Process Journey for Neighbourhood Planning Groups

Incorporating Green Infrastructure into Neighbourhood Plans using the Green Infrastructure Framework- Principles and Standards for England

Date: January 2023

Contents

1.0 Introduction

1.1　This Process Journey has been designed for communities preparing a neighbourhood plan and organisations supporting them. The aim is to enable the use of the [Natural England Green infrastructure Framework](#) to address locally identified green infrastructure needs and opportunities. The Process Journey is intended to supplement the existing guidance on Neighbourhood Plans produced by Locality. Please see:

- Neighbourhood plans roadmap [Neighbourhood plan roadmap](#)
- Neighbourhood planning for the environment [How to consider the environment in Neighbourhood plan](#)
- Monitoring and review [How to implement, monitor, and review your Neighbourhood Plan](#)

1.2　The Process Journey provides:

1. Two overview diagrams showing recommended stages to take and relationship to the Green Infrastructure Framework
2. Background information on neighbourhood plans
3. Detailed description of the suggested actions to take at each of the five stages of the process
4. Links to useful guidance and tools

1.3　This Process Journey is one part of the Green Infrastructure Standards Framework, and should be used in conjunction with:

- The [15 Principles of Green Infrastructure](#)
- The on-line [Green Infrastructure Mapping Database](#) and [User Guide](#)
- The [Green Infrastructure Headline standards](#)
- The [Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide](#)

1.4　Please note the term green infrastructure covers blue infrastructure as well for the purposes of this process journey. Documents mentioned in the text are referenced at the end of each section.

1.5　This Process Journey assumes that a neighbourhood plan group has been established and the area for the Plan has been agreed.

Green Infrastructure Definition

1.6　The [National Planning Policy Framework (2021)](#) defines green infrastructure as 'a network of multi-functional green and blue spaces and other natural features, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental, economic, health and wellbeing benefits for nature, climate, local and wider

communities and prosperity'. In this Process Journey we use the term green infrastructure to also include all elements of blue infrastructure as well, such as rivers, canals, ponds reservoirs and streams.

What can a Neighbourhood Plan include on Green Infrastructure?

1.7   A neighbourhood plan can seek to protect and enhance the existing individual elements of green Infrastructure such as parks and greenspaces. It can also describe and suggest locations for new green Infrastructure. Crucially a Neighbourhood Plan can map out the connections between new and existing green Infrastructure, and green Infrastructure connections within and between built development, including housing and roads. Policies on how green Infrastructure can be better integrated into the urban fabric through measures such as green roofs, green walls, rain gardens and water features are also appropriate. In addition, a neighbourhood plan can include planning policies, maps evidence and projects related to green Infrastructure.

1.8   Neighbourhood plans should focus on providing planning policies and the evidence to support them in relation to green Infrastructure rather than green Infrastructure projects or initiatives which fall outside of the planning process.

1.9   Green infrastructure is increasingly seen as important for its roles in addressing biodiversity, water management, climate change and health inequalities. Neighbourhood plans can also describe policies to achieve these objectives using green infrastructure.

