



Planning guidance that gets results

A guide for councillors and local government officers



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About APSE



The Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) is a not-for-profit local government body working with over 300 councils throughout the UK.

Promoting excellence in public service, APSE is the foremost specialist in local authority frontline services and operates one of the UK's largest research programmes in local government policy and frontline service delivery matter.

About this guidance

This guidance is written to provide practical hints and tips for local councillors and local government officers across the UK. Whilst the different UK Administrative areas have differing planning regimes, policies and frameworks, there is commonality in that each UK Administrative area, whether Westminster, the Senedd, Holyrood, or Stormont have all made commitments to reduce carbon emissions. In doing so the role of local councils is clear. They form part of the solution.

However, as this research identifies, there are limitations placed upon the actions that can be taken at a local level. In a regulatory sense this could be reasonably assumed to be because central administrations of their appointed agencies wish to retain a degree of control over planning policy at a government level. However, this guide demonstrates that in spite of restrictions, there are many routes by which councils can seek to influence better outcomes for the local environment, helping to reduce the impact of carbon and, at the same time, improve the health and well-being of local residents.

This guide provides practical hints and tips, explores the art of the possible and shares case study examples of positive influence over developers and other key stakeholders. It is not intended to be a legal guide to planning laws and regulations and as ever APSE would always advise that you seek your own competent advice on both legal matters and planning. That being said it is hoped that this guidance will assist both officers and councillors in asking the right questions, maximising the impact of local developments and ensuring that, in spite of the relatively weak planning powers available to local councils, every opportunity is made of the ability to reduce carbon, improve local biodiversity and improve health and wellbeing outcomes for local people.

A note on the Ministerial Statement of December 2023

Whilst there are more stringent requirements to demonstrate the impact on viability if Local Planning Authorities wish to exceed current or future building regulations in terms of energy efficiency, this does not prevent many of the recommendations in this document being implemented. There are significant co-benefits that can be achieved through a comprehensive policy suite in terms of climate change, wellbeing and addressing biodiversity loss and this guidance should be read in the spirit of this ambition.

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

The vast majority of APSE member councils have declared a climate or ecological emergency. In those member councils that haven't, there nevertheless remains broad commitments to enhance the local environment in whatever ways they are able. Across our members there is a shared frustration that planning policy and regulation has become over centralised and limits what they are able to influence at a local level.

APSE wanted to develop a guide that demonstrates that in spite of the current UK frameworks across the different administrative areas, there are a range of actions and measures that could be taken, at a local level, to maximise environmental outcomes, and address climate change and ecological concerns.

This guide covers the technical details as well as practical actions. It is a highly useful guide for councillors who wish to explore with their good officers, whether their own local authority is going far enough in developing planning led solutions to climate change and ecological issues or, indeed, if there are other areas of influence that are yet untested.

Whilst APSE will continue to campaign for the reinstatement of an effective locally-led planning framework in the absence of such changes, it is imperative on all of us to make the most of what we have.

I commend this guide to you and it would remiss of me not to thank Tim Crawshaw for his expertise and guidance in authoring this report.

I hope that you are able to share this guidance within your local authority, across political parties and across all organisations that aim to improve the environmental outcomes at a local level.

CLlr Jacqui Burnett, APSE National Chair

Executive Summary

The UK has one of the most discretionary planning systems in the world with a high degree of flexibility in decision making compared to similar economies and jurisdictions. Whilst this has several advantages, delivering predictable and consistent outcomes is challenging and frequently difficult for stakeholders to understand and engage with.

The Planning System in operation across the UK can deliver great results for people and planet. However, accepting that the system is imperfect, there are many opportunities to deliver quality on the ground regardless of the local economy and viability considerations. This practical guide is intended to describe the key ingredients of comprehensive local guidance that can ask for, and deliver more, for people, place, and planet.

There is a greater emphasis and a requirement for localised policies that do not repeat the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and other policies. As such, the onus is on Local Planning Authorities to identify the key local issues and priorities and guidance should 'localise' this to support local distinctiveness.

Elsewhere in the UK, the policy landscape is changing with a much greater understanding of the spatial and societal interactions of policy, such as the objective of the National Planning Framework (4) of improving equality and eliminating discrimination in Scotland. Meanwhile Planning Policy Wales (2024) headlines wellbeing as a primary objective, alongside local distinctives, accepting climate change as a cross-cutting theme. Likewise, amidst a changing set of responsibilities, the National Policy in Northern Ireland is underpinned by the objectives of achieving better health and wellbeing.

There are significant opportunities in the light of recent changes in legislation that allow the key issues of our time to be addressed through integrated policy and guidance. Whilst some of these are confined to the English planning system, there are similar opportunities to deliver multifunctional infrastructure and healthy and resilient places at a range of scales from regional to neighbourhood.

Policies regarding climate change actions have become increasingly contentious and the need for effective community engagement and front loading has never been greater. This briefing provides the background to policy and guidance development

and suggestions for the active and meaningful involvement of communities in the development of this.

Often the need for improved guidance is driven by councillors who are keen to see improved outcomes across a range of issues. The development of guidance is resource intensive and with the upcoming of the streamlining of Local Plans and the need to deliver multiple benefits from development and infrastructure, comprehensive guidance that covers the big issues is a cost-effective approach.

This APSE guidance concentrates on the key issues of the day including climate change, biodiversity loss and increasing disparities in health outcomes across society. Recognising that the Planning System can make a significant positive difference to these issues, they are explored in detail, alongside how they interact in comprehensive policy suites and effective guidance that will support cost effective investments.

Written in an accessible style, this short guide, based on best practice and backed with case studies, will be invaluable to elected members and officers. For those who may be tasked with procuring supplementary planning documents and guidance this is an essential primer.

1. Local plans and policy hooks

At the heart of every successful policy suite is the Local Plan. Without the necessary 'hooks' in the Local Plan, detailed guidance is challenging to apply and whilst successful interim guidance can be produced, the strongest position comes out of a strong development plan. New plans should be informed by a series of core objectives or values that inform the later policies. Whilst these are often generic in character, they need to be localised and validated at an early stage of development, an ideal 'front loading' opportunity.

Case study - Plymouth Plan

The Plymouth Plan is a truly innovative example of a comprehensive and inspiring ambition for a healthy, growing and inclusive place. With a bold ambition to support the achievement of Net Zero by 2030, the Plan covers a wide range of domains that planning can make a positive difference to.

The strength of a plan such as this lies in the comprehensive and linked themes that create a strong and integrated whole, with good reasons for developers to comply and robust policies to manage development positively.



[Plymouth plan 2020](#)

The Plymouth Plan is available as an online interactive resource, an innovative and engaging way of making the Plan accessible.

Case study - Intermediate guidance Somerset and West Taunton

Somerset Council have not waited to develop new Local Plans and instead have released the Climate Positive Planning: Interim Guidance Statement on Planning for the Climate and Ecological Emergency. This clearly sets out the expectations of the Council and is a great example of positive action that, whilst not part of the development plan, it is a material consideration in planning decisions being Council Policy.



[Climate positive planning in the Somerset West and Taunton area](#)

Recent changes through the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023) (LURA) in England will potentially change the structure of Local Plans and the timescale for their preparation. This makes the need to be clear on priorities and local needs even more urgent and front loading will be required. The main changes in the LURA include:

- A limit of 30 months for the preparation of Local Plans
- The requirement for area wide design codes
- Greater strength for Local Plan policies
- The introduction of National Development Management Policies (NDMP)

In the case of the NDMP, climate change is a priority and, as such, this will support policy at a local level to provide detail on how this can be complied with. Additionally, proposed changes to the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) will potentially bring land value capture into the equation of planning obligations, that could potentially support investments and funding for green infrastructure, nature-based solutions to climate change and social infrastructure that supports health and wellbeing. CIL is often the mechanism by which contributions are secured to deliver infrastructure, both social and physical, at local level with is largely replacing Section 106 agreements for many developments.

Case study - LETI climate emergency design guide (low energy transformation initiative)

Originally known as the London Energy Transformation Initiative and now the Low Energy Transformation Initiative (LETI), this organisation has produced the Climate Emergency Design Guide that forms a great basis for policy and the setting of standards. Based on simple and universal metrics that are consistent across several development types, this guidance demonstrates simple techniques to reduce consumption and emissions in a user friendly format. Crucially, LETI also provides standards for embodied carbon in buildings (the energy that goes into their components and manufacture and lifecycle) and makes this clear to a wide audience.



2. The Big Three

Whilst planning policy and guidance can influence many aspects of new development, there are three key areas where wider global and societal outcomes can be directly influenced. Later in the document, matters such as character and distinctiveness and placemaking are discussed. However, these must be set against the pressing and urgent need to tackle some significant threats in the form of the climate emergency, biodiversity loss and the interlocking health and wellbeing crisis.

2.1 Climate change

Climate change is a key priority for many local councils and LPAs with many having declared a Climate Emergency.¹ There has often been a time lag between declaring a climate emergency and the production of Local Plans leading to a perceived and actual mismatch in policy. Whilst councils can make great gains in their own buildings and operations, there are much wider mitigation measures that can be secured through Local Plans and supplementary guidance.

Upcoming changes to the Building Regulations in England will secure higher performing residential buildings. However, there are significant opportunities to ensure that embodied energy in new development is minimised, alongside waste and utilisation of recycled and reclaimed materials and aggregates. Additionally, a hierarchical approach to the retention of existing buildings in preference to demolition and rebuilding can be a policy objective. The NPPF Paragraph 152 states that:

“The planning system should support the transition to a low carbon future in a changing climate, taking full account of flood risk and coastal change. It should help to: shape places in ways that contribute to radical reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, minimise vulnerability and improve resilience; encourage the reuse of existing resources, including the conversion of existing buildings; and support renewable and low carbon energy and associated infrastructure.”

The National Design Guide (explored later in this paper) provides clear guidance on the approach to be taken to building design and planning that exploits the natural resources of the site including the sun, wind and topography. These can be successfully expanded on in supplementary guidance and aligned with other local design objectives such as character and distinctiveness, heritage and green infrastructure.

Whilst it remains uncertain whether LPA's will have their ability to require enhanced standards of energy efficiency curtailed, current legislation allows for this and notwithstanding improvements in performance through the Building Regulations, more can be secured. Passivhaus standards have been a requirement of some local plans in recent years. Additionally, commercial developments can be measured against standards such as BREEAM and standards set in Local Plan policies.

