

Planning and Health

Why is Planning a Public Health issue?

Town planning and public health have long been linked, with modern planning's roots originating in 19th Century industrial cities in response to unsanitary, overcrowded and inhumane conditions.

Anticipating social and economic needs

- Planning, if done well can contribute significantly to improving the physical and mental wellbeing of communities by ensuring sufficient housing, economic and other infrastructure
- Spatial planning has a clear and strong influence on healthy choices made by individuals.
- It promotes safe and accessible environments and reduces health inequalities.
- It can deliver social recreational and cultural facilities and services that communities will value

Transport

- It can reduce inequalities in access to transport, particularly for vulnerable groups such as the young and the elderly and those without private transport.
- It can lead to increases physical activity through providing or improving walking access within mixed use communities.
- Local plans and policies can protect and exploit opportunities for the use of sustainable transport modes.

Amenities

- Improves the social environment by improving the street scene and promoting safe and accessible environments.
- The provision of safe green and open spaces can have a positive impact on mental health and encourage people to exercise and get involved in physical activity, sport and recreation.
- It promotes the retention and development of local services and community facilities in villages, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.
- Policies which balance land use within their area encourages people to minimise journey lengths for employment, shopping, leisure, education and other activities.

Safety

- Improves the population's health by reducing air and water pollution.
- Good planning can reduce the risk of new and existing development from the risk of soil, air, water or noise pollution.

- Well planned flood avoidance and protection measures protect communities and improve the quality of life.
- Fit for purpose water and sewerage systems provide the basic infrastructure for development.

What can the County Council do about it?

Anticipating social and economic needs

- Ensuring policies within the Core Strategy make reference to health issues where appropriate
- Encourage closer working between Planning and Public Health to ensure that there is access to health information and evidence to support planning objectives and proposals
- Plan to provide new homes that better meet the population's needs particularly for older and vulnerable people
- Propose standards for new homes and buildings, which as well as improving energy efficiency, promotes other health related benefits where viable
- Use planning obligations (§106 agreements) to secure contributions from developers to provide facilities and services which make a positive contribution to health where viable
- Consider the delivery of shared infrastructure as part of the development of the Community Infrastructure Levy to benefit local communities such as health and/or sport and recreation facilities

Transport

- Where appropriate, create places where people can access local services, jobs, shops and community facilities without having to use a car.
- Encourage plans for new developments which prioritise the need for people to be physically active as a routine part of their daily life including walking and cycling facilities and infrastructure.

Amenities

- Work towards improving the distribution and quality of recreational, sport and open space provision.
- Give consideration to improving access to healthy food by regulating land use and promoting local food growing sites such as allotments
- When resources permit, enhance Green Infrastructure, including the provision of sports facilities and playing pitches, open space standards and the protection of Local Green Spaces

Safety

- Plan for the management of water, aiming to reduce flood risk, maintain water quality and ensure that water supply and sewerage infrastructure can support existing and future development.
- Provide an environmental criterion to avoid unacceptable health risks associated with minerals and waste applications (e.g. contamination, dust, noise)

How will it make a difference?

Formulating and implementing planning policies and development proposals based on the evidence of how they affect human health is likely to lead to improvements in health. Building health into the urban and rural environments or designing out unhealthy factors to 'design in' health, in the same way as trying to 'design out' crime is a vital step towards delivering longer term improvements in health across the whole of our Northumberland population.