

# Warwickshire County Council Public Health Response to Planning Applications

## Purpose

To provide guidance on behalf of WCC Public Health to developers submitting Planning Applications for less than 250 households. Planning Applications which are of 250 households or more will be provided with a tailored response.

## Background

The links between planning and health are well documented. The 2024 National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) emphasises the importance of prioritising planning policies/decisions that create healthy, safe and inclusive environments.<sup>1</sup> The National Planning Policy Guidance (NPPG) adds to this further stating that Director of Public Health should be consulted on any planning applications to support creation of environments that support and encourage healthy lifestyles and reduce inequalities.<sup>2</sup>

**Overall recommendation:** We encourage all developers to complete a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) for any new development. HIAs are conducted where there is a potential impact on health and wellbeing to identify and mitigate risk. HIAs consider the proposed change and assess what the likely positive and negative consequences for health and wellbeing will be. Recommendations are then made on how to enhance the positive consequences and reduce the negative. HIAs are endorsed by the Health and Wellbeing Board, the statutory body for monitoring health and wellbeing. We recommend that developers use the London Healthy Urban Development Unit (HUDU) HIA tool,<sup>3</sup> or the Wales HIA Support Unit (WHIASU) tool.<sup>4</sup>

## Maximising Health and Wellbeing: Key Factors for Planners to consider.

### 1. Neighbourhood Design

#### Recommendation 1a: Access to facilities

WCC Public Health recommend that key amenities be placed within a reasonable distance for walking or cycling. This includes education and community/ health facilities, reasonably priced healthy food choices and limitations on unhealthy hot food takeaways. Local amenities should be within a walkable distance, reducing the need for car use and promotion of active travel.

**Rationale:** Having community assets and amenities within a walkable distance will help in reducing the need for car use, promoting active travel and physical activity.<sup>5</sup> Increasing physical activity levels

---

<sup>1</sup> [National Planning Policy Framework](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Planning Policy Guidance](#)

<sup>3</sup> [HUDU Rapid HIA tool](#)

<sup>4</sup> <https://phwwhocc.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/HIA-and-LDPs-Toolkit-E-final.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [Walkable neighbourhoods: how to reduce car dependency in new developments \(sustrans.org.uk\)](#)

in the population will help prevent or manage long term conditions such as coronary heart disease, diabetes, some cancers and improve mental health.<sup>6</sup>

### **Recommendation 1b: Adequate provision of community facilities and healthcare infrastructure**

WCC Public Health recommend that all developments include adequate provision for community facilities to meet the needs of current and future residents and support communities' health, social and cultural wellbeing.

**Rationale:** Paragraph 92 of the NPPF states that Local Councils are to “*plan positively for the provision...of...community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments*” and are to “*take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community.*”<sup>7</sup>

Provision and use of shared community spaces can reduce loneliness and social isolation of residents in the neighbourhood.<sup>8</sup> Actual and perceived social isolation are both associated with increased risk for early mortality. The effect of loneliness and isolation on mortality is comparable to the impact of well-known risk factors such as obesity and has a similar influence as cigarette smoking.<sup>9</sup>

### **Recommendation 1c: Adequate access to green spaces**

WCC Public Health recommends provision of green spaces such as parks, woodland, fields and allotments as well as natural elements including green walls, roofs and incidental vegetation.

**Rationale:** Frequent exposure to green infrastructure has a positive influence on mortality rates, certain types of morbidity, mental health, quality of life, and is associated with less stark inequalities in health. Highest levels of green space (typically around the home residence) tend to be associated with more favourable salivary cortisol, heart rate, diastolic blood pressure, HDL cholesterol and pregnancy outcomes.<sup>10</sup> In addition to this, increased green space access offers cost saving benefits, evidence shows that £2.1 billion could be saved per year in healthcare costs if everyone in UK had good access to green space.<sup>11</sup> It provides opportunities for people to exercise outside and walk or cycle to key services and facilities.<sup>12</sup>

### **Recommendation 1d: Healthy Streets**

WCC Public Health endorse the [Healthy Streets Design Tool](#) in creating environments that prioritise health and wellbeing of residents.

**Rationale:** The environment in which we live can influence the choices we make. The Healthy Streets Approach is a human-centred framework for embedding public health in transport, public realm and planning. It is useful in creating environments that prioritise health and wellbeing of residents by promoting active travel, reducing air pollution, improving road safety and enhancing public safety.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/physical-activity#:~:text=Regular%20physical%20activity%20is%20proven,of%20life%20and%20well%20being.>

<sup>7</sup> [National Planning Policy Framework \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [CEL-Tackling-loneliness-through-the-built-environment-Final.pdf \(campaigntoendloneliness.org\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Social Relationships and Mortality Risk: A Meta-analytic Review](#)

<sup>10</sup> [A rapid scoping review of health and wellbeing evidence](#)

<sup>11</sup> [Improving Access to Greenspaces, A new Review for 2020](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Green space mental wellbeing and sustainable communities](#)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.healthystreets.com/resources>

## 2. Transport

### **Recommendation 2a: Public transport**

WCC Public Health recommend that developments should support access to public transport schemes. Where possible, bus stops should be accessible to the surrounding residential areas and close to footpaths and cycle routes. Waiting areas should have good quality seating and timetable displays. They should also be clearly lit with a 10-metre surrounding visibility.

