

**Local Plan 2021-2041**

**Healthy & Sustainable  
Communities Background Paper**  
March 2024

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# Local Plan Policy Background Paper – Healthy and Sustainable Communities

## 1. Introduction

The built and natural environment is a key determinant of health and wellbeing, and the relationship between planning and health is well established. [Research from Public Health England \(2017\)](#) suggests that 'the environment in which we live is inextricably linked to our health across the life course' and that the 'design of our neighbourhoods can influence physical activity levels, travel patterns, social connectivity, mental and physical health and wellbeing outcomes'. Planning in the broadest sense, from development management and infrastructure to the location of health and community services can play a crucial role in creating environments that enhance people's health and wellbeing.

This Healthy and Sustainable Communities Background Paper has been prepared as part of the process of evidence gathering to support Herefordshire's emerging Local Plan. The purpose of this background paper is to provide background information on the subject of health and sustainable communities in relation to development within the county. The paper focuses on the needs of residents with regard to physical health and mental wellbeing as opposed to clinical health. It can be used as a tool to address the health challenges it identifies through planning policy. The demand for clinical health facilities and services such as GP practices, health centres, dentists, hospitals and ambulance provision as well as associated infrastructure with new development will be addressed through the *Infrastructure Delivery Plan*.

The background paper looks at the issues which influence the health and wellbeing of the residents of Herefordshire. The background paper looks at current policies and guidance regarding health and planning. It also has a section setting out how representations made during the Options Local Plan consultation have been used to shape policy in the Local Plan.

There are a multitude of factors that can impact health and wellbeing but this background paper focuses on those areas where planning policies can have an influence. Herefordshire faces a number of health challenges and inequalities in which planning and place making has an important role to play.

The level of some of these health challenges is significant and it is important that the Local Plan includes meaningful policies that can help to influence health outcomes. In addition to this, the health and wellbeing of Herefordshire residents should be a consideration in all policy making and in the determination of planning applications.

## 2. Background

The way that places are planned, designed, built and managed has a significant influence over whether communities are able to live healthy lives. The built and natural environments are important determinants of health and affect health inequalities.

[The National Health Service's Healthy New Towns programme](#) identified five principles for designing, delivering and managing healthy places. These are:

1. Create compact neighbourhoods;
2. Maximise active travel;
3. Inspire and enable healthy eating;
4. Foster health in homes and buildings; and
5. Enable healthy play and leisure.

#### Creating compact neighbourhoods

Compact and connected neighbourhoods should be designed to use land efficiently and allow people to move around safely and easily and access shops and services on foot. A range of key facilities, such as schools, shops, health centres and dentists should be clustered close to each other to provide multiple reasons for people to visit the same area, providing places for people to meet socially. Multi-functional green spaces should also be provided close to residential areas so people have the opportunity to exercise and access nature in urban areas.

The concept of well connected neighbourhoods, which incorporates the Town and Country Planning Association's (TCPA) [Healthy Homes Principles](#), by providing a framework for local authorities to establish neighbourhoods where most people's daily needs can be met within a short walk or cycle ride. The concept has been gaining momentum around the world and has been implemented in cities such as Paris and Melbourne.

#### Maximising active travel

Just small increases in people's daily physical activity have been shown to reduce mortality rates and improve people's general health and well-being. When designing new neighbourhoods, it is important to do this in such a way as to make active travel (walking and cycling) the easiest option for the people that live there. This should therefore be considered at the earliest stage of development.

Simply providing walking and cycling routes is not enough to guarantee that people will use them. It is just as important to consider facilities such as benches and access to public toilets along these routes to encourage the elderly and people with disabilities to use them. Opportunities to make routes more attractive and safer to use should also be considered by integrating them with green infrastructure, incorporating public artwork and providing safe levels of lighting.

#### Inspiring and enabling healthy eating

Poor diet is the biggest cause of ill health in England. It is responsible for a number of health conditions such as cancer, diabetes, heart failure, and obesity. Therefore, by considering how the design of developments can influence and encourage healthier eating habits, planners and developers can have a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of residents.

One of the key ways of improving the local food environment is by enabling more people to access healthier food options. Deprived areas are more likely to have a higher concentration of hot food takeaways which restricts the choice of foods on offer and can lead to less healthy eating habits. Local planning authorities can encourage healthier eating habits by considering, through design, how to provide opportunities for people to grow food close to where they live and to learn about healthy eating and cooking, how they can access affordable healthy food and by providing a healthy retail offer.

#### Fostering health in homes and buildings

The quality of the homes and buildings we occupy has a significant influence on our health and wellbeing.

When designing buildings, there are several important factors to consider which, if designed and built to a high standard, can enhance people's health. The location of the building should be safe from crime, provide safe and easy access to parks or green spaces, provide access to walkable and cyclable neighbourhoods, and ideally be within walking and cycling distance to essential shops and services. The fabric of the building should be energy efficient so residents can keep warm easily during the winter months, each room should provide access to plenty of natural light, and they should be well ventilated to prevent overheating. Occupants should have access to plenty of internal space to live comfortably and to use the building for a range of activities. Homes should also be adaptable to suit the needs of everyone throughout their whole lives, limit light and noise pollution and minimise unsafe or illegal levels of indoor or ambient air pollution.

### Enabling healthy play and leisure

The built environment affects the way in which people interact. Through careful design, developers can create spaces for people to come together and develop social connections. Planners and developers should consider creating spaces for community activities and events as part of new developments to encourage physical activity and social interaction. Such spaces should be designed to be accessible to all and include plenty of benches or chairs for people to sit. Outdoor gyms, children's play areas, sports pitches, public parks, community centres, faith centres and community food growing plots can all provide spaces for physical activity and social interaction.

It is also important to consider how the creation of a strong sense of place and identity can be achieved, as a lack of connection with one's surroundings and neighbourhood can result in a higher turnover of residents and reduced social connections, which can contribute to poor mental health. Public art, such as murals or outdoor galleries, particularly those which highlight an area's unique character or history, can help to create a sense of place. Developers should ensure that, throughout the development, there are safe, affordable, fun and inviting spaces that can be used by people for a wide range of activities to suit the needs and interests of people of all ages and from a variety of backgrounds.

### Purpose of this paper

- To help achieve the Council's vision of addressing the current health challenges through planning policy
- To ensure the Local Plan contributes to the national and local wellbeing goals set out in the Health and Social Care Act 2012 which brings a new focus for public health to agree on an integrated way to improve local health and well-being through a variety of disciplines.
- To provide supporting information and guidance for planners, developers and investors on how our environment and the planning decisions we make, impact the health and well-being of the population.
- To offer guidance for addressing the effect of the built and natural environment on health and well-being as part of a strategic approach to tackling the county's health inequalities and promoting healthy lifestyle options. To be an important material consideration in the determination of planning applications by setting out a range of potential health and wellbeing related factors that developers should consider when drawing up development proposals.

# 3. Policy and legislative context

## 3.1 National Policy

### National Planning Policy Framework

[The National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) recognises the importance of creating healthy and sustainable communities, highlighting the need for planning policies to promote physical and mental well-being. Paragraph 8 states that the overarching social objective of the planning system, is to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities.

