



**ecological
budgetUK**

The complete UK wide account
of resource use and environmental
impact for sustainable development
decision makers

Local Authority Area Ecological Footprints

Frequently Asked Questions

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What is Ecological Footprinting?

WHAT IS ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTING?

Ecological Footprint analysis measures the impact of human activity upon nature. The Footprint expresses the land area that is required to feed, provide resources, produce energy, assimilate waste, and to re-absorb the greenhouse gases produced by our use of fossil fuels.

This approach uses land as its 'currency', and provides a notional figure for the land area required to support an individual, a community or a nation's population at its present lifestyle. Calculating our Ecological Footprint helps us to explore and understand our impact on the environment and the planet, and identify ways to reduce it.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT OVER OTHER INDICATORS?

The Footprint is very good at answering a question that other indicators don't: "Are we living within the biological capacity of the planet?" The Ecological Footprint can provide an initial answer to this question and encourages us to understand that the environment has limits, which makes it quite unique.

The potential for the Ecological Footprint to communicate the idea of global sustainability is also very powerful. The idea of requiring three planets to provide all our resources, if we were to live like the average person in the UK, is a powerful metaphor and can be used for educational purposes and to raise awareness.

Additionally, it can be used to model different scenarios thus informing strategies and planning by examining the possible impact of policies and actions in a number of areas such as waste, economic and transport planning and the environment.

In conjunction with sustainability appraisal the Footprint can help to identify unsustainable trends which can create opportunities for more sustainable management of resources and the challenges we face in the future.

Finally, these local authority area Footprints include a complete assessment of household consumption. Everything is included from transport and energy to goods and services. This complete assessment allows comparisons to be made between different policy areas, something that many indicators cannot do.

WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS OF THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT?

The Footprint only addresses ecological sustainability and tells us nothing about our quality of life (although it may indicate what conditions will be like in the future).

It is a quantitative measure, and does not measure the quality of the environment. So it does not take into account the impact of pollutants, the quality of soil management or other external factors that may have an effect on natural resources such as nuclear power. Some of these impacts will be addressed in the future. Currently, an international working group of experts is examining how nuclear power generation can be expressed adequately.

A comparison between Footprints and Biocapacity accounts on a global scale tells us whether we consume within ecological limits. However comparisons of a local population's Footprint to the local or regional biocapacity does not necessarily predict whether that Footprint could be sustained on a global scale.

Additionally, the Ecological Footprint indicator should be supported with local data and should also consider economic and social indicators in order to give the whole picture of sustainable development.

IS ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTING SENSITIVE ENOUGH TO TRACK TRENDS YEAR ON YEAR, AND DEMONSTRATE CHANGES RELATED TO SPECIFIC POLICY DECISIONS?

At the national level, some changes would be seen in the Ecological Footprint. The same is true for devolved country and regional data.

At local authority level, the input of up-to-date information from the local authority area is required. If this data is available the Footprint would be sensitive enough to inform the user whether the change had brought about a subsequent reduction in the Ecological Footprint.

HOW ACCURATE IS THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTING MODEL AS AN INDICATOR OF THE SUSTAINABILITY OF OUR CURRENT PRACTICES?

The Ecological Footprint is not a "sustainability" indicator per se. Sustainability is a broader issue than just living within biological capacity; social and economic issues are also part of the sustainability agenda. The Ecological Footprint measures the land required to provide a given population with all its resources and absorb its waste. This is one important part of the sustainability debate.

ARE GOVERNMENTS USING ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTING?

