Please cite the Published Version

Mulholland, Cara (2020) Better Places (Social Value) Toolkit: A review of existing tools and practices [Briefing note]. Documentation. Stantec.

Better Places (Social Value) Toolkit
A review of existing tools and practices

Knowledge Transfer Partnership with the University of Reading

Stage 1 report | January 2021 | Cara.mulholland@stantec.com

Introduction

The aim of the Better Places Toolkit is to develop a tool that makes it easy to incorporate social value into decision making around the use of land. This report presents the findings of the explorative study completed as the Stage 1 of the Better Places (Social Value) Toolkit (Better Places Toolkit) project. It aims to develop a process to quantify social value outcomes to enable informed decision-making for better strategic land development projects which deliver better community, climate change and commercial outcomes.

Social value is playing an increasingly important role in how we approach land development, but there is a lack of guidance for the development industry on how social value should be defined and how it can be used to inform the deployment and valuation of land. Our toolkit proposes to quantify and spatially map social value data to deliver a digital analytics solution to improve evidence-based decision making.

The Better Places Toolkit KTP has begun with an explorative study to determine what the current best practice of social value creation and measurement in strategic land development might be, primarily based on a desk review of tools and practices and compared against extensive stakeholder engagement. This report outlines the key findings from the high-level longlist and more detailed short list desk review of tools and frameworks, followed by suggestions to satisfy the gaps and challenges identified by key stakeholders both during the review process and in the focused workshop.

The Better Places Toolkit Partnership

The Better Places Toolkit project is a collaborative Innovate UK funded Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) between Stantec and the University of Reading. The project has explicitly grown from the previous work done by the Stantec and University of Reading partners, and builds on previous knowledge, experience and understanding of needs of industry. By bringing these together and focusing on spatial mapping of social value strategic land development the toolkit development aims to be a mechanism that develops thought leadership and best practice in several areas.

Social Value Creation for Better Places

This increased attention on social value has been running alongside other efforts to understand and create better places such as the development of post-occupancy studies, sustainability frameworks, placemaking initiatives and the creation of new design regulations and standards. Often social value practices have not explicitly connected with these other areas of work, as the challenge of establishing an agreed foundation of social value standards is complex so needed to have a narrowed scope. This work aims to bring together parallel and overlapping practices to explore how a new impactful digital approach could be developed.

The need for a Better Places Toolkit

In the past year social value practices in the built environment have gone from strength to strength. This became apparent when in Spring 2020 a series of reports from different industry bodies were published that solidified the significance of social value to built environment professionals. These publications do not contradict one another, all agreeing that social value is difficult to define and will differ depending on the context, and changes across the project life. But they have chosen to focus on certain areas of the social value challenge, and as such are drawing attention and activity to the aspect they view as important.

The reports were each the product of distinct, robust consultation and evidence gathering processes aiming to provide insight to a complex but important agenda for a myriad of organisations working in the built environment. Each report aimed to provide clarity for a different aspect of social value. There was a broad consensus of agreed principles:

- Social value needs to be considered across the whole project life cycle: however, most effort is currently focused on social value through delivery and construction.
- Measurement is essential to understand social value more deeply, but this can be done in many ways and there is not yet a full set of metrics and processes agreed (or a desire explicitly referenced for this).
- Understanding local needs, the wider context, and learning from post-occupancy studies can create learning loops for better outcomes in future projects.
- The language of social value is still confusing and ambiguous. It needs to be tailored depending on sector and client needs.

These accounts are clearly very relevant and influence our approach to the development of the Better Places Toolkit, however, there are a number of yet under-developed aspects of social value. Firstly, none of these reports focus on how social value practices can be established to facilitate decision making as early as possible, before a specific project has officially initiated. Secondly, the social value metrics which are most widely agreed upon are limited (due to further robust testing needed) and are not yet adequate for strategic land development whole life considerations. And more broadly, these foundational reports indicate there are not yet easy to use, intuitive tools that draw on automated data or even extensive data sets for evidence bases. These current gaps set the stage for the Better Places Toolkit research scope.

Exploratory review process

Stage 1 of the Better Places Toolkit Knowledge Transfer Partnership was an explorative study to determine what the current best practice of social value creation and measurement in strategic land development might be, to establish:

What is the need for a new social value tool in land development strategic decision making?

The purpose of establishing the need for a new tool is to ensure early assumptions of developing a tool have correctly identified a gap in existing practices and a defined want to create social value in new projects.

To explore the need for a new tool, the following questions were explored:

1. What tools or practices exist, and how widely are they used?
2. What gaps or opportunities exist between established tools and practices?
3. What do users want to see from tools, and how / is this currently being met?
4. What would be beneficial and impactful in a new tool? How would it address user needs and gaps in existing tools and practices?