Overview diagrams showing the stages

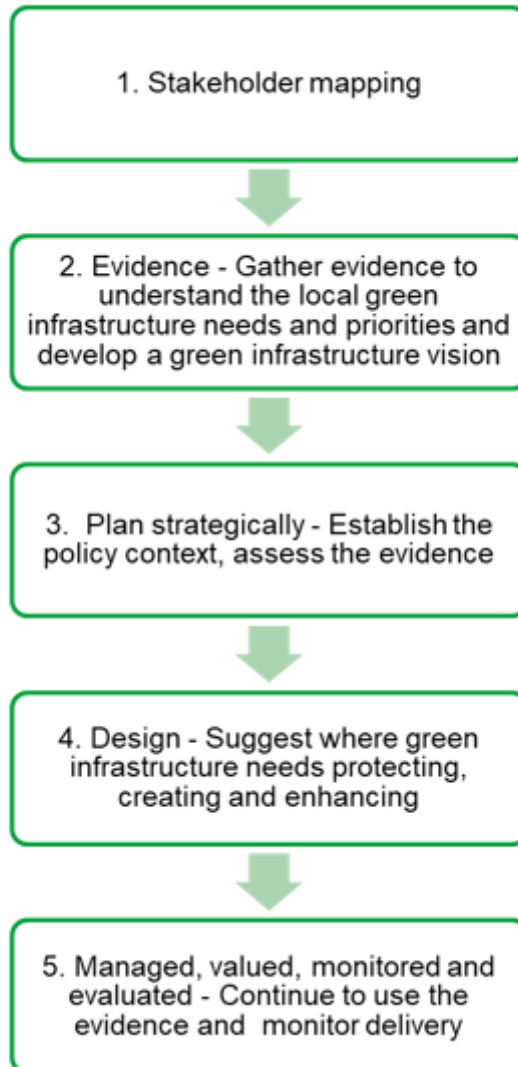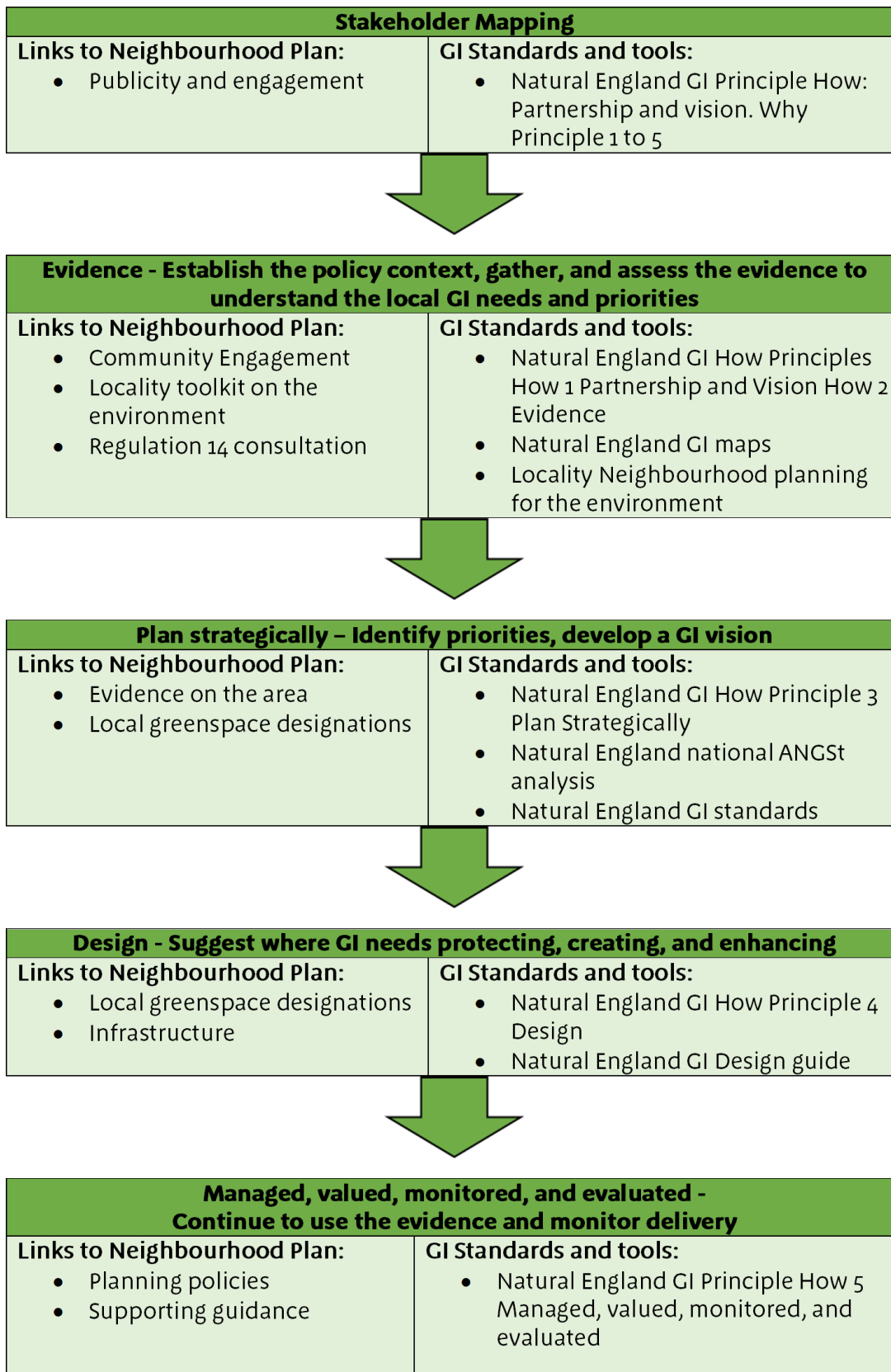**Figure 1** – Flow diagram showing 5 stages to incorporate **green infrastructure** into a Neighbourhood Plan

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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│     1. Stakeholder mapping       │
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                 ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│  2. Evidence - Gather evidence to│
│  understand the local green      │
│  infrastructure needs and        │
│  priorities and develop a green  │
│  infrastructure vision           │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
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┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│  3.  Plan strategically - Establish the│
│  policy context, assess the evidence   │
└─────────────────────────────────┘
                 ↓
┌─────────────────────────────────┐
│  4. Design - Suggest where green │
│  infrastructure needs protecting,│
│  creating and enhancing          │
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│  5. Managed, valued, monitored and│
│  evaluated - Continue to use the  │
│  evidence and  monitor delivery   │
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Figure 2 - Flow diagram showing the stages and their links to Neighbourhood plans and Green Infrastructure Standards and tools.

Stakeholder Mapping	
Links to Neighbourhood Plan:	**GI Standards and tools:**
• Publicity and engagement	• Natural England GI Principle How: Partnership and vision. Why Principle 1 to 5

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Evidence - Establish the policy context, gather, and assess the evidence to understand the local GI needs and priorities	
Links to Neighbourhood Plan:	**GI Standards and tools:**
• Community Engagement • Locality toolkit on the environment • Regulation 14 consultation	• Natural England GI How Principles How 1 Partnership and Vision How 2 Evidence • Natural England GI maps • Locality Neighbourhood planning for the environment

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Plan strategically – Identify priorities, develop a GI vision	
Links to Neighbourhood Plan:	**GI Standards and tools:**
• Evidence on the area • Local greenspace designations	• Natural England GI How Principle 3 Plan Strategically • Natural England national ANGSt analysis • Natural England GI standards

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Design - Suggest where GI needs protecting, creating, and enhancing	
Links to Neighbourhood Plan:	**GI Standards and tools:**
• Local greenspace designations • Infrastructure	• Natural England GI How Principle 4 Design • Natural England GI Design guide

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Managed, valued, monitored, and evaluated - Continue to use the evidence and monitor delivery	
Links to Neighbourhood Plan:	**GI Standards and tools:**
• Planning policies • Supporting guidance	• Natural England GI Principle How 5 Managed, valued, monitored, and evaluated

Background

1.10   All neighbourhood plans must meet the 'basic conditions' set out in planning law and should:
- Have regard to national policy.
- Contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.
- Be in general conformity with the strategic policies in the development plan for the local area.

