

Health Issues and Social and Community Facilities

Background

This topic looks at how the Local Plan can protect and enhance the provision of social and community infrastructure and also looks at how the Local Plan can play a part in improving people's health and well-being.

Social and community facilities can include a range of public services, cultural and leisure uses and services provided by the community and voluntary sector.

Public Health England's (PHE) [Healthy Places guidance](#) states that both the built and natural environment are part of the wider determinants of health and wellbeing across your lifespan and have an influence on your physical and mental health, and on health inequalities. The quality of the built and natural environment can affect connectivity within a neighbourhood and people's social networks, the location and quality of housing, exposure to air and noise pollution, safe and accessible transport and opportunities for active travel. It also plays a crucial role in promoting access to open space, employment and healthy food options.

These health inequalities were brought into sharp focus through the way in which Covid-19 disproportionately affected certain communities which did not have as many easily accessible facilities.

It has been shown that residents living in areas which suffer from deprivation and a lack of community facilities and green spaces are much more likely to suffer from health problems. Conversely, studies have shown the detrimental health impacts of loneliness. Therefore, the twin issues relating to health and community are intertwined. The provision of strong community facilities that connect residents to each other through various activities and support groups contributes to people's sense of belonging and to combat loneliness.

This makes it easier for people to live in their community for longer, preventing more serious illness later on in life. Additionally local community facilities contribute to a more sustainable pattern of development with communities by helping to reduce the need to travel.

The Local Plan 2021-2041 will set out how new planning proposals coming forward can promote and facilitate healthy lifestyles, with regard to the mental and physical wellbeing of existing and new residents to the county, in the way that they are designed and are accommodated by easily accessible health, social and community facilities. In addition to a specific policy on health, the overarching aim will be to address the wider determinants of health by creating healthier places by improving the quality of, and access to, the built and natural environment and to reduce health inequalities. This will be embedded into the Local Plan.

The following sets out how the topics of health issues and community and social facilities are addressed through the County Plan and the Local Plan's new vision and objectives.

Herefordshire County Plan

The council's [County Plan](#) (2020-2024) sets out how the council intend to fulfil its environmental, social and economic ambitions over the next four years. A key community ambition is to '*Strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together*'

Herefordshire Council's ambition is to strengthen communities and '*to make wellbeing inevitable*' through the [Talk Community](#) approach. As part of this approach, 39 Talk Community Hubs in Herefordshire signpost key health and wellbeing information and help to connect 'people to services, groups and activities within their local community or across the county'.

Under the economic ambition, a community wealth building initiative entails four key principles – spend more locally, skill-up, strengthen the use of our assets and speak up and out.

Local Plan Draft Vision

The Local Plan 2021-2041 has a community theme vision, which states:

'Herefordshire will be an exemplar of 21st century rural living, where rural settlements and market towns have resilient communities.'

By having relevant and up to date policies on health and community policy within the Local Plan, will play an important role to achieve this vision.

Local Plan Draft Objectives

Health and community ambitions are set out with the Local Plan community objectives, namely:

- To provide connectivity and infrastructure that is designed for inclusion, with factors such as gender, age, and disability considered;
- To support good-health and wellbeing, through ensuring easy access to open space, sports facilities, and active travel options;
- To ensure that health and social care infrastructure will meet the demands of a growing population, whilst supporting good-health and well-being and addressing inequalities.

National Guidance

[National guidance](#) emphasises the need to work collaboratively with health professionals and partnerships. National policy promotes planning for healthy lifestyles. This includes planning for the provision and use of shared facilities, protecting valued facilities, recognising local health, social and cultural strategies and facilitating an integrated approach to the consideration of location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services.

Local Considerations

According to [Understanding Herefordshire data](#), people living in the most deprived areas of the county are 36% more likely to die prematurely of cancer, 22% more likely to die prematurely from cardiovascular disease and 18% more likely to die from respiratory disease. The areas suffering most acutely from health deprivation are located in south Hereford, pockets of the north of the city, as well as in Leominster. These areas are also more likely to suffer from poor air quality, with the county's two AQMA's (Air Quality Management Areas) being located around the A49 road in Hereford and the Bargates area in Leominster, contributing to negative health outcomes.

There are also hidden pockets of rural deprivation due to isolation and a lack of services that support communities. These communities struggle with poor connections, both in terms of digital, health and community infrastructure and access to reliable public transport.

A quarter of Herefordshire's population is in the over 65 age bracket with this figure likely to grow to 28% by 2028. Children and young people also lose out from a lack of services, preventing them from developing well and achieving more. Major obstacles in delivering healthy places are set out in Royal Town Planning Institute's (RTPI) [Enabling Healthy Placemaking](#) report, citing resourcing, managing developers' expectations and funding as key issues.

The lack of local services and facilities in rural areas is a key issue for the county particularly in rural areas. However the plan also needs to ensure that careful consideration is also given to the retention of these facilities in Hereford and the market towns where the cumulative loss of facilities may have a significant impact on local services and diversity of choice for recreation and leisure.

