A **Health in All Policies** approach to place-shaping

Delivering on Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022 - 2026

Foreword

An introduction from the Director of Public Health

Where we live, work and socialise plays an important role in our health. Both the built and natural environment make up part of the wider determinants of health and influence people's physical and mental health across the life course and can impact on health inequalities. The quality of the environment can influence many aspects of people's lives, from access to education, employment, healthcare and green and blue spaces to social connections within a neighbourhood, quality and affordability of housing, food production and availability, exposure to air, noise, and light pollution and safe sustainable transport including opportunities for active travel. The planning and management of places can help promote good health, improve access to services and reduce health inequalities. This is what we refer to as 'place shaping,' which can be defined as the 'creative use of powers and influence to promote the general well-being of a community and its residents'. It focuses on shaping an area's distinctive and unique identity and acts as the voice of the entire community. (1) (2)


Source: ChangeLab Solutions

The factors that influence our health are multiple and complex. Most of these factors lie outside the health and social care system, with these services only accounting for up to 25% of health outcomes. It has been estimated that socio-economic and physical environments determine approximately 60% of health outcomes. These are known as the wider determinants of health. Focusing on wider determinants is essential for improving population health and wellbeing and reducing inequalities. (3)

The King's Fund highlight the following wider health determinants, all of which are included within Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026, as being crucial drivers of population health:

- Spatial planning
- Access to green spaces and leisure
- Transport and active travel
- Built and green environment

- Housing
- Best start in life
- Warmer and safer spaces
- Strong and resilient communities
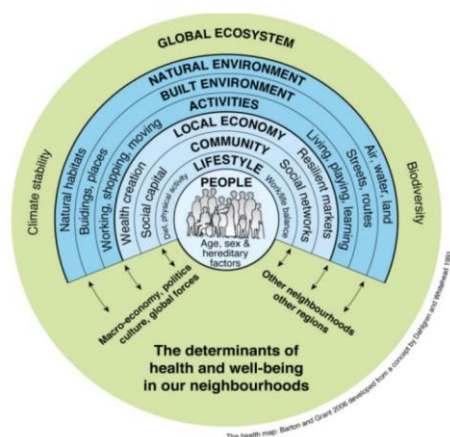
However, in the public and political debate about how to improve health in the UK, the wider determinants are often left out, underestimated, or misunderstood. People tend to think of health as highly individualistic; it's the food we eat and how much we exercise. But this isn't the case, almost every aspect of our lives impacts our health and ultimately how long we will live. The Health Foundation has recently published a document, 'A matter of life and death: explaining the wider determinants of health in the UK' and an accompanying toolkit, 'How to talk about the building blocks of health' (see suggested reading below). (4), (5). This toolkit sets out how we can frame communications to tell a more powerful story about health inequalities.

In Thurrock there are many complex factors that contribute to the widening of health inequalities including a reliance on cars; poor air quality in parts of the Borough; unequal access to green and blue spaces; poor public transport and walking and cycling infrastructure; uneven distribution of affordable healthy food options; and lack of affordable housing. Public Health's role is to influence the wider determinants to support a reduction in health inequalities through working in partnership with a range of stakeholders, across a number of systems including housing, local plan, planning and design, regeneration and transport.

The Health in All Policies (HiAP) approach is central to achieving this collaborative place-based approach which builds on the strengths of Public Health and emphasises the reach and influence of local government's many other functions. (6) The 'Framework for creating change' (below) is synthesised from review of multiple policy and guidance documents from across the planning and health sectors which identified similar themes presented in a variety of ways. The framework encapsulates the key themes related to place-shaping: Neighbourhood Design, Housing, Food Systems, Natural

Source: Adapted from Merton Council APHR, 2022/23

Environments and Transportation Networks. The model below represents the areas where design, housing, local plan, planning, regeneration, transport, leisure and recreation, environmental health and communities can have the most impact for health and wellbeing. Climate change, sustainability and health underpin each of the framework topics, the infographic above illustrates the interconnectedness of health and climate. We recognise that there are synergies across and between the five topics contained within the framework and have added relevant evidence, data and guidance under the topic which is most relevant. We have utilised the Framework icons to emphasis where issues are cross-cutting.