1.11   According to the National Planning Policy Framework, achieving sustainable development has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways:

An economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive, and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure
A social objective – to support strong, vibrant, and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
An environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built, and historic environment, including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

1.12   The National Planning Policy Framework chapters 8,9,12,14,15 and 16 are particularly relevant to GI. Appendix 1 of this document contains links to other useful government policy information.

1.13   In reference to green infrastructure, the relevant local strategic policies for neighbourhood plans are likely to be contained in the:
- Local Planning Authority's Local Plan (adopted or emerging) – some will have a specific green infrastructure chapter, others may have a core policy on green infrastructure, or include green infrastructure policies in the environment sections
- Local authority green infrastructure strategy and green infrastructure delivery plan
- Local Design Code
- Combined authority green infrastructure Strategy

1.14   Where possible the steps suggested in this Process Journey should be undertaken as an integrated part of the Neighbourhood Plan process and not as separate activities. However, the order in which the steps are taken can vary. Some groups may wish to identify issues first, develop policy themes, seek out the evidence and then develop draft policy.

1.15   Natural England recognises that the level of assistance a local authority can offer a neighbour plan group will vary. Therefore, Neighbourhood plan groups may not be in a position to prepare or obtain all the evidence suggested. It will be for the Group to decide the amount of information required based on issues they would like to address and what is possible to achieve. Any green infrastructure policy will need to be suitably evidence in the neighbourhood plan.

2.0 Five Stage Process Journey

2.1. Stage 1 - Stakeholder Mapping

2.1.1   Consider:
- Who has the green infrastructure expertise and knowledge you need?
- Who are you trying to influence and what do they need to know about the green infrastructure in your area?

2.1.2   Neighbourhood plans will be driven by the issues identified by the local community. This will lead to a set of policy themes which will focus evidence collection and therefore which stakeholders need to be engaged with. At the outset it is important to establish which stakeholders have the expertise and knowledge you want to help address local needs. For instance, do they have the relevant data. Also, it is important to understand who you need to influence, to make the changes to the green infrastructure or increase it. It can sometimes be useful to do a 'Power or Influencing Map'. This is a process to identify key people in organisations or decision makers; understanding their interests and how they are connected; and working out the best way to engage with them. Green infrastructure is a very broad agenda so focus can be important. The interests of stakeholders will overlap and if possible, getting parties with joint interests together should create more momentum. You may also want to consider a skills audit of your own group to assess what knowledge on green infrastructure you have and might need. Support from environment consultants, ecologists, horticulturalists, or a landscape architect may be appropriate.

2.1.3   Previous consultations on planning matters may influence the public or stakeholders' views. It is therefore worth investigating previous consultations. Early engagement is key to ensuring that full consideration is given to all views. Green infrastructure is complex and using the right language to involve the community is crucial. Good facilitation skills can also be important as well as ensuring consultation venues are accessible. Stakeholder mapping should help to identify excluded groups. It will be necessary to reach out to groups who are less visible or under-represented in the community and speak with them at their own meetings. You may also be able to tap into existing partnerships, such as Local Nature Partnerships for knowledge and information. Overall, a mixture of professional advice and knowledge from local interest groups is likely to bring the right balance of information.

2.1.4   Reviewing Natural England's 5 Why green infrastructure principles, should help identify the scope of topics. Initially, it is worth starting with the local authority to identify all the relevant green infrastructure information across the breadth of green infrastructure. Where the local authority is unable to provide the relevant information, table 1 below lists potential green infrastructure related stakeholders and the information they may be able to provide. The list should be used selectively to ensure that relevant stakeholders are engaged to develop the green infrastructure policies you want. It is unlikely that all those listed need to be contacted.

Table 1 – Table of potential green infrastructure related stakeholders

Topic	Stakeholders	Interests	Relevant green infrastructure principle
Biodiversity	Local biodiversity or ecology experts, local wildlife groups, Local Nature Partnerships/ Local Nature Recovery Strategy partnerships	Data on existing species priorities and opportunities for enhancing biodiversity including connectivity of habitats. The LNRS may also pick up on wider environmental issues such as water and air quality and climate change. Specific wildlife sites, trees and woodlands.	Why 1- Nature rich beautiful places What 1 -Multifunctional:

Topic	Stakeholders	Interests	Relevant green infrastructure principle
Health	Local health practitioners such as GP surgeries, outdoor keep fit businesses, walking groups, disability groups, local health charities.	Data on health inequalities and how green infrastructure can support physical and mental health and wellbeing .e.g. as places for physical activity such as walking or cycling, or for connecting with nature.	Why 2 - Active and healthy places What 1 - Multifunctional:
Local businesses	Locally based businesses and chamber of commerce, business park owners/developers.	Creation/maintaining high quality environments to attract businesses and investors, e.g., greening up Town centres	Why 3 - Thriving and prosperous places
Water	Lead local flood authorities and water companies. Local resilience forums.	Information on how green infrastructure such as sustainable drainage systems can improve surface water run off quality, reduce volume, and provide other amenity and biodiversity benefits.	Why 4 - Improved water management
Climate Change	Climate change mitigation and adaptation leads from statutory bodies .e.g. The Environment Agency.	Data on potential climate change impacts. Information on how green infrastructure can reduce risk of flooding, help with urban cooling or air quality. How to help wildlife adapt to climate change.	Why 5 - Resilient and climate positive places What 1 - Multifunctional
Education	Preschools, schools, colleges, universities, youth groups.	Providing areas for outdoor learning, sport and recreation, safe routes to school and air quality	Why 2 - Active and healthy places

