



Faculty of Public Health

of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom

Working to improve the public's health

Faculty of Public Health

Healthy Spatial Planning Special Interest Group

The Faculty of Public Health (FPH) is a membership organisation for nearly 4,000 public health professionals across the UK and around the world. We are also a registered charity. Our role is to improve the health and wellbeing of local communities and national populations. We do this by supporting the training of the next generation of public health professionals by designing and managing the national public health training scheme and curriculum, encouraging and promoting new research in public health, and improving public health policy and practice at local, national, and international level by campaigning for change and working in partnership with governments on specific public health projects.

Response to the Raynsford Review of planning (2017)

1. The English planning system and sustainable development

An effective planning system must allow for competing interests to be balanced. There has been wide discussion of the purpose of planning. The key question is whether it is about setting the vision and place making, or about delivery of developments and housing units. The reality is that it needs to provide a balance between these two objectives, and this must include robust consideration of sustainability.

Sustainability is an important issue for both planning and public health. This includes sustainability related to climate change but also social and environmental sustainability, including sustainable communities and related topics such as food security. Planning and land use has a substantial influence on all these dimensions and it is essential that the planning system has sustainability as a central featureⁱ.

A clear definition of sustainability is needed which balances different aspects of sustainability. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) states that promoting sustainable development is the core role of planning. This is defined at the start of the document as including the economic, environmental and social aspects of sustainabilityⁱⁱ. This definition of sustainability is a reasonable starting point.

However, in application of the NPPF in national and local planning decisions, the use of 'sustainable' most often refers to economic growth. There is an inconsistency between the initial comprehensive definition of sustainability in the NPPF and how it is applied in practice.

Economic sustainability is important, a healthy local economy that provides good quality local jobs will have a positive influence on the health of the population. However, the current system often places economic sustainability as the only measure. An effective planning system must consider all aspects of sustainability and how they interrelate.

The importance of economic growth and the employment this will provide is reinforced throughout the NPPF. The health benefits of employment are well documented, providing people with a good quality job will have significant and long term positive effects on their physical and mental healthⁱⁱⁱ. In the current economic climate, the provision of increased employment is a priority if health inequalities are to be reduced.

Local authorities have prioritised encouraging sustainable growth, inward investment and the creation of private sector employment within their areas. Planning is an important part of this work.

However, if this employment is built on unsustainable planning decisions to encourage economic growth this will have long term negative impacts on health and wellbeing which will limit the health benefits from employment. It is essential that planning policy is explicit in defining sustainability as environmental, social and economic sustainability.

Sustainability will be enhanced by the development and strengthening of local economies, i.e. those that prioritise commerce between organisations in the same neighbourhoods and communities rather than more distant ones. A planning system that has a presumption in favour of strengthening local commercial bonds, rather than distant ones, could support this.

The United Kingdom, along with all other members of the United Nations, has endorsed the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals^{iv}. These are wide ranging and cover all aspects that an effective planning system needs to consider, including sustainability in all its forms. Planning and place making have a central role in delivery of the goals, the planning system must therefore include consideration of the goals throughout planning policy and implementation.

The definition should be supported with practical advice on how this will be applied to a planning application. A possible starting point is the four aspects to any development and how they impact on economic, social and environmental sustainability.

- The location of a proposed development
- The physical form of the development (layout, density, public realm)
- The building itself (design, materials and construction)
- The use of the development (including who will use it and what was the previous use)

It must be clear that for a development to be sustainable it must be sustainable on all four aspects. For example, a building may have an excellent BREEAM rating and be zero carbon, but if its location means the only realistic way of getting to it is by car then it is not sustainable. Similarly, a development may be in a city centre next to a train station but if it uses rainforest hardwoods, has air conditioning, no green roof and the only way upstairs is by electric lift then it is not sustainable. Neither is a gated luxury residential development that turns its back on the communities in which it is located.

With the *presumption in favour of sustainable development* within the NPPF, it is essential that there is a clear and consistent definition of what this means and how it applies to both plan making and development management. The current position often appears to be that the focus is on economic growth, and anything that supports this should be approved.

Climate change will be one of the key public health challenges in future decades^v. There is clear evidence that climate change will disproportionately affect the poorest and most vulnerable. Research clearly identifies the relationship between sustainability and climate change and health

improvement and health inequalities and demonstrates that mitigation and adaptation for climate change is a public health priority^{vi}.

Planning policy, and application in both plan making and development management, must be significantly strengthened to make it clear that all plans and developments must contribute to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. For example, supporting strategies for the growth of ports, airports or other major generators of travel is likely to result in an increase in emissions rather than a decrease.