Framework for creating change
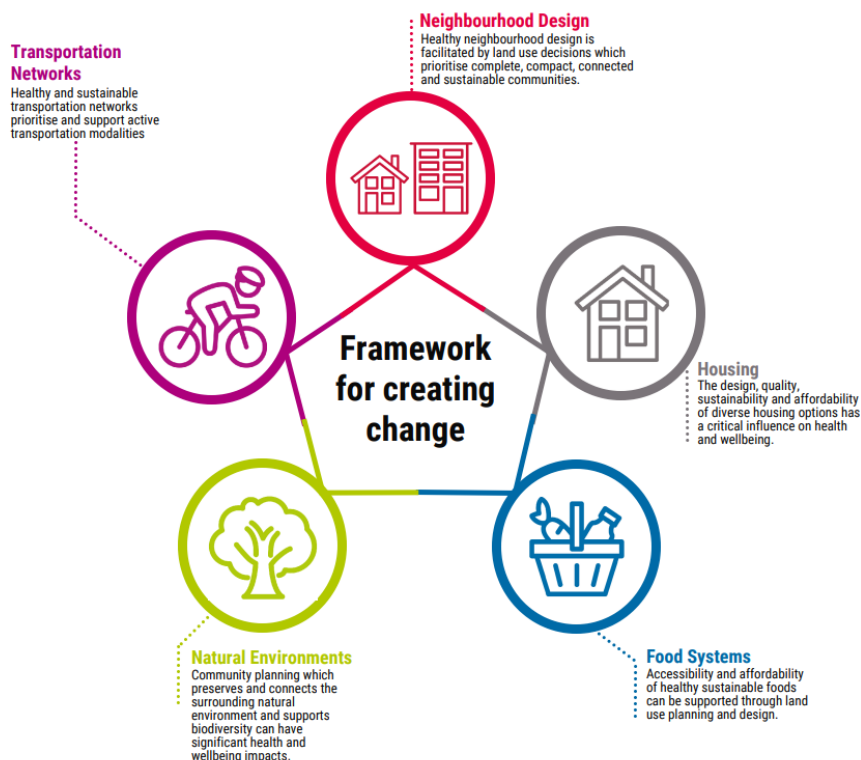
Source: British Columbia Centre for Disease Control.
Healthy Built Environment Linkages Toolkit: making the links between design, planning and health, 2018

This report provides an overview of the health and community profile in Thurrock and then presents each of the five framework topics in turn, outlining: key issues, local picture, resident voice, evidence base and recommendations, which should be considered over the short, medium and long-term. 'Spotlight' boxes draw attention to specific examples of policy, practice, evidence or local issues across the framework areas, whilst 'Focus On climate change and sustainability' boxes highlight the key related issues and opportunities. There is a further reading section at the end of the report.

This guidance document represents our aspirations for healthy place-shaping for existing and future residents, as set out in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2022-2026). It is deliberately ambitious to enable us to strive for meaningful change in policy, guidance and practice, recognising that such change can only be achieved intergenerationally. This guidance is aimed at those involved in place-shaping in Thurrock and includes the Place Leadership & Growth Board, Public Health, community development, strategic planners (Local Plan), development management (Planning), housing, transport, highways, regeneration, design, sustainability, leisure and recreation, the community and residents of Thurrock, NHS partners in the ICS, and developers, house builders and project promoters. It sets out achievable recommendations for delivery in the short, medium and long term, which support the overall vision whilst acknowledging the Council's current financial position.

Dr Jo Broadbent
Director of Public Health

Thurrock Overview

Thurrock has a population of 175,000 and is growing. It is a relatively young place, with an average age of 36.9 years old compared to the England average of 40.2 years old. A quarter of residents are aged under 18 years. White British is the most common ethnicity reported by Thurrock residents at 77% of the population. The second largest ethnic group is Black/African/Caribbean and Black British at 9% followed by all other White at 7%. (7) It is estimated that 3,120 people have a learning disability, which accounts for just under 2% of the Thurrock population.

The most recent deprivation scores show that Thurrock has several areas that fall within the 10% most deprived locations in the country, but also some areas that fall within the most affluent in the country.

The more deprived areas are mainly located in and around Tilbury, with further areas in South Ockendon, Grays and areas of Corringham also suffering from higher levels of deprivation. Less deprived areas tend to be found in Thurrock's more rural locations, around South Chafford, and in some areas to the north of Grays. Just under a fifth (18.6%) of children live in poverty, and there is a high percentage of older people living in deprivation[1].

