

Place and Health

How the planning system can build healthy environments: the evidence

Neighbourhood design and housing

Planning can improve health and wellbeing by ensuring access to greenspace and services, providing opportunities for physical activity and social connection, and developing spaces that are safe and free of pollution. Appropriate housing supply to meet the needs of the local population is also crucial. The evidence tells us that:

- Greater neighbourhood provision of **public parks** from childhood through to adulthood may help to slow down the rate of cognitive decline in later life.ⁱ
- **Food growing** has multiple benefits for health, incl. increased fruit and vegetable consumption and better diet; provision of low-impact exercise and improved physical health; a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing; improved air quality; and reduced social isolationⁱⁱ.
- **Housing supply**, especially social housing and the quality of housing, have significant impacts on healthⁱⁱⁱ. Targets for social housing should be maintained as there is a shortage of social housing and without targets supply could be further affected.
- **Community facilities** should be safeguarded within Local Development Plans as they have a protective effect on the health and wellbeing of communities and provide a space for increased connectedness and community cohesion^{iv}.

The environment: food, alcohol and tobacco

The food environment is the “space in which a range of food options open up to consumers based on food availability, accessibility, affordability and appeal.”^v The food environment, as well as the availability of other health-harming activities and substances, is a major determinant of long-term health, influencing people’s ability to lead healthy lifestyles^{vi}.

- Diet-related health is poor overall in Scotland, but inequalities exist: 32% of adults living in the **most deprived areas** are obese, compared to just 20% in the least deprived areas^{vii}. The availability of fast food outlets is linked with increasing level of area deprivation^{viii,ix}.
- The House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee called for planning law reform to enable local authorities to limit the proliferation of **unhealthy food outlets**^x.
- Planning should redress unequal **access to healthy foods**. Research found that essential food items can cost up to 3 times as much in rural and deprived areas^{xi}.
- Recent research looking at the **clustering of alcohol, fast food, tobacco and gambling outlets** shows that deprived neighbourhoods are disproportionately affected^{xii}.
- **In Scotland, neighbourhoods with the most alcohol outlets had double the alcohol-related death rate, almost double the alcohol-related hospitalisation rate, and four times the crime rate than neighbourhoods with the least outlets**^{xiii}.
- There are also 40% more places to buy alcohol in the most deprived areas^{xiv}.
- Those living in areas with a greater availability of **tobacco** outlets are more likely to start and/or sustain smoking, and less likely to quit.^{xv}

Sustainable and inclusive growth

A healthy place must include accessible local industries, services and facilities, thus helping to secure employment, enterprise and training opportunities for residents and attracting key workers^{xvi}. It is also key for Scotland’s future food security and sustainability that prime agricultural land is given the highest levels of protection against development (especially in the context of uncertainties that Brexit brings).

- Planning has a key role to play in **protecting and promoting the local economy**. Local businesses are key for thriving communities. For example, £10 spent in a local food outlet is actually worth £25 to the local economy, as it gets re-spent locally several times^{xvii}.
- The Planning process should also take cognisance of the impact of **health-harming venues** such as betting shops, fast food outlets (stationary and mobile), and alcohol

outlets. Although some of these may fall under the remit of Licensing, the Planning Bill offers us an opportunity to have some influence over the specifying of particular forms of retail or other developments which should be restricted. The House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee stressed that health should be made a licensing objective for local authorities^{xviii}.

Transport

It is important to bring together Spatial and Transport planning. It is essential that places are planned, located and designed strategically to ensure good connectivity between residential areas and employment, retail, services and amenities, predominantly by active travel modes and public transport.

- People's transport choices are influenced by the distance that they have to travel to conduct their daily routines as well as the way in which they perceive their physical environment. **Improving the quality of the built environment and improving the connections between places** can encourage people to make more sustainable travel choices that impact positively on their health such as walking and cycling. It is also important to note that well-connected and attractive public places and streets can encourage people to exercise and make active travel choices.
- The planning process can help to develop **walkable neighbourhoods** by creating high connectivity (for example, easy routes between destinations), good pedestrian and cycling facilities (such as good street design, lighting, well-maintained pavements, cycle routes, traffic calming measures), and good accessibility (easily reached destinations and facilities, greenspace and transport links)^{xix}.
- Physical activity can improve mental health and reduce the risk of obesity, coronary heart disease, type 2 diabetes and certain cancers^{xx}.

Signatories and contacts^{xxi}

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ⁱ Cherrie, M. P., Shortt, N. K., Mitchell, R. J., Taylor, A. M., Redmond, P., Thompson, C. W., ... & Pearce, J. R. (2018). Green space and cognitive ageing: A retrospective life course analysis in the Lothian Birth Cohort 1936. *Social Science & Medicine*, 196, 56-65.

ⁱⁱ https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/the_benefits_of_gardening_and_food_growing/

ⁱⁱⁱ https://www.scotphn.net/wp-content/uploads/private/2013_02_26_HIA_of_Housing_Improvements_Guide1.pdf and https://www.scotphn.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/2017_06_27-FINAL-SHIIAN-50-000-New-Homes-HIA-Report-ES.pdf

^{iv} https://www.scotphn.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/SIIAN_Community_Venues_and_Health_Guide1.pdf

^v Food Foundation (2016) Force-Fed <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/force-fed/>

^{vi} Townshend, T. & Lake, A. (2017), Obesogenic environments: current evidence of the built and food environments

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/28449616> & NHS Health Scotland (2016), Place and Communities

<http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1088/27414-place-and-communities-06-16.pdf>

^{vii} Food Standards Scotland (2018) Situation Report: The Scottish Diet: It Needs to Change, 2018 Update

^{viii} Fraser, L.K., et al. (2010) The geography of food outlets: A review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*.

^{ix} Public Health England (2018) Obesity and Environment. Density of fast food outlets. 2018064.

^x Health and Social Care Committee (2018) Childhood obesity: Time for action. Eight report of session 2017-19

^{xi} Citizens Advice Bureau Dumfries & Galloway (2017), Cost of Living in Dumfries & Galloway

^{xii} Macdonald, L., Olsen, J. R., Shortt, N. K., & Ellaway, A. (2018). Do 'environmental bads' such as alcohol, fast food, tobacco, and gambling outlets cluster and co-locate in more deprived areas in Glasgow City, Scotland?. *Health & place*, 51, 224-231.

^{xiii} AFS and the Centre for Research on Environment, Society and Health (2018). [Alcohol Outlet Availability and Harm in Scotland](#)

^{xiv} AFS and the Centre for Research on Environment, Society and Health (2018). [Alcohol Outlet Availability and Harm in Scotland](#)

^{xv} Pearce, J., Rind, E., Shortt, N., Tisch, C., & Mitchell, R. (2015). Tobacco retail environments and social inequalities in individual-level smoking and cessation among Scottish adults. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*, 18(2), 138-146.

^{xvi} Town and Countryside Planning Association (2017), Creating health-promoting environments.

^{xvii} Nourish Scotland (2014), Growing the Local Food Economy in Scotland & New Economics Foundation and The Countryside Agency (2002), The Money Trail: Measuring your impact on the local economy using LM3.

^{xviii} Health and Social Care Committee (2018) Childhood obesity: Time for action. Eight report of the session 2017-19.

^{xix} Glasgow Centre for Population Health (2013). The built environment and health: an evidence review.

^{xx} Glasgow Centre for Population Health (2013). The built environment and health: an evidence review.

^{xxi} <https://vhscotland.org.uk/hpon-planning-scotland-bill/>