Given the issues of sustainability and climate change there is a need to balance impacts that occur on different timescales. In the past, short term (often economic) arguments have had far more weight than long term issues (such as environmental degradation, climate change and sustainability). In the current planning system, the balance is strongly towards economic growth and rapid delivery of developments and housing units. Over recent years, the priority given to sustainability, climate change and social inclusion has decreased substantially.

Current planning policy is that only significant negative impacts should prevent development going ahead. However, there may be different proposals in the same area with negative impacts that are not deemed significant by themselves but could represent a significant negative impact when viewed cumulatively. This issue needs to be recognised and is an argument for a more cohesive plan based system that provides longer term planning and considers the wider impact and implications of both local plans and individual planning decisions.

The evaluation of the potential impact of a plan or development must include an assessment of the health impact, and what is needed to maximise health benefit and minimise health harms. There has been much discussion of the role of separate health impact assessments, and their effectiveness in influencing plans. There may be cases, with larger developments, where an independent health impact assessment is required. For most cases, the most effective approach will be to build health into the other statutory assessments such as the environmental impact assessment (EIA).

The Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment and the Faculty of Public Health have produced a primer and discussion document^{vii}. This offers brief guidance and recommendations for including health in EIA. This guidance is for public health teams, EIA practitioners, planning officers, consultees, consenting authorities and others concerned with population and human health (e.g. during screening, scoping, consultation, assessment, reporting and monitoring).

For this to be effective, there needs to be clarity over the power of local areas to grant or refuse permission. With the current system local decisions can be overturned by the planning inspectorate or the Secretary of State.

One example is the building of large numbers of new homes without appropriate consideration of the impact on other services such as education and health services. There have been recent cases where local decisions to refuse permission due to these considerations have been overturned by the planning inspectorate or the Secretary of State.

There must be a clear duty to involve other agencies in the planning process, including the NHS and blue light services, but particularly public health. The pressure is to deliver planning decisions in the shortest possible timescales. Any involvement of public health must therefore be built into

the planning system from the earliest possible point, and local areas will need support to develop appropriate relationships, shared understanding and systems.

This has implications for both planning teams and public health teams. Both have been affected by austerity, with much reduced capacity and capability across the system. There will be a need to increase the knowledge and skills both in public health and in planning to enable closer working. The TCPA resources on re-uniting health and planning could provide a good starting point, as well as building on good practice that already exists across England^{viii}.

A recommendation is for the development of shared resources and joint training across public health and planning to develop a shared understanding and closer working.

An important question to be addressed is how planning can have a place shaping role when many parts of the system needed to support planning are being eroded by austerity. National policy for public health will need to reflect changes to the planning system to ensure public health and planning have the capacity and capability to develop and implement a new, coordinated, approach to planning.

The scope of the planning system

The priority, whether a plan led system, a zonal system or a combination of both, is for a coordinated approach that allows a cohesive and coherent approach to place making at different levels. There needs to be a national plan to set the overall priorities over the shorter, medium and longer term.

This system must ensure that there is alignment between national plans across different functions of government, for example, public health policy and NHS health policy. Delivery of public health and NHS priorities and plans is strongly influenced by the built environmentⁱ. Planning, if effective, must consider the requirements of these sectors. Delivery of sufficient health and education facilities related to new housing developments needs to be central to the planning of these developments.

Transport is one area where a range of national and local priorities overlap. These include the need to increase levels of active travel and physical activity, providing a built and transport infrastructure that supports a more active population. Associated with this are the emerging changes in transport, such as the move to electric and autonomous vehicles. These overlap with the requirements for improving air quality and reducing the burden of ill-health related to pollution^{ix}, and the need to reduce carbon emissions and mitigate the impact of climate change^{vi}.

Planning for housing needs to consider the long-term sustainability and use of the housing. National and local housing policy must include robust standards around housing quality and standards. This will include standards on minimum room size, measures to ensure low levels of indoor air pollution, maximising fuel efficiency and minimising the climate change impact of housing design.

Planning policy needs to include a consideration of environmental lighting. Although actual lighting energy use is reducing due to a move to the use of light emitting diode technology for street lighting, there is nevertheless a tendency to over illuminate when buildings, domestic or commercial, are not being used. A presumption that buildings are not illuminated when not in use might be helpful.

Delivery of these interrelated priorities needs a coordinated approach at national, regional and local level. Planning and place making need to be central to this. This requires an English national plan, which will need to inform the re-development and re-introduction of regional plans and the formation of local plans. All these priorities are influenced by the built, natural and agricultural environments. Therefore, the planning system should include all land uses.

Discussion of a zonal planning system first requires a decision on what form this zonal planning will take. The previous Conservative government was considering introducing zonal planning for housing on brownfield sites. However, this was permissive zoning, similar to approaches in the United States. Its aim was to substantially reduce the restrictions on house building, including requirements for affordable housing. This approach would have been less likely to deliver sustainable development and communities.