	Thurrock	East of England	England
Male life expectancy	78.3	80.2	79.4
Female life expectancy	82.6	83.8	83.1
Premature (<75) mortality rate Per 100,000	351.9	303.5	336.5
Cancer (<75) mortality rate Per 100,000	137.0	122.6	129.2
CVD mortality rate Per 100,000	74.5	62.9	70.4
% of people in employment (16-64 yrs)	76.1	76.9	75.1
Homelessness - households owed under homelessness reduction act Per 100,000	10.5	10.3	11.3
Violent crime - violence offences Per 1,000	35.5	28.8	29.5
% of adults who smoke	17.5	13.7	13.9
% of adults overweight/obese	69.4	62.3	62.8
Hospital admission rate for alcohol Per 100,000	471	484	519
Learning disability prevalence Per 100,000	348	502	510

Key: Significantly better than the England average / Not significantly different than the England average / Significantly worse than the England average / Lower than the England average

Source: Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Strategy, 2022-2026

There is variation in health outcomes across Thurrock. Life expectancy for both men and women in Thurrock is significantly worse than average for England for both men (78.3 years vs 79.4 years) and women (82.6 years vs 83.1 years). (2). More information about the health and community profile of the Borough can be found in the **Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2026.**

Health Inequalities

Health inequalities are unjust, avoidable and unfair systematic disparities between different groups of people. (8) The work of Public Health focuses on narrowing the gap between the most and least advantaged by trying to remove barriers and create equity. Public Health's primary aim is to create an environment which empowers and enables people and communities to achieve wellbeing across all aspects of their lives, while also addressing systematic health inequalities.
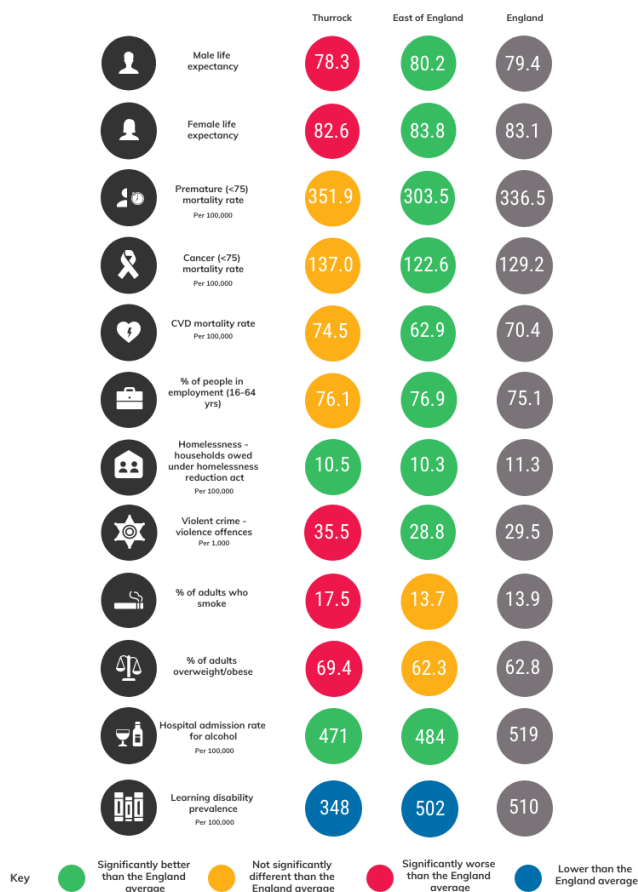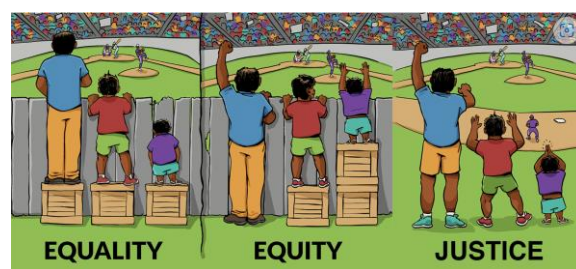
Source: Adapted from Interaction Institution for Social Change

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[1] The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) measures the proportion of children 0 to 15 years, living in income deprived families. The Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index (IDAOPI) measures the proportion of all those aged 60 or over who experience income deprivation. They are subsets of the Income Deprivation Domain which measures the proportion of the population in an area experiencing deprivation relating to low income. The definition of low income used includes both those people that are out-of-work, and those that are in work but who have low earnings (and who satisfy the respective means tests).

Levelling the playing field in Thurrock

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy focuses on levelling the playing field in Thurrock:

Smoking and obesity are key drivers of unequal health outcomes. Both smoking and obesity are significantly worse in Thurrock than across England and drive premature deaths from health conditions such as heart disease.