Chapter 8 'promoting healthy and safe communities' states that planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

- Promote social interaction
- Are safe and accessible
- Enable and support healthy lifestyles through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

Paragraph 102 of the NPPF highlights that access to a network of high-quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities.

Sustainable transport is acknowledged to have a positive impact on air quality and public health. Sections on 'making effective use of land' and 'achieving well-designed places' cover the importance of securing well-designed, attractive and healthy places which promote health and well-being.

### National Planning Practice Guidance

[The National Planning Practice Guidance \(NPPG\)](#) states that the built and natural environments are major determinants of health and wellbeing, therefore, local planning authorities (LPAs) should ensure that health and wellbeing and health infrastructure are considered in local and neighbourhood plans and in planning decisions.

LPAs should engage with relevant organisations (these are set out in NPPG) when carrying out their planning function to ensure that local strategies to improve health and wellbeing and the provision of the required health infrastructure are supported and taken into account. Key issues to address this include:

- making physical activity an easier option (e.g. through the provision of high quality and accessible green space);
- promoting active travel through the provision of safe, accessible and integrated active travel infrastructure;
- ensuring access to healthy food options and opportunities to grow food close to where people live;
- creating safe and inviting places and spaces to meet and share activities (that are accessible to all) in order to support community engagement and social capital;
- considering health inequalities;
- considering health infrastructure needs; and

- considering different types of pollution.

NPPG states that a health impact assessment (HIA) is a useful tool to use where there are expected to be significant impacts on health and wellbeing as a result of a development.

#### Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023

The Bill makes a range of legislative changes associated with the Government’s “levelling up” agenda, which intends to reduce geographical, economic, social and health inequalities. The amendment included:

*In the course of preparing a statement of levelling-up missions, the Minister of the Crown must have regard to—*

*(a) the importance of the levelling-up missions in the statement (taken as a whole) addressing both economic and social disparities in opportunities or outcomes, and*

*(b) the needs of rural areas.*

Many of these changes were foreshadowed in the February 2022 White Paper ‘[Levelling Up the United Kingdom](#)’. Health and well-being are quoted in the paper as “the very essence of levelling up” and an overarching mission across the levelling up agenda as it is affected by a variety of different aspects of lives such as physical and mental health, jobs, community relationships and the environment.

The paper sets two core missions relating to health and well-being:

- By 2030, the gap in Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) between local areas where it is highest and lowest will have narrowed, and by 2035 HLE will rise by five years.
- By 2030, well-being will have improved in every area of the UK, with the gap between top performing and other areas closing.

## **3.2 Further policy**

#### Health and Social Care Act (2012)

Under the Health and Social Care Act (2012) it became a statutory responsibility of councils and clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) to jointly produce a *Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)* of the health and wellbeing needs of their local area. A JSNA is the means by which local leaders work together to understand and agree on the needs of all local people. It informs the joint health and wellbeing strategy setting out their priorities for collective action. Responsibility for the JSNA rests with the Health and Wellbeing Board.

#### The Health and Wellbeing Board

Health and Wellbeing Boards are statutory forums where political, clinical, professional and community leaders from across the care and health system come together to improve the health and wellbeing of their local population and reduce health inequalities.

#### Health Impact Assessments

A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a systematic and flexible tool that can be used to identify the potential health and wellbeing impacts of a policy or project. It can help to assess the impact of any change or amendment to a policy, service, plan, procedure or programme on the health of the population and on the distribution of those effects within the

population, particularly within vulnerable groups. Undertaking an HIA produces information on how negative impacts on health can be reduced and positive health gains can be encouraged.

Any prospective HIA applicable to development in the county will have to take these factors into account, alongside other broader factors such as the availability of green and open spaces, safe walking and cycling routes and employment opportunities.

A [Health Impact Assessment Guide 2020](#) has been published by Public Health England to ensure that HIAs are properly conducted and will ultimately contribute to reducing health inequalities. The HIA process is systematic and scalable and can be applied to different types of projects and sectors. It helps to drive a Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach by explicitly raising awareness of health and wellbeing amongst policy-makers in all sectors. The process uses the wider determinants of health as a lens through which to assess the impact of policies or projects on people's health and has five steps: *screening, scoping, appraisal of the evidence, recommendations and reporting, and review and reflection*. A consideration of health inequalities is an integral part of the process. There are three distinct types of HIA, which include; a *prospective HIA* – conducted at the start of a project, proposal or plan, a *concurrent HIA* – conducted alongside the production of a project, proposal or plan, and a *retrospective HIA* – conducted after a project, proposal or plan is concluded. There are also three forms of HIA; a *desktop HIA*, *rapid HIA*, and *comprehensive HIA*, each taking a different amount of time and resources.

### Planning Obligations

Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 enables a local planning authority to enter into a negotiated legal agreement – a planning obligation – to mitigate the impact of a specific development to make it acceptable in planning terms. Even where CIL is charged, the Government considers that there is still a legitimate role for Section 106 agreements to enable a local planning authority to be confident that the specific consequences of a particular development can be mitigated.

Planning obligations may only constitute a reason for granting planning permission if they are:

- necessary to make the development acceptable in planning terms;
- directly related to the development; and
- fairly and reasonably related in scale and kind to the development.

These requirements are set out both as statutory tests in the Community Infrastructure Regulations 2010 (as amended) and as policy tests in the NPPF paragraph 57.

Planning obligations are usually used to secure contributions from the developer for on-site infrastructure needs, including the provision of affordable housing, children's play space, access improvements or sustainable urban drainage systems, as part of the new development, either directly or through monetary.



# 4. Local Policy

## 4.1 Health in the Herefordshire Core Strategy (2011-2031)

The Core Strategy specifically includes 'health' as Objective 2 in the plan which closely relates to its policies on open space and community facilities within the Plan:

*'To improve the health, well-being and quality of life of all residents by ensuring new developments positively contribute towards better access to, provision and use of, improved public open spaces, sport and recreation, education, cultural and health facilities, local food production and ensuring safer communities'.*

### SS1 – Presumption in favour of sustainable development

Aims to secure development that improves the social, economic and environmental conditions in Herefordshire, supporting strong, vibrant and healthy communities, as per national planning policy.

### SC1 – Social and community facilities

The closest policy specifically on health is within *Policy SC1 - Social and community facilities*, which addresses the role that community facilities have in the environment and how their provision contributes to the wellbeing of its people. It is focused on how services from a wide variety of areas all contribute to meeting community needs as well as looking at accessibility across the county. The policy aims to ensure development proposals provide, protect, retain or enhance existing social and community infrastructure as they offer services that are essential for education, health and well-being; support community cohesion and benefit the general quality of life of residents.

### OS1 – Requirement for open space, sports and recreation facilities

### OS2 – Meeting open space, sports and recreation needs

### OS3 – Loss of open space, sports or recreation facilities

These policies recognise the benefits of open space, sports and recreation on the health and well-being of the community and that in order to meet the needs of the community, provision for open space, sports and recreation facilities will be sought.

### MT1 – Traffic management, highway safety and promoting active travel.

Requires developments to incorporate measures to encourage active travel and minimise dependency on the private car. These measures promote healthier ways to travel.

