Reuniting Planning and Health

Planning for Healthy Communities resources pack

RESOURCE 3:

PLANNING POLICIES AND PRACTICE FOR HEALTHY COMMUNITIES .

A resource for *elected members, planners and public health practitioners. It explains the opportunities and constraints for considering health concerns within the planning process, and includes examples of evidence-based policies.*

Planning for Healthy Communities resources pack

> *'The integration of planning, community planning, regeneration, local economic development and local tourism, combined with councils' existing functions, should provide a productive joined up approach that will enhance the role of local government as a natural partner in helping to deliver health improvements and addressing health inequalities at the community level.'*
> Dr Michael McBride, Chief Medical Officer, Northern Ireland ([Your Health Matters](), 2013)

Welcome

This set of resources explains how better integration between health and spatial planning can help to create healthier places to live. It explains the opportunities for achieving this in Northern Ireland, and includes suggestions from elsewhere to illustrate potential ways forward.

These resources have been developed primarily for elected members, senior officers in local government, planners and public health practitioners. They will also be useful for community development practitioners and others who want to understand how the planning system can play a part in improving health and wellbeing locally.

Not everyone will want to know the same thing, and users will come with their own existing knowledge. To make the resources as useful as possible they have been written as standalone resources. This means that users can choose the ones they are most interested in, without having to start from the beginning of Resource 1 and work their way through to the end (you are of course welcome to do this too!).

Resource 1 is for people who want to learn more about the links between planning and health. It is a brief overview with lots of links to other more detailed reports and websites to get more information.	**Resource 2** is for elected members and senior officers. It focuses on the role of planning corporately, and how a focus on health can help to achieve wider corporate objectives. This is particularly timely as councils consider how they will coordinate and organise their new responsibilities.	**Resource 3** is for elected members, planners and public health practitioners. It explains the opportunities and constraints for considering health concerns within the planning process, and includes examples of evidence-based policies. There are lots of links to more information.	**Resource 4** is for people who want to know more about how health can be considered within the existing and emerging Northern Ireland planning system.	**Resource 5** is for people who want to know more about what integrated health and planning might look like in practice. It showcases examples of places where health has been considered throughout the planning process.

Resource 3: Planning policies and practice for healthy communities

Highlights how evidence-based planning policies can support public health priorities, and illustrates the importance of collaborative working

Understanding planning: opportunities and constraints

To work with planners effectively it is important to understand the system they operate in, and the processes for developing policy and making decisions. Planning must follow a process set out in legislation; knowing when to input into policy is vital for influencing change on the ground.

Put simply, local planning decisions will be guided by local plan policies, which must be based on evidence. This evidence should be drawn from a range of sources such as quantitative data, the needs and wishes of local communities and the council's strategic objectives. The most effective way to influence policy is to provide evidence in a form that is useful to planners, at the time when they are preparing the local plan. In Northern Ireland, the new local authorities will be preparing their plans from 2015. This presents an opportunity for public health practitioners and others to make contact with local authority planners and talk about the policies they would like to see included, whether or not the evidence exists already and, if not, how they could help to generate it.

For more information on the Northern Ireland planning system see Resource 4.

For general information on influencing each stage of a planning process to improve health, see [Planning Healthier Places](#) (Section 4) (TCPA, 2013).

Developing evidence-based policies

This section is designed to help public health practitioners and planners think about relevant policies for their area, based on existing evidence. The information below is structured around public health priorities that are influenced by the built environment, which are:

- Increase physical activity
- Prevent obesity
- Reduce health inequalities
- Improve mental health and wellbeing
- Tackle health impacts of climate change.

For each of these the resource:

- identifies suggestions for evidence-based planning policies that can help to meet the public health priority
- includes examples of policies from English local authorities to illustrate how these can be adopted in practice, using local evidence
- includes links to documents/projects that illustrate what implementation could look like on the ground.

The policy examples come from England, where the driver for developing health policies in local plans is the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Planning Practice Guidance. The NPPF has a whole section on planning for healthier communities. Note that the NPPF and PPG are relatively new documents (2013 and 2014 respectively) and so it is too early to evaluate the policies set out here for effectiveness, although they have been adopted through an examination process (unless otherwise stated).

Some councils have developed overarching supplementary planning documents – which are intended to support adopted local plan policies – on healthy communities. Examples include:

- Healthy Urban Planning (Stoke-on-Trent City Council, 2012)
- Planning for Health (Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council, 2013)

The weight given to these policies will depend on the context of the local planning authority – in general, policies in a local plan carry more weight than those in an SPD. However, they are a very useful place to start for understanding the range of policies that planners can consider adopting.

