Green Belt Tool Review

Regulatory Tools

TABLES Project 2012: Mini reviews	
Task 1: Basic information	
Name of the tool	Green Belt
Type of tool (list all that apply) *Learning and skills (pedagogic); participatory; regulatory; collaborative; mapping; valuation; modelling; decision; futures; financial; ecosystem services*	Regulatory, Mapping, Valuation, Collaborative, Decision, Modelling.
Group members	1. Paul Gibbs
	2. Alister Scott
	3. Peter Larkham

| **Please provide a brief synopsis of the tool**

This may include: background context, development (and ownership if appropriate), current use and applications etc.

Please also note any desired outcomes of the tool so that you can make reference back to these in Task 7: SWOT analysis | The concept of protecting the land around towns and cities has existed for 1000s of years. However, the formal use of Green Belt (GB) as a planning control mechanism is generally taken to flow from The 1947 Town and Country Planning Act in the UK. Its application was given substantial encouragement in 1955 by the Minister of Housing such that numerous schemes evolved. Its roots lie in the government circular 42/55. There are currently (as at 31 March 2010) 1,639,560 hectares of GB in England equivalent to 13% of the land area; the GB in England comprises 14 separate areas around cities, towns and conurbations. There are 30 GB areas in Northern Ireland, 1 in Wales and 10 in Scotland.

Many cities and urban areas around the world have GBs (often using different names, such as Greenspace, Greenstructure, Urban Growth Boundaries or city-specific names e.g. Boston Emerald Necklace. They can be found in Australasia (e.g. Adelaide, Dunedin, Islamabad and Seoul), the Americas (e.g. Sao Paulo, Portland, Ottawa and Toronto) and Europe (e.g. Stockholm, Belgrade and Paris).

GBs have various functions but these are generally seen to be:
The prevention of urban sprawl.
The definition of the edge of the urban area.
The protection of the countryside around cities.
The provision of open space/recreation areas for the urban population.
The provision of cleaner air for the urban dwellers.
The prevention of the coalescence of two cities/towns/conurbations.
The protection of the setting or approach to cities (especially historic cities).

The Government had set out its GB policies for England and Wales in Planning Policy Guidance Note 2: Green Belts. This has been superseded by the National Planning policy Framework (NPPF) in March 2012. The NPPF defines inappropriate development in the GB where very special circumstances must be shown demonstrating that the benefits would outweigh the harm to the GB. The NPPF has five stated purposes for including land in the GB:

To check the unrestricted sprawl of large built-up areas.
To prevent neighbouring towns from merging with one another.
To assist in the safeguarding of the countryside from encroachment.
To preserve the setting and special character of historic towns.
To assist in urban regeneration by encouraging the recycling of derelict and other land. |

Task 2: Use of the tool

Position / Use *If you can, please indicate which **stage(s) of the decision / policy making process** your*	**Stage**	**Currently used**	**Could be used**
	Ideas	Yes	
	Survey	Yes	
	Assess	Yes	
	Policy / decision	Yes	

tool is / could be used in (these stages were identified in the specification document)	Implement	Yes	
	Evaluate	Indirectly	

Task 3: Existing literature about the tool

Are you aware of any KEY policy and / or academic literature evaluating your tool? *(e.g. reports, journal articles, books)*	There is a huge amount of literature on the GB. Key documents and references include: 1. The Town and Country Planning Act, 1947 2. Planning Policy Guidance Note 2: Green Belts 3. Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) 21, Feb 2010 4. Green Belt policy in Scotland 10/85 5. The National Planning Policy Framework, 2012 6. Local Planning Authority Green Belt Statistics: England 2009/10. 7. Scottish Parliament: Planning Policy 159 8. The Localism Act, 2012 9. The Planning Act, 2008 10. Osborn FJ 1969 *Green belt cities* Evelyn Adams & Mackay 11. Munton RJC 1983 *London's green belt in practice* Allen & Unwin 12. Elson MJ *et al* 1993 *The effectiveness of green belts* CAB 13. Edwards M 2000 'Sacred cow or sacrificial lamb: will London's green belt have to go?', *Cities* 4(1)

Task 4: Your experience of working on the tool

Have you done any research/consultancy work on this tool in terms of its development, testing and/or evaluation? *If so, please provide an outline.*	David Jarvis Associates Limited (DJA) was commissioned in 2002 by the Counties of Meath and Kildare to review the extant Dublin GB in Eire**.** The study was to define a new GB which not only performed the generally stated Planning aims of GBs but also took into account the Landscape Quality of the putative GB; new landscape protection and enhancement policies were to be devised. The GB was specifically NOT to be a set width but to vary according to the landscape (particularly the landform). As an example, the GB would be wider in a flat open landscape than in a wooded undulating landscape where the inner and outer edges could be less likely to be intervisible. Particular care was to be taken when defining the inner GB edge such that it was not simply the existing urban edge. Where the existing urban edge was attractive this could occur but where improvements were needed, the space would be allowed for quality built development that would eventually provide an attractive façade/approach to Dublin. The outer edge of the GB would be chosen to give adequate separation between Dublin and the surrounding towns and villages; however it was to anticipate the leapfrogging that would inevitably occur at some point in the future.