The European model of zone based planning describes in detail the requirements for development in a zone. This includes clear requirements for affordable homes, better quality housing and green spaces. Developments within the zone must comply with these requirements.

Such a zone based system, if appropriately policed, would ensure that developments were more sustainable. This would provide opportunities for public health to inform plans and would have the potential to improve the sustainability of new developments.

In the current situation, the power balance is in favour of developers. This zoned approach would require a major step change in the relationship between planning and developers, with the power balance between these sectors being substantially changed.

The spatial structures of the planning system

The current plan based system is based around local plans. These relate to a local authority level; there is a 'duty to cooperate' between neighbouring areas but this has been of limited effectiveness. This is leading to a local focus on plan making and developments. There are examples where there is consideration of a wider approach to planning, such as in areas with local devolution agreements.

If planning is to be successful in developing a vision and place making, it must consider the wider implications of planning. As well as including other disciplines and sectors, such as public health, the NHS, and businesses, it must consider the wider spatial dimension. Within the sectors that will need to be involved there are a mix of different boundaries and decision-making geographies. For example, NHS structures can overlap several local authorities, so consideration of NHS infrastructure cannot be considered in isolation in local plans.

Achieving this across a wider area will need coordination of vision and place making across local authority area and across sectors. Within the current plan based system this would necessitate the development of wider plans that provide the overarching vision within which local plans would be developed.

Plan making across different local authority areas will be essential. The current duty to cooperate is not effective, there must be a more robust and directive *duty for* local authorities to work together across wider areas, and with other sectors including health and public health.

There are areas where this is starting to develop, such as areas with devolution agreements e.g. the West Midlands Combined Authority and the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, but this needs to be built into the whole planning system from national to regional to local areas.

In development of these tiered plans, public health must be involved at each level to ensure that improving health and reducing inequalities are central to the plans. The Public Health England Healthy People, Healthy Places programme^x, if appropriately resourced, could provide the 'network of networks' to support this involvement and to develop resources to support joint working.

Community involvement in planning

Community involvement in planning is essential. The challenges in achieving this have been widely discussed. Within plan making and local planning policy there is scope for people to be involved. The timescales are relatively long and there is time to involve and engage meaningfully with local people. For development management, and individual planning decisions, the timescales are much shorter. The pressure is to make planning decisions quickly and planning departments performance is partly measured by the speed of decision making.

With the current pressure to deliver decisions and developments as quickly as possible, and with the financial pressures facing councils, the priorities are to secure developments and house building. The objectives and requirements in local plans can be compromised when it comes to individual developments. There can also be resistance from developers to community engagement due to a perception that it is a risk to obtaining the necessary permissions for their developments.

While involvement of local people in plan making is important, they also need to be able to influence planning decisions on major developments. Involving local people in setting local plans which are then overturned to secure a development risks the people becoming cynical about the process and disengaging.

The planning system will also need to provide clarity over the power that communities and local people can have over planning decisions. Within the current system there is a substantial inequality in power towards the developers. They can appeal to the planning inspectorate, and local communities and planning committees can be overruled to allow developments they have refused. This power imbalance must be addressed. It is recognised that this will be challenging, balancing the need for infrastructure development and new housing, while acknowledging the concerns and objections of local communities. True, and meaningful, involvement of communities at all stages will make this balance more likely.

For individual planning decisions, people will be most interested in those that affect their local area. These may be few pre-existing community groups with the knowledge and capacity to engage or respond in time.

For large scale developments, the time where people can have the most influence will be at the pre-applications stage. There are substantial difficulties in involving the public at this stage due to confidentiality and commercial sensitivity, but this needs to be addressed if local people are to have a voice in planning.

A major consideration in community involvement must be the way in which it can further entrench existing inequalities. More affluent areas are more likely to have individuals and groups

who can coordinate responses and who have the skills and education to influence planning, both in plan making and in development management.

Sectors of the community who may be excluded are older people and those experiencing significant deprivation and poverty. These are groups that can be significantly affected by spatial planning decisions but have the least influence.

These challenges are highlighted in the development of neighbourhood planning following publication of the NPPF. The degree of influence these plans can have and their scope in relation to the local plan is still an area of discussion. However, they offer opportunities for local people to have meaningful influence in local planning.

The uptake of neighbourhood plans has been largely weighted to rural areas and more affluent areas^{xi}. The number of plans in disadvantaged urban areas is much lower. These areas have populations with low levels of qualifications and a substantially weaker political voice. The geography in these areas is also much more complex with overlapping communities and a range of community based groups which may wish to be involved in neighbourhood planning.