Increase physical activity

- Ensure planning applications for new developments always prioritise the need for people to be physically active as a routine part of their daily life
- Provide daily services and facilities within walking distance of where people live
- Provide well-lit and pedestrian-friendly footpaths and socially enhancing street patterns
- Provide green spaces and play areas that stimulate children and safely challenge them
- Provide well maintained, distinctive, attractive and safe-feeling public spaces and routes (for all)
- Implement traffic measures that reduce speeds or divert traffic away from busy streets and spread the flow more evenly across built-up areas
- Implement traffic calming measures in busy residential streets such as 20mph zones

Sources: Promoting Walking and Cycling (NICE, 2013); Preventing Obesity (NICE, 2013); The Built Environment and Health: an evidence review (GCPH, 2013)

Examples of adopted policies

Hertsmere Core Strategy
- Promote recreational access to open spaces and the countryside and promote greenways – a largely car-free network of paths within and between urban destinations and the countryside

Newham Core Strategy
- Facilitate and promote walking and cycling to increase people's activity rates

Stockport Core Strategy
- A focus on facilitating cycle-friendly neighbourhoods.
- Layout of new developments should favour more 'people-friendly' streets and reduced vehicle speeds

More information, and examples

[Active planning toolkit](#) (Gloucestershire Conference, 2011)

[Obesity and the environment: increasing physical activity and active travel](#) (PHE, 2013)

[Walking works](#) (The Ramblers and Macmillan Cancer Support, 2013)

[Improving the health of Londoners: transport action plan](#) (especially Chapter 8) (TFL, 2014)

Prevent obesity (also see 'Increase physical activity' and 'Reduce health inequalities')

- Encourage local retailers to offer and promote affordable fruit and vegetables
- Use existing powers to control the number of takeaways and other food outlets in a given area, particularly near schools

Source: [Preventing Obesity](#) (NICE, 2013)

Examples of adopted policies

Salford Hot Food Takeaways Supplementary Planning Document
- Where a hot food take away is proposed within 400 metres of a secondary school, planning permission will only be granted subject to a condition that the premises are not open to the public before 5pm Monday to Friday and there are no over the counter sales before that time.
- This policy will not apply to hot food takeaways proposed in a designated local centre, town centre or the Manchester/Salford City Centre, or locations that would be unlikely to be accessed by pupils of a nearby school

Central Lincolnshire Joint Core Strategy (publication version, not yet adopted)
- Promote and safeguard the role of local food growing spaces – including garden plots, community gardens and allotments – and local markets

More information, and examples

[Obesity and the environment briefing: regulating the growth of fast food outlets](#) (PHE, 2013)

[Obesity and the environment briefing: increasing physical activity and active travel](#) (PHE, 2013)

[Takeaways Toolkit](#) (Greater London Authority, 2012)

Reduce health inequalities

- Plan public realm schemes to boost regeneration
- Provide high quality streets and places to boost resident esteem and promote investor confidence
- Take actions to reduce the risk of traffic accidents on busy roads within areas of socioeconomic disadvantage
- Restrict health damaging uses, especially in areas of socioeconomic deprivation that tend to have higher concentrations (specifically fast food outlets)

Sources: [The Pedestrian Pound: the business case for better streets and places](#) (Living Streets, 2013); [The Built Environment and Health: an evidence review](#) (GCPH, 2013)

Examples of adopted policies

Newham Core Strategy
- Objective to improve employment levels and reduce poverty, while attending to the environmental impacts of economic development, including community/public safety, noise, vibrations and odour, and the legacy of contaminated land

Stockport Core Strategy
- Seeks to address disparities in social equity between pockets of deprivation and areas of affluence, resulting in inequalities, especially in health

Bristol Site Allocations and Development Management Policies (publication version, not yet adopted)
- Development should contribute to reducing the causes of ill health, improving health and reducing health inequalities within the city, through:
    - addressing adverse health impacts
    - providing a healthy living environment
    - promoting and enabling healthy lifestyles as the normal, easy choice
    - providing good access to health facilities and services

Further information, and examples

[Plugging health into planning](#) (LGA, 2011)

[Healthy Places](#) website (managed by UK Health Forum)

Improve mental health and wellbeing

- Plan to reduce excessive and persistent noise in homes and neighbourhoods, which can lead to poor mental health
- Reduce the amount of derelict and vacant land, which is associated with a number of poor health outcomes such as reduced mental wellbeing
- Provide access to good quality greenspace, paying attention to design, location and maintenance

- Include places in new developments and in existing neighbourhoods for people to socialise and organise

Source: [The Built Environment and Health: an evidence review](#) (GCPH, 2013)

Examples of adopted policies

Newham Core Strategy
- Council will support proposals that improve housing quality and inclusion through better design, and that reduce crime, insecurity and stress

Brighton & Hove Submission City Plan (not yet adopted)
- Planning will support programmes and strategies which aim to reduce health inequalities and promote healthier lifestyles through the following:
  - recognise, safeguard and encourage the role of allotments; garden plots within developments; small scale agriculture and farmers markets in providing access to healthy, affordable locally produced food options

Growing Communities Strategy by Belfast City Council and partners
- Strategy aims to ensure that all parts of the community have the opportunity to participate in and experience the benefits of food growing

Further information and examples

[Design for social sustainability](#) (Young Foundation, 2011)