In the light of the recently adopted National Planning Framework (4) in Scotland work is underway to produce guidance for Climate Change and Adaptation and crucially work is underway to establish appropriate data and monitoring for the whole life carbon of new buildings, which is an essential new frontier.² The recently Adopted Planning Policy Wales (2024) establishes the principle of Local Area Energy Plans (LAEP) with a whole systems approach advocated. Across the UK the pace of change is variable. However, there are significant convergences in terms of approaches, and a recognition that further work needs to be done to ensure consistent approaches at a local level.

Case study - Central Lincolnshire



Adopted in 2023, the Central Lincolnshire Local Plan is a visionary and ambitious statement of intent. The plan sets targets of achieving a space heating demand of around 15-20kWh/m²/yr and a total energy demand of 35 kWh/m²/yr, achieved through a 'fabric first' approach to construction.

To simplify (and hence speed up) the decision making process, applicants are able to demonstrate that they have met the requirements of this policy if they provide certified demonstration of compliance with:- Passivhaus Plus, Premium or Classic.

2.2 Biodiversity

Biodiversity loss is a significant issue that has led to dysfunctions in the natural environment and threats to species. The UK boasts more than 70,000 known species of animals, plants, fungi and microorganisms, but most assessments indicate that the abundance of its wildlife is declining.

Trying to measure biodiversity loss over time is very difficult and much of the data available will have gaps, not having been gathered consistently over time. However, the most recent State of Nature report³, published in 2023, suggests there has been a 19% decline in the average abundance of wildlife in the UK since the 1970s. Changes in land use and changes in the distribution of habitat types will have seen changes in biodiversity with an overall picture of ongoing species decline. The previous State of Nature Report (2019) pegged the decline at 13%. The links between nature and health are becoming better understood and multifunctional green infrastructure provides a wide range of ecosystems services to the wider economy. Nature recovery is a key policy objective of the Environment Act 2021 and communities are beginning to mobilise around the protection of natural assets and cherished habitats.

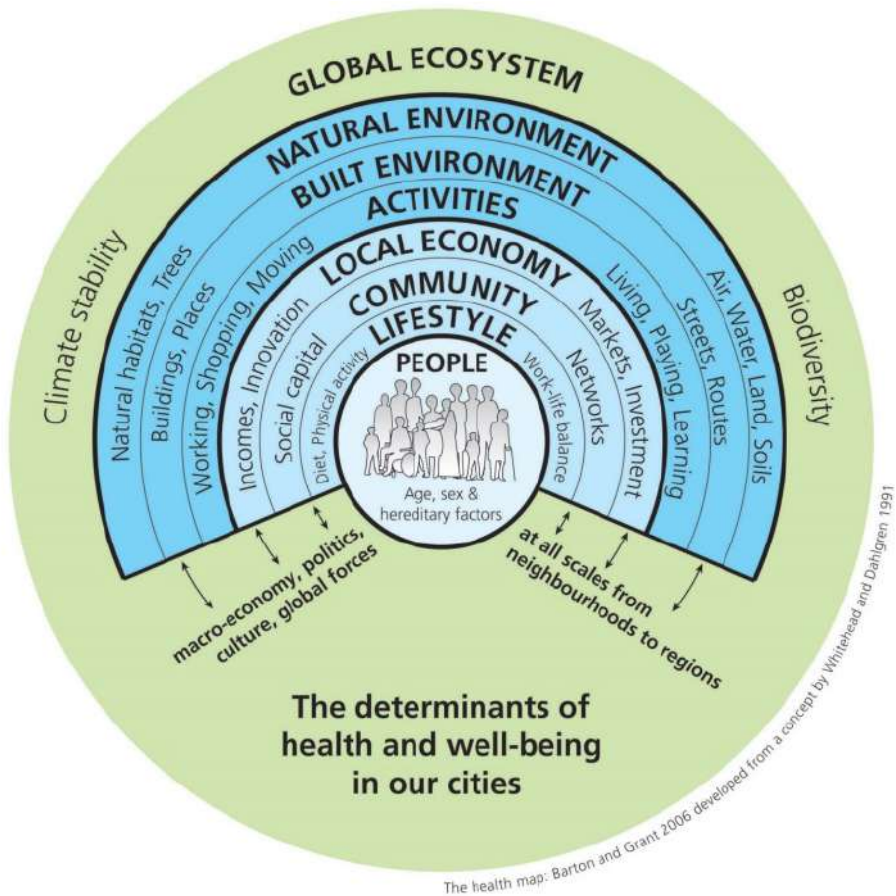
The Scottish Government have recently consulted on the Biodiversity and Delivery Plan with the aim of setting targets for nature recovery alongside tackling the underlying causes of biodiversity loss⁴.

Many Councils are seeking to increase biodiversity through their local plans through Biodiversity Net Gain (see [4.1](#)) and there are significant opportunities to integrate nature based solutions into local plan policy and guidance.

The economy and human health rely heavily on the natural world for ecosystems services and, as such, the imperative to deliver more and better-connected places for nature has never been greater. When linked to nature-based solutions, climate change including carbon sequestration, flood and water management and temperature regulation, the case has never been greater. This will require smart and effective policy and guidance development to support and make the case for investment through new development and in existing places.

2.3 Health and wellbeing

The origins of modern planning are in the protection of public health and wellbeing. Whilst the planning system has been successful in the main in protecting people from gross hazards such as poor sanitation and contaminated land, there are significant benefits to population health that can be secured through the planning system.



Work such as the NHS Healthy New Towns Programme began to make in-roads into the role of planning and healthy places but there is still much to be achieved. The recently established Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) is championing planning as a means to securing better health outcomes through the planning system and many Local Plans are seeking to deliver these. Policy and guidance, whilst providing valuable in-roads into tackling obesity and poor health, such as the control of hot food takeaways, can deliver on so much more and can become the foundation for local plans.

Case study - Wigan

[Health supplementary planning document \(wigan.gov.uk\)](https://www.wigan.gov.uk/health-supplementary-planning-document)

Wigan Council adopted the Planning for Health Supplementary Planning Document in 2022 with a wide ranging and ambitious coverage of topics ranging from active travel to access to healthy food, work and training.

Use	Health Impact Assessment	Planning for Health Checklist
Residential	150 homes or more	10 - 149 homes
Residential (where number of units not known)	Over 5 hectares	0.5 - 5 hectares
Employment	Over 5 hectares	0.5 - 5 hectares
Other commercial / leisure	Over 1 hectare	Over 1,000 sq. m (or 0.5 - 1 hectares if floorspace not known)

The Health Impact Assessment approach and toolkit provides a simple and understandable framework for applicants and eases the evaluation of proposals against the criteria set and policy objectives.

The Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) has multiple resources for planners relating to the built and natural environment⁵.

Increasingly Health Impact Assessments are being used to objectively measure the quality of proposed developments and their use at varying scales of development can be secured through Local Plans outside of the statutory Environmental Impact Assessment regime, that now includes Health as a chapter.

Case study – Darlington

The Darlington Local Plan adopted in 2022 was informed by the Darlington Healthy New Towns Principles which have now been widely accepted as a framework for thinking about healthy placemaking. Reflecting the interrelationships between green infrastructure, the local economy, local distinctiveness and active travel the principles provide a framework for planning for dementia friendly environments.

HEALTHY NEW TOWN

• Transport, access and movement must be planned with the following hierarchy:

1. Walking
2. Cycling
3. Public transport
4. Rail
5. Private cars, taxis and motorcycles.

- Facilities for those on foot or cycle must be provided in new developments and supported in existing neighbourhoods such as benches, cycle parking and adequate signage.
- Connectivity and safe, well lit, routes between neighbourhoods, local services and schools must be provided for new developments.

Transport and Movement

- Healthcare, leisure, playing pitches, local services and retail must be clustered together into nodes with adequate public transport connections in local centres identified in the Local Plan
- Local services, social infrastructure and local facilities must be provided in the first phases of development to establish a sense of community
- The public realm must be high quality, benefit from natural surveillance and be means to connecting communities to each other and to facilities.
- Developments above a threshold of 100 units must demonstrate that there are local services and access to community facilities within 400-800 m (or 5-10 minutes walk) or that these will be created.

Social Infrastructure

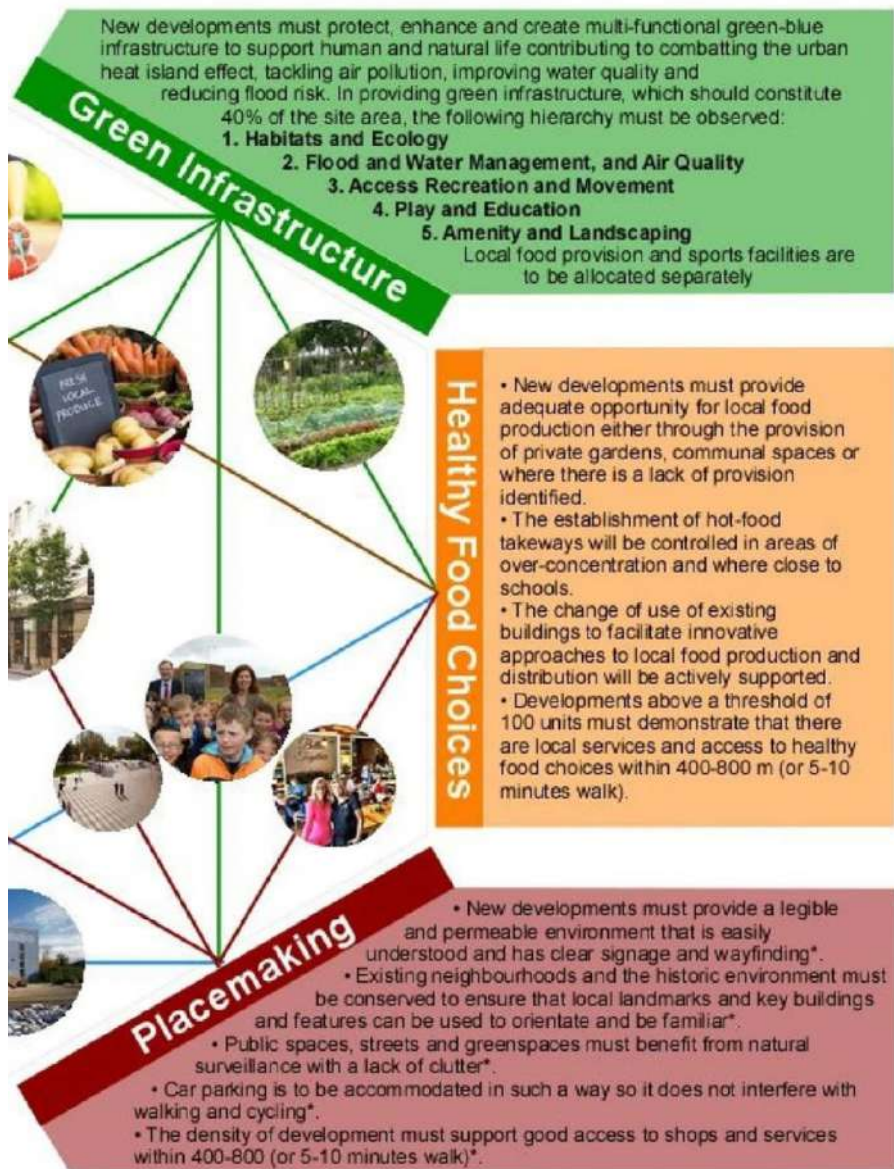
- New developments must ensure that there is access to good links to employment opportunities and that these are integrated into mixed-use areas wherever possible.