### LD3 – Green infrastructure

The policy recognises that social benefits of green infrastructure include places for leisure, garden food production, recreation, sport and exercise, all of which make a major contribution to health and wellbeing. The policy states that development proposals should protect, manage and plan for the preservation of existing and delivery of new green infrastructure.

## 4.2 County Plan 2020-2024

Herefordshire Council's County Plan 2020-2024 is the key strategic document for the council that outlines the ambitions and objectives over a four year period and highlights how those ambitions will be delivered. The ambitions it sets out fall under three headings:

'Environment', 'Community' and 'Economy'. Under the 'Community' heading, the plan aims to *'strengthen communities to ensure everyone lives well and safely together'* by putting physical and mental health at the heart of everything Herefordshire Council does.

The Plan also lists a number of 'success measures', some of which include:

- making housing more affordable throughout Herefordshire;
- reducing the number of children living in poverty, with tooth decay or obesity;
- reducing the number of households living in fuel poverty; and
- improving community resilience in Herefordshire.

At the time of writing, the council is preparing its new County Plan 2024-28, and recently consulted the public on a new set of commitments for the years ahead. These are set out under the themes of 'People', 'Place' and 'Growth'.

### **4.3 Vision & Objectives**

The Local Plan's (2021-2041) Vision states that by 2024, *"The county will have resilient, well connected communities where new development is beautifully designed and inclusive. The health and wellbeing of the county's residents will be enhanced by everyone having the opportunity to live in a decent home with access to community facilities and services."*

The goal to achieve healthy and sustainable communities is embedded within the Local Plan's objectives. Those of particular relevance include:

- To provide inclusive connectivity, development and infrastructure for all;
- To ensure that all new development supports the health and wellbeing of its occupants in accordance with the Healthy Home Principles;
- To ensure that all residents are well connected to nearby services and facilities for daily requirements;
- To create good quality, attractive places to live and work;
- To support good health and wellbeing, through easy access to open space, sports facilities, and active travel options;
- To ensure the provision of high-quality education easily accessible for all and increase skills and qualifications;
- To ensure residents feel safe in Herefordshire from crime and climate change events; and
- To enhance access to cultural heritage and heritage tourism.

# 5. What are the key issues facing Herefordshire?

## 5.1 Health and wellbeing impacts in Herefordshire

### Access to community facilities

The provision of community facilities across Herefordshire is not evenly spread. Herefordshire is a rural and sparsely populated county, therefore, many residents have to travel long distances to access community facilities. These communities struggle with limited access to health and community infrastructure, digital connectivity such as broadband and access to reliable public transport.

These issues impact all ages. For children, young people and families, it becomes difficult to access basic health facilities such as dental care and doctors. Parents are reliant on cars to access education, which is particularly difficult for parents without access to a car and where public transport is infrequent and expensive in rural areas.

Herefordshire has an increasingly ageing population. Involuntary social isolation and loneliness are more prevalent in rural areas where there is a reliance on private cars to access community facilities and where the opportunity to meet and socialise is restricted due to the poor provision of community facilities such as community centres, village halls and pubs. This also affects young people who are unable to travel and rely on the community facilities in their area.

### Health

There is an increasing rate of obesity across Herefordshire with 31% of adults classified as obese compared to the England average of 25%.

The Covid-19 pandemic contributed to an increase in mental health issues in Herefordshire, in particular young people living with parents.

The cost of living crisis has led to an increase in the price and affordability of food. There has been an increase in the number of people in Herefordshire receiving support from food banks. According to the [Public Health Report 2022](#), as of August 2022, 2,102 vouchers supporting 2,775 adults and 1,398 children were already redeemed. In addition to the increased demand there has also been a reduction in food donations. This leads to concerns over access to fresh and nutritional food for individuals and families, particularly affecting vulnerable populations such as children and the elderly. There is also the psychological stress and emotional strain associated with food insecurity which can have indirect consequences on physical health and immune systems.

### Education

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the health and well-being of young people by providing essential knowledge, skills and resources to make informed decisions, adopt healthy behaviours and prevent health risks. Schools should be accessible for all and encourage active transportation such as walking and cycling. There are 32 Herefordshire Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are in the 25% most deprived in England in terms of children and young people's education and skills. (Understanding Herefordshire, 2029)

These areas are not concentrated in a single geographic location but distributed across the entire county.

These pockets of deprivation throughout Herefordshire indicate the importance of encouraging young people, particularly those from the most deprived area and disadvantaged backgrounds, to have access to good quality schools and be encouraged to engage in education, training and work.

Herefordshire will need to accommodate increased demand arising from development across the plan period. The Local Plan 2021-41 has identified a need for a new special needs education school which will be developed within this plan period.

### Air Quality

It is recognised that air quality is a major environmental factor that can affect human health and PPG states that Local Plans should seek opportunities to actively improve air quality through plan-making and development management decisions.

Public Health England produced a report [Estimation of costs to the NHS and social care due to the health impacts of air pollution](#) on the estimation of costs to the NHS and social care due to the health impacts of air pollution in which they state that “Air pollution is the leading environmental cause of early death – contributing to the equivalent of 5% of all deaths globally. Long term exposure to air pollution is estimated to have an effect equivalent to 29,000 deaths a year in the UK.”

Two air quality management areas (AQMAs) have been identified. Each one was declared due to a breach of the Government's objective for nitrogen dioxide. Both areas are at locations where housing and higher levels of traffic exist in built up areas of Leominster and Hereford. Annual air quality status reports consider all new monitoring data and assess the data against the national objectives.

Local air quality improvements can be achieved through good practices, careful design of neighbourhoods through design codes and enabling easier access to public transport, active travel or other sustainable transport choices. HSC1 requires the minimisation of unsafe levels of indoor or outdoor pollution. It therefore positively supports development which makes provision for the charging of plug-in or ultra-low emission vehicles in both residential and non-residential developments.

### Infrastructure

The timely provision of infrastructure requirements associated with the growth of new homes and jobs is critical to ensuring that the planned area is a place where people want to be – whether to live, work, study or visit. Investment will be required for improvements to existing infrastructure and the provision of new infrastructure to support development growth and the creation of healthy, sustainable communities.

The prospect of more housing or jobs can cause concern about traffic congestion, school places, and loss of green spaces, difficulty getting a GP or hospital appointment, and other vital issues. The only way to deal with these issues is to plan for them in a co-ordinated way in partnership with the relevant infrastructure providers.

The delivery of the right types and levels of infrastructure is essential to support the objectives of increased housing and economic growth and the creation of healthy, sustainable communities. Infrastructure includes:

- highway and transport infrastructure, including new strategic infrastructure for Hereford, public transport services, walking and cycling facilities, electric vehicle charging and parking provision;
- education, community safety, and health and social care;
- emergency and essential services, including waste services;
- green infrastructure and biodiversity enhancement/mitigation;
- safeguarding of the Herefordshire Gloucestershire and Canal;
- open green spaces, recreation, sport and leisure and other community facilities; and
- drainage, flood prevention and protection, utilities, such as water supply and drainage, waste water treatment, gas, electricity and telecommunications.