Topic	Stakeholders	Interests	Relevant green infrastructure principle
Neighbouring towns and villages	Town and parish councils, neighbourhood forums.	Physically connected local settlements, green corridors connecting varied, multifunctional greenspaces.	What 1 -Multifunctional What 2 -Varied What 3 -Connected
Transport	Highways authority, transport groups – cycling, walking horse riding, disability, health practitioners, education providers	Motorised and non-motorised route improvements, making transport corridors greener e.g., through tree lined routes. 15-minute neighbourhoods, footpath links and reducing travel.	What 4 -Accessible:
Character	History and preservation groups	Protection and enhancement of local landscape and townscape character and historic assets.	What 5 - Character:

2.2. Stage 2 - Evidence

Overview

2.2.1   Understand the existing green infrastructure network by engaging with the local community, local planning authority and relevant stakeholders.

Consider what documents or tools you need to use and review:

- Natural England 15 Green Infrastructure Principles, green infrastructure standards, Green Infrastructure Maps and Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide
- Your Local Planning Authority's Local Plan (adopted or emerging)

- Recent green infrastructure evidence or strategies suggested by the local planning authority.
- Local maps and spatial information
- Evidence from relevant organisations/local groups
- Existing open space user and condition survey information

Collect and use evidence to understand:
- The quality, quantity, and distribution of current green infrastructure assets
- Gaps in provision, inequalities in access and any specific threats or opportunities

Detailed description

2.2.2   The engagement aspects of this stage can take place before and as part of the statutory Regulation 14, 6 week consultation process. Record keeping will be important as the Regulation 14 consultation statement must contain:

- Details of people and organisations consulted
- How they were consulted
- A summary of the main issues and concerns raised
- Descriptions of how these issues and concerns were considered and addressed

2.2.3   Overall, this stage should be to ensure that evidence is collected to develop an understanding of:

- The existing green infrastructure network looking at the quality, quantity and distribution of current green infrastructure assets
- What are the local needs for people, places and nature
- The ability of the existing green infrastructure to meet different needs
- The range of potential benefits that existing or new green infrastructure could deliver
- Any specific locations with threats to the existing green infrastructure, or opportunities for new or enhanced green infrastructure.

Evidence

2.2.4   Developing an evidence base can help to assess the existing network of green infrastructure. There will be a temptation to collect a significant amount of evidence which can be overly time consuming, draining the energy of those involved. To avoid this focus on using evidence already available. Try to break this down into 'bite-sized tasks'. Splitting this between national, local authority and community level sources may help. Also focus on the evidence you need to

develop the green infrastructure specific policies you want, rather than to have a complete record of all green infrastructure.

National level

2.2.5   Spatial data including the [Natural England Green Infrastructure Mapping Tool](#) will be a good source of evidence. It includes data on the location of green and blue infrastructure and whether it is accessible. It also includes socio-economic data on deprivation and health, that will be important factors in thinking where green infrastructure can help to address local needs. This national data can be supplemented by locally collected data. The Natural England mapping and analysis can help also identify gaps in provision or inequalities in access. It should be possible to identify opportunities for potential new or enhanced green infrastructure provision to strengthen existing or create new networks, corridors and green infrastructure linkages.

Local authority

2.2.6   The local planning authority may be able to help with identifying relevant documents. These are likely to include the adopted or emerging Local Plan, local green infrastructure strategies, greenspace strategies, biodiversity and the (forthcoming) Local Nature Recovery Strategy and other relevant adopted strategies such as local tree and woodland strategies, levelling up and net zero strategies. Where possible, make use of the existing evidence on local needs including information prepared to inform the Local Plan. This should include Strategic Flood Risk Assessments (SFRAs), open space assessments and walking and cycling strategies. The SFRA might identify needs and opportunities for Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) or river restoration. This should consider likely future needs such as new housing development or climate change.

2.2.7   Information used for the local plan can sometimes be broad brush. There will potentially be a need to add locally specific detail on sites and how they link together, as both an ecological network (sites with wildlife which are physically or functionally linked) and an access network (footpaths, bridleways and roads which connect the green infrastructure together). This level of evidence can help applicants in the planning process understand the specific constraints and opportunities in the neighbourhood plan area. If your local authority has a Natural Capital Account this could be useful to understand spatial, physical, and economic data on relevant green infrastructure.

Local evidence

2.2.8   Highlighting local level issues such as valued local greenspaces and trees will bring the neighbourhood plan to life for local people and identify specific evidence gathering tasks that they can do. Individuals without specific technical knowledge, can usefully tackle these types of evidence gathering. Local Greenspace or Footpath Audits, identification of hedgehog corridors and key bird roosting sites can be useful and undertaken by groups or individuals.

Consultation and Community Engagement

2.2.9   Neighbourhood Plan discussions with local organisations should include green infrastructure enhancements they may have planned; opportunities for new or enhanced green infrastructure which they may have identified; barriers to green infrastructure delivery which they are aware of, and potential funding sources they may have available.