- New employment sites must be well connected to the walking and cycling network and the public transport system.
- New developments must take the opportunity to employ local labour and provide training and skills through their construction.
- Local and town centres should be supported to ensure that the local population can be served, with an emphasis on local centres providing for community needs.
- Flexibility should be built-in to new local centres to allow change of use to commercial over time.

Economy

* Denotes measures that support a Dementia Friendly Environment

JS - DESIGN PRINCIPLES



3. The UK wide context

3.1 Scotland

Supported by a multi-layered national, strategic, and local planning system, supplementary guidance is an integral part of the Scottish system. Some councils have an extensive suite of Supporting Planning Guidance that deals with a wide range of matters from biodiversity to design to affordable housing. There is significant scope to add details to adopted policy that can be expressed at a high level explained further through Supporting Planning Guidance.

A wide-ranging policy and guidance suite supports good decision making, although as will be explored in this document, aggregated and mutually supportive policy and guidance is an opportunity to link the key matters of health, climate change and an inclusive economy together.

3.2 Wales

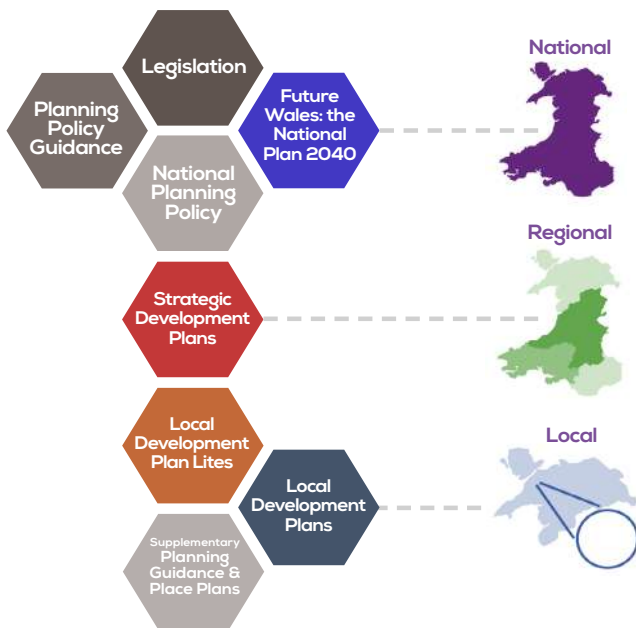
With many similarities with the English system, the Welsh National Planning Policy (expressed as Planning Policy Wales) and Local Plans follow a similar pattern. In common there is a regional spatial layer which differentiates this from the English system. The Welsh system of Local Development Plans makes provision for Supplementary Planning Guidance and Place Plans⁶. These offer an opportunity to integrate a wide range of planning issues at a local level providing additional detail underneath Local Development Plans.

Case study: Pembrokeshire Biodiversity SPD (2021)

Covering the National regulatory framework this document localises policy and provides specific guidance for compliance. Supporting the Pembrokeshire Local Development Plan (LDP) (adopted February 2013) and the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Local Development Plan (adopted September 2020) this document assists in ensuring that the key principles of national planning policy and guidance on biodiversity and nature conservation are met fully at the local level.

3.3 England

Recent changes to the English planning system including upcoming and proposed are encapsulated in the Levelling UP and Regeneration Act (2023) (LURA). Key changes proposed include greater scope of regional scale planning alongside



1

The Welsh planning system (source planning aid Wales)

proposed national Development Management policies and crucially for this briefing, changes to the preparation of Local Plans. Under the LURA, Local Plans will be limited to ‘locally specific’ matters, which is an opportunity for new approaches linking climate change to other local priorities.

In the Act every LPA will be required to produce a design code that covers the whole area of the Plan and as such is a key opportunity to integrate local distinctiveness, climate change, habitats and biodiversity, healthy streets and space together into a holistic vision.

3.4 Northern Ireland

Since Development Plans were devolved to the 11 Councils in Northern Ireland there has been significant progress. Where local plans do not exist these are still owned by the Department of Infrastructure. Primarily at the plan strategy stage, each council will eventually move to the preparation of the Local Policies Plan (LPP). In preparing the LPP, councils will look in detail at land zonings and will be establishing key site requirements for the delivery of development. Supplementary guidance is limited and held nationally, including specific documents relating to design and character. These will potentially be replaced locally the future.

4. Emerging and recent legislation

4.1 Biodiversity Net Gain

Protection from losses of biodiversity, as a consequence of development and a non-specified net gain is already covered in the NPPF under paragraph 174 whereby:

“(d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;”

And additionally, paragraph 180:

“(a) if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.”

In addition to this there is an upcoming requirement for new development under the Environment Act 2021. Substantially all planning permissions granted in England except for small sites will have to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain from January 2024. BNG will be required for small sites from April 2024. BNG will be measured using Defra’s biodiversity metric and habitats will need to be secured for at least 30 years. Additionally, there is;

- a strengthened legal duty for public bodies to conserve and enhance biodiversity;
- new biodiversity reporting requirements for local authorities; and
- mandatory spatial strategies for nature: Local Nature Recovery Strategies (see below).

Biodiversity net gain must be assessed and considered under a hierarchical approach of avoidance, on site mitigation, off site mitigation and finally through the trading of credits into remote sites under a regulated scheme under the auspices of Natural England.

It is of note that as 10% is mandatory and therefore not subject to viability tests, this will have both an impact on the viability of new developments and other planning gains that can be secured, but there also there are opportunities for Local Plan policies and guidance to positively skew outcomes. LPA’s should develop BNG policies for a number of reasons:

- This approach allows the local authority to set strategies they require developers to take into account in delivering BNG, such as Green Infrastructure Strategies and Local Nature Recovery Strategies. For example, in targeting offsite BNG delivery and to determine the 'strategic significance' score that is part of the Biodiversity Metric. This means that BNG can contribute to wider nature recovery plans in addition to local objectives. It can help ensure that the right habitats are provided in the right places; and
- Including BNG in the Local Plan can link biodiversity to other strategic objectives and the overall place-making strategy for an authority, enabling a more holistic approach.

There is requirement for BNG to be attached to a conservation covenant. Conservation covenants must be for a duration of 30 years and must be an agreement with a 'responsible body' who must be either:

- a local authority;
- a public body or charity, where at least some of its main purposes or functions relate to conservation;
- a private sector organisation, where at least some of its main activities relate to conservation.

Conservation covenants can be quite wide ranging in their scope and as such could include:

- Ensuring public access;
- Banning the use of certain pesticides;
- A relationship to heritage assets;
- Provide payments for ecosystem services and for biodiversity net gain.

BNG is challenging for many types of development and detailed guidance as to how developers can integrate BNG into their schemes is recommended as part of supplementary guidance alongside a robust Local Plan policy. Whilst enhanced levels of BNG have been proposed and required by some LPA's this must be considered in balance with other priority deliverables depending on viability and the local economy.

Recently published draft secondary legislation⁷ has provided clarity on the use of Habitat Management and Monitoring Plans to provide certainty regarding the

ongoing stewardship and maintenance of BNG assets. This is a key policy and guidance consideration as the stewardship of BNG as a dynamic living asset requires design approaches that ensure that there is clarity on:

- Planned management activities;
- Site monitoring;
- Reporting;
- The review period for the management plan;
- The restoration of the biodiversity value of your site if it fails to reach target conditions.

Whilst the details are to be finalised it is likely that BNG will help to fund and deliver significant investments in nature in a local area and the link with Local Nature Recovery Strategies is a potential area of landscape scale collaboration between councils.

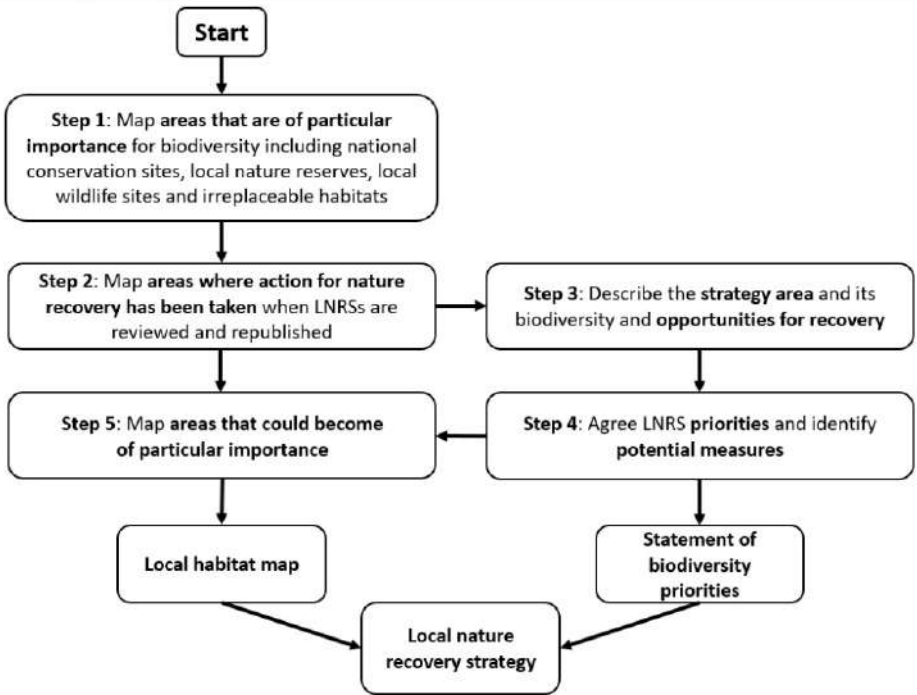
4.2 Local nature recovery strategies

In England there are 48 specific areas where Responsible Authorities must produce Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). Responsible Authorities range from County Councils to Unitary Authorities, Combined Authorities and City Regions⁸. LNRS come in two parts and whilst responsible authorities and people involved in preparing a strategy can choose how they want it to look, every strategy must contain:

- A local habitat map;
- A written statement of biodiversity priorities.