The provision of adequate services for transport, education, health, leisure and other community needs is a fundamental factor in achieving a high quality of life for residents and with a growing population it is essential that these are planned in such a way that they meet the future demands that are placed within the county. The type and level of infrastructure needed will depend upon the future scale and pattern of development. Funding will come from a variety of sources, including developer contributions and government grants. However, it is important to have realistic expectations about what we can achieve via the planning system and prioritise what is necessary, both to facilitate new development and to sustain it in the longer term. It is also important to be clear about what we cannot do, which is to:

- expect developers to fund solutions for existing infrastructure problems or
- seek the provision of infrastructure over and above that necessary to make the impacts of the planned development acceptable

Developers may be asked to provide contributions for infrastructure in several ways. It could be through the Community Infrastructure Levy, planning obligations in the form of Section 106 legal agreements, or Section 278 highway agreements. Developers also have to comply with any conditions attached to their planning permission.

## 5.2 Local Plan consultations

### Spatial options consultation (January - February 2022)

This consultation focused on the vision and objectives of the local plan and the preferred option for strategic growth in Herefordshire over the 20-year plan period. Consultees were asked if they agreed with the vision and objectives and if the vision and objectives reflect their priorities for the county. Between 63% and 64% answered yes.

For the strategic spatial options, Strategic Option 3: Focus Growth across Hereford and the Market Towns was voted as the preferred option. Keeping the focus on growth in the urban areas was favourable due to these areas already having the facilities and services available to take extra growth.

For the rural options, Rural Areas Option 4: (30%) Focus growth within settlements outside AONBs and conservation areas was voted the preferred option. This is to ensure the protection of the AONB and conservation areas throughout Herefordshire.

A reoccurring theme of comments throughout the consultation relating to healthy communities was:

- The consideration of the need for key services where there is development;
- Consideration of the disabled and elderly in the safety of routes and methods of transport;
- Recognition of new technologies and changing working lifestyle practices;
- 'Right house, right place';

#### Policy options consultation (April – May 2022)

In April to May of last year, the council consulted on various policy options for the different strategic policy areas. Since health was not explicitly made into its own policy in the last core strategy, and with growing awareness of the link between the built environment and health and wellbeing since then, it was important that health was given more importance in the emerging local plan.

To that end, we gave three different options for respondents of the consultation to choose from in order to best ascertain how health could be more at the forefront of planning decisions. The results were:

- 40% said HC1 - Create one strategic policy
- 23% said HC2 - Continue with current policy and address health issues through additional policies
- 37% said HC3 - Include a social and community facilities policy and a separate health policy

Option HC1 'Create one strategic policy' was the most popular of the three options. This preferred option allows health to be considered in terms of providing primary, secondary and tertiary care facilities, and in an integrated way where appropriate, as well as dealing with policies relating to such topics as walkable neighbourhoods which have an important role to play in health outcomes as per Planning Policy Guidance. Both of these elements need to be well informed and supported by public health colleagues. This two-faceted approach enables health outcomes to be considered holistically and these two elements can be mutually enforced.

#### Place shaping consultation (June - July 2022)

This consultation asked consultees to rank, in order of preference, a number of proposed sites for development in Hereford and the market towns and was asked to provide any alternative sites.

Although health was not directly consulted, there is an emphasis on ensuring the provision of community facilities and open space in areas of development. This has been recognised and these have been identified in place shaping policies which will be going to consultation in the summer.

## **5.3 Local Plan evidence base**

### Sustainability Appraisal (SA)

A Sustainability Appraisal (SA) is a statutory requirement of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 and is mandatory for Development Plan Documents. It is designed to ensure that the plan preparation process maximises the contribution that a plan makes to sustainable development and minimises any potential adverse impacts. The SA was commissioned for the Draft Herefordshire Local Plan Regulation 18 consultation stage.

The SA concluded that Policy HSC1: Promoting health and wellbeing is expected to have a significant positive effect on the following SA objectives:

- 3 – (community cohesion and safety) as the policy requires development proposals to be accessible and inclusive to different needs and sets out a wide range of measures to support community cohesion and resilience. It promotes community food growing through provision of allotments, community orchards and local markets, promoting to support healthy foods diets and community cohesion.
- 5 – (access to services, facilities and education) as the policy states that development proposals must protect against the loss of existing facilities and use developer contributions to strengthen, refurbish and/or extend existing facilities, where the need is created by new development. Proposals must seeks to retain and provide new community and health facilities where required, including enhancing access to pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education.
- 6 – (physical and mental health and wellbeing) as the policy encourages improved access to open space, exercise facilities and cycling routes. It also safeguards sports facilities from development, emphasises the long-term management of open spaces, requires homes to have access to natural light, provide year-round thermal comfort and are safe in relation to the risk of fire and minimise unsafe levels of indoor or outdoor pollution. Similarly, promotion of healthy food environments through community food growing will improve diets and people’s connection to nature and their community.

A minor positive effect is likely in relation to SA objectives:

- 1 – (climate change) and 10 (air quality) as there are active travel measures that are likely to contribute to improved air quality and reduced emissions.
- 8 – (employment and reducing inequality and poverty) as the policy seeks to improve education and training provision.
- 9 – (travel) as the policy supports the improved access to walking, cycling and wheeling routes within the county as well as battery powered modes of travel. 11 (biodiversity and geodiversity) and 12 (landscapes and townscapes) as the policy requires the provision of open space with biodiversity net gain and commitment towards avoiding light pollution.

Policy HSC1 requires large scale developments to carry out a Health Impact Assessment to ensure that the health and wellbeing of future residents is maximised. Each strategic housing site allocation in the Local Plan requires this, therefore significant positive effects are likely in relation to SA objective 6 (physical and mental health and wellbeing).

#### Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA)

As with the SA, a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) is a statutory requirement and refers to the assessment of the potential effects of a development plan on one or more sites afforded the highest level of protection in the UK: SPAs and SACs.

The HRA screening found that no ‘likely significant effect’ predicted for Policy HSC1. The policy will not result in development and therefore will not result in significant effects on European sites. The policy will also contribute to the safeguarding of European sites.

### Green and blue infrastructure

The Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy 2023 updates and refreshes the former Green Infrastructure Strategy 2010. Since the publication of the 2010 GI Strategy, the definition of GBI has evolved to incorporate wider environmental and societal assets and benefits. The concept has also become increasingly prevalent in national policy and the wider planning context, including with developers and transport authorities.

The term GBI is also now widely adopted and is used to describe the network of natural and semi-natural features as well as 'blue' assets such as rivers, ponds and lakes. GBI is not limited to traditional green spaces such as parks and can involve various interventions to thread nature into streetscapes or to increase connectivity between assets at various landscape scales.

Public Health England (PHE) highlights that people who have greater exposure to greenspace have a range of more favourable physiological outcomes. The benefits of GBI on people's mental wellbeing should also not be overlooked either, with possibilities to use GBI as an asset for social prescribing within the county as well as the integration of it into our everyday lives.

