI Val or Orval (don't create new ones)
- Would be good to have a tool as scaleable as WHO heat tool for walking and cycling.
- A systematic approach eg GI – ecosystem services- health benefits – measurable outcomes eg reduction in asthma
- Something about green links/pathways/routes and making people more connected
- Using peoples experiences and testimonials about value
- Qualitative data important ; telling stories of experiences and using quotes.
- Social differences ; understanding key barriers to access GI
- Well being link what sparks a connection with GI and greater contact with nature.
- CPD sessions for health sector in parks.
- Design GI to meet human givens ; need for water , loos, warmth and social interaction, safety and movement , wider appreciation of nature
- Sense of ownership and pride in green spaces.
- Need greater link with town planning and regulation.
- Get users more actively involved ; what do they would they use.
- Need sparks to engage ; eg gardens great way for people to engage with greenspace.