The desk review used key search terms to find a longlist of relevant tools and frameworks, which were refined for a shortlist to be explored in more detail. These were checked against direct stakeholder feedback when possible. The tool matrix created in this review process will continue to be updated throughout the whole Better Places Toolkit project as it has proved a useful resource.
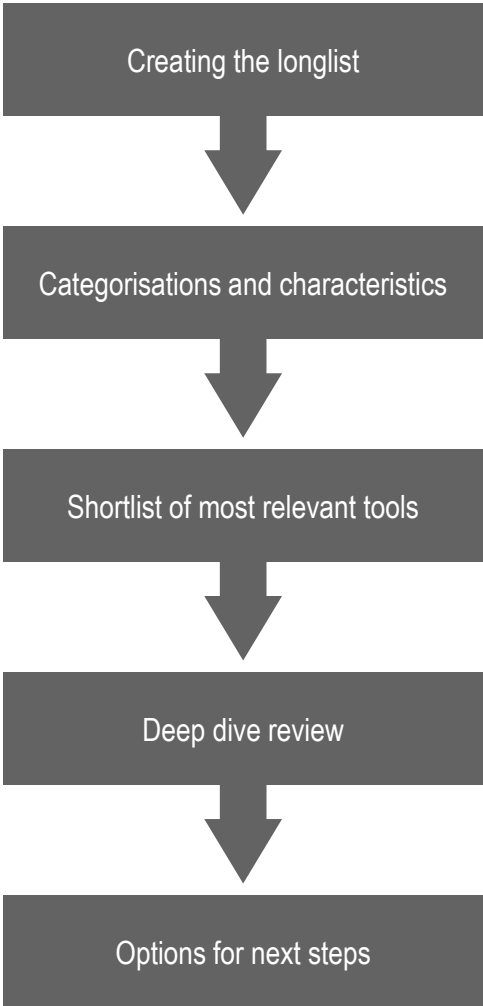
Search Criteria: **Against:**

1. Tool
2. Toolkit
3. Framework
4. Appraisal

1. Social value
2. Sustainability
3. Social impact
4. Placemaking
5. Wellbeing
6. Community
7. Quality of life
8. Land development
9. Housing
10. Benefits

Choosing tools for more detailed review depended on satisfying more than one criteria of:

- Land development focused
- Relevant metrics (social value focused on wider outcomes of strategic land development, not construction and delivery)
- Relevant process (spatially mapping or digital interfaces)
- Widely used (demonstrating usefulness or acceptance of accreditation)

Creating the longlist

Categorisations and characteristics

Shortlist of most relevant tools

Deep dive review

Options for next steps

Existing tools and frameworks

Mapping of social value: Very few tools or frameworks aim to map social value. The spatial consideration of where social value is created has not yet been included as a standard. This raises issues when considering large scale engineering and infrastructure projects in the built environment: the issue of "where" social value is felt and how communities are impacted differently is significant even is complex to portray. Although, that is not to say all tools would benefit from mapping as they currently stand.

Monetisation of social value: Few tools have chosen to monetise the social value if they have chosen to measure it. This is most likely a reflection of the challenges faced in applying monetary values to apparently intangible benefits. Natural Capital and Wellbeing approaches appear to be the most established approach to this.

Quantification of social value: Many of the tools chose to produce more high level principles which may be assessed qualitatively. Of those which did quantify there were not necessarily standardised processes for this. A few tools use a scoring system which lets evidence of quantified social value become a more standard, comparable output.

Principles of social value: Many tools offer high level principles which will be directly relevant to the BPT. These are not always translatable into more specific outputs, outcomes or metrics, but provide the wider thinking of social value that creates the best decision making.

Metrics, methods and processes of social value: there were no widely used or standard approaches to metrics, methods or processes other than pushing to move from outputs to outcomes-thinking. This aligns with the immaturity of the field, which is setting higher level foundational thinking.

