Town planning and public health

The Faculty of Public Health and the Royal Town Planning Institute, along with the Spatial Planning and Health Group and Design Council, urge the providers of education and training for planning and for public health professionals to emphasise the importance of members of both professions acquiring at least a basic mutual understanding of:

- The role of the built and natural environment as a determinant of health, and its relationship with health inequalities
- The spatial planning system and its role in promoting and creating healthy, sustainable communities
- Health-promoting design principles
- The assessment of the effects of spatial plans, projects and developments on human health and the implementation of mitigation and enhancement measures.

Public health and town planning have common roots...

Both grew from concerns about the poor and unhealthy conditions in the expanding industrial cities of the 19th century. The reforms to the urban environment brought about by pioneering public health practitioners and town planners led to dramatic improvements in health and life expectancy. Today the rises in the prevalence of non-communicable diseases and in levels of obesity present new challenges, and the two professions again need to work together to confront them.

In recent years much evidence has accumulated which shows just how important the physical, social and economic environments in which we live and work are for our health. These are often called 'the social determinants of health'. The Marmot Review, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives*, pointed out that: 'People's health is affected by the nature of their physical environment; living in poor housing, in a deprived neighbourhood with a lack of access to green spaces impacts negatively on physical and mental health.' The review recommended: 'Fully integrate the planning, transport, housing, environmental and health systems to address the social determinants of health in each locality.' The recently published National Planning Policy Framework has noted that: 'The planning system can play an important role in facilitating social interaction and creating healthy, inclusive communities.'

Many of the issues for which spatial planners are responsible interact with human health and can, if we get these issues right, contribute to improving our physical and mental health, diminishing inequalities in health, and promoting sustainable development. The decision to integrate public health into local government makes it all the more important that planners and public health professionals can work together effectively. However, as planning and public health have evolved into two separate disciplines, the evidence suggests that planning and health professionals do not always fully understand each other's language, assumptions and processes.

The Spatial Planning and Health Group (formerly the NICE Programme Development Group on Spatial Planning and Health) recommended that basic competencies in understanding and assessing the effect of environmental changes and developments on health should be incorporated into the education and training of planners and public health professionals. We agree.

We therefore encourage education and training providers, through joint working and the development of cross-disciplinary provisions, to ensure that planners and public health professionals acquire at least a basic understanding of each other's methods and ways of working, so that the potential for both better health and more sustainable development can be realised.