Task 5: Incorporating the ecosystem approach (EA) and ecosystem services (ES)
Please refer to the summary text about ES for concept clarification at the end of this template (appendix)

Using examples (from practice,	DJA is not aware of any use of EA/ES in recent GB designation or refinement of boundaries.

research or consultancy), explain how EA and/or ES are currently incorporated in/by the tool *If neither approach is currently incorporated, please move to the next question*	EA/ES are not mentioned with regard to GB in the NPPF 2012, Localism Bill 2012 or Planning Act 2008.
How <u>could</u> the ecosystem approach and/or ecosystem services be (further) incorporated within the existing tool?	One of the major criticisms of current GB policy in the UK centres on the tendency for GBs to become degraded agricultural landscapes with little or no public access or recreation opportunities. The Dublin study referred to above attempted to include the quality of the landscape and its on-going improvement into the designation. In the UK the quality of the GB does not matter only its physical dimensions. It is possible that an examination of the benefits (tangible and intangible) in particular the potential social/environmental/economic benefits and the interaction between them could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the current and potential ecosystem services benefits of a GB. Set within a wider Green Infrastructure approach they could use the pioneering work done by Birmingham City Council which has valued the ecosystem services of green infrastructure

Task 6: Situating the tool within priority questions/criteria arising from the scoping interviews

Explain how the tool can be situated within the priority questions/criteria that arose in the scoping interviews *Complete as many boxes as required*	Priority question/criteria	Does your tool address/implement this question/criteria? *If yes, please explain how.*
	Language and communication	
	1. Contribution to aiding the development of shared vocabulary within which principles of EA and ES can be shared with multiple stakeholders across built and/or natural environment	**Somewhat** – Review of GB designation and their refinement provides a legal and potentially transparent framework within which interactions relevant to the natural and built environment can be consistently presented and consulted upon.
	2. Capacity of the tool to develop shared understandings of the many identities and values of places from the perspectives of multiple visitors, residents and businesses	**Yes** – GB designation should require engagement with the public and other stakeholders to ascertain their views about the status of their local environment and the needs of future generations. There is therefore scope to bring together the perspectives of various groups.
	3. Capacity of the tool to improve or enable engagement across different publics so avoiding the usual suspect problem	**Somewhat** - Stakeholder engagement should be a core requirement of GB designation and as such there is the potential to engage with those groups that are felt to be most appropriate around the development of a plan or programme.
	Learning from experience/pedagogy	
	4. Capacity of the tool to help reveal and value 'hidden' assets	**Yes** - The baseline information acquired at the early stages of GB designation and evaluation stages should

	that are not recognised by communities or publics that use them	provide an opportunity for 'hidden' assets to be recognised.
	5. Extent to which tool is building on other tools or EA/ES progress	**Yes** – GB is a broad policy application to which EA/ES can feed in as a supporting and key theme.
	6. Extent to which tool is locally derived or grounded or can be adjusted to closely reflect 'local' context. Is the tool suitable for an open source approach?	**Yes** - GBs are city specific and by definition must reflect local social, physical, economic and environmental geography.
	7. Extent to which the tool is open to interpretation and application in a variety of forms (that reflect 'cultural' differences)	**Yes** – the brief for definition or refinement of a GB allows for the creation of a GB which reflects the brief requirements.
Developing and selecting tools		
	8. Is the tool dependent on a specific funding source? How onerous is the application procedure? What are the chances of success?	**Yes** – GBs are public designations by national, regional or local authorities; their establishment is a publicly funded exercise. The definition and establishment of a GB involves the assembly of large quantities of data, consultation, analysis and synthesis. It is a reasonably onerous task.
	9. Does skills development (essential or optional?) and support exist for the tool or is there a body to ensure the optimal and correct use of it?	**No** – There is no dedicated body or generally accepted process.
	10. Extent to which current statutory hooks can be exploited by the tool or will benefit the quality or application of the tool (e.g. NNPF's duty to cooperate, SUDS, ecol. networks)	**Yes** – There is substantial scope for current statutory hooks to inform an updated and refined GB establishment/management process.
Informing resultant policies effectively		
	11. Extent to which the tool informs or improves policies/decisions. What does the tool cover? (full range of positive and negative economic, social and environment impacts / tradeoffs?)	**Yes** – GB policy has to incorporate EU and national regulations and laws. It must consider the full spectrum of social, economic and environmental aspects including trade-offs.
	12. How does the tool link into the planning system (applications and processes). At what cost / extra burden?	**Completely** – it is a fundamental plank of UK planning law but its zoning does reduce land prices unless planning permissions can be secured through selective exceptions or national need. . .
Delivering management objectives		
	13. Suitability or capacity of the tool to assist with managing visitor needs and pressures	**Completely** – GB policy can be written to address this. However at present it does appear to have an overly restrictive aspect to recreational activities. The