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KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PARTNERSHIP WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF READING
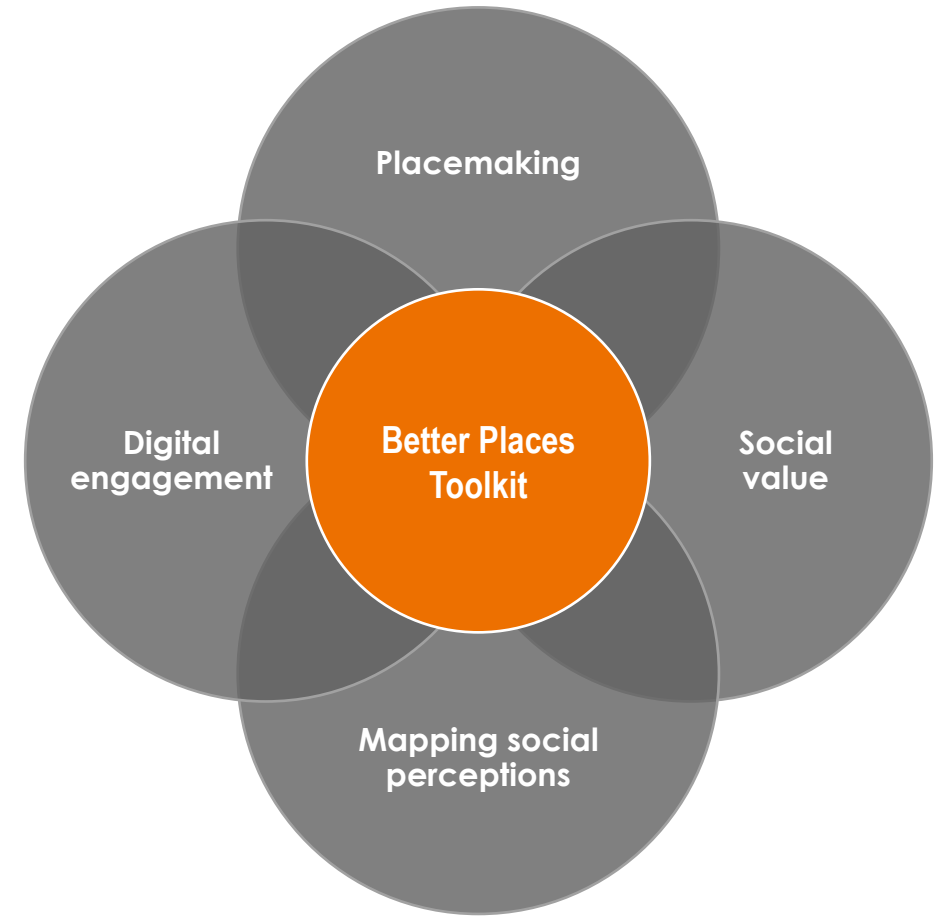
Shortlisted tools for in depth review

NAME	OWNER/ DESIGNER	TYPE
External Accreditation: These tools are managed by independent bodies who review the required evidence presented by project teams.		
WELL Building (Community)	International WELL Building Institute	Appraisal framework
BREEAM (Community)	BRE	Appraisal framework
Livewell Development Accreditation	Essex Planning Officers Association	Appraisal framework
Tool as a service: These tools are externally sourced and managed, delivered as a whole package service for a project.		
Greenkeeper	Barton Wilmore	Tool
Commonplace	Commonplace	Tool
Streetscore	Create Streets	Tool
Framework for Capturing Wider Benefits	Scottish Land Commission	Appraisal framework
Use internally: These tools are created by independent bodies, but freely available for project teams to use themselves without review needed.		
The Outcomes Matrix	Good Finance	Web based tool
Place Standard	Scottish Gov	Tool
Social Value of Ecosystem Services (SolVES)	USGS	Tool
B£ST (Benefits Estimation Tool)	CIRIA (developed by Stantec)	Tool
Exeter Future Placemaking Toolkit	Partnership	Framework (called a toolkit)
Creating Successful Places - A toolkit	Berkeley	Framework/ approach
Natural Capital Planning Toolkit	Centre for Environmental Economics and Policy (CEEP)	Tool
Stantec Tool: Tools developed within Stantec and used on internal projects. They were created to meet specific project and client needs.		
Equilibrium	Stantec	Tool
Stantec Socio-economic baseline tool	Stantec	Tool
University of Reading: Existing social value mapping techniques used by the university team.		
MESA	University of Reading	Methodology

Relevance to the Better Places Toolkit

Learning from Existing Tools and Frameworks

The review was partly to reflect on **what works best in the design of existing tools** and frameworks.

There are many things to learn from work which has been done before the Better Places Toolkit development, including:

- Firstly, applying social value thinking to have impact on such a large scale as a new strategic community development will **require more than scaling up existing methods**.

- Secondly, finding new ways to measure the most difficult but most meaningful aspects of social value is a complex problem that will **require the inclusion of community involvement** and feedback.

- And third, to influence decision making we must make a tool that produces what people need in a way which is **useful, accessible, and has potential for industry buy in**.

- The tools reviewed broadly fell across a spectrum of tools that are used on their own within project teams, to tools which are **aligned with external frameworks and comparable across projects**.

- Considering the benefits and disbenefits of differing tool design, our preferred approach is to create an open access tool, **which connects with and contributes to other tools** and frameworks were possible.

- The detailed design of the Better Places Toolkit will ultimately be **shaped by the needs of the primary user and the identified key audience**.

- Existing tools will provide a strong foundation for the Better Places Toolkit development. Specifically **the most used and most useful tools, social value mapping tools, and tools which influence decision making**.