The Strategy in chapter 5 'People', specifically focuses on how GBI assets provide health and societal benefits, including wider connections to nature for both residents and visitors. There are conclusions here on how GBI can work better for people and communities. These include looking at the public rights of way network, more active travel routes and better provision in particular locations. There are also a number of policy recommendations for improving GBI which will be beneficial to healthy communities and the natural environment. The expansion and improvement of GBI interventions offer the potential to support the delivery of both physical and mental health benefits

### Open Space Assessment 2023

By their nature, open spaces should have a range of facilities to meet the needs of users and encourage and facilitate recreation and healthy lifestyles. They should also reflect a multifunctional network, with different open spaces offering different functions to meet the local and environmental context. [The Open Space Assessment 2023](#) updates the previous 2006 Open Space Study completed 17 years ago. The study assesses all the publicly accessible open space sites in Hereford and the market towns as well as a sample of those in the rural areas. These sites vary in type from:

- amenity greenspace
- natural and semi natural greenspace
- green corridors and chains, civic spaces
- children and young people provision
- allotments and
- cemeteries and graveyards
- (Outdoor sports provision has been assessed in the Outdoor Playing Pitch Assessment)

The study looks at the value to the community, quality and quantity of local open space provision. By gathering this information it allowed an analysis of quality and value standards to be drawn up for Herefordshire. There are also a number of policy recommendations as well as highlighting particular areas that would benefit from improved open space provision. There is also a recommended framework for prioritisation around investment and developer contributions as part of new development. The assessment was



commissioned at the same time as the Green and Blue Infrastructure Study to ensure a joined up approach to this area as we progress the Local Plan.

### Built Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy 2023

[The Built Indoor Sports Facilities Strategy 2023](#) was commissioned to assess the needs of indoor sports across Herefordshire. The assessment looked at village and community halls, sports halls, swimming pools and health and fitness facilities.

Herefordshire has 160 village/community halls with over one-third of the population living within 800 meters of one. However, with the increase in new developments during this next plan period and the increasingly ageing population in Herefordshire, it is likely there will be an increased demand for these facilities. It is important to be capable of adapting to the changing demand and needs across Herefordshire. The council needs to ensure facility stock continues to be fit for the future and viable.

In regards to sports halls, the county is generally well-served in terms of the number and coverage. However, spatially, sports halls are primarily concentrated in urban areas, creating disparities in access for residents in rural areas. There are concerns with the quality of sports halls, highlighting the need for infrastructure enhancements and amenities and the limited availability during peak times, indicating the interest in engaging in sports but the demand is not being met. Ensuring the maintenance and access of sports halls can encourage those who are currently active to remain active and encourage the people who are inactive to 'get active'.

Swimming pools are important for all ages in ensuring regular physical activity amongst all ages. There are good overall levels of accessibility to pools in Herefordshire; 90% of the population lives within a 20-minute drive of a swimming pool. Just over 32% reside within a 20-minute walk. Whilst the overall accessibility in terms of proximity is high, there is still a significant proportion of the population who still need to rely on a car to access these facilities. This limits opportunities for people without personal transportation, impacting their ability to engage in regular physical activity. Swimming pools are operating at over 80%+ capacity for lessons, indicating a clear demand. Adequate provision of swimming lessons is crucial for encouraging healthy lifestyles, particularly among children the quality of pools is below average due to their age and it is recommended to consider investing in the provision and maintenance of the pools to maintain the current pool stock and the demand for the future.

There is an overall good supply of gyms throughout the county, deemed sufficient now and projected to meet the demand up to 2041. This may be due to some residents in the north and east who will access facilities in neighbouring authorities. It is important to ensure that gyms cater to the diverse market segments within the county and remain affordable for all. This ensures that individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds can access and benefit from the fitness facilities, promoting inclusivity and equitable opportunities for physical activity and health improvement.

### Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy 2023

[The Playing Pitch and Outdoor Sports Strategy 2023](#) presents a supply and demand assessment of playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities within Herefordshire and provides a strategic framework to ensure that the provision of outdoor playing pitches meets the needs of residents (both existing and future) and visitors across the local authority.

The assessment looked at all key outdoor sports and associated facilities, including artificial surfaces and the role of informal recreational space in Herefordshire. These included pitches for football, cricket, rugby, tennis, hockey, netball, athletics, cycling and BMX, multi use game areas and other sports. The assessment concluded that there is sufficient capacity of facilities for the assessed sports, although the demand for football pitches is currently not being met. It was recognised that there will be an increased pressure of supply and demand in the future. Ensuring an adequate supply of pitches and facilities for these sports

Therefore, it was recommended that the council must continue to protect and enhance the existing supply of playing pitches and outdoor sports facilities to meet the current and future needs. Where there is a high demand for certain sports, providing new pitches and facilities is important at the location of where there is an identified need.

## 5.4 Council strategies and further evidence

### Herefordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

The Herefordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) data focuses on four priorities as developed by the Health and Well-being board for the Herefordshire context, namely:

- Giving our children a good start in life by maintaining a healthy weight and looking after their teeth
- Supporting people with dementia to remain as independent as possible within their community, ensuring that people are well cared for when nearing the end of life
- Support the development of resilient communities, where people help each other to remain independent and in control of their own lives
- Keeping people warm so they are less likely to develop enduring health problems and become acutely ill when it is cold

These priorities are based on data for the county and show the specific challenges that residents face. Accessibility of health facilities is likely to be a factor behind the need to include a priority about giving **young** people a good start in life particularly in terms of maintaining a healthy weight and receiving dental treatment. A key aspect of this, alongside the availability of, and accessibility to, community and health facilities, is attracting medical and dental staff into the county. At present, the county has the second worst housing affordability rates in the West Midlands region, behind Solihull. A key way of attracting staff into the county is to deliver a decent supply of affordable housing, as well as provide key worker accommodation.

Due to the fact that the county has a particularly **ageing** population, this makes support with dementia and ensuring the residents are given support in general when they are nearing the end of their life an important priority. Despite the age of the population, there is still a below average rate of diagnosis of dementia, which calls into question the accessibility of a network of health and community facilities where this can be diagnosed and dealt with accordingly.

Strong, **resilient** and cohesive communities are present in Herefordshire as set out in the Director of Public Health Report 2019 [Director of Public Health Report 2019](#). The county has a strong sense of community overall as four out of five residents are satisfied with the

area in which they live, and nine out of ten people feel that the members of their community treat each other with dignity and respect. There are high levels of community engagement in the county, as demonstrated by higher than national volunteering rates. A third of adults regularly give unpaid help to a group, club or organisation at least once a month. However, the [JSNA 2021](#) states that there are significant local variations, involuntary social isolation and loneliness can be more prevalent in rural areas, where there is a reliance on private road transport to access services and, increasingly, a lack of places to meet, such as community centres, pubs, or village halls. Equally, people in the city are less likely to feel part of a community. A sense of community belonging is lower in Hereford City among deprived households and among those who have lived in Herefordshire for less than 10 years.

There is a disproportionately higher number of houses which were built before 1900 (39% compared to 8% nationally), this makes it more difficult to ensure that the house is well insulated which causes health problems due to the low temperatures, particularly problematic during cold weather spells. Moreover, 17% of households in the county live in fuel poverty (13% nationally). This is likely to be due to the fact that more houses were built before 1900 than the national average. Also, fewer properties are not connected to Mains gas compared to nationally (69% to 87% nationally). **Fuel poverty** affects rural areas and private sector stock more with the highest concentrations of fuel poverties in the private housing stock found in the rural wards of Birch, Old Gore and Golden Valley South. These figures were taken from JSNA findings taken in December 2021. Due to global factors, the percentage of households in fuel poverty is likely to be higher.

### Herefordshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023 – 2033

[The Herefordshire Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2023-2033](#) is a statutory requirement for the council which sets out the approach taken by the council to improve the health and well-being needs of the population, which were identified through the JSNA.

The Core Priorities are:

- Best start in life for children
- Good mental wellbeing throughout life

The majority of work to promote the best start in life is through the local delivery of the Healthy Child programme, as well as in other statutory settings such as early year's providers and schools.

The main commissioning/delivery mechanism for good mental wellbeing, is through the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Mental Health Collaborative. The Collaborative has a duty, as required by the NHS Long-term Plan, to secure improvement in current secondary/tertiary care services, it has, through the reallocation of existing resources, been able to initiate new ways of working

Supporting priorities are:

- Improving access to local services:
- Support people to live and age well:
- Good work for everyone:
- Support those with complex vulnerabilities:
- Improve housing / reduce homelessness:
- Reducing our carbon footprint

This strategy has a role in reducing inequalities by addressing the wider issues that affect health, including housing, employment, and crime. Employing community-based approaches needs to be driven by partnerships at a place level involving the council, health services, the voluntary sector, police, public sector employers and businesses. As part of plans to review the progress of the strategy during the 10 year term, there will be an opportunity, if deemed appropriate, to switch focus more to the other priorities for a period of time and ensure that the Herefordshire system continues to improve health and wellbeing for all residents.

#### Herefordshire Food Alliance (HFA)

Food is a key driver of health inequalities. These health inequalities include unhealthy diets leading to obesity and diet-related ill health and the least deprived areas struggling to afford or access healthier foods leading to higher rates of food poverty and obesity in these areas. It is evident that issues relating to health are seen across Herefordshire. The ever-changing food system has meant that there is an increased availability of cheap, processed foods and a healthier diet has become more expensive.

It is recognised that consuming locally produced food is a much healthier and more nutritional option and can encourage a healthier diet. Growing food in community gardens/allotments can encourage a healthy diet and improve community engagement, which fosters a sense of community, and promotes social connections and sustainable food practices, overall benefitting the well-being of residents. Local food growing can also provide opportunities for residents to interact with local growers and understand the food they consume.

[Herefordshire Food Alliance \(HFA\)](#) was formed in 2020 and is a partnership between food banks, Borderlands Rural Chaplaincy, the voluntary sector, Herefordshire Council, Farm Herefordshire, NFU Mutual Hereford, farmers, growers and community groups. The vision of the alliance is for:

*‘a thriving and sustainable local food economy which contributes to a healthy lifestyle, healthy communities and a healthy environment’.*

The HFA is a member of the Sustainable Food Places (SFP) and is leading the local implementation of the SFP framework. The SFP is a network of food partnerships with counties across the UK driving innovation and best practice on all aspects of healthy and sustainable food. The framework is split into six key issues:

- Taking a strategic and collaborative approach to good food governance and action
- Building Public awareness, active food citizenship and a local good food movement
- Tackling food poverty, diet-related ill-health and access to affordable healthy food
- Creating a vibrant, prosperous and diverse sustainable food economy
- Transforming catering and food procurement and revitalizing local and sustainable food supply chains
- Tackling the climate and nature emergency through sustainable food and farming and an end to food waste

#### Herefordshire Physical Activity Strategy 2021-2026

The importance of physical activity for individual and community health has been highlighted through the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic which has also exacerbated health inequalities across the UK.

[The Herefordshire Physical Activity Strategy 2021-2026](#) sets out the priorities for physical activity in Herefordshire over the next five years, underpinned by the vision:

*'In Herefordshire, every person has the opportunity to: 'get moving, be active, feel better, keep well and enjoy healthier lives as part of everyday life in their local community'*

In order to challenge and address inactivity in Herefordshire, the shared outcomes are:

- Active Environments – environments that support and facilitate everyday physical activity for everyone
- Active Communities – supported and developed community assets to increase physical activity levels and build community resilience
- Healthy Individuals – decreasing inequalities, increased awareness and capability in our inactive population to change their behaviour and increase physical activity levels long-term
- Partnerships and Collaborative Working - improved partnership working to increase physical activity opportunities and participation across our population

The strategy identified several inclusivity and health issues in Herefordshire:

- 21.3% of the population is inactive.
- The rate of people with Life limiting Conditions is higher than the national average at 19%, compared to 18% nationally
- 38% of people in Herefordshire have at least one long term health condition.
- 64.5% of the adult population in Herefordshire is overweight or obese and 34.7% of children
- Although life expectancy is 83.6 for women and 80.1 for men, those living in the most deprived areas in the county are 1.3 times more likely to die prematurely than those who live in the least deprived areas
- Around 4,300 live in poverty (14% in Herefordshire compared to 20% nationally).
- Approximately 4,900 young people are currently living with a parent with severe mental health issues.
- The most common underlying causes of death pre Covid-19 in Herefordshire were cancer and circulatory system diseases.

It is recognised that these issues are caused by several barriers to participation in physical activity in Herefordshire. The rural nature of the county means that for people living in rural areas of Herefordshire, there is a lack of good transport routes to sports facilities and activities, resulting in reduced physical activity and social isolation for young and old people. This is due to the provision of facilities being prioritised within Hereford City. Ensuring the current community facilities, sports facilities and open spaces are enhanced and protected as well as providing new ones is important in tackling the overall lack of provision for indoor and outdoor sports facilities and new and improved physical infrastructure such as safe walking and cycle paths and open space across the county. To tackle childhood obesity, promoting and encouraging physical activity within a school environment is key.

There is a clear need to do things differently to ensure that those who are inactive have the opportunity and encouragement to make behaviour changes and become active and that those who are currently active have the opportunity to continue to participate and to be able to enjoy the lifestyle benefits that physical activity brings. It is therefore important that all residents have access to open spaces and sports facilities to encourage

individuals and communities to engage in physical activity and improve their overall health and wellbeing.

#### Dark skies

Not only does light pollution disturb the natural rhythms of wildlife, but it also has negative impacts on our physical and mental health. Studies show that exposure to light at night can disrupt our body's production of melatonin, a brain hormone best known for its daily role in helping us to sleep. Light pollution can also impact our connection to nature and the natural world, which is an important aspect of mental health and well-being. Herefordshire has the 'third most pristine dark skies in England' according to CPRE's Night Blight report.

Herefordshire has made lots of progress in ensuring our dark skies are protected. In 2016 Herefordshire Council completed a project to replace the majority of the 12,000 council-owned lights with LEDs and several Neighbourhood Development Plans (NDPs) have incorporated dark sky policies into their plans.

The rurality and characteristics of Herefordshire are particularly important and appreciated by local people and visitors, therefore, it is important that developments preserve and protect our dark skies.