There is specific guidance for Responsible Authorities with an emphasis on partnership working and stakeholder engagement⁹. An ideal conduit for partnership working is the network of Local Nature Partnerships (LNPs) across England. Established in 2012 in parallel with Local Enterprise Partnerships LNPs are a long-established mechanism for cross departmental and sector working with nature at the heart of their activities. Very similar to the Local Plan Duty to Cooperate, Responsible Authorities should engage positively with their neighbouring authorities and in addition a clear plan of engagement with local stakeholders is required.

The process of developing a LNRS is described in the diagram overleaf.



Many areas have already been working on Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOA) and whilst these are not explicitly mentioned in the guidance, they provide a useful baseline and proxy for the second step in the process that reflects the requirement to review LNRSs on a 3-10 year basis. The Secretary of State may direct that certain areas are included in Step 1 which also includes local nature reserves.

Examples of wider national environmental objectives that all local nature recovery strategies should seek to contribute to are:

- mitigating climate change (for example, through the potential measure of planting trees);
- improving the water environment (for example, through the potential measure of creating wetlands);
- mitigating flood risk (for example, through the potential measure of restoring degraded upland peat).

Whilst these objectives can be considered in isolation there are significant opportunities to deliver on wider objectives such as public access, rights of way, sustainable and healthy travel and climate change adaptation such as reducing summer overheating through shade and water bodies.

In proposing new areas that 'could become of particular importance for biodiversity' or 'where the recovery or enhancement of biodiversity could make a particular contribution to other environmental benefits', these may include areas previously identified as BOA although the guidance is very specific about targeting opportunities, and that these should be integrated and not scattered across the area.

Overall LNRSs are a key opportunity to align climate change mitigation and adaptation with BNG and the Local Plan. Local nature recovery strategies should be used by plan-makers to inform the way they address the National Planning Policy Framework requirement for plans to protect and enhance biodiversity.

The Levelling Up and Regeneration Act introduces changes to the planning system which will lead to government updating the National Planning Policy Framework. This will include how LNRSs should be given weight in the plan-making process. Separate guidance is anticipated on how local authorities will be expected to comply with their duty to have regard to local nature recovery strategies through their planning functions.

There are also large overlaps with land management frameworks where there are large areas of publicly owned land with opportunities to provide alignment between the LNRS, internal BNG and carbon offsetting.

Case study – Tees Valley Combined Authority

The Tees Valley Combined Authority has been nominated the Responsible Body for the development of the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) across five local authorities. The emphasis alongside the development of the LNRS is under the Net Zero theme of the TVCA Economic Strategy demonstrating the versatility of the regulations.

[Net zero - business \(teesvalley-ca.gov.uk\)](https://www.teesvalley-ca.gov.uk/net-zero-business)

4.3 Climate change and net zero

There have been recent mooted changes to national policy which have changed the landscape in terms of net zero development and energy efficiency. Whilst the

Building Regulations and the Future Homes Standard will be changing in 2025, it is not clear whether gas boilers will be phased out. This has implications for emerging policy regarding net zero development, although the ability to set planning policies locally has not changed. However, in Scotland the New Build Heat Standard comes into force on the 1st April 2024 prohibiting the use of fossil fuel heating in new buildings, differing from England where gas boilers may be given a reprieve.

Some LPA's have already successfully adopted Local Plans that require net zero development at a defined scale and these will not necessarily be made irrelevant through the Future Homes Standard, as this only applies to residential development and does not cover matters such as embodied carbon in materials and the basic standard, as opposed to the full application of the energy hierarchy.

The LURA 2023 does not require further Whole Life Carbon Assessments, the roll out of the requirement for these outside of London is inconsistent and this is a potential hook for these through the climate change duties expressed through the National Development Management Policies.

5. Healthy streets and places

In both unitary and two-tier authorities, the role of the highway and associated public spaces is often overlooked and this can have a significant influence on development on the ground. Highway standards and the patchy adoption of Manual for Streets¹⁰ has resulted in tensions between the envisaged outcomes of planning and design guidance, and this can work against priorities such as reaching appropriate urban densities and a good fit with the local character and distinctiveness of the places.

Whilst the case for multi-functional green infrastructure is becoming better understood and widely adopted there are significant opportunities to view our streets and public spaces through a similar lens. Suggested aspects that may require guidance include:

- Movement;
- Non-motorised traffic;
- Biodiversity;
- Air quality improvement measures;
- Flood and water management;
- Connectivity to existing settlements and neighbourhoods;
- Aesthetics and amenity value;
- Play;
- Lighting;
- Dementia friendly, neurodiverse aware and trauma informed environments;
- Enclosure and placemaking;
- Trees and planting.

In two tier areas, engagement with the local highway authority is key and a joint approach to developing a county wide design guide is a significant opportunity to reduce duplication and crucially, matters such as adoption and maintenance can be dealt with up-front.

5.1 Active Travel

Design to facilitate active travel is a contentious and emerging discipline that highlights the range of choices that must be balanced when considering new policies and guidance. What works for some groups does not work for all when the details are considered. Living Streets¹¹ are campaigning for greater clarity and a national design standard for walking.

In terms of cycling there is clear guidance in the form of Local Transport Note 1/20 (2020) (LTN 1/20)¹² and this is applicable to new build schemes and the retrofitting of streets. Clearly the connections and interface between new and existing streets needs to be considered, however within a specific scheme this guidance should form the basis of design guidance in the wider context of active travel and wider multifunctional benefits that can be realised.

Active Travel England¹³ are the executive agency of the government to deliver on the commitment to support active travel, with a specific emphasis to date on cycling. The reasons to invest in active travel are clear and Active Travel England (ATE) are now a statutory consultee for developments equal to or exceeding 150 housing units, 7,500 m² of floorspace or an area of 5 hectares. To assist developers in meeting the requirements of ATE, design guidance will provide locally distinctive solutions that meet local priorities in terms of street design.

Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans provide the strategic framework for the development of new infrastructure.

The key outputs of LCWIPs are:

- a network plan for walking and cycling which identifies preferred routes and core zones for further development;
- a prioritised programme of infrastructure improvements for future investment;
- a report which sets out the underlying analysis carried out and provides a narrative which supports the identified improvements and network.

Whilst this framework for investment is a useful lever for active travel, there are significant opportunities to deliver multiple stacked benefits for communities alongside these improvements including:

- Placemaking (see below);
- Flood and water management;
- Economic growth opportunities at key nodes;
- Improved facilities of cycling in adjacent new developments.

Health

Physical inactivity costs the NHS up to **£1bn per annum**, with further indirect costs calculated at **£8.2bn**

£8.2bn



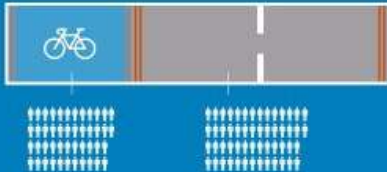
Wellbeing

20 minutes of exercise per day cuts risk of **developing depression by 31%** and increases productivity of workers



Congestion

The new east-west and north-south cycle routes in London are moving **46% of the people** in only **30% of the road space**



Local businesses

Up to **40% increase** in shopping footfall by well-planned improvements in the walking environment



Environmental and air quality

Meeting the targets to double cycling and increase walking would lead to savings of **£567 million** annually from air quality alone and prevent **8,300 premature deaths** each year and provide opportunities to improve green spaces and biodiversity⁵.



Climate change

Mode shift to active transport is one of the most cost-effective ways of reducing transport emissions



Economy

Cycling contributes **£5.4bn to the economy** per year and supports **64,000 jobs**

£5.4bn



5.2 Placemaking

“Cities must urge urban planners and architects to reinforce pedestrianism as an integrated city policy to develop lively, safe, sustainable and healthy cities. It is equally urgent to strengthen the social function of city space as a meeting place that contributes toward the aims of social sustainability and an open and democratic society.” Jan Gehl, Urban Designer.

Most people’s experiences of places lies in the quality of the public realm and whilst some in-roads have been made in improving the quality of some new developments there is still a long way to go. The opportunity to create design guidance that informs the design and retrofit of streets has as much potential, if not more, than that of buildings which most design guidance relies on.

Placemaking as an emerging and jointly held discipline seeks to deliver places that support human and non-human activity and deliver multiple benefits for communities. Very few examples exist at a local policy level, and this remains a major gap in the creation of consistently good places.

There are many good existing and emerging resources that can inform the development of comprehensive guidance that delivers safe, attractive, and healthy streets that should form the basis for any localised guidance. Not exhaustively this includes:

- Sport England Active Design Principles;¹⁴
- Building With Nature Design Standards;¹⁵
- Healthy Streets Indicators;¹⁶
- Healthy Streets for London.¹⁷

Case study – Surrey healthy streets design guide

Surrey County Council published the Healthy Streets for Surrey Design Guide in 2023. A live document this web based resource is a step-change in highways design guidance, embedding multi-functionality in terms of flood risk management, biodiversity and improved air quality. With principles applicable to both two tier and unitary authorities this guidance is a modern and timely contribution to policy and practice.

[Healthy streets for Surrey \(surreycc.gov.uk\)](https://www.surreycc.gov.uk)

Healthy Streets for London features 10 Healthy Street Indicators that could be aligned easily to interlocking policy objectives such as climate change adaption and universal design principles.



[Healthy streets for London \(tfl.gov.uk\)](https://www.tfl.gov.uk)

The indicators provide a strong framework without specifying specific solutions although clearly the inclusion of street trees would contribute to many of the objectives. A theme throughout this briefing is around developing policies and

strategies that deliver multifunctional infrastructure the secures stacked benefits which can demonstrate value for money.