2.2.10   Local community engagement can focus on highlighting what value, priority issues and the kinds of green infrastructure that would make a positive difference to people's lives and for biodiversity. Communities will also be able to identify specific threats to sites. This will be invaluable in developing site specific polices in the neighbourhood plan.

2.2.11   It is important that all sections of the community are involved. This may mean working with representative groups e.g., a local nursery or college to get the views of young children and young people, or a care home to get the views of senior citizens. It is important to engage with sections of society who may experience particular barriers to accessing or using green infrastructure, such as young people; people from ethnic minority backgrounds; people living with disabilities; people living in low-income areas; women and older people. Getting a full understanding of their experiences will be critical in ensuring that green infrastructure meets the needs of existing and potential users.

2.2.12   In terms of community consultation, it is important to explain clearly what it is that green infrastructure can achieve. A vision can help with this covering environmental, social, health and economic policy objectives. The community should be encouraged to identify the locations where green infrastructure could make a difference. This is the time when creative thinking and the energy of local activists can be harnessed to generate new ideas and ways of doing things. This can be motivating and empowering for local people to discuss possibilities for green infrastructure to provide for local needs, it is important to engage with what the community is excited about and use this to make the vision inspiring for all.

There can also be scope for setting up subgroups of motivated individuals to research particular topics.

2.2.13   Other factors connected to the social benefits of green infrastructure such as the suitability of sites for community events, or views over the surrounding landscape that are valued by the community, should be included in discussions.

2.2.14   It is also important to consider businesses for instance. are there greenspaces for workers to relax at lunchtime or green corridors for active travel to and from work?

2.2.15   Landowners may have differing views. Some will be enthusiastic about green infrastructure as a way of supporting the local people, nature and combatting climate change. Others may be resistant to green infrastructure, if it is perceived to be limiting development or certain ways of managing the land. Presenting how their land holding is important in a wider context can help persuade them. For instance, how a wider landscape scale biodiversity corridor could be created or enhanced through green infrastructure on their land.

2.3. Stage 3 - Plan Strategically

Overview

2.3.1   Identify priorities which green infrastructure could help address, which could be related to:
- Thriving nature and biodiversity gains
- Health and wellbeing benefits
- Supporting a prospering community
- Understanding and managing water
- Resilience and adaption to climate change

2.3.2   Create a vision and policy themes for green infrastructure as part of the draft Neighbourhood Plan and share it with stakeholders and discuss it with the local planning authority.

Objectives and details

2.3.3   The aim of this stage of the process should be to assess whether the local plan policies:
- Support your objectives

- Provide the enough local detail

2.3.4   To achieve this firstly review the green infrastructure relevant parts of the local planning policy. This review should cover green infrastructure specific policies along with those on biodiversity (including biodiversity net gain), designated wildlife sites, tree and woodland provision and landscape character (including sensitivity), heritage assets and designations. Green infrastructure may also be embedded in local plan policies on air and water quality, health and wellbeing, transport, open spaces, and economy so if your objectives cover these aspects they will also need to be reviewed.

2.3.5   Policies in the local plan which set standards for the provision of green infrastructure should be carefully looked at in terms of how well they serve your area's needs. The policies may cover the required size of green infrastructure such as greenspace, sports provision and play areas. They might cover the expected distances from housing to greenspace and the quality of spaces. Woodland canopy cover may also be included. Assessing these against the Natural England Green Infrastructure Standards can also be helpful in developing your own policies if they are needed.

2.3.6   Secondly assessing all the information gained from maps and evidence collected in the previous stage against the local plan policy will be helpful. The overall aim should be to look at where the policies support or conflict with what you want to achieve locally through green infrastructure. Look for specific or potential threats to achieving good green infrastructure. Review how effective the current policies are in delivering green infrastructure against your needs in each location.

2.3.7   Any gaps in information needed to make the case for green infrastructure policies should be filled through further local data gathering. Barriers or regulatory requirements should be flagged up here alongside development which might have a positive or negative impact on delivering good quality green infrastructure. Overall, this should enable a set of policy headings to be developed.

Policy mechanisms

2.3.8   It can also be helpful to highlight the policy mechanisms such as biodiversity net gain which can bring about enhancements in green infrastructure.
Some important factors to consider are:
- **Protected sites**: What are the sites that you want to protect? Starting with the nationally and locally designated sites can be useful (see appendix 2). Understanding why they are designated will be important and if they are meeting the criteria for that designation. For instance, is a Site of Special

Scientific Interest (SSSI) in favourable condition? Assessing what value the community places on them in addition to their statutory purpose will give a good indication of quality and value. Locally valuable sites should also be identified and assessed. Any threats to those sites should also be noted as this will be important in developing locally specific policies in the NP, for protection and enhancement of sites.

- **Quantity of GI:** Is there enough green infrastructure to meet local need in terms of size? Is existing green infrastructure meeting local needs in terms of function? For example, in areas of poor air quality, is green infrastructure in the places where it is most needed as a barrier to air pollution or to absorb it? Are there good quality greenspaces in areas where it is most needed e.g., where there are limited amounts of private garden space? Natural England's Green Infrastructure Standards such as Accessible Greenspace Standards, Urban Greening Factors and Urban Tree Canopy Cover standards can help to benchmark your green infrastructure provision and assess where there may be gaps in provision.
- **Quality of GI:** is the green infrastructure good quality? Standards such as Green Flag Award and Building with Nature can help with assessing quality.