The Ecological Footprint has been used by different levels of government in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland:

- In **Scotland** the *Scotland's Global Footprint Project* is working with a number of Councils to integrate the Footprint into policy and also use it as an educational tool. A major objective of Scotland's Sustainable Development Strategy is to reduce Scotland's footprint and the Scottish Executive is committed to conducting an independent analysis of Scotland's footprint in 2008.
- **Wales** has in many ways led the way on Footprinting. A national Footprint has been developed and is being used by the Welsh Assembly Government to monitor progress on sustainable development. Cardiff and Gwynedd Councils used ecological footprint analysis to inform policies through the *Reducing Wales Ecological Footprint* project.
- A Footprint report for **Northern Ireland**, *Northern Limits*, has been prepared. A revised version of this report is now in preparation as is a new piece of work to assess the Footprint of the Irish republic.
- In England projects are underway in most regions and approximately 30 local authorities have undertaken studies:

- In **London** a Footprint of the capital was published in 2002. In 2004, the Mayor's Sustainable Development Commission adopted Ecological Footprint as a headline indicator and the concept has also been integrated with the London Plan;
 - The **South-East** are using the Ecological Footprint as a headline indicator in the Integrated Regional Framework, July 2004. The South-East's Spatial Strategy acknowledges the South-East's global impact and has made a commitment to stabilise the Footprint of the region. The South-East's first Ecological Footprint, Taking Stock, was published in March 2003;
 - The **North-East** Footprinting and mass balance report will be launched in 2006. This will include a special focus on Sunderland City;
 - In the **West Midlands** a Regional Footprint and Mass Balance report will be launched in 2006 with a focus on Sustainable Communities;
 - The **South-West** has included a commitment to tackle sustainable consumption and production in its Integrated Regional Strategy and published its first Ecological Footprint study, Stepping Forward, in April 2005.
- **Devolved Country** and **Regional** footprints will be available as part of the Ecological Budget UK project in March 2006 www.ecologicalbudget.org.uk.

IS ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTING SAYING "NO" TO PROGRESS?

The Ecological Footprint is a tool that encourages progress and allows us to identify ways to move forward and develop in a sustainable, pro-active way while living within environmental limits.

Ecological Footprint jargon

WHAT IS A GLOBAL HECTARE?

A global hectare is one hectare of biologically productive space with world-average productivity. In 2002 the biosphere had 11.4 billion hectares of biologically productive space corresponding to roughly one quarter of the planet's surface. This includes 2.0 billion hectares of ocean and 9.4 billion hectares of land. 1 global hectare is a hectare representing the average capacity of one of these 11.4 billion hectares.

Global hectares allow the meaningful comparison of the ecological footprints of different countries, which use different qualities and mixes of cropland, grazing land, and forest. For comparative purposes an ecological footprint is usually expressed in gha per person. Once all global hectares of bioproduktive land and sea are divided by the total global population, we end up with our fair earth share - 1.8 gha

WHY IS ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT BASED ON CONSUMPTION RATHER THAN PRODUCTION?

The Materials Flow and Ecological Footprint Analysis assesses material consumption and its impacts based on where the benefit is experienced. It includes imports of all kinds consumed in a region, anything produced and consumed in the region, and other activities that are of benefit to a region's residents such as air travel. It excludes exports. As many industries and supply chains are increasingly global in scale, this is the most meaningful and comprehensive analysis

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'REAL LAND' AND 'ENERGY LAND'?

Real land is actual land or sea area, sometimes called bioproduktive land or sea, used to provide materials, food and other biomass. Energy land is forested land required for the absorption of carbon dioxide emissions from energy use. An ecological footprint is made up of both real land and energy land.

ISN'T ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT TOO SIMPLISTIC?

Footprint methodology is being improved all the time and part of WWF's wider programme is about establishing a Global Footprint Network to share / standardise footprint methodology. The footprint methodology used in Ecological Budget UK enables footprint to be calculated and used at a regional / local level, based on National and regional data.

At present footprint calculations are an underestimate of our global impacts. Although greater accuracy is important, we need to act on what footprint is showing us now and start to take action. We shouldn't wait until we have accuracy up to the 10th decimal place!

WHAT IS MATERIAL FLOW ANALYSIS - MFA?

Material Flow Analysis - measures the flow of materials from source, through the economic sector (i.e. extraction, manufacture, processing) to consumers and finally to disposal.