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
Language of social value is becoming increasingly common as more organisations work together. **Wider benefits** relevant to the Better Places Toolkit have already been explored in placemaking tools. **Social impact mapping** already happens with GIS- based approaches and digital engagement tools.	**Limited metrics and proxies** used, focused on construction phase often and don't take into account spatial factors. **Embedding concepts into practice** not yet done for placemaking. **Focus on environmental** or economic impacts in sustainability. Challenging to get wide **responses in real time** to be spatially mapped.
Opportunities	**Threats**
Maturing social value agenda across the built environment. **Digitisation of the built environment** show appetite for social value to follow. **Government contracts** including social value evaluation as standard. **Existing digital engagement** tools that are designed well for capturing social value perceptions.	**So many tools** can make organisations sceptical of their use. Some tools are very widely used but **hard to determine influence on decision-making**. All tools suffer from **ambiguous language** use and parallel agendas. **Debates of monetisation** and quantification of social value.

Workshop feedback on tool design

The overarching design of the toolkit moving forwards has been determined based on feedback in a stakeholder workshop in response to the full review report in December 2020.

The key points agreed in the workshop were:

- We should design the tool for varied stakeholders, look beyond private developers and include local government, among others.

- There isn't a need to focus on one part of the project cycle, this tool could be facilitate evidencing social value throughout to follow how decisions shape outputs and impacts.

- Try to not commit to only one social value framework, have consistent themes (e.g. climate change, employment and health) that are flexible and work for all.

- Prioritise use of/ hosting open-source data and methods that others can use. Making it open source widens who can use it and means they can use it in different ways.

- People want evidence for their decision making – data will provide this. This could also challenge the way land value is communicated, and therefore traded.

- Monetisation can be useful to make things comparable and in one language but recognized that it can be misleading representation of social value and resource intensive to develop. Quantification of some sort should be the goal if full monetization isn't needed.

- Visual mapping of social value all agreed as a very useful output.

Design choice considerations

What is the purpose of the tool?

What needs to be included in the definition of social value?

Level of detail wanted: what social value aspects will be quantified and how?

Who will use the tool, and who will the outputs be communicated to?

What stage of a project will the tool be used at?

What will the tool interface look like?

How will existing, future or potential communities be involved in the tool?

Next steps: Stage 2

Stage 2 focuses on developing up a detailed methodology over four months to shape the tool development: both the metrics to be included (along with data sources) and the design of the tool. Revisiting the tools which have proven to be most relevant and useful to gain further insight to the detail behind metrics and processes included will be essential to designing the methodology. Following this will be a six-month period (Stages 3 and 4) of trialing the tool prototype on identified exemplar projects to refine the outputs, usability, and community response.

STAGE 1	STAGE 2	STAGE 3	STAGE 4	STAGE 5	STAGE 6
Understanding social value in the context of academia, industry and clients, and raise client and industry awareness.	Develop options for methodology and prototype Better Places Toolkit	Piloting the Better Places Toolkit	Community Consultation and Better Places Toolkit Evaluation Running parallel with Stage 3, will enable the evaluation of the BPT against the reality on the ground.	Refinement of Better Places Toolkit and early-stage Commercialisation	Outputs and Dissemination of BPT.

KEY OUTPUTS:

Stage 1
- Understanding of social value definition, metrics and practices in the context of land development
- Establishment of an external Stakeholder Group.
- Design of a Better Places Symposium.

Stage 2
- A prototype of the BPT, incorporating the elements above and forming the basis of Stage 3
- Plan of when the BPT will be trialled in a series of pilot projects.

Stage 3
- A completed pilot study of the BPT.

Stage 4
- Knowledge and understanding of community consultations methods.
- A community consultation for pilot project(s).
- Comparison of actual and predicted social value outcomes.

Stage 5
- BPT version 1.0 completed
- Initial strategic land development and social value consultancy projects secured.

Stage 6
- Complete project documentation including Company Brief.
- Technical User Guide.
- Training and Communication programme.
- Marketing material.
- Research paper.

Two-year plan for Better Places Toolkit project

Acknowledgements

This report and its findings have been shaped by the generous contributions of the stakeholders who have supported the aims of the Better Places Toolkit by sharing their knowledge and experience to help us better understand the industry needs and realities for creating better social value outcomes.

External Stakeholder Group

- Jon Blower (Institute for Environmental Analytics)
- Justin Kliger (Connected Places Catapult)
- Jude Hassall (Greater London Authority)
- Gill Marshall (UK Regeneration)
- Jackie Sadek (UK Regeneration)
- Matthew Morgan (Quality of Life Foundation)
- Matthew Niblett (The Independent Transport Commission)
- Robert Wolfe (CHY)
- Katherine Pollard (Scottish Land Commission)
- Vikki Slade (Cratus)
- Claire Bradbury (Action Sustainability)
- Ron Lang (Construction Innovation Hub)
- Ellie Jenkins (Construction Innovation Hub)
- Jenni Montgomery (Barton Willmore)

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