

The Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework and Assessment Kit

Part I: Introduction



Beacon's Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework (NSF) and associated tools provide a framework for people and organisations wanting to improve the sustainability of neighbourhoods that they are planning, retrofitting and managing.

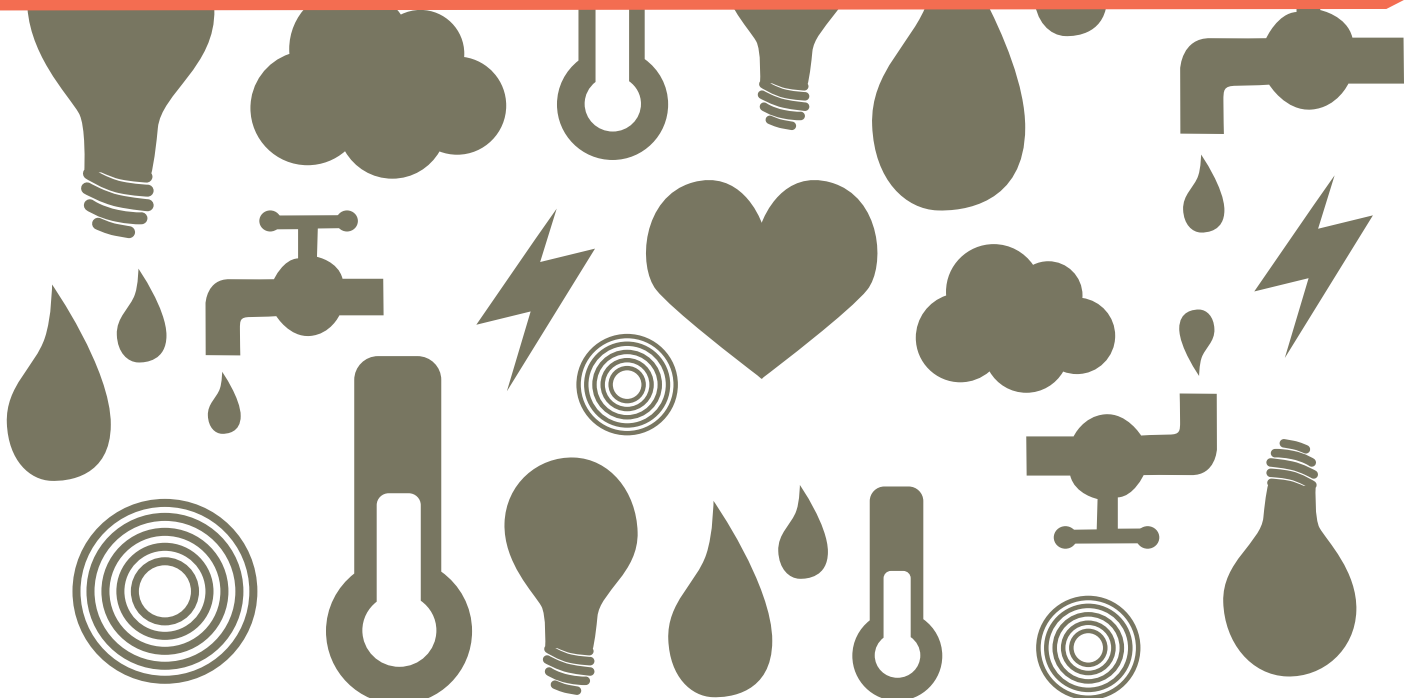
The Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework innovatively integrates the environmental, social, behavioural and economic elements of neighbourhoods. It recognises that neighbourhoods are dynamic, and unique in their development histories, their built environments, their population and their geographical and socio-economic positioning within the broader settlement. In short, neighbourhood outcomes are the result of multiple decisions made by a range of stakeholders at different times.

Achieving sustainability in this context is therefore a dynamic, multiple stakeholder process, and the NSF and tools provide a means by which to drive conversations on specific aspects of neighbourhood level sustainability in order to inform practical decision making.

With practice in mind, the NSF and associated tools are embedded in a systematic analysis of international research and have been developed, tested and refined in New Zealand for use in urban New Zealand neighbourhoods.

You will find the Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework and Assessment Kit useful if you are a:

- developer
- local authority planner, engineer, policy maker or community developer
- designer
- planner
- neighbourhood manager, for example, with Housing New Zealand Corporation or a housing trust



PURPOSE

This Kit brings together the Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework and its associated tools for measuring the sustainability of New Zealand neighbourhoods. These are designed to provide an independent assessment of the sustainability of neighbourhoods that can inform neighbourhood-level decision making. The goal is to show how to design, construct and manage neighbourhoods which:

- are adaptive
- are resilient
- allow people to create rich and satisfying lives
- respect the limitations of the environment

The NSF considers both the residential and non-residential environments, including shops and community facilities, public and open space such as streets, walkways and parks, the state of the infrastructure systems and services available as well as the way existing neighbourhoods are used, how people in neighbourhoods behave and get together, and how all these things work together.

The NSF and associated tools are intended to assist a range of stakeholders – developers, local authorities, designers, planners and neighbourhood managers – by providing information to contribute to discussions about how to optimise the ongoing performance and sustainability of existing and new neighbourhood built environments.