Your kitchen offers a good example of what we mean by material flow. Every week one or two supermarket trolley loads come in, and three or four bin bags go out. We also need to include the fuel for the energy powering the fridge, cooker, microwave etc, and indeed the energy and materials involved in manufacturing them. And for the household as a whole, the same principle

applies for other items such as furniture, carpets, lighting, toilet paper, garden equipment - and, highly significantly, the family car.

WHAT DOES MASS BALANCE MEAN?

The mass balance concept is based on the fundamental physical principle that matter can neither be created nor destroyed. Therefore, the mass of inputs to a process, industry or region balances the mass of outputs as products, emissions and wastes, plus any change in stocks, hence the term 'mass balance' is used to describe this type of analysis. When applied in a systematic manner this simple and straightforward concept of balancing resource use with outputs can provide a robust methodology for analysing resource flows.

The mass balance methodology also allows the development of "what if" scenarios where the impact of changes on resource flow can be measured. For example, what would be the impact on resource use if glass recycling levels increased to 50% of glass used by householders?

For more information on the Mass Balance concept and UK mass balance projects download the, Mass Balance UK document, produced by Forum for the Future. This report by Forum for the future covers the mass balance methodology and includes a summary table of all the Biffaward funded mass balance projects.

WHAT IS DIRECT MATERIAL CONSUMPTION - DMC?

The total amount of materials directly used in the regional economy and consumed in the region, i.e. excluding exports.

WHAT IS TOTAL MATERIAL CONSUMPTION - TMC?

The total material use associated with the regional consumption activities, including direct material consumption and the indirect or 'hidden' material flows involved in extracting, moving and processing the materials directly used. Again this excludes exports and their associated indirect flows.

What are the Local Authority Area Ecological Footprints?

WHAT ARE THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTS?

A Local Authority Area Footprint is the Ecological Footprint of the residents who live within the local authority area. Wherever the residents consume their resources this is allocated to the individuals. For example, if I live in York, drive my car to Leeds and go to buy clothes made in China, my Footprint would include the impacts of my car journey, of the textile manufacturing in China as well as of the transport of the clothes and would be completely allocated to the local area of York.

WHERE AND HOW CAN I ACCESS THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA FOOTPRINT RESULTS?

The data for each local authority area throughout England, Scotland and Wales is available for free from www.sei.se/reap. Results for Northern Ireland will be released later on this year.

HOW OFTEN WILL THESE FOOTPRINTS BE UPDATED AND BY WHOM?

It is hoped that funding will be available to repeat this study in the near future. As the Footprint is measuring long-term trends, it is recommended to repeat the analysis every 2-3 years. In order to monitor progress a new set of local Footprint accounts is planned for 2008.

WILL UPDATES BE FREE?

Yes, if funding can be obtained.

WHAT OFFICIAL BODIES HAVE ENDORSED THESE RESULTS?

These results have been endorsed by WWF, Biffaward¹ and the Global Footprint Network. The National Footprint Accounts, on which the local accounts are based, have been endorsed by the European Environment Agency, which presented the headline findings in its State of the Environment Report, released on 29 November 2005. For more information visit <http://org.eea.eu.int/news/Ann1132753060>

¹ pending approval of the Ecological Budget UK project which is due to finish in spring 2006.

Why is it useful for Local Authorities?

WHY IS ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTING RELEVANT TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES?

Footprinting can be an effective indicator that can be used for a wide range of council and community plans and strategies (including corporate, community, partnership, environment, planning, economic, transport, waste, procurement, housing, education). The footprint enables us to compare between environmental policy options in a way that no other indicator can.

There is substantial potential to use the Footprint to evaluate whether plans are really helping to promote local sustainability and it can also be used to assess the impact of individual policy decisions made by a Local Authority or Strategic Partnership.

The Audit Commission Quality of Life indicators report (2005) recognised that individual indicators cannot always provide the 'big picture' or reflect cross-cutting issues adequately and it makes reference to Ecological Footprinting as an aggregate indicator that can help provide this perspective.