**Rationale:** Transport is a key wider determinant of health and important for reducing health inequalities and improving the health of the population.<sup>14</sup> Access to public transport can reduce car dependency whilst benefiting health and wellbeing as a by-product of increased physical activity.<sup>15</sup>

### **Recommendation 2b: Active travel**

WCC Public Health recommend that active travel is considered in any new development. For example, minimising the need to travel by private car and providing linkages or new footways, bicycle parking, cycle paths and bridleways giving access to key local facilities.

**Rationale:** Active travel is a form of transport that involves human physical activity such as walking and cycling, including transit to public transport. Improvement in active travel and consequently, physical activity has substantial benefits for health and wellbeing as evidenced on page 2 above.

## 3. Housing

### **Recommendation 3a: Affordability and Accessibility**

WCC Public Health recommends that a mixture of housing tenure types is included within every development. Affordable housing should be equally dispersed throughout the community, rather than concentrated in one area or on the fringes of sites. In addition, it is important to ensure a variety of housing designs are built to meet the [Lifetime Homes Standards](#) so they are flexible and allow people to grow with their homes.

**Rationale:** A mixture of housing tenure types, equally dispersed throughout the community will allow for a range of people to live in the community, while a variety in housing designs will maximise the independence of vulnerable residents including young people, people with disabilities, older people, homeless people and other vulnerable adults.<sup>16</sup>

### **Recommendation 3b: Quality of housing**

WCC Public Health recommend that EPC rating should be A or above in all developments.

**Rationale:** The quality and provision of housing has a significant impact on health and wellbeing. Poor housing problems such as damp, mould, antisocial neighbours, uncertain tenancies, and overcrowded conditions can worsen mental health by increasing stress, and anxiety. It can also have

---

<sup>14</sup> [How transport offers a route to better health - The Health Foundation](#)

<sup>15</sup> [How transport offers a route to better health - The Health Foundation](#)

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/25.213%20HICM%20Housing\\_04\\_MJ\\_AA.pdf](https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/25.213%20HICM%20Housing_04_MJ_AA.pdf)

a huge social impact upon the ability of individuals to achieve their potential in education or employment .<sup>17</sup>

Poor housing that is difficult to heat, damp or dangerous may also help to exacerbate health inequalities among those from low-income groups, older adults and those living with chronic pre-existing conditions.<sup>18</sup>

## Planning Across the life course

WCC Public Health recognises the ever-changing needs, preferences, abilities of individuals as they grow through different life stages and the importance of creating inclusive and equitable environments for all ages. Planning across the life course allows for the specific needs of each age group to be taken into consideration.

## Priorities When Planning for Children and Young People’s Health and Wellbeing

Children and young people having the **best start in life** is a key priority for the Health and Wellbeing Board as agreed by all five district and borough councils, county council, and NHS organisations. WCC Public Health encourages creating a child friendly environment that supports optimal physical, cognitive and emotional development, emphasising the importance of safe outdoor green spaces for play and increased physical activity.

**Access to green spaces** has been shown to positively impact children’s mental, behavioural, cognitive, and physical health. Additionally, consultation with CYP across Warwickshire highlights their support for enhanced access to green spaces.<sup>19</sup> WCC Public Health recommend that places are well connected to green spaces to encourage physical activity among this age group.

Improving **neighbourhood walkability** to allow active and independent travel by children and young people has a proven public health benefit. WCC Public Health recommend pedestrianisation through low-traffic neighbourhoods, and playgrounds to encourage active travel, social interaction and physical activity – all of which supports healthy child development.<sup>20</sup>

Additionally, **housing design** should prioritise natural light, ventilation, sustainable energy and enhanced building standards to prevent poor health outcomes in children such as respiratory diseases and mental health issues associated with overcrowding, damp and mould.<sup>21</sup> Damp cold homes also affect children's ability to concentrate at school, negatively affecting their educational attainment.<sup>22</sup> Therefore, WCC Public Health recommend EPC of A and above to reduce risk.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> [Housing and Health:A reading list](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Spatial Planning For Health](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Child Friendly Warwickshire Dialogue 2022](#)