Increasingly, with an ageing population there is a need to create streets and places that are supportive of people living with dementia including:

- Access to greenspace;
- Quiet and regular places to sit and rest;
- Signage and wayfinding;
- A street hierarchy with a clear demarcation of public and private space;
- Shelter and refuge from busy streets, including quiet spaces.

These factors are equally applicable to the design of places that support neurodiverse people who live with dyspraxia, dyslexia, and autism for example.

5.3 Building for healthy life

Originally known as Building for Life 12, Building for Healthy Life (BHL)¹⁸ has been cited by many LPA's in local plans and supplementary guidance. The latest edition (2020) has been written in partnership with Homes England, NHS England and NHS Improvement. BHL integrates the findings of the three-year Healthy New Towns Programme led by NHS England and NHS Improvement. The criteria within BHL are a good basis for more localised policy and guidance that could be expressed through a local area design code as required in the LURA.

The domains of BHL can be summarised overleaf.

Integrated Neighbourhoods	National Planning Policy Framework	National Design Guide
Natural connections	91a; 102c and e; 104d; 127b; 127f	B3; M1; M2; N1; R3
Walking, cycling and public transport	20c; 91a; 91c; 127e	B1; B3; M1; R3
Facilities and services	102; 103	B1; B3; N1; P3; U1; U3
Homes for everyone	60-62	B1; B2; U2; U3
Distinctive Places		
Making the most of what's there	122d; 127c; 127d; 153b; 184	C1; C2; I1; B2; R3
A memorable character	122d; 127c; 127d	C2; I1; I2; I3; B3
Well defined streets and spaces	91a	B2; M2; N2; N3; P1; P2; H2; L3
Easy to find your way around	91b; 127b	I1; M1; M2; U1
Streets for All		
Healthy streets	91b; 102c and e; 110a-d	M1; M2; N3; P1; P2; P3; H1; H2
Cycle and car parking	101e; 127f; 105d	B2; M1; M3
Green and blue infrastructure	20d; 91b; 91c; 127f; 155; 170d; 174	C1; B3; M1; N1; N2, N3; P1; P3; H1; R3; L1
Back of pavement, front of home	127a-b; d; f	M3; H3; L3
Generally	7; 8; 124; 125; 126; 127; 130	15; 16; 17; 20-29; 31-32
Using the tool as a discussion tool	39; 40-42; 125; 128; 129	

As a framework BHL prevents duplication of key policy hooks and allows for localised policy in line with the LURA.

6. Nature based solutions

Planning policy and guidance can significantly influence outcomes through the championing and requirement for nature-based solutions. These can be wide ranging and deliver on a variety of strategic objectives. In line with National Policy, including the National Design Guide¹⁹ in England, the National Planning Framework²⁰ in Scotland and Planning Policy Wales²¹, local policies and guidance can ensure that these are sound and deliver multiple benefits.

6.1 Climate change adaptation and mitigation

Once separated in terms of policy, practice and understanding, climate change adaptation and mitigation have significant crossovers, particularly in the context of nature-based solutions. In times of budgetary constraint and marginal viability in new development, the case has never been greater to interlock multiple benefits through nature-based solutions. Within the framework of the LNRS (see above) and delivering on BNG there are opportunities to provide guidance on the integration of landscaping and nature into new development and retrofit projects that can also reduce energy consumption and sequester carbon dioxide.

Examples of multiple benefits include:

- The use of street trees to reduce the urban heat island effect, intercept rainwater, improve air quality and sequester carbon;
- Sustainable drainage to create biodiverse wetlands, sequester carbon, reduce summer temperatures and reduce downstream flood risk in extreme weather events;
- The creation of 'carbon capture gardens' the reduce flood risk, landscape previously developed land, sequester and fix carbon dioxide and increase biodiversity;
- The promotion of timber construction and finishing materials to sequester carbon linked with local supply and agro-forestry.
- These measures need to be considered from the outset, with clear links to placemaking, other policy objectives such and health and wellbeing, local distinctiveness and identity.

6.2 Health and wellbeing

The link between health and wellbeing and nature is well attested and there are emerging evidence bases that demonstrate the power of the natural world to heal us.

Whilst some areas of research remain immature there is significant evidence²² that nature supports:

- Physical health;
- Mental health;
- Social wellbeing;
- Built environmental aesthetics leading to pride in place ;
- Local food production;
- Skills and employment;
- Natural tourism and leisure.

Where planning policies have been informed by health and wellbeing as a strategic objective, the provision of additional guidance enables the smoother delivery of nature-based solutions, allied to other priorities such as climate change.

Public Health England (now OHID) published *Improving Access to Greenspace (2020)*²³. This document clearly articulates the benefits of nature for health and wellbeing and recognises the key role of local government, in part through the planning system, in delivering:

- New good quality greenspace with new development,
- Improving and maintaining existing greenspaces,
- Promoting healthy streets,
- Improving active travel opportunities.

Health and Wellbeing is a significant policy hook and helps to make the case for green infrastructure and the integration of habitats and biodiversity into planning outcomes delivering on other policy agendas such as flood and water management and tackling excess summer temperatures.

6.3 Nature recovery

Whilst the LNRS provides the framework for nature recovery and a container for the logical application of BNG, there are many opportunities to integrate nature into new development through good planning guidance. Local Plan policies if worded correctly provide the background to supplementary guidance and detail that will form part of the Plan. There are pre-existing guidance documents that should form the basis for local policies.

Case study – Building with nature standards

[Building with nature](#) have recently published Delivering High Quality Green Infrastructure in Wales (2023) as a briefing reflecting recent proposed changes to Planning Policy Wales that will include:

- A proactive approach to green infrastructure
- Net benefits for biodiversity
- Protection for Sites of Special Scientific Interest
- More emphasis on trees and woodlands

This all sits under the ‘stepwise’ approach where nature is considered at all stages of the planning and design process.

In some cases drawing on an accepted standard of framework or making this a policy requirement may be enough to secure better outcomes in the interim whilst further detail is being developed and often external industry led standards, assuming they are rigorous, benefit from buy-in and certainty.

There are several domains where nature-based solutions can support improved health and wellbeing and new policy and guidance could include such matters as:

- Green space that is connected to the external fabric of buildings such as green roofs and green walls;
- Urban green space that is connected to grey infrastructure such as street trees or greenified alleys;
- Urban parks such as neighbourhood greens, urban forests or pocket parks;
- greenspaces used for food production such as allotments or community gardens;
- indoor green spaces;
- Blue spaces such as seacoasts and wetlands;
- Green areas for water management including swales, raingardens and sustainable urban drainage systems; and
- Derelict areas or vacant plots of land with patches of wilderness.

Increasingly there is a policy and guidance deficit in terms of retrofitting existing buildings and spaces to be nature friendly and whilst there are successful examples of this in new development, more work needs to be done to secure nature-based solutions to climate change, biodiversity loss and health and wellbeing in existing communities. These matters can be contentious in terms of behaviour and acceptance and participatory planning approaches are a key opportunity in the development of guidance at a community level.

7. Low and zero carbon development

7.1 New buildings

A significant focus for many LPA's is the need to improve the thermal performance of new development and this is a worthy Local Plan objective. Whilst the Future Homes Standard is due to be made law in 2025, there has been a reversal in the commitments made by the English Government. In Scotland there is a more ambitious target for net zero development in 2024²⁴ and a general harmonisation predicted between England and Wales. Notwithstanding the importance of improvements through Building Regulations, there is still a significant role for planning in terms of ensuring that buildings perform in passive manner – reducing the need for technological interventions and also in terms of embodied carbon in the materials and construction.

In terms of passive means of reducing energy consumption planning policies and guidance is supported in England by the National Design Guide²⁵ that specifically references:

The Energy Hierarchy in respect of:

- reducing the need for energy through passive measures including form, orientation and fabric;
- using energy efficient mechanical and electrical systems, including heat pumps, heat recovery and LED lights; and
- maximising renewable energy especially through decentralised sources, including on-site generation and community-led initiatives.

And additionally:

- the layout and aspect of internal spaces;
- insulation of the external envelope and thermal mass;
- management of solar gain; and
- good ventilation to reduce overheating.

When described through the National Model Design Code, recognising in England at least all LPA's will have to produce a Design Code (NMDC)²⁶, these factors can be designed into the Code and be made a localised standard that can also support:

- Local character and distinctiveness based on local materials and low embodied carbon (using timber or local stone);

- Responses to local microclimates and regionally distinctive building techniques;
- The general reduction in carbon intensive materials; and
- The successful integration of solar and other technologies into the design and appearance of the buildings.

This of course extends to the design of the public realm and the space between buildings which forms part of the NMDC and is considered elsewhere in this document. In Wales, Technical Advice Note 12 provides some useful details and would support design approaches that recognise the natural resources of the site or context such as sun path, topography and prevailing wind.

Case study – Emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan

This joint plan between Cambridge District and South Cambridgeshire District Council is being developed with the express focus on sustainable development. As a comprehensive policy suite, the major priorities are:

- Climate change
- Biodiversity and green spaces
- Wellbeing and social inclusion
- Great places
- Jobs
- Homes
- Infrastructure

Of note is the joint approach to wide disparities in health across the region and the underpinnings of the plan seeking to address this at a strategic level.

<https://consultations.greatercambridgeplanning.org/greater-cambridge-local-plan-preferred-options/greater-cambridge-2041>

For non-residential development many LPA's apply a BREEAM²⁷ standard for new development, many choosing "Excellent" as the target.

The style and targets of new guidance is changing and local guidance is moving towards a target standard for both new build and retrofitting schemes. Of these the

Low Energy Transition Initiative (LETI)²⁸ is an example of emerging thinking based on achievable standards with the support of the public and private sector. Of their publications, the Climate Emergency Design Guide provides a comprehensive approach to a range of building archetypes that is an ideal primer for the development of local Design Codes as required by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (2023). It has nuance in terms of built forms and standards based on 'at meter' consumption for a variety of building archetypes, alongside standards for embodied carbon.

There is no equivalent framework in Scotland and Wales for the production of design codes, however there are significant opportunities to integrate passive design strategies to reduce energy consumption in terms of heating and cooling based on good practice approaches.

7.2 Historic environment

There is often a tension between the objectives of achieving energy efficiency and the refurbishment and conservation of historic buildings. Designated heritage assets such as Listed Buildings form part of the workload for LPA's and specific guidance is scant in terms of standards, regulation and appropriate techniques that maximise the opportunities for retrofitting.