HOW CAN LOCAL AUTHORITIES USE THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT?

At the local level, Footprinting can be used as a key indicator and strategic management tool; as an awareness raising and educational tool; as a cross-cutting thread running through a wide range of strategies and plans; and as a source of baseline information.

HOW CAN ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTING CONTRIBUTE TO PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT AND RELATE TO GOVERNMENT INDICATOR SETS?

The Ecological Footprint can help provide evidence and context for performance management (Best Value, Corporate Performance Assessment, Local Area Agreements, Public Service Agreements, etc.) and directly supports and can supplement the Quality of Life Indicators.

This is because it offers an overall picture of progress in a way that is both practical and easy to understand. It also covers consumption and reflects environmental limits, as well as the local to global aspect of sustainable development that current indicators do not adequately address.

The Audit Commission in England has recognised the potential value of the Footprint as an indicator that can help to provide the 'big picture' on sustainable development and it is covered in their recent Quality of Life publication launched in August 2005. The report recognises that individual indicators cannot always provide the 'big picture' or reflect cross-cutting issues adequately and it makes reference to Ecological Footprinting as an aggregate indicator that can help provide this perspective.

HOW CAN ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTING CONTRIBUTE TO PROCUREMENT / BEST VALUE?

A key principle of Best Value (which governs the purchasing of all goods and services by a Local Authority) is that it should promote sustainability and there is a commitment within the UK Sustainable Development Strategy to develop key performance indicators on sustainable public procurement. The Footprint can help assess whether purchasing decisions are contributing towards sustainability, providing quantified data that can be used as evidence.

HOW CAN ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTING CONTRIBUTE TO STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING?

The Local Authority Area Ecological Footprints can be used as an indicator and source of evidence for the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of all relevant plans and strategies. It can directly help with the consideration of alternatives and can provide an appropriate environmental baseline.

It can also be used to see the effect that the policies proposed within Local Development Plans would have on the Ecological Footprint and can provide baseline information for Sustainability Appraisals.

It can also prove useful in supporting sustainable design policies and encouraging better design through planning.

HOW DOES ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTING CONTRIBUTE TO COMMUNITY PLANNING?

There is significant potential to use Ecological Footprinting to evaluate whether community planning and strategies are really helping to promote local sustainability. It is also a way to link the local to the global providing a unique tool that can help local authorities, their partners and the public think about what impact local actions and policies will have on the global environment.

Links to the Community Planning agenda and the activities of Strategic Partnerships are crucial. The Ecological Footprint should be linked to developing 'sustainable' community plans and linking to quality of life measures.

It has the potential to become a key indicator within community plans, and can help inform decision making and target setting. For example York has set a target of cutting the city's Ecological Footprint within its Community Strategy.

If it is used within the community plan, it should in turn be linked to the core strategy of the Local Development Framework/ Planning Framework.

HOW DO I LINK ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINTING TO MY CURRENT SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PLAN/ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY?

Essentially the Footprint is a key indicator of environmental sustainability and can be used to help develop and deliver 'sustainable' policy and decision making across the authority, within local partnerships and within the community.

In March 2005, the government launched a shared framework for sustainable development, common to all parts of the UK, and the new UK Sustainable Development Strategy. The strategy sets out five new principles, including a more explicit focus on environmental limits for which the Ecological Footprinting tool can provide a baseline measure. The Strategy also sets out priority areas for immediate action which are outlined below and the Local Authority Area Ecological Footprint's support:

- sustainable consumption and production;
- climate change and energy;
- natural resource protection and environmental enhancement; and

- sustainable communities.

The Footprint can provide an important tool to support the work of local authorities in delivering and reviewing their sustainable community strategies.

It can also provide a strong education and awareness tool for use with Councillors, staff and the public to help promote the concept of sustainable development. People empathise with the issues but do not know what they can do about it, positive feedback via the Ecological Footprint tool will be very valuable.

The Footprint can also be a useful environmental indicator for other local strategies, for example Climate Change, Waste, Transport, Planning, Economic Development, Procurement and Energy.