<sup>21</sup> [Child Friendly Warwickshire \(Page 6\)](#)

<sup>22</sup> [the health impacts of cold homes and fuel poverty](#)

<sup>23</sup> <https://api.warwickshire.gov.uk/documents/WCCC-1350011118-3291>

## Priorities When Planning for Adults Health and Wellbeing

At this stage of life key things to consider when planning includes environments that support active lifestyles, economic opportunities and social connectedness. This involves designing neighbourhoods with mixed land uses and reliable public transport to encourage walking and cycling - resulting in improved air quality, physical wellbeing and community cohesion.<sup>24</sup>

Public health endorses initiatives promoting **active travel**, particularly for remote workers, this involves ensuring that community amenities are within a 5-minute walkable distance,<sup>25</sup> reducing the need for car use and also providing linkages or new footways, cycle paths and bridleways giving access to key local facilities. **Access to services, employment, and community amenities** within a walkable distance promotes physical activity and reduces reliance on cars, while also integrating facilities into the heart of the community to reduce loneliness and social isolation.

Additionally, **good quality affordable housing** is essential, as a lack of affordable housing options as well as poor housing conditions can negatively impact on physical, emotional, psychological, and behavioural health.<sup>26</sup>

## Priorities When Planning for Older Adults Health and Wellbeing

Older adults make up a large proportion of Warwickshire's population and people aged 65 and above are projected to account for almost one in four Warwickshire residents by 2033.<sup>27</sup> As the older adult population in Warwickshire continues to grow, it is important to consider the specific need of this age group in the planning process.

WCC Public Health recommend creating **good quality accessible homes** and [age friendly environments](#) that prioritise accessibility, safety and social support networks as this is crucial for promoting independent living and healthy aging. Additionally, ensuring that homes are flexible and grow with people - allowing them to stay in their homes longer and receive care in the right place is important for continued independence in older age.<sup>28</sup>

The [Warwickshire Healthy Ageing JSNA 2023](#) showed that housing and transport were rated the least positively by survey respondents answering question about features of their local area. Good quality, suitable housing significantly impacts the physical and mental health of older adults who spend around 80% of their time at home.<sup>29</sup> Older people are also more susceptible to damp- and cold-related health problems, and most deaths due to falls occur at home.

Fundamental to the Care Act 2014<sup>30</sup> is the suitability of accommodation to meet and support the needs of older and vulnerable people. The Care Act places a general duty to promote health and wellbeing through accommodation. Public Health advocates for energy efficient, **age-friendly housing options**, with features such as room for wheelchairs, handrails and other considerations such as minimal steps into the property to cater to older adults' diverse needs.

---

<sup>24</sup> [Land use planning and health and well-being](#)

<sup>25</sup> [Promoting Health and Wellbeing Through Spatial Planning](#)

<sup>26</sup> [The Impacts of Affordable Housing on Health : A Research Summary](#)

<sup>27</sup> [Healthy Ageing JSNA](#)

<sup>28</sup> [Spatial Planning For Health Pg 13](#)

<sup>29</sup> [The Housing and Ageing Alliance. Policy Paper: Health, Housing and Ageing. The Housing and Ageing Alliance](#)

<sup>30</sup> [The Care Act 2014](#)

Public health also emphasises the importance of **accessible and affordable transport options** for older adults. Reliable transport facilitates social connections, access to essential services, and participation in community activities, thereby preventing loneliness and isolation and improving quality of life overall.<sup>31</sup>

Additionally ensuring public places and **green spaces** are accessible for older people by including access to public seating and toilets, as well as improving street safety through measures such as level pavements, adequate crossing times, and street lighting can increase physical activity among older adults and contribute to the holistic wellbeing of older adults.

## Useful Resources and tools

- ❖ Please find the Neighbourhood Development Planning for Health for guidance and please feel free to include any additional information to strengthen the health and wellbeing through the neighbourhood plan: <https://api.warwickshire.gov.uk/documents/WCCC-630-656>
- ❖ Planners are encouraged to refer to the Warwickshire County Council Promoting Health & Wellbeing Through Spatial Planning document for further details of how good planning and well-designed spaces can impact positively on people's health and wellbeing: <https://democracy.warwickshire.gov.uk/documents/s2123/04%20Appendix%20A.pdf>.
- ❖ The healthy streets design tool can be used for measuring existing streets and proposed designs for how healthy they are: [Resources — Healthy Streets](#)
- ❖ The Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA) analyses current and future wellbeing needs of the local population and can help inform planning for health and wellbeing: [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment – Warwickshire County Council](#)
- ❖ Included in the folder with this document is a checklist aligned with the Building for Life's 12 principles. We encourage planners to refer to it when planning for health and wellbeing

---

<sup>31</sup> [The Future of Transport in an Ageing Society](#)