Case study – Bath and North East Somerset

Bath and North East Somerset have developed a comprehensive "Energy efficiency, retrofitting, and sustainable construction supplementary planning document" which has a specific section on the retrofitting of historic buildings. This document provides a menu of approaches for the local building archetypes, with many of these being applicable to historic building, providing cost-effective and non-invasive approaches to energy efficiency compatible with the need for buildings to breathe for example.

<https://beta.bathnes.gov.uk/energy-efficiency-retrofitting-and-sustainable-construction-supplementary-planning-document/policy>

Whilst the case study is becoming quite aged, the principle of providing clear guidance is sound in the achievement of appropriate measures to address the climate emergency, weighed against the need to protect the historic fabric and performance of historic buildings.

Retrofitting guidance is relevant to the work of LPA's insofar as offsetting funding (see 'Funding' later in this document) can be applied to difficult to treat existing buildings, alleviating fuel poverty, raising living standards and securing investment in existing community buildings.

7.3 Compact growth models

With significant improvements possible in the fixed emissions, the importance of compact growth that makes use of previously developed land becomes a priority. With emissions from transport approaching 40% of the global figure in some areas there are many gains in supporting walkable neighbourhoods, active travel modes, accessible local services and the efficient use of land close to existing town and local centres.

The guidance and policies described in this document including Local Plan policies, site allocations, infrastructure requirements and design codes can support the wider objectives of compact growth. This can include:

- Appropriate heights and densities to support a local population close to services and goods;
- Walkable and beautiful streets that are interconnected providing choice and delight;
- Integrated local and accessible play;
- Supporting forms and density that make district heating and cooling viable;
- The use of flexible ground floors to ensure that buildings have multiple uses over time and can support local shops and services;
- Mixed use development;
- Storage and parking for cycles;
- Car free streets and neighbourhoods;
- Integrated EV charging;
- A healthy and supportive public realm; and
- Integrated in pavement waste management.

Case study – Wirral Plan

The advanced emerging Wirral Local Plan 2021-2037 is being finalised and takes a bold approach to the use of previously developed land with an emphasis on compact growth. Focussed on the regeneration of Birkenhead the bold ambition place is clearly articulated and this is aligned to the ambition for the area to be carbon neutral by 2041.

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/files/sd1-wirral-local-plan-2021-2037-submission-draft-may-2022-reg-19-publication-final-260422/download?inline>

In recent years compact growth and the use of previously developed land has been challenging in many LPA areas due to funding and viability. Volume housebuilders are ill equipped to develop urban sites and often unsuccessfully try to apply lower density suburban models of development, undermining the best practice approaches to placemaking and the creation of healthy streets. Organisations such as Create Streets²⁹ have extensive resources and inspiration that demonstrate the qualities of walkable neighbourhoods that benefit from excellent public transport. An integrated approach to design coding and guidance is required to provide certainty to developers and set standards.

7.4 Funding

Local Plans have a significant role in securing infrastructure to mitigate for and support new development. The Community Infrastructure Levy whilst being potentially phased out can make provision for a wide range of community facilities including district and cooling networks. Additionally, where policies exist for Net Zero Development, offsetting can be applied to local projects and initiatives. The localisation of offsetting in the form of carbon credits is an opportunity to apply these to the LNRS and BNG, delivering multiple stacked benefits that can also deliver on protecting health and wellbeing.

In London the GLA has secured some £90M³⁰ in offsetting funds, however blockages to the delivery of projects has stalled the success of this scheme and this demonstrates the need for a pipeline of priority projects.

8. Data and insights

To support policy and guidance development there are several sources of data that can support integrated approaches across the key domains identified in this briefing. In addition to this the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment provides a narrative overview of the key health and social needs in your local area and highlights the recommendations. These recommendations are a key baseline for policy and strategy development and when cross referenced and plotted alongside indices of deprivation, economic wellbeing, climate risk, air quality and access to healthy food choices for example, these provide a powerful and compelling justification for ambitious policy and guidance.

8.1 Datasets

One of the main sources of publicly accessible data is the OHID (formerly PHE) Fingertips³¹ provides data across a range of domains either by Clinical Commissioning Group area or locality and this can provide the necessary evidence to support policy development. Covering mental and physical health profiles measured against the national average, trends and insights can be extracted.

Local Public Health Data is another source of information to support interventions and policy development that address health inequalities. Emerging work across local authorities is using this to make powerful cases for better air quality, policies that tackle the urban health island effect and address flood risk whilst also supporting integrated solutions such as multi-functional green infrastructure.

Case study – OHID (formerly Public Health England) public health profiles

As a starting point for understanding the local context in terms of health and where interventions may be most urgent that could form part of a policy suite the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities Public Health Profiles data is essential. For planners, building close links with public health colleagues is an important first step and at a local level more insights add value to this comprehensive baseline.

<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk>

The lived experience of communities is also an emerging source of rich data that can inform policy and supplementary guidance. This can take many forms and can be a compelling narrative to support design quality, climate resilience, healthy placemaking and the integration of new development with existing communities, including new and shared social infrastructure such as schools and community facilities in accessible locations. This is explored later in this document under Community Engagement and Consultation and various techniques and support a deep and rich understanding of the needs of existing communities and local concerns.

Case study – Placechangers Horden

As part of the Healthy Happy Places Programme under the North East and North Cumbria ICS Placechangers were commissioned to provide an online platform to map the community insights and experiences of place. Across a range of domains including community safety, access to greenspace, feelings of belonging and areas that require improvement and investment. The interactive map is available pending this data informing the investment plan for the area.

<https://app.placechangers.co.uk/campaign/277/overview>

With the mental health consequences of flood risk³², for example, the need to plan for greater climate resilience can be justified on grounds greater than physical risks and downstream consequences. This is just one example of bringing both physical and mental health together with planning and design.

9. Smart and integrated guidance

9.1 Bringing it all together

This report has explored the interrelated matters and priorities that policy and guidance can bring together. Both from a policy, practice, and funding perspective. To deliver on these priorities smart guidance is required that makes integrated urban planning solutions the obvious and easy option, influencing the design of proposed development at an early stage.

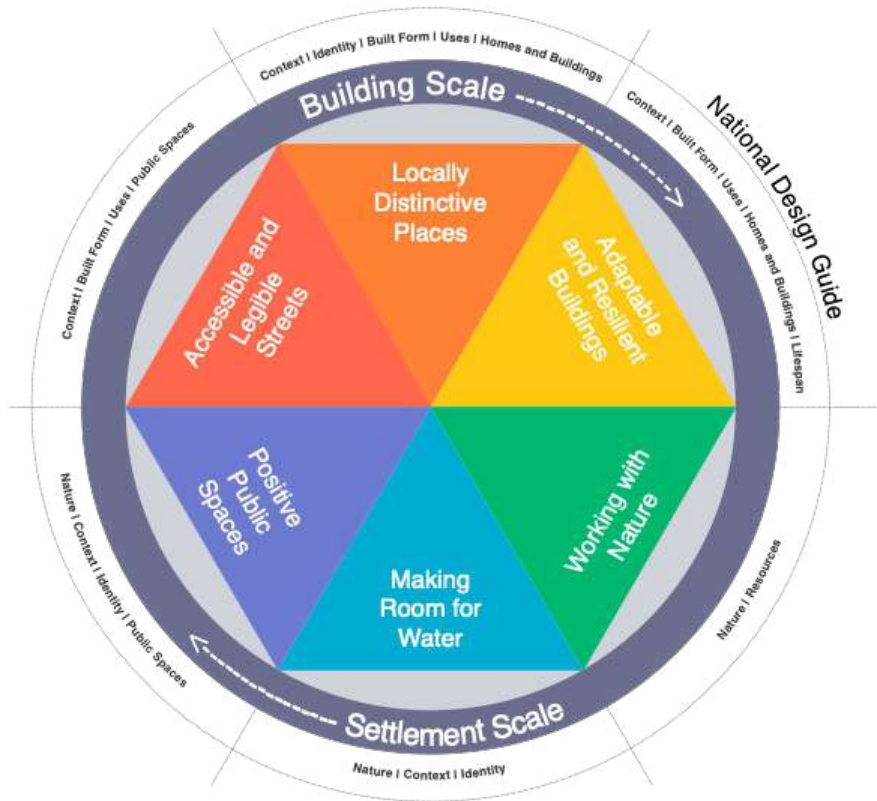
The upcoming requirement, in England at least, for local design codes is a key opportunity to make the most of new and emerging legislation to inform locally distinctive policies and these principles are applicable irrespective of the planning system.

9.2 Design quality

Much is written about design quality and for many people there is a perception that design quality is a subjective matter. Within the debate and enthusiastic promotion of specific agendas and aesthetics, there is a high degree of objective commonality relating to:

- Site and contextual analysis;
- An understanding of local character and distinctiveness;
- Appropriate density for the context and access to local services;
- Access, movement, permeability, and choice;
- Green infrastructure and designing with nature;
- Safe public spaces and streets;
- An appropriate mix of uses;
- Building servicing and amenity;
- The appropriate use of natural resources;
- Adaptability;
- Long term maintenance, stewardship and resilience.

The process and order of these considerations is also key to achieving positive outcomes and the design process has a significant impact.



Core design principles – melton design

SPD https://www.meltonplan.co.uk/files/ugd/c2f881_721ab4620cf7421b9711f0a1e8def1cb.pdf

9.3 Local distinctiveness

Local distinctiveness is often a direct response to local climatic conditions with an overlay of cultural and stylistic cues. As we seek more climate friendly approaches to development some locally distinctive elements of building design and placemaking reflect a more localised and sustainable approach to design and construction. These can often include materials with a lower embodied energy, such as timber cladding and local stone that not only reinforce a sense of place but also provide an opportunity to mitigate climate change. Equally, built forms that respond well to the local climate, sun path and orientation in terms of the ratio of windows to walls on each elevation are sensible design cues for new buildings.

Case study – Kent Design Guide

https://www.kent.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/12098/design-guide-detail.pdf

The Kent Design Guide provides a comprehensive overview of the elements of local distinctiveness that is required in new development. Within the parameters set in terms of spatial relationships, material and building types and form there is a lot of detail that should be included in local design codes, aligned to the National Model Design Guide³³ and aligned to the objectives described in this briefing. Without this understanding of the underpinnings of character and distinctiveness local approaches to climate could be missed.