2.3.9   To check that the priorities you have identified are well defined it is worth reviewing the Natural England Green Infrastructure Principles particularly the What and Why principles:

- **Multifunctionality:** Consider whether existing green infrastructure is delivering or could deliver the following:
  - Thriving nature and biodiversity gains
  - Health and wellbeing benefits
  - Supporting a prospering community
  - Understanding and managing water
  - Resilience and adaption to climate change
- **Variety**: Is there a variety of size and types of green infrastructure provision? Does the green infrastructure meet the needs of the local population, workers, and visitors? Does it provide for different ages and abilities? Does it provide a variety of experiences? Is nature given the opportunity to thrive through different types of habitat?
- **Connectedness**: How well connected are the different green infrastructure sites for people and nature? Can you travel between them by bicycle or by walking? Is the signage and online information integrated to encourage people to travel between sites. How can ecological connectivity be strengthened? Can new nature or active travel networks be created?
- **Accessibility:** Is the green infrastructure located near users? What are the barriers to access e.g., major roads, rivers or railways? Can people with less

mobility access the sites easily e.g., is there disabled parking, are there alternatives to steps, stiles and kissing gates, is there an accessible toilet?

- **Local Character:** Does the green infrastructure respond to the local character? Where there are already good quality landscapes and townscapes, does the green infrastructure respond to this character? Where an area is degraded, does the proposed green infrastructure seek to create or recreate a new positive character? There may be landscape character assessments which can be broken down further with more local information. What can new or improved green infrastructure do to increase community cohesion and pride?

2.3.10   A clear focus on what needs to be fixed or aspired to should be the guiding principle for green infrastructure priorities. This can be supplemented by a description of what you would like to accomplish in the long-term. This vision for green infrastructure can be developed with the local community and stakeholders and discussed with the local planning authority.

2.4. Stage 4 - Design

Overview

2.4.1   Based on the evidence collected, suggest policies, locations and mechanism for delivery. Including protection, designation and opportunities for creation and enhancement of green infrastructure to achieve the following outcomes:
- Meet people's needs and address inequalities in the amount and quality of provision
- Help meet wider policy objectives e.g., health and climate change
- Create and enhance local networks, links, and corridors
- Provide further local detail on green infrastructure objectives in the Local Plan or green infrastructure strategy including targets for green infrastructure
- Respond to local identity and sense of place
- Identify delivery mechanisms where possible

Aspirations

2.4.2   The next stage is to agree local aspirations for green infrastructure. This should involve:
- Identifying the opportunities/locations for green infrastructure to be protected, created, or enhanced,
- The priorities for protection, creation, and enhancement,

- Targets for the quantity, quality, and accessibility
- Delivery mechanisms.

2.4.3   Using the evidence collected in previous stages it should be possible to write policies and state priority locations for green infrastructure to be protected, created or enhanced. The Natural England Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide should help with prioritisation and sets out 12 services that should be considered:
    1. Biodiversity
    2. Soils and geodiversity
    3. Water
    4. Carbon and energy
    5. Temperature regulation
    6. Food production
    7. Access to nature
    8. Active Lifestyles
    9. Air quality
    10. Noise and soundscapes
    11. Education and volunteering
    12. Sense of place

2.4.4   It is important to think across topics and away from green infrastructure being considered as purely about the environment. Focus groups or links between different working groups may help. The process should consider how the locations identified can meet multiple policy objectives such as net zero by 2050, air quality targets, flood risk reduction and increased physical activity. This should take account of the evidence collected from the earlier steps. Keeping catalogued records of this can help in influencing future planning decisions.

2.4.5   A focus on inequalities in provision will be important as well as meeting wider community needs. Responding to local identity and sense of place may also be important. Where there is potential for larger sites, asses how these might form a network of linked green infrastructure features. Consider how these can support multifunctional sites, corridors, and networks. For smaller sites, consider how small green infrastructure measures such as green roofs or tree planting can contribute.

2.4.6   Sometimes one topic may stand out. Minerals for instance. How can green infrastructure mitigate the impacts of development and operation of quarries? How can green infrastructure effectively contribute to repairing sites once the extraction has stopped? Collecting the evidence from the local community on these kinds of highly visible issues, can be a good mechanism for widening conversations about how developments can fit into a multifunctional landscape.

2.4.7   Similarly, climate change can be a major driver. Dealing with surface water in high-risk areas can bring a focus, with an emphasis on sustainable drainage.

Protection and designation of Green Infrastructure

2.4.8   A local Greenspace designation can be used as mechanisms to create more green infrastructure. The National Planning Policy Framework allows Local Greenspace designation to protect local green areas of particular importance to local communities through local and neighbourhood plans. Provided they are:

   a) Reasonably close proximity to the community it serves

   b) Demonstrably special to a local community and fulfil one or more of the following suggested criteria:
   - Beauty - Visually attractive contributing to landscape, character and or setting of the settlement.
   - Historic significance - A setting for, and allow views of, heritage assets or other locally valued landmarks.
   - Recreational value - Local significance for recreation.
   - Tranquillity - Providing an oasis of calm and a space for quiet reflection.
   - Richness of wildlife - Valuable habitats

   c) Local in character, not an extensive tract of land

2.4.9   If land is already designated or protected by for instance Green Belt policy any additional local benefit needs to be established. Mapped Local Greenspace Designations (LGS) can form part of green corridors and join up green infrastructure networks at a local level. Where there are multiple green corridors, it may be possible to define a green matrix across the plan area linking both LGSs and more significant tracts of woodland and open space horizontally and vertically.