HOW CAN THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT BE USED TO ENGAGE THE PUBLIC AND POLITICIANS?

It is a valuable and effective visualising tool for educators, and can be used with children, young people and adults.

The Ecological Footprint creates simple mental images from complex statistics and can be used by decision-makers to think about the 'big picture' and compare between different policy options.

Various studies have shown that the Footprint can be an effective tool in school education including in Scotland, for example, where exercises have been supported by an interactive software tool and materials.

For further information on how the Footprint can be used, please see the '[How to Guide](#)'.

DOES THE ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT ONLY APPLY TO POLICY AREAS OR CAN IT APPLY TO PROJECTS?

The Ecological Footprint can apply to both policy areas and projects. One example of its use with a project can be seen in London's bid for the Olympic Games in 2012 in which Footprinting was used to promote the environmental credentials of the bid.

WHAT LOCAL DATA DOES THE LOCAL AUTHORITY NEED TO PROVIDE?

Local data has been entered into the analysis but using the Footprint alongside other local indicators, knowledge and tools is obviously beneficial. If the local authority feels that even better data is available then information on waste, transport and energy can be replaced with the use of the Resources and Energy Analysis Programme (REAP).

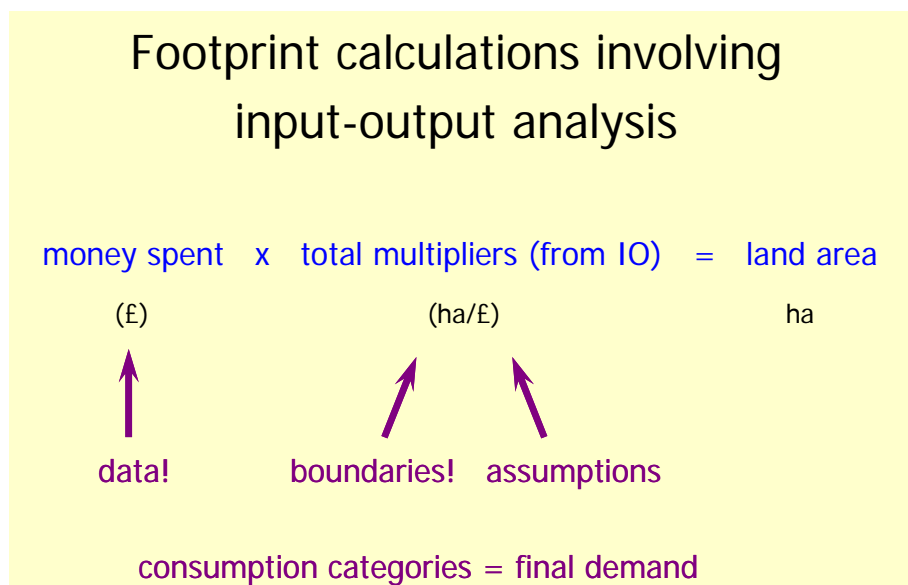
How are the Local Authority Area Ecological Footprints calculated?

HOW ARE THE LOCAL AUTHORITY AREA FOOTPRINTS CALCULATED?

Previously, a method was used to calculate the Ecological Footprint which involved the collection of local data for resource and energy consumption. This is not only time intensive and costly but there were also fundamental problems with data availability and unclear boundaries. Therefore, a new method has been developed by the Stockholm Environment Institute.

The new calculations are based on a well established method called ‘environmentally extended input-output analysis’ and involve the conversion of expenditure data into Ecological Footprints. As data on local household expenditure is more easily available, local Footprints can be established faster, cheaper and on a broader scale.

The following diagram depicts the methodology.



New input-output-based method: good data availability, well defined study boundaries and consumption categories, consistent with economic National Accounts from the Office of National Statistics (ONS).