In terms of climate change adaptation, landscapes and spaces form a significant part of local character and distinctiveness whilst also providing summer cooling and the interception of rainfall. Wet woodlands, for example, provide significant habitat opportunities and also contribute to the management of water.

Building forms have traditionally responded to the climate in terms of passive heating and cooling and as such have had a large influence on local distinctiveness. This is most evident in pre nineteenth century development before the advent of the railways rendered many places like the next across the UK. Overhangs of eaves, the angle of roof pitches, small details such as tiles above windows and over chimney pots reflect the local climate. Smart policy and guidance brings together these cues to respond to the new challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss.



Roof forms and climatic response

<https://www.designing-well.com/blog/roof-forms-for-houses-in-different-climates>

9.4 National Model Design Code

The National Model Design Code³⁴ (NMDC) is intended to form the basis of local design codes under the LURA and offers an opportunity to embed a wide range of priorities at a local scale through the design of new development. Aligned to the National Design Guide, the NMDC is the framework for new codes that apply the following principles.

- Context;
- Movement;
- Nature;
- Built Form;
- Identity;
- Public Space;
- Use;
- Homes and Buildings;
- Resources;
- Lifespan.

26. Biodiversity Design Principles:

Planting: To provide nectar, nuts, seeds, native vegetation and berries along with trees and shrubs, logs and stones. Native plant and tree species are generally, but not always, better for wildlife.

Existing features: Natural assets such as trees, woodlands, hedges, wetland areas and other natural features need to be retained and enhanced where possible.

Mosaics: A range of elements and structures as small patches of bare ground, tall flower-rich vegetation, or scattered trees and scrub to support a range of species and their life-cycles.

Trees and hedgerows: These should be incorporated into public realm and other open spaces as well as private development where appropriate.

Creating habitats: Strategies need to be considered for creating natural habitats, for example, through use of trees, wildflowers and ponds as well as bat and bird boxes, bee and bird bricks and hedgehog highways.

Enhancing Habitats:

Management of native planting, foraging grounds for bats, feeding grounds and wetlands for birds and forest floor habitats.



SuDS and rain gardens: These can be designed to provide benefits to nature by including planting and habitat niches.

Ecological network: Masterplans should create an interconnected ecological network that encompasses everything from doorstep spaces and private gardens to the surrounding countryside.

Ecological niches: Can create a range of ecological conditions from woodland transition zones to wetland areas and open grassland.

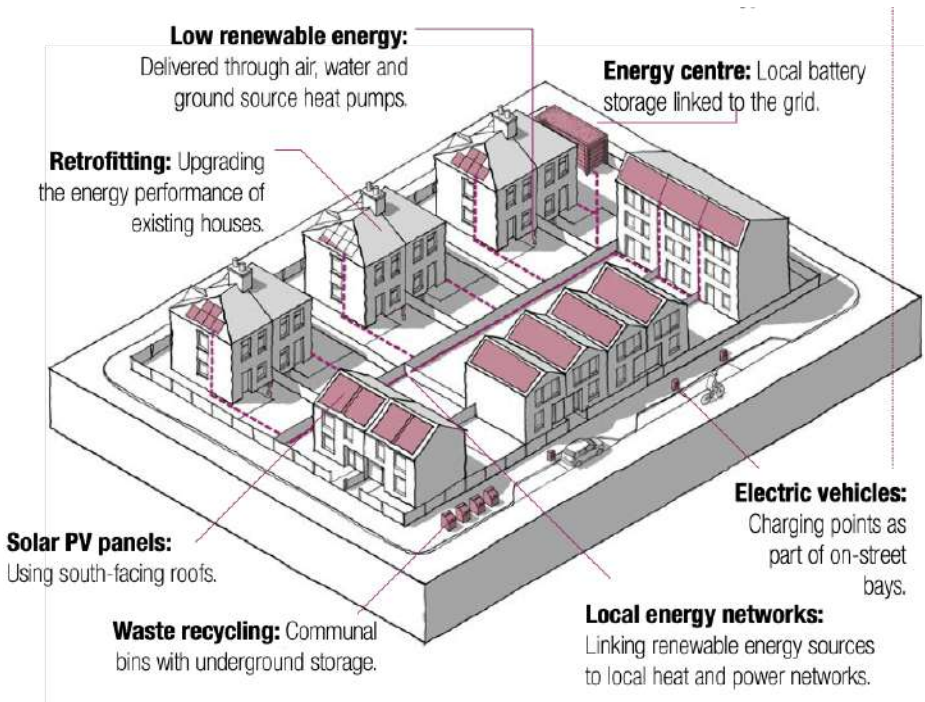
Rivers: Restoration techniques create habitat and reduce flood risk.

Green roofs & walls: Green facades provide nesting opportunities and food for bees. Habitats can also be created on roofs and are especially beneficial for birds and insects.

Design for biodiversity at a settlement scale – NMDC

Provision is made for the local ‘calibration’ of the NMDC to fit local the circumstances and context and this offers significant scope to ‘design in’ multiple benefits addressing climate change, improving health and wellbeing and tackling inequalities.

The NMDC provides the framework to integrate low and zero carbon energy approaches into new developments that can be modified to meet local requirements and existing infrastructure. This approach clearly demonstrates the art of the possible and will ultimately influence practice in the industry.



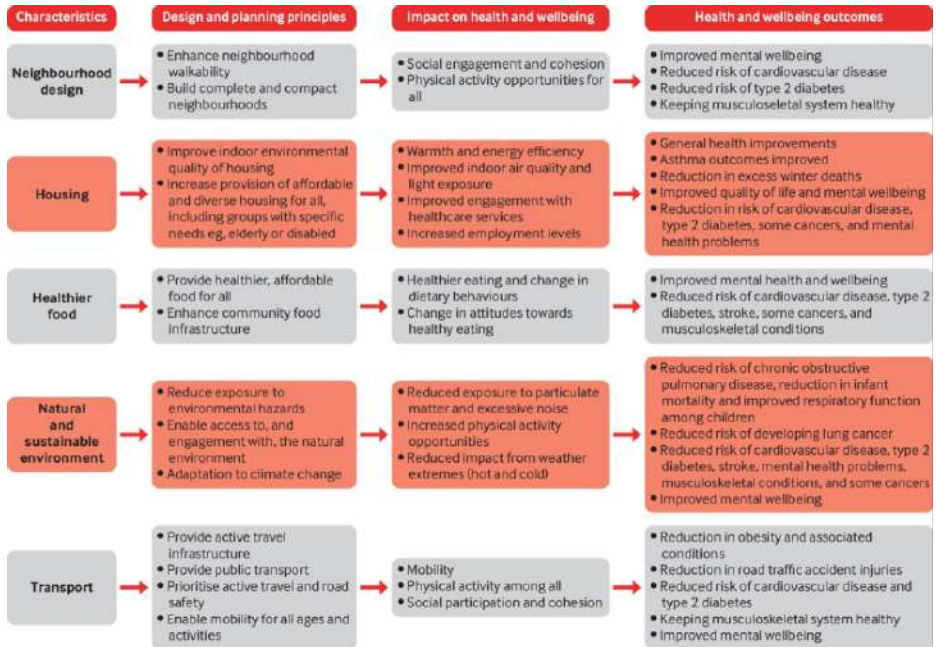
Integrating energy technologies into new development.

Elsewhere in the NMDC there is specific guidance relating to the use of materials with low embodied energy. There is scope to codify this to support and reinforce local character and distinctiveness.

9.5 Integration

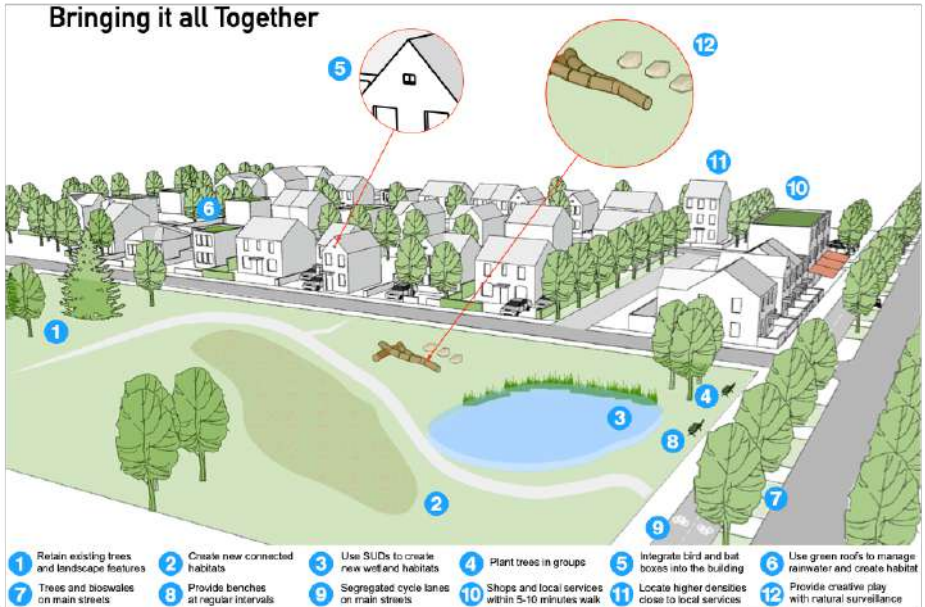
In common with all guidance and design coding, there are significant challenges in linking cross-cutting themes in the development of the code and expressing this holistically on account of the inherent structure. Responding to this will require cross referencing and working with the tools provided. Ensuring that the message of delivering multi-functional infrastructure through aligning various policy objectives, leading to funding and finance is the end goal.

In terms of health and wellbeing PHE (now OHID) have mapped the interrelationship between several aspects of planning and placemaking and these connections and their understanding could form the basis for an integrated approach.



This 'theory of change' identifies the strategic outcomes envisaged (right column) as a result of policy and guidance (left column).

Making more use of diagrams and cross sections can express the wider multiple benefits that can be achieved for a typical development typology and these (whilst not specifically prescribed in the NMDC) can be useful tools to explain the key objectives and their benefits.



9.6 The Theory of Change approach

A Theory of Change (ToC) is a means of expressing achievement of desired objectives from a series of interventions or policies that lead to outcomes to deliver on these. When writing policy and guidance, particularly in the face of viability concerns and budget constraints, it is a great framework to make the case for multi-functional infrastructure and integrated solutions.