Other local designations

2.4.10   Local Nature Reserves and Local wildlife Sites can also be used to protect land with nature conservation interest. See appendix 2 for details. Neither can be designated through a neighbourhood plan. However, discussions with local authorities and conservation bodies about possible designations can form part of the neighbourhood plan process.

2.4.11 Designated sites will occur in many areas such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Ramsars, etc. These are the responsibility of national and international organisations such as Natural England to designate. However, it is possible to discuss with them the potential for enhancement, enlargement, buffer areas or linking corridors as part of the Nature Recovery Network.

Responding to local identity and sense of place

2.4.12 Neighbourhood plans can provide detailed policy on a locality in a way which a local plan covering a larger area is less well placed to do. Breaking the neighbourhood plan area up into distinctive areas which reflect different characters will be key. That way specific polices relating to local building materials, design details, building layouts and how developments relate to one another can be created. Protecting the heritage of an area will likely bring together policy on buildings, parks and open spaces. It can be useful in green infrastructure terms to consider these together. Often polices will focus on protecting what is special and already exists but it is also prudent to consider how the character of an area can change. So are there specific drivers of change which will impact on the character of an area, such as climate change or loss of particular trees species or needs expressed by the community for allotments or food growing areas? How can these be positively accommodated and supported through policy?

2.4.13 The Natural England Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide provides comprehensive details of what good green infrastructure design looks like and identifies how green infrastructure can contribute to the National Design Guide's ten characteristics of well-designed places. It also identifies the building block of green infrastructure and how the green infrastructure Standards can be applied in different areas such as urban centres and high streets, urban areas, streets, sub-urban and rural areas.

2.4.14 The local authority will also have or should be producing local design guides and codes. Referring to these will also help to set the green infrastructure within a wider design framework.

Standards and Targets

2.4.15 Existing guidance tools should be used to understand the benefits of green infrastructure and how to integrate them into your Neighbourhood Plan, e.g., Locality toolkit on the environment and the local plan. Where the local authority does not have well developed green infrastructure policy it will be beneficial to consider Natural England's Green Infrastructure Standards to help target the

creation or enhancement of GI. These include standards for new major developments and area wide standards. A Neighbourhood Plan could for example:

- Promote the use of the Accessible Greenspace Standards to set minimum and aspirational neighbourhood-wide ambitions for the amount of accessible greenspace and natural greenspace. Also, aspirations for minimum walking distances from housing areas to greenspace.
- Suggest using Urban Greening Factors for development in urban areas. This can work alongside Biodiversity Net Gain by helping to set the amount of on-site green infrastructure as part of development.
- Include Urban Tree Canopy Cover Standards to set goals for the quantity and quality of woodland cover.
- Specify the use of existing standards which enhance the quality of existing green infrastructure, for example Green Flag Award.

Writing policy

2.4.16   Before writing policies on green infrastructure, it is important to take stock and be realistic, focus on what is important and your communities' green infrastructure priorities. You may want to set up an Environment/Green infrastructure working group with links to local wildlife conservation groups, to build up local green infrastructure priorities and write policy.

2.4.17   To be effective Neighbourhood plan policies must be clear about the outcomes, respect the basic conditions, be supported by evidence, guide applicants and help planners determine applications. Green infrastructure policies can be topic based for instance supporting the enhancement and protection of landscapes and habitats. To have impact the policies should provide additional detail over and above existing local plan policies. This can be achieved by naming the landscape or habitat and how it should be protected or changed. Where a landscape or habitat is not protected the value to the community should be clearly stated to provide justification. An example might be undesignated semi-wooded valleys near to developments which could be planted up to provide improved recreation, biodiversity, and flood protection. Where a development site has been identified, detailed site-specific green infrastructure requirements can be included in a neighbourhood plan. This can detail the amount and type of greenspace and what should be included for the benefit of people and wildlife.

2.4.18   Writing green infrastructure policy might seem daunting. Don't reinvent the wheel, use, adapt, elaborate or distil what others have done successfully in existing plans. See Appendix 3 for useful publications including 'Neighbourhood planning in a climate emergency' by the TCPA which includes polices developed by neighbourhood plan groups.

Delivery Mechanisms

2.4.19   Where possible identify how the green infrastructure might be delivered. Will this be principally through planning gain. This may help in terms of refining the vision for green infrastructure into what is likely to be delivered in the short term or what will take longer. Biodiversity net gain for example will support management for a 30-year period, conservation covenants can be in perpetuity.

2.5. Stage 5 - Managed, valued, monitored, and evaluated

Overview

2.5.1   Use the evidence to inform consultation responses to relevant planning applications and input to the LPA's Local Plan. Ensure green infrastructure is governed, managed, monitored, maintained and funded for the long term. Refine your green infrastructure vision over time.

Using the evidence long term

2.5.2   Once a Neighbourhood plan has been developed, you can use this, and the evidence collected to inform reviews of the local plan. Discuss with the planning authority mechanisms to ensure green infrastructure in new developments is governed, managed and funded in the long term. Planning conditions, obligations or the Community Infrastructure Levy may be useful mechanisms for securing funding for green infrastructure implementation, monitoring and ongoing management. In future Biodiversity Net Gain and the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELM) will be important funding mechanisms.

Performance over time

2.5.3   Monitor and evaluate how your Neighbourhood plan is performing over time. Assess whether it is informing and influencing planning decisions. Refine your vision for green infrastructure in line with changing community needs. Where the local community and stakeholders have expressed an interest in long term management or maintenance, opportunities to involve them in ownership, delivery and ongoing management should be included in the Neighbourhood Plan. The Natural England green infrastructure Principle How 5 can help with thinking about management and maintenance.