#### Digital technology

Improving digital connectivity is a national and local priority and is particularly important to our rural communities. It can also contribute towards reducing the need to travel. The Government has set a target of achieving 5G coverage for the majority of the population by 2027 and full fibre connectivity across the whole country by 2033. Enhanced digital connectivity can offer significant benefits to Herefordshire and developments that take steps to improve connectivity for residents and businesses will be encouraged. There are parts of Herefordshire which make online accessibility difficult and these relate to poor signals, availability of Wi-Fi and geographical accessibility to nearby community facilities with online technology.

At the time of writing, the council's Digital, Data and Technology Strategy 2024 - 2028 is being prepared and is expected to be finalised in Spring 2024. The draft strategy sets out an agreed set of 'ambitions' under the headings of 'People', 'Data' and 'Cyber Security' to guide strategic decision making in the design, sourcing and implementation of digital technology in Herefordshire.

Developments can take advantage of upgrades in technology to improve areas such as; energy efficiency, flexibility of business space, and accessibility to telecommunications and internet services across the county. Further, residential connection networks have the potential to improve the quality of life for residents with different types of needs.

Fastershire is a partnership between Herefordshire Council, Gloucestershire County Council and national Government. This is part of a commitment to the digital transformation of Herefordshire, which is vital for the future of the local economy and those who live and work in the community. Since its inception in 2011, Fastershire has transformed superfast broadband speeds from nearly zero per cent to an impressive 94.75% of Herefordshire premises, now enjoying access to speeds exceeding 30Mbps, benefiting over 11,000 homes and businesses with ultra-fast connectivity. Fastershire is still ongoing with projects and grants to ensure all households and businesses in Herefordshire benefit.

### Electric Vehicle charging

An electric vehicle strategy for Herefordshire Council is being developed and will form part of the council's Local Transport Plan once reviewed and adopted. There is no budget allocated to the installation of electric vehicle charge points. All installations currently rely on government funding.

There are currently electric vehicle charge points in council car parks in most of the counties market towns and the city, as well as in supermarket car parks, garages and some businesses. Plans to increase the provision of public charge points across the county are being developed including a concession contract with the charge point operator Wenea that will result in a significant increase in charge points in council car parks; and plans for on-street charge points which are being developed with help from Midlands Connect and supported by government funding. Works to install public charge points in the car parks and on-street are expected to start in 2024 and continue over a number of years.

### Healthy Homes Principles

The Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) have developed a set of basic [principles](#) which together define what constitutes a healthy home and neighbourhood. These evidence-based principles are the absolute minimum the public expects from the home they live in to enable them to live healthily. The TCPA is campaigning for the principles to be translated into law as a set of minimum common sense standards that all new homes would have to meet. A number of local authorities in England have also chosen to adopt the principles and apply them to new development through local policy.

## 6. Preferred policy direction

The Local Plan will replace the existing [Core Strategy](#) and will guide development up to 2041. This section of the background paper will set out Herefordshire Council's preferred approach to the formation of the *Healthy and Sustainable Communities* strategic policies.

As previously discussed, healthy and sustainable communities covers a wide range of topic areas, all of which should be addressed in planning policy. There are four distinct policies within this section: *Policy HSC1 – Promoting Health and Wellbeing*; *Policy HSC2 - Infrastructure Delivery*; *Policy HSC3 – Green & Blue Infrastructure*; and *Policy HSC4: Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal*.

### **Policy HSC1: Promoting health and wellbeing**

This policy is split into five sections: i. *community facilities*; ii. *health*; iii. *open space and sports facilities*; iv. *dark skies*; and v. *education and training*. The first section includes four criteria, the first of which requires development to “provide new community and health facilities which reflect the needs of the local population”, to carefully consider “accessibility and inclusivity” in the design of new facilities, and employ measures “to tackle social and health issues including tackling health inequalities”.

Developers should also “protect against the loss of existing facilities” and “refurbish and/or extend these”, where necessary. The policy also encourages “the co-location and dual-use of various facilities” to maximise resource efficiency and improve accessibility of a variety of services. The policy requires developers to “secure the long-term management of facilities”. Having easy access to local health services and community facilities is important for supporting people's

wellbeing as well as physical health. Co-locating facilities encourages more frequent journeys to the same location thus increasing social contact between residents, which is known to improve wellbeing.

The next section within Policy HSC1 focusses on measures that directly support people's health and wellbeing, such as by requiring developers to ensure good access *"to open space, sport and exercise facilities, walking, cycling and wheeling routes and natural environments"* and to *"ensure that habitable rooms have access to natural light, year-round thermal comfort, are safe in relation to the risk of fire and minimise unsafe levels of indoor or outdoor pollution"*, and to *"pay regard to the safe and accessible storage of waste"*. The link between each of these factors and people's health is well-established by the evidence (including the Town & Country Planning Association's evidenced-based Healthy homes Principles) and therefore, by requiring developers to address them, we can ensure that new development has a positive impact on people's health and wellbeing. The policy wording in this section also requires developers to assess the impact of their development on people's health by conducting a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) and also to ensure that waste is stored safely.

The third section of the policy requires developments to provide *"multi-functional open space...close to new and existing residents' homes"* which is *"accessible and inclusive to suit everyone's needs"*. The policy also requires development to *"protect against the loss of open space"*, to *"promote healthy food environments"*, to *"mitigate impact arising from new development on sports facilities through developer contributions"* and *"ensure that the long-term management of open space and sport facilities"* is secured. There is a wealth of evidence that demonstrates how having good access to open space can improve people's health and wellbeing as people living close to these spaces are more likely to exercise regularly. Open spaces are often under threat from development and therefore it is very important to ensure they are protected through strong planning policy. Development can provide the spaces for people to grow food safely and sustainably, such as through the provision of new allotment spaces close to people's homes.

Herefordshire is well known for its dark skies due to a lack of light pollution in many areas. The fourth section of this policy limits development to levels of lighting required to minimise crime and fear of crime. Artificial lighting can disrupt wildlife, particularly in rural areas, and also impact on people's enjoyment of the dark skies and the natural environment.

Lastly, the fifth section of Policy HSC1 requires development to *"ensure that early years, primary, secondary and special education provision are easily accessible for all children"* and to *"facilitate further and higher education learning for all"*. Ensuring access to the educational facilities for all is an important contributor to people's wellbeing and provides improved life opportunities.

## **Policy HSC2: Infrastructure delivery**

The second *Healthy and Sustainable Communities* strategic policy is *Policy HSC2: Infrastructure Delivery*. The provision of high quality infrastructure, such as active travel routes, public transport, roads all play an important role in ensuring that communities are able to access essential services needed to maintain a healthy life on a daily basis.

## **Policy HSC3: Green & blue infrastructure**

The third policy is *Policy HSC3: Green & Blue Infrastructure*. There is a wealth of evidence demonstrating the link between the provision of high quality, multi-functional green and blue infrastructure (GBI) close to where people live and people's health and wellbeing. The policy requires development to *"take forward the objectives and priorities presented in the most recent*



*Herefordshire Green and Blue Infrastructure Strategy*”, which makes a range of recommendations for the improvement of multifunctional green and blue infrastructure across the county based upon extensive evidence. This is to ensure that improvements to green and blue infrastructure through the planning process reflect its character, are targeted to areas where there are deficiencies, and that provide connectivity for people and wildlife.