A standard format for a ToC does not exist. However, a typical way of developing and constructing a Theory of Change is the application of the logic model framework. This linear logical model explores the basic components that will eventually become a ToC. The common components of the logic model are:

- Inputs: The financial and nonfinancial resources you bring;
- Outputs: The immediate, direct results from deployment of these resources, including what is delivered, to whom, when, and how. Examples include the number of units or products sold, the number of users reached, or the demographic characteristics of the direct beneficiaries;

- Outcomes: The short-term and medium-term results attained or effects for individuals, groups, or issues. They can be both directly and indirectly related to resource deployment. Examples include improvements in targeted health behaviours for individuals or groups, or reduction in localised household-level economic poverty;
- Impact: The long-term changes achieved for populations, issues, or systems. Impacts usually also specify the nature of contribution from the deployed resources relative to other inputs and influential factors. Examples include the shifts in behaviours or patterns for multiple population groups, or reductions in regional poverty levels.

A ToC can form part of a much wider ‘whole systems approach’ recognising the role that urban planning has within the wider wellbeing of place, as in the example below.

9.7 Universal design principles

There are many interlocking design principles that help to deliver places that are friendly and accessible to all. These include guidance for:

- Dementia friendly design;
- Design for neurodiversity;
- Trauma informed environments;
- Gender inclusive design.

Across all these priorities there is much commonality in terms of:

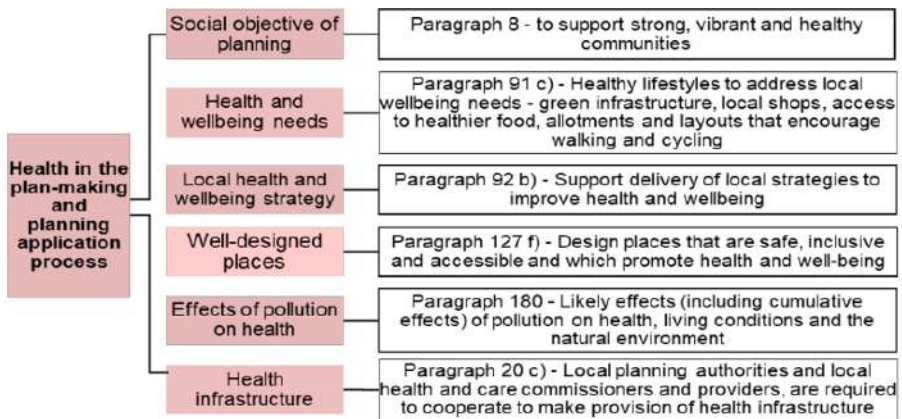
- Shelter and a place to rest off the street;
- Regular benches;
- Adequate lighting;
- Good wayfinding and signage;
- Clear and well-lit entrances to buildings and spaces;
- Natural surveillance;
- Legible street hierarchies;
- Properly demarcated public and private spaces;
- Play areas with two means of escape.

There are several good publications and resources that can support policy and the development of guidance including Dementia and Town Planning (RTPI 2020)³⁵ and gender mainstreaming in Vienna³⁶.

9.8 The role of health impact assessment

Within the current Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) framework there is a requirement for a chapter on Population and Human Health³⁷. This is only applicable however in the case of EIA development and as such many smaller developments do not benefit from this as a means of evaluating the impacts of development including health, and how this is balanced against other environmental considerations and benefits. Many LPAs have established 'thresholds' where a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is required. This threshold can be quite wide ranging and it is a matter of local judgement as to the best approach.

HIAs are supported by the NPPF and as such have a sound basis for the adoption of the requirement for one to be submitted with major planning applications. The relationship between HIA and the NPPF is described in the diagram below.



When developing policy and guidance this can reference HIA as an assessment methodology and the HUDU Planning for Health Metric³⁸ is a great starting point to understand the interrelationships between health, planning and design, further justifying bold and ambitious standards.

9.9 Evaluation of critical success factors

Within the cycle of 'plan-do-review' it is important to measure the impact over time of policy and guidance and this can take several forms. To gain Member buy-in and increase understanding amongst stakeholders visits to new developments to evaluate their quality can be a powerful tool. This too can be used to engage with developers, highlighting best practice and local design awards can be used to celebrate successful developments.

10. Community engagement and participation

10.1 Participatory planning

Effective and impactful policy and guidance is best where there is community 'ownership' of the process and outcomes. This is a time consuming and difficult task that is also challenging as behaviours and expectation have changed since the pandemic. Often communities are excluded from the conceptual stage and as such solutions proposed in plans and guidance may not meet the perceived or actual needs and priorities.

In the case of design guidance and codes, the Office For Place and the Planning Practice Guidance³⁹ provides significant resources to assist in the development of an effective community engagement programme.

Several engagement tools can be employed to gain an understanding of community preferences and priorities such as:

- Visual preference surveys that survey the local community on buildings, places, and streets they prefer, dislike or would like to improve;
- Place assessment such as tools like Placecheck and Spaceshaper;
- Structured workshops and charrettes including hands-on events to explore the challenges and opportunities of a site or area, analyse options or develop design proposals at various stages in the process;
- Community panels or forums that ensure the voice of the community is considered through formal and informal structures;
- Drop in events and exhibitions providing the opportunity to discuss the proposals with the consultation team and provide feedback in-person or via a questionnaire;
- Community representation on design review panels, often design review panels are normally made up of professional experts, but they can be enriched by including representatives of local communities.

These techniques alongside Citizens Assemblies for specific issues such as climate change are a powerful means of engaging at an early stage and to set the core values that form the foundation of any plan or strategy. Common themes include climate

change and biodiversity loss, although there is no reason why this methodology could not be used to plan for health infrastructure and strategies that positively influence the wider determinants of health in the environment.

In common with many engagement processes there is a risk that this is not representative of the wider community and the voices of the engaged few dominate the conversation. Reaching the 'seldom heard' remains a challenge and there is some evidence that digital techniques can assist in this end. This could include:

- The use of digital techniques can help to engage with hard-to-reach groups in the community, such as younger people, and can be used in addition to in-person techniques referred to above;
- Social media platforms, apps, email campaigns and websites: can be used to promote in person events but could also be used to share information, allow online participation in consultation processes and get feedback;
- Digital models of design codes and their context, area or sites: to help to visualise concepts and the wider effects of development. These might include the use of gaming platforms to engage younger audiences in exploring spatial design;
- Other visualisation techniques for three dimensional models: to provide the community with a visual appreciation of the proposals;
- Community-level data gathering to gauge levels of support for particular ideas along with accessible, transparent representation so the community can see the views of the whole community reflected statistically.

UN Habitat⁴⁰ have recently provided a briefing on the use of Minecraft to engage younger people in urban design and this is a technique that can be used to demonstrate a variety of concepts that would underpin policy and guidance, particularly in terms of climate change, placemaking and integrated design solutions.

10.2 Crowdsourcing

A source of rich data can be rapidly gained through crowdsourcing using a variety of platforms. The observations made of local character and distinctiveness can help to develop localised and distinctive design guidance that meets the technical requirements and the priorities of the LPA, such as climate change or biodiversity.

Case study – The use of Flickr to gather local distinctiveness

To inform the development of the Design SPD in Darlington Flickr was used to crowdsource local impressions of local distinctiveness. Some years past in terms of the use of this platform, new social media opportunities exist in the form of Instagram and this provides an opportunity to gather rich data, insights and impressions in a popular format.

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/designquality/>

To gain a better understanding of the mental health impact of places on citizens, pioneering work has been taking place regarding the emotional mapping of towns and cities to inform interventions and provide a baseline understanding of the issues from the experience of diverse groups.

Case study – Emotional mapping in Belfast

The Urban Room in Belfast established in the former Tesco Express hosted the Quality of Life Foundations amongst others to provide a platform for deep engagement, exhibitions and events for the city. The role of social spaces in the city as a permanent fixture where insights, innovation and change can come together is an essential ingredient in great placemaking and social change.

<https://s3-eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/commonplace-customer-assets/ccqolreading/Reading%20CCQOL%20Report%20updated%2020221017.pdf>



10.3 Consultation

New technology and social media allows for a variety of techniques to be used to test policy and guidance with stakeholders and provides an opportunity to understand unexpected consequences.

Consultation with developers is essential to understand the real-world application of guidance and the impact that this may have on practice and viability. Usability, consistency and a balance between descriptive and prescriptive guidance needs to be struck.

10.4 The role of elected members

Elected Members are the voice and representatives of the community although sometimes their agency can feel circumvented by process and engagement. Buy-in at an early stage and active participation in the development of community engagement and workshops adds legitimacy to process and ensures that Members experience the strength of feeling and insights from the community.

Often the need for improved guidance is driven by Members who are keen to see improved outcomes across a range of issues. The development of guidance is resource intensive and with the upcoming of the streamlining of Local Plans and the need to deliver multiple benefits from development and infrastructure, comprehensive guidance that covers the big issues is a cost-effective approach.

11. Looking ahead

An increasing challenge in the future will be the comprehensive retrofitting of existing buildings and whilst this is outside of the current planning system there are significant health and wellbeing and climate change benefits than can be secured. With changes to the infrastructure levy there may be additional funding that could be applied to retrofitting projects and with NPPF signalling that the re-use of existing buildings is a primary consideration, there is a good case to develop guidance on the retrofitting of existing buildings and places, streamlining delivery and using locally appropriate techniques that support wider placemaking objectives such as local distinctiveness.

There is an increased interest in retrofitting, reflected in the recent and upcoming programme at the Building Centre that has explored the various dimensions of retrofitting including finance, health and wellbeing and technological considerations.

https://www.buildingcentre.co.uk/whats_on/exhibitions/retrofit-24-commercial-cultural-civic-buildings

12. Training and roll out

APSE Energy can provide the full range of expertise, workshops, and policy development for local planning authorities in the fields of BNG, climate change and energy and how these interlocking issues can help to deliver better outcomes for people and the planet. We are currently helping local authorities to embed sustainability into local plan policies.

Member and officer training

A great starting point for development of new policy, guidance and strategies is an officer and Member workshop. APSE Energy can offer a structured process where priorities can be agreed that meet local needs, comply with national policy and can inform local plans and guidance.

APSE Training

Carbon Literacy training is offered where this is required as a primer. In addition to this APSE Training is also providing courses suitable for both Councillors and Officers on biodiversity net gain. Details can be found on the APSE Training website.

Carbon Literacy training is offered where this is required as a primer.

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