A key question is how communities will be engaged in the planning process. Planning is complex and engaging in the planning process at the level required to develop plans takes considerable time both for the local people involved and for the organisations supporting the communities in gaining the necessary knowledge and understanding.

This engagement must be meaningful, in that it provides local people with the understanding and time to become involved and to respond to plans. Planning departments will need support with this engagement. However, community development capacity in many councils is being reduced due to declining resources and competing prioritisation of front line services such as children's services and social care.

There is a real risk that more vulnerable communities in areas of deprivation, which could benefit most from neighbourhood plans, will be the least likely to be engaged in planning. This will widen inequalities and have a negative impact on health and wellbeing in these areas.

Planning and taxation

Full and realistic assessment of the impact of a planned development must include its impact across the whole system, including public health, the health service and education. There must be an effective mechanism for capturing the increase in land values that will contribute to mitigating impact across all these sectors and in supporting communities. The current system of section 106 and community infrastructure levy (CIL) is not effective in delivering this requirement. CIL is not raising as much money as was envisaged when it was established^{xii}, especially in disadvantaged areas.

The key areas of criticism from the CIL review: report to government^{xiii} are:

- The limited ability to influence the outcome of CIL rates in charging schedules
- The lack of workability of CIL on more complicated, phased schemes and projects that have to be changed both prior to and after construction starts
- A range of challenges in calculating CIL and when/how existing floorspace in a range of uses can be offset (ie, issues around the building being 'in use')

- Generally, a lack of flexibility particularly for the unique and varied viability issues affecting different sites and different uses.

Clarity is also needed over the implementation of CIL and where it can, and should, be applied. CIL charges are based on the size, type and location of the development proposed, with guidance available to assist applicants, developers and landowners in terms of what development will be liable for CIL. To make sure that the levy is used transparently, charging authorities (the Council) must prepare short reports on the levy that provide information for the previous financial year. The reports set out how much revenue from the levy has been received, what it has been spent on and how much is left.

There has also been much lower uptake by local authorities and less infrastructure funding raised from the levy than originally anticipated. There may therefore be scope to review the process of CIL and the Section 106 process to create a more effective method of generating developer contributions.

An advice note published by the Planning Officers Society suggests that if a development is acceptable without the obligation then it should not be sought^{xiii}. This is contrary to the blanket requirement for CIL charges based on thresholds and land use type

Other thresholds or requirements might also exist to require section 106 related travel plans, traffic mitigation measures and initiatives based on floorspace and land-use type, meaning that obligations would be sought automatically. Perhaps a list of thresholds for land use types stating when Section 106 obligations and/or CIL would be required should be produced. The Department for Transport published similar guidance for transport assessments which demonstrates this approach, though this is now withdrawn^{xiv}

This will require a combined approach that can consider the relationships between developments and services and which recognises all costs and benefits across the whole system, including planning, health, economy and education. This is an argument for development of a national urban strategy which aligns spatial planning to these other key sectors.

Effective implementation

Many of the challenges in aligning public health and planning have come from trying to incorporate public health as an additional consideration in the planning system. To date, most successes have been in embedding public health within plan making and planning policy. Including public health in development management has been much more challenging.

The future planning system must consider public health as an integral part of the planning process, both in plan making and in development management. Rather than an additional consideration, public health and sustainability must be a central part of the process.

This will require a coordinated approach at national, regional and local levels. Developing coordinated, cross government plans which make clear the role of planning as central to place making, improving health, and reducing inequalities. This must include public health and health services. This approach will align health plans, (e.g. 5 Year Forward View, Sustainability and Transformation Plans) with planning at national, regional and local levels.

Another area where there many of these priorities overlap is transport. This has a major role in promoting economic sustainability, and in promoting physical activity and active travel, improving air quality and tackling climate change. This can only be effective if there is a coherent approach

across sectors and at national, regional and local levels. Implementation will need to reflect existing developments, such as areas with devolution agreements.

Implementation will require clarity over the role of public health evidence in planning, resolving the challenges that come from the different approaches in public health and planning. Where public health takes a population health approach and planning is more focused on the health impact of individual developments and in quantifying health impact. This can build on existing work in this area including Public Health England's Healthy People, Healthy Places programme^x, the Town and Country Planning Association's Re-Uniting Health and Planning and Healthy Weight Environments^{viii} and the work of the Royal Town Planning Institute on public health and planning^{xv}.

For this coordinated approach to work, with public health as an integral part of planning, there will need to be investment in both time and resources in education and training. Both planners and public health will need to gain a far better understanding of each other's disciplines, opportunities and constraints. This would best be achieved through including public health in planning training and planning in public health, with joint training wherever possible. There are existing examples of good practice, both in academic training and in local areas, where this has been implemented.

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