For more information on the ACORN data and method used please download:
“*Reducing Wales’ Ecological Footprint – Main Report*” (Stockholm Environment Institute, University of York; published by WWF Cymru, Cardiff, UK; March 2005)
<http://www.walesfootprint.org>

For further information download:
“*Towards Standardisation of the Ecological Footprint – Keeping the Calculation Method Up-To-Date*” (SEI).

WHAT ARE THE DATA SOURCES?

The data sources that are used to calculate local Footprints are:

- National (economic) Accounts (Office for National Statistics),
- National Footprint Accounts (Global Footprint Network),
- National Environmental Accounts (Office for National Statistics),
- Household Expenditure Survey (Office for National Statistics),
- National Travel Survey (Department for Transport),
- National Food Survey (Office for National Statistics)
- household expenditure by ACORN² group (CACI Ltd.³),
- composition of ACORN groups in LA areas (CACI Ltd.)

The base year for the current set of local Footprint accounts is 2001.

IS THE DATA 'LOCAL' OR IS IT SIMPLY A PROXY OF NATIONAL DATA?

The local accounts are based on local expenditure data. These have been derived from regional expenditure data by using both surveys and modelling techniques (for more information see <http://www.caci.co.uk/>)

This analysis can be supplemented by local data, for example on waste, transport and energy, which will make it more responsive to local policies.

HOW DO THESE RESULTS FIT WITH OTHER ECOLOGICAL FOOTPRINT STUDIES?

The results have 100% comparability and consistency with the Global Footprint Network ("standard") accounts. As described above, the calculation methodology has recently changed which means that the new results are not directly comparable with older studies (on average, Footprint values are now slightly lower than previously as we have eliminated possible double counting in the previous method).

There may also be differences to studies from other Footprint consultancies. However, Footprint practitioners from the UK and worldwide have joined in an effort to create a standard procedure for Footprint calculations. The first set of standards is due to be published in June 2006. The present accounts comply with the draft standards. For more information visit www.footprintstandards.org

Unfortunately it is not easy to adjust former Footprint studies for comparability as the old studies use different categories and classifications. Simple updating is not possible in most cases.

WILL THE METHODOLOGY BE REFINED FURTHER AND HOW WILL THESE CHANGES BE COMMUNICATED TO US?

The methodology will constantly be reviewed and where necessary refined and changes will be available via the SEI website www.sei.se/reap

² see ACORN User Guide 2005 from CACI http://downloads.postcodeanywhere.co.uk/pdf/acorn_user_guide.pdf

³ <http://www.caci.co.uk/>

In any case, future Footprint accounts will comply with the standards (www.footprintstandards.org) which guarantees consistency and comparability worldwide.

IS THERE AN INTERNATIONALLY RECOGNISED STANDARD AND DO THESE RESULTS COMPLY WITH THIS?

The first set of standards will be published in June 2006 by the Global Footprint Network at the International Footprint conference in Sienna. Information is available at www.footprintstandards.org

Where can I get further support and advice?

WHERE CAN I GET FURTHER SUPPORT AND ADVICE?

Stockholm Environment Institute - York

Email: footprint@sei.se

Website: <http://www.regionalsustainability.org>

SEI's Resources and Energy Analysis Programme (REAP) offers a number of packages for Local Authorities. These include a general presentation on REAP to potential users, a full-day workshop with users (how to run policy scenarios with REAP and technical assistance with software problems via telephone or e-mail.

WHERE CAN I FIND OUT MORE?

WWF have a wealth of experience working with Local Authorities on Footprinting. They have recently produced a guide to support local authority use of the Ecological Footprint Tool which includes signposting to examples and studies.

For further information please email: footprint@wwf.org.uk

Please also visit:

www.wwf.org.uk/footprint

www.sei.se/reap

www.regionalsustainability.org

www.ecologicalbudget.org.uk

www.footprintnetwork.org

www.footprintstandards.org

www.walesfootprint.org

www.scotlandfootprint.org

www.bestfootforward.com

www.massbalance.org

The mission of WWF is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity;
- ensuring that the use of renewable resources is sustainable;
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

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