The NSF is also designed to assess sustainability of any neighbourhood. It recognises that the outcomes for a neighbourhood result from decisions that are made by a range of stakeholders. For example, the tools will reflect the good outcomes achieved by a well-designed and well-located neighbourhood. Where a neighbourhood has been sited in a poor location (e.g. biophysical impacts or connectivity), the tools make these deficiencies explicit, and also pick up good design that may optimise performance in that challenging location. Similarly the outcomes for a neighbourhood that is well-sited but poorly developed will be revealed through the use of the NSF tools.

This recognises the multiple stakeholders operating within neighbourhoods and enables the provision of comprehensive data that can be useful and applicable to the activities of all of these stakeholders. Thus developers, local authorities, designers, planners and neighbourhood managers can all benefit from the application of the Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework and its tools which highlight the interlinking of neighbourhood sustainability issues and the collective responsibility of several stakeholders. This information and consequent conversation may also encourage greater collaboration and partnership towards neighbourhood level sustainability.

The Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework is not a rating tool.

Although the NSF and tools provide the ability to assess a neighbourhood at a single point in time, they do not provide a comparative ranking. They do not give you directions about what to do in the neighbourhood. Rather, the results provide an assessment to help you think about the neighbourhood and how the built environment supports, or does not support, sustainable behaviours. Their purpose is to identify and reflect on actual and potential changes and trade-offs in neighbourhood built environments that will improve performance.

APPLICATION

By applying the Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework and its tools to better understand the nature of sustainable neighbourhoods, developers, local authorities, designers, planners, neighbourhood managers and those in the building and construction industry can develop designs and construction (techniques, products, materials) to build neighbourhoods that last.

The NSF assists users to identify and prioritise changes to improve the sustainability of the neighbourhood. Reports are provided for each tool, clearly indicating where the strengths and weaknesses of neighbourhood-level sustainability are, in a particular place, at a particular time. This offers users the opportunity to consciously consider how, or whether, to address these issues.

CONTENTS

The Kit is presented in five parts:

1. Introduction

2. **The Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework.** This section sets out the six areas (or domains) critical to neighbourhoods and the characteristics in each domain that indicate highly sustainable neighbourhoods.

3. **A Guide to Tool Choice** to help you decide which set of tools to use, based on whether you are assessing an existing or new neighbourhood.

As an **existing neighbourhood** already has residents, the assessment uses both the Observational Tool and the Resident Self-Report Tool.

Because **new neighbourhoods** do not have any existing residents, the assessment uses only the Observational Tool.

4. **The Observational Tool** assesses the buildings and structures of the neighbourhood through observed and measured data and scores. It weights this data into sustainability bands for each section (Low, Medium, High, Very High). The NSF identifies core pre-requisites fundamental to good neighbourhood outcomes. These pre-requisite outcomes are listed and the report indicates whether or not they are met.

The Observational Tool itself is an Excel-based desktop calculator, provided electronically on the disk included in the Kit.

Guidelines for its use are provided both in paper and on the disk.

Relevant documents:

- *Part 4. Guidelines for Using the Observational Tool*
- *Observational Tool Calculator.xls*

5. **The Resident Self-Report Tool** assesses what the residents think of the neighbourhood through a survey process that analyses residents' self-reported behaviour and perceptions in relationship to the critical domains of the Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework. This data is analysed in relation to data collected through a national survey in 2009, providing results that are relative to urban neighbourhoods across New Zealand. Each report presents an overall neighbourhood sustainability band (low, medium, high) and it states where the assessed neighbourhood lies in relation to national patterns.

The Resident Self-Report Tool is made up of a survey and an Excel-based calculator.

Detailed instructions and advice for conducting the survey process are provided, along with questionnaire templates for both telephone and face-to-face interviews, and for self-completion. These are provided both in paper and on the disk.

The calculator is provided electronically on the disk included in the Kit.

Relevant documents:

- *Part 5. Guidelines for Using the Resident Self-Report Tool*
- *Part 5a. Resident Self-Report Survey – Telephone Interview Questionnaire*
- *Part 5b. Resident Self-Report Survey – Self-Complete and Face-to-Face Interview Questionnaire*
- *Part 5c. Interviewer Ethics and Behaviour*
- *Part 5d. Safety Protocols*
- *Resident Self-Report Tool Calculator.xls*

NOTE: The tools provided here have been developed in good faith and on the basis that every endeavour has been made to be accurate and not misleading and to exercise reasonable care, skill and judgement in providing them. The usefulness of the Neighbourhood Sustainability Framework and tools is, of course, dependent on the accuracy and validity of inputted data. This Kit provides guidance to support a robust process by which users should gather, input and interpret data about individual neighbourhoods. This information is freely given and so the user has responsibility for the quality of surveying, data inputting, interpretation of outcomes and any subsequent decision-making. Neither Beacon Pathway Limited nor any of its employees, subcontractors, agents or other persons acting on its behalf or under its control accept any responsibility or liability in respect of any interpretation of outcomes / subsequent decision-making.

All information and tools associated with this Kit are free to use and to share. They are available from http://www.beaconpathway.co.nz/neighbourhoods/article/the_neighbourhood_sustainability_framework