Future modifications

2.5.4   The introduction of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRSs) across England will affect the process of local policy and plan-making including green infrastructure. Guidance on how Local Planning Authorities need to have regard to LNRSs will be made available by government in due course. In addition, the Government has committed to comprehensive reform of the planning system. The Process Journey will be updated to reflect changes in guidance and policy to avoid duplication and maximise benefits.

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Appendix 1 – Links to useful policy information

Links to relevant government policy and guidance

- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2019) 'Planning Practice Guidance for the Natural Environment. green infrastructure section
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2021) 'National Model Design Code: Part 1 - The Coding Process
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2021) 'National Design Guide. Context and identity sections
- HM Government (2018) A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment. Chapter 2
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2021) 'National Planning Policy Framework. Chapters 2 and 15
- Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (2021) 'Build back better high streets

Appendix 2 – Table of Internationally, Nationally and Locally designated sites

Table 2 - Table of Internationally, nationally, and locally designated sites

Designated Sites	Description
Internationally designated sites	
Ramsar sites	Significant wetlands for wildlife, especially waterfowl, are designated as Ramsar sites, including around 70 in England. They are protected under the International Convention on Wetlands of International Importance, which was established in the Iranian town of Ramsar in 1971. Ramsar sites have the same legal protection as Special Protection Areas and Special Areas of Conservation.

Designated Sites	Description
Special Areas for Conservation (SACS)	SACs protect sites of importance for wildlife other than birds. They were originally established under the 1992 European Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats.
Special Protection Areas (SPAs)	SPAs are created to protect threatened or vulnerable bird species. They were established under the 1979 European Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds. Governments are required to take appropriate steps to avoid pollution or deterioration of SPAs, or any significant disturbance affecting the birds.
Nationally Designated Sites	
National Nature Reserves (NNRs)	NNRs are managed for wildlife by the statutory nature conservation bodies, or other approved bodies. There are around 400 NNRs across the UK. There is a presumption against development on NNRs.
Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)	SSSIs are nationally important sites for wildlife and geology. There are more than 4,000 in England, identified and protected by Natural England. They are managed by more than 26,000 owners and occupiers and cover about 8% of the country. They have legal protection from damaging forms of management and development.
Locally designated sites	
Local Nature Reserves (LNRs)	LNRs are usually designated by local councils but parish and town councils

Designated Sites	Description
	can also declare LNRs if they have the powers to do so delegated to them. LNRs can be large or small and be created where there are wildlife or geological features, that are of special local interest. They must have a management plan. LNRs are intended for people <u>and</u> wildlife and used for purposes such as habitat management, quiet recreation, study and to interact with nature and enjoy it. LNRs cannot be designated through a Neighbourhood plan.
Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs)	Confusingly LWSs are given different names by different local authorities. However, they are all wildlife-rich sites selected for their local nature conservation value. They are identified locally, by partnerships of local authorities, nature conservation charities, statutory agencies, ecologists, and local nature experts, using robust, local scientifically determined criteria and detailed ecological surveys. They vary in shape and size and can contain important, distinctive, and threatened habitats and species. Their designation is non-statutory, and their protection comes via the planning system not by law. Many are owned by private individuals; they do not have to have public access. Local Wildlife Trusts usually hold information on LWSs. LWSs cannot be designated through a neighbourhood plan.

Appendix 3 – Other guidance, tools, and information

Table 3 - Table of other guidance, tools and information available

Other guidance tools and information	Location
Locality provide a wide range of support and guidance documents on all aspects of producing a Neighbourhood plan	Available at: Toolkits and Guidance - Locality Neighbourhood Planning
Best practice community engagement techniques. Herefordshire County Council (2015)	Available at: www.herefordshire.gov.uk best practice community engagement
Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS). CIRIA has lots of information on SUDS including design best practice	Available at:www.ciria.org.
The trees and design action group has very useful information on street trees and trees in urban areas	Available at: www.tdag.org.uk
The Green Flag award run by Keep Britain Tidy provides detailed assessment criteria on the quality of parks	Available at: Green Flag Award | Keep Britain Tidy
A case study for how green infrastructure was evaluated is contained in Tools for Planning and Evaluating Urban Green Infrastructure: Bicester and Beyond (2019)	Available at: Environmental Change Institute - University of Oxford
Neighbourhood planning in a climate emergency TCPA, Esmee Fairburn, Centre for Sustainable Energy (2020)	Available at: neighbourhood-planning-in-a-climate-emergency-feb-2020.pdf (cse.org.uk)

Other guidance tools and information	Location
Liverpool City Council and Fields in Trust are working to protect all of the greenspace in perpetuity	Available at: [Protecting Liverpool's greenspaces for good	Fields in Trust](#)
Building with Nature provide information and standards on built development quality and associated green infrastructure	Available at: [Building with Nature](#)
Health and green infrastructure – 'Natural England - A Rapid Scoping Review of Health and Wellbeing Evidence for the Framework of Green Infrastructure Standards (2020)'	Available at: http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/4799558023643136
Natural England 'Climate Change adaptation manual - ISBN 978-1-84754-343-8 Catalogue Code: NE751 (2020)'	Available at: [Climate Change Adaptation Manual - NE751 (naturalengland.org.uk)](#)
Natural England – 'The 'Included outside' publication series (2022)'	Available at: http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6508353768652800

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