The Local Plan can safeguard land for health infrastructure, protect and extend green corridors and provide the framework to oblige developers to support the funding of health and community facilities that arises both for new and existing communities. It will also need a strong stance on protecting against the loss of existing social and community infrastructure.

The Parish Council questionnaire indicated that many rural areas have lost key services, such as post offices, public houses and shops. Opening times have been reduced, as well as having bus services cut. This impacts on local residents' ability to lead active, social lifestyles and access key services. The provision of rural medical centres or GPs were seen as a desirable key service..

Evidence Base

- The Herefordshire [Health and Well Being Strategy](#) is a statutory requirement for the council which sets out the approach taken by the council to improve the health and wellbeing of the population. Priority 4 Impact of housing – fuel poverty and poverty and the impact on health and wellbeing recognises the importance of housing as a determinant of health. Good standards of housing can reduce ill health, increase mobility and support discharge from hospital. This is most pertinent among vulnerable groups for whom access to decent quality housing will help to reduce health inequalities.
- The [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) provides statistics about the health of the population, presented in the context of the wider determinants of health and well-being, and housing is specifically cited as one of these.
- The Physical Activity Strategy will set out ways in which the council can encourage more active lifestyles with regard to healthy environments, active communities, healthy individuals and partnership and collaborative working.

Existing Policy

SC1 - In the existing Core Strategy, this Social and community facilities policy recognises the importance of such facilities to accompany new developments and is recognised as a particular problem in rural areas. Types of facilities are set out according to their various functions in terms of recreational, social, educational, spiritual and health and wellbeing purposes.

Health and Community Policy Options

Option HC1- Over-arching strategic policy addressing health issues and an additional policy addressing health, social and community facilities issues

As health issues are interconnected with other policies (open space, housing, among others), this issue would be effective in a strategic policy overarching more specific areas. The existing policy SS6 Environmental quality and local distinctiveness includes important considerations which would be extended upon in order to ensure that developments had a positive impact on health.

The policy currently aims to '*maintain and improve the effectiveness of those ecosystems essential to the health and wellbeing of the county's residents and its economy*'. This policy would enable us to capitalise on our increased understanding of health inequalities.

This option would strengthen areas within a social and community facilities policy incorporating updated policies with regard to:

- Public toilet strategies.
- Co-location, examples and marketing of community facilities in the context of safeguarding against loss of existing facilities, as well as updated community ownership avenues.
- Updated examples of community facilities could be in the role that they play in community wellbeing.
- Role that planning for community facilities has in incorporating Cultural Strategy aims. ([Herefordshire Cultural Strategy 2019-2029](#) - See cultural infrastructure).

Option HC2- Retain social and community facilities policy and address health issues through other policies of the plan with a cross cutting approach

As well as being incorporated into the over-arching strategic policy, health considerations could be addressed in a number of policies in the Local Plan due to the cross-cutting nature of health issues. A criteria approach for each place based proposal would be included to ensure that any new development is properly served by good quality and sufficient infrastructure.

It would also take into account how issues such as transport, open space, design and housing can enable people to live healthier and more active lives. This would enable the policies to better take into account the health needs and accessibility of services through these policies.

In terms of health policies within a wider design topic, this would include healthy place making principles to be integrated into design policies.

In the housing and design policies of the plan, the need for good quality housing stock which meets the needs of and is accessible to all groups of the community will be required. This housing should be designed in a way that facilitates healthy living and addresses the needs of different groups.

A policy incorporating [Child Friendly Planning principles](#) could form an important part of the open space policy, which would contribute to more families being able to move to the county. For the wider population, the open space policy would promote healthy and active lifestyles.

Healthy neighbourhood aspirations could include particular opportunities for accessible, active travel in transport policies.

Option HC3- Include a social and community facilities policy and a separate health policy

This option would include a new policy dealing specifically with health, whilst retaining an amended social and community facilities policy. This separate policy could address all the issues outlined in options 1 and 2 and also include a framework for requiring [Health Impact Assessments](#) (HIA) as part of the planning application process. This would be in addition to a strategic over-arching policy incorporating health issues and an updated social and community facilities policy.

An individual health policy would detail when an HIA would be required and the contents required for a HIA. This would determine, among other factors, the threshold of houses, above which a HIA would be required in a residential development, for example, as well as factors which would need to be demonstrated had been met for a development to gain planning permission.

The guidance includes 'a properly conducted HIA recommends measures to maximise positive impacts; minimise negative impacts; and reduce health inequalities. HIAs puts people and their health at the heart of the planning process. An HIA supports the planning system to address local health and wellbeing needs and tackle inequalities through influencing the wider determinants of health.'

The planning team will work in partnership with the public health team to develop policies. The public health team also would support training for planners too in this area. Close collaboration will ensure that the right health and community infrastructure is provided with new development.