	within protected areas / the considered area? How?	increased use of green belt for active recreation could help mitigate pressures on protected landscapes.
	Local ownership/new governance	
	14. To what extent can the tool assist in developing statutory plans (local and management plans) and improve ownership and use by publics?	**Yes** – Current GB policy needs to be updated to allow/encourage greater public access and usage, notwithstanding the majority is in private ownership. This issue poses a conundrum.
	15. To what extent does/could the tool contribute to a new form of community governance in management of the environment?	**Somewhat** - As it is normally practiced there is limited scope as 'authorities' are the ones who are defining the areas and the policies. However the localism agenda and neighbourhood plans possibly offer opportunities for more positive use.
	Improved tools: understanding flows, interconnections and spatial issues	
	16. Capacity to improve spatial understandings of the flows and interactions of various ecosystem services between sectors and at different scales	**Yes** – An updated GB policy could use the ecosystem service approach.
	17. Capacity of the tool to reconcile assessments of options and benefits across different scales (and sectors)	**Yes** – GB by definition is all encompassing where it applies. However its use as a one size fits all is currently limiting this.
	18. Extent to which the tool is capable or can be manipulated to work across sectoral and administrative boundaries	**Yes** – no difficulty (see ref to Dublin Counties above) however there is evidence that green belt issues are poorly dealt with. Duty to cooperate may change this.
	19. Extent to which the tool can handle data shortages and gaps (or is effectiveness considerably compromised?)	**Yes** – All systems are only as good as the data input. The poorer the data, the potential for the effectiveness of a GB diminishes.
	20. To what extent has/could the tool put landscape/nature conservation and designated species/sites on the radar (positively or resulting in resentment?)	**Completely** – They are fundamental.

Task 7: A SWOT analysis of the tool

Referring back to the relevant policy and academic literature (listed in Task 3), plus your own expertise (listed in Task 4) and the way in which the tool is situated within the priority questions/criteria (listed in Task 6), please complete a	**Strengths** *(of the tool in delivering intended outcomes)* • Delivering the seven functions listed in the brief synopsis above.
	Weaknesses *(factors that detract from the tool's ability to deliver intended outcomes)* • Sterilisation of land which could provide valuable functions not in conflict with the core values. • A tendency to "freeze" the outer façade of a city (whether good or bad). • The ignoring of the quality of the landscape. • A tendency to encourage leapfrogging of development. • A tendency to require lengthy transport networks through the GB to serve development beyond its boundaries. • A failure to provide adequate public access and recreation.
	Opportunities *(consider opportunities for application of the ecosystem approach and services)* • ES/EA is an integrating concept which instead of dealing with discrete

summary SWOT analysis ensuring that each point is well justified *Where possible, this analysis should reflect the tool's past and current application, as well as its effectiveness in policy and decision making processes*	environmental 'topics' considers bundles of services that flow from the environment. As such it is more 'real' and may allow better consideration of cumulative impacts - an area currently poorly dealt with in GBs.

- With ES/EA the description of the environment moves from things to benefits and may be a more persuasive way of evaluating GBs.
- Stakeholders and the public are well placed to engage with this alternative description as they are potentially the 'users' of the environment.
- ES/EA may be of particular value where there are clear conflicts between traditional environmental, social and economic arguments within GBs or their policies/management.
- The ecosystem service framing makes explicit the value of the environment for decision makers.

Threats *(factors which negatively affect the tool and its outcomes)*

Threat of going down ecosystem services route in GB designation and management to validity of the concept	Seriousness (high, medium, low)	Probability of occurrence (high, medium, low)
The use of ecosystem services language may not resonate with stakeholders.	Medium	Medium
The complexity of ecosystem services may add to already complex process	Medium	High
The contested nature of ecosystem service valuation may not be robust enough for GB policy which operates within a legal framework.	Low	Medium
Doing more comprehensive ecosystem services assessment is potentially very resource intensive	High	High
Public perceptions may not be reflected adequately e.g. the effect of GB on house building/house prices	Low	High
Ecosystem services may not address the political dimension.	Low	High
Ecosystem services may not be uniformly relevant to all aspects of GB.	High	High
Valuation of ecosystem services does not necessarily fit with how decisions are made about spatial planning – which is much more about balancing a wide range of factors, not a cost, benefit calculation.	Medium	Low

Further comments	