[Public Health and Landscape: Creating Healthy Places](#) (Landscape Institute, 2013)

[Feel Better Outside, Feel Better Inside: Ecotherapy for Mental Wellbeing, Resilience and Recovery](#) (Mind, 2013)

[Planning Sustainable Cities for Community Food Growing](#) (Sustain, 2014)

[PAN06: Food Growing and Development](#) (Brighton & Hove Council, 2011)

Tackle health effects of climate change
- Facilitate actions to mitigate climate change, such as transferring to active forms of travel and producing locally grown food
- Upgrade flood defence mechanisms where necessary, particularly in areas where people have fewer resources to cope in the aftermath of a flooding event
- Increase the number of permeable surfaces within built-up urban areas to reduce levels of surface water runoff
- Employ green and blue infrastructure as Sustainable Drainage Systems, including reducing impermeable surfaces in built up urban areas to manage the flow rate and volume of surface runoff to reduce the risk of flooding and water pollution

Source: [The Built Environment and Health: an evidence review](#) (GCPH, 2013)

Examples of adopted policies

Black Country Core Strategy
To assist in both reducing the extent and impact of flooding and also reducing potential urban heat island effects, all developments should:

- incorporate Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDs), unless it would be impractical to do so, in order to significantly reduce surface water run-off and improve water quality
- create new green space, increase tree cover and/or provide green roofs.

Climate Change Strategy for Coventry
To ensure that by 2020 Coventry is a world leading low carbon, and sustainable city, resilient to extreme weather events and to long term climate change. By 2020 we want:

- to increase green space, protect habitats and encourage locally grown food.

Further information, and examples

[Green and Blue Space Adaptation for Urban Areas](#) (GRaBS)

Reduce respiratory disease

- Reduce levels of harmful transport and industrial emissions (e.g. through switching to cleaner energy sources, promoting active travel and providing a networked infrastructure which enables active travel throughout towns and cities)

Source: [The Built Environment and Health: an evidence review](#) (GCPH, 2013)

Example of adopted policy

Newham Core Strategy
- Improve air quality, reduce exposure to airborne pollutants, and secure the implementation of the Air Quality Action Plan, having regard to national and international obligations

More information, and examples

[Low Emission Strategies Partnership – case studies](#) (website, ongoing)

The value of collaborative working

If planners are to help create healthy communities they need to work with the range of other professionals and practitioners that also have a role. There are a number of benefits that can come from a commitment to practise collaborative working. These include:

- Helping to meet corporate objectives and aspirations
- Sharing and potential pooling of capacity and resources
- Sharing an evidence base
- Engaging communities in a coordinated way
- Developing a shared understanding of the challenges and potential solutions
- Assessing the health impact of proposed policies, strategies and development
- Aligning strategies to avoid duplication and unintended consequences
- Working more effectively with elected members.

Previous work by the TCPA has found that one of the most effective ways of helping to facilitate better joint working is to appoint someone to do it. These specialist postholders report that their role has been vital to:

- help public health staff to understand and engage effectively with the planning process and other council regulatory functions
- increase planners' understanding of health inequalities
- break down language and jargon barriers across both professions.

Public health and planning collaborating for better health

In 2010 Knowsley Council, in north west England, created a Health and Regeneration Project Officer post with the Department of Regeneration, Economy and Skills. The purpose of the post is to promote health in all aspects of planning and regeneration.

Successes include:
- embedding health principles into local planning documents and major regeneration projects by doing a health impact assessment (HIA) – this has strengthened the council's focus on promoting physical activity, protecting green space, providing areas for food production and responding to the health impacts of climate change – for example, by increasing the amount of shaded areas
- getting large groups of officers and residents together to understand the likely health impact of developments, to discuss the pros and cons, and to consider any other issues that had not been talked about previously – leading to better quality developments.

The postholder, Cath Taylor, says:
'Since I started in 2010 I've sat with planning policy/strategy, regeneration, housing and environmental health. This has really helped to make contacts, to identify opportunities for joint-working and to make sure that people understand the links between their work and the public's health.'

Contact: Cath Taylor, Principal Health Promoting Environments Officer, Knowsley Council, catherine.taylor@knowsley.gov.uk

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Sharing information to benefit 'real people'
Northern Ireland's Public Health Agency undertook a major consultation on the factors that influence people's emotional health, which used a mixture of techniques including social media to get a wide range of views. More than 3000 people responded. Not surprisingly, the majority of responses focused on the quality of their relationships. But the next most important theme to emerge were factors that related to where people live: antisocial behaviour, design, connection to parks and leisure, employment, transport. These are all either directly or indirectly influenced by planners, transport planners and other built environment professionals. And yet a conventional 'planning consultation' would have failed to get this information. Although planners were not originally a target for the information, thanks to a collaboration via Belfast Healthy Cities, the PHA health and wellbeing team is now looking at sharing the information with Belfast City Council planners.

This resource is part of a series

Reuniting Planning and Health- Planning for Healthy Communities.

All five publications are available to download

at

planning.belfasthealthycities.com