Developers are expected to *“create new and protect and enhance existing green and blue infrastructure on-site, and link to existing green and blue infrastructure nearby”*. Green and blue infrastructure delivers most benefits when it is planned for at both the macro and micro scales. This policy criterion therefore encourages developers to design new GBI in this way, by considering how it joins up and links with existing GBI nearby. Developments should also design GBI to provide *“better links between urban and rural landscapes, creating accessible and attractive places for communities to make regular contact with the natural environment”*. GBI should be integral to active travel routes and, if designed carefully, can ensure good access to rural areas and the natural environment for people living in urban areas, which is vital for people’s health and wellbeing.

The fourth criterion states that development should *“address the aspects of ‘People’, ‘Place’ and ‘Nature’... and ensure that green and blue infrastructure is designed to support the delivery of wider landscape-scale green networks including through tree planting, Biodiversity Net Gain enhancements and natural and semi-natural green space provision”*. The recently published Herefordshire Green & Blue Infrastructure Strategy is centred on the themes of ‘People’, ‘Place’ and ‘Nature’ and identifies opportunities to improve the way in which the county’s green and blue infrastructure delivers benefits across these. As mentioned above, GBI should be designed to support the delivery of green networks at the landscape-scale as this better supports wildlife.

The fifth criterion states that developments are expected to *“support the provision of active travel networks, and be located within easy walking distance of green space, wherever possible. Where it is not possible to locate development close to existing green spaces, new high quality accessible and multifunctional green spaces should be created nearby”*. This is to ensure equitable access to well-maintained green spaces for all. Living within close proximity to good quality green spaces has been shown to improve health and wellbeing.

The sixth criterion states that developments should *“allow...for blue infrastructure to take account of existing wetland habitats, watercourses and ground water, as well as new proposals for surface and foul water drainage”*. In the same way that green infrastructure should be designed to integrate with existing wider-scale green networks, for it to function properly, blue infrastructure introduced as part of new development should be designed to connect with existing blue infrastructure features.

The seventh criterion states that developments should *“incorporate nature based solutions to minimise surface-water runoff”*. By incorporating Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) into their design, development can mitigate the impact of flooding events.

The policy also requires development to *“design green and blue infrastructure in such a way as to provide formal and informal sport, recreation and play, and as an outdoor education resource”*. One function of GBI can be to provide the space for people to exercise and play, which is fundamental for supporting a healthy lifestyle. Having areas for sport close to where people live can encourage more people to stay active.

Lastly, this policy requires developers to put in place measures to support the long-term management and maintenance of GBI on-site. This is vital as the benefits of GBI can be entirely lost if it is left unattended or unmanaged.

## Policy HSC4: Herefordshire & Gloucestershire Canal

Policy HSC4: Herefordshire and Gloucestershire Canal has been included in this policy section as the canal is considered to be green-blue infrastructure with the potential to provide health and wellbeing benefits to Herefordshire's residents and visitors, once delivered. This policy safeguards the historic route of the canal so it is not prejudiced by development. Any development that does cross the safeguarded corridor will be required to incorporate land for the canal's restoration. However, the policy does allow for development that would prevent the restoration of any section of the canal in exceptional circumstances where the benefits of doing so outweigh its safeguarding. In this instance, a rerouting of the canal must be agreed prior to permission being granted. Lastly the policy provides some flexibility for sections of the canal route to be developed for its *"recreational and nature conservation potential, in particular, the use of the old line of the canal for walking, cycling and interpretation"*. It is recognised that it may be impossible to restore some sections of the canal and therefore the policy allows for sections to be developed in this way.

# 7. Next steps for the Local Plan

This paper highlights that the collaboration between health and planning is essential. Effective planning can shape environments that either support or hinder public health outcomes. Health considerations should inform planning decisions to ensure that communities are designed in ways that support healthy lifestyles and reduce health disparities. By integrating health considerations into the planning processes, such as designing well connected communities, accessible green spaces and equitable access to healthcare facilities, health challenges and promoting well being can be proactively addressed. The Local Plan serves as a blueprint for development and health has been integrated throughout.

To continue this collaboration, while at the time of writing it is yet to be confirmed, a health impact assessment of the draft Local Plan could be carried out to ascertain the potential health and wellbeing impacts of the new Local Plan. Its findings may then be used to support the strategic planning team to make alterations to policy that best prevent ill-health, promote good health and reduce health inequalities through development. Some examples of similar health impact assessments include:

- [Northumberland County Council Local Plan Health Impact Assessment;](#)
- [Ashfield District Council Local Plan Health impact Assessment;](#) and
- [South Oxfordshire Local Plan Health Impact Assessment.](#)

## 7.1 Redraft of evidence

### Infrastructure Delivery Plan

An Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) was published in association with the adopted Local Plan back in 2015. This accompanied the policies at the time. As part of the preparation of the new Local Plan, we will continue to gather further evidence on what new or improved infrastructure will be required to support growth over the period to 2041.

Eventually, the new Local Plan will be informed by an updated IDP which identifies the new or improved infrastructure necessary for sustainable housing growth and demonstrates that

the required items can be delivered in a timely manner over the plan period, either through direct provision or through developer contributions. Work is ongoing in terms of the viability assessment to ensure that the level of infrastructure provision needed to support development, together with other planning policy requirements, does not undermine the deliverability of the Local Plan. This work will continue as the Local Plan progresses to adoption.

The Infrastructure Delivery Plan (IDP) will be a 'live' evidence document and will be kept up-to-date to reflect any changes in circumstances regarding the requirement for infrastructure. Work will begin on this following the Regulation 18 consultation. The IDP forms an integral part of the evidence base supporting the Local Plan and meets part of the requirement for delivery strategies to accompany the production of local plans as set out in the NPPF and Planning Practice Guidance.

#### Priorities for developer contributions

The amount of on-site infrastructure and contributions that the new Local Plan can require of development are affected by the financial viability of development – what the development can afford to provide. The amount of on-site infrastructure and contributions required should not undermine the deliverability of the development. The Government considers that 15-20% of gross development value may provide a suitable return to developers as set out in the [Viability PPG Guidance](#)

The financial viability of development and the amount that it can afford to contribute towards infrastructure improvements are affected by a number of issues including: the cost of construction; the type and number of specific on-site requirements for development to meet; the value of land that is being developed; and the sale price of the development once it has been completed. The Council's expectations in the new Local Plan must be clearly set out so that developers do not pay too much for a piece of land and then calculate that they cannot afford to meet our policy requirements. The Government is clear that it is the responsibility of local planning authorities, in collaboration with the local community, developers and other stakeholders, to create realistic, deliverable policies.

A Viability assessment has been prepared as part of the preparation of the Local Plan to ensure that our policy requirements are set at a level that is viable for development to go ahead. The Government expects all viability assessments, including any undertaken at the plan-making stage, to be publicly available as per NPPF paragraph 58.

Assessing the viability of plans does not require individual testing of every site allocation or assurance that individual sites are viable. The Council can use site typologies to determine viability during the plan-making process. Average costs and values would be used to make assumptions about how the viability of each type of site would be affected by all the relevant policy requirements.

All our planning policy requirements will be important to residents and local communities, but no requirement should be so high that it makes development unviable. Consequently, if one policy requirement is raised, another may need to be reduced.