Around two thirds of people with **long term health conditions** such as high blood pressure and mental ill health are not diagnosed and not receiving support. We know that certain communities have higher rates of these conditions including people living in less affluent areas, men, people with learning disability, young people and older adults, unpaid Carers, certain minority ethnic groups, LGBTQ+ people.

People who felt most lonely and disconnected from their local community prior to COVID-19 in the UK now have even higher levels of loneliness. This includes young people, people living alone, those on low incomes, who are out of work, or living with a mental health condition and / or learning disability.

Residents are concerned about the **ease of seeing a GP**, and we know that access and capacity in Primary Care differs across the Borough, and sometimes within the same ward. **Quality of care** also varies for both physical and mental health conditions.

Educational attainment is generally good across Thurrock, but children who are NEET, have SEND, are Children Looked After or In Need, and from some minority ethnic groups do not achieve the same levels as their peers. While overall, 61% of GCSE pupils in Thurrock achieved 9-4 in 2019, only 10% of pupils with three disadvantages did.

The proportion of **adults in employment, the claimant count and the impact of economic growth** varies between communities in Thurrock. Groups that experience inequality in employment include 18–24-year-olds, those living with a physical or learning disability and those with chronic diseases such as serious mental illness and musculoskeletal conditions.

Housing affordability is a major challenge in Thurrock, with over half of households not being able to purchase a home in the Borough.

The **fear and risk of crime** continues to be a challenge for many community groups. The rates of recorded **violent crimes** are higher in Thurrock compared to England and have risen sharply since 2013. The Thurrock Youth Offending Service are seeing young people with a more entrenched pattern of offending and a greater degree of complexity and risk. National data indicates that 1 in 5 working-age women have experienced sexual violence

Source: Thurrock Health and Wellbeing Strategy, 2022-2026

Local Policy Context

The *Health and Wellbeing Strategy* 2022-2026 focuses on six broad domains aligned to the Council's corporate priorities of **People**, **Place** and **Prosperity** and aims to address the wider determinants of health. (2) The Domains are:

1. Staying Healthier for Longer
2. Building Stronger & Cohesive Communities
3. Person-Led Health and Care
4. Opportunity for All
5. Housing and the Environment
6. Community Safety

Backing Thurrock is a five-year Economic Strategy focused on supporting economic recovery, resilience and growth. The vision is for Thurrock to recover from the economic impact of the pandemic and return to growth that benefits residents, local businesses and the Borough as a whole. It aims to strengthen and grow the local economy so that it is sustainable and inclusive, making Thurrock a more resilient place and positively contribute to securing the well-being of everyone in the community. The current strategy's roadmap action plan is underpinned by three key goals, namely: enabling economic recovery; building resilience and; a return to growth. **(9)**

A refresh of the Backing Thurrock Economic Growth Strategy is currently being undertaken, with a view to publishing the strategy and action plan by late 2023. In parallel to this the **Green Growth Action Plan** is being developed and aims to align economic growth with carbon reduction in Thurrock's key sectors to help realise the UK's net zero ambitions.

*The **Local Plan*** sets out and helps to shape how land uses and places will change and develop in the future. The Local Plan offers a unique opportunity to systematically address some of the wider determinants of health within the Borough. This includes environmental, living and working conditions and the social and community networks which have been identified by Dalgren and Whitehead (1991) and later by Barton and Grant (2006). (10), (11)

In early 2014 the Council began work on a new Local Plan; the intention is to adopt this by the winter of 2025. It will cover the period up to 2040 and will endeavour to deliver circa 32,000 new homes over the course of its lifetime across five identified strategic character areas and within nine potential growth areas.

Part of this work aims to develop a better understanding of these growth areas and Thurrock as a place. The Local Plan team are developing some placemaking intelligence packs which will be supported by the 'live' Ward level health and wellbeing profile cards which the Public Health Intelligence team are creating.

The *Thurrock Design Charter* and *Design Code* act together to promote high-quality design in the Borough and provide clear expectations to planning applicants on design requirements for development. The Thurrock Design Charter sets out the vision for the design code, articulated around a series of high-level objectives and aspirational themes that describe the importance of good design for Thurrock and the Council's vision for the quality of local places. The Design Code itself would provide a set of simple, concise, illustrated design requirements that provide specific and detailed parameters for critical aspects of development for the borough. The purpose of the Charter and Code is both to set an aspirational vision for place quality for Thurrock, and give applicants greater certainty around expectations, hence de-risking the planning process and accelerating the delivery of high-quality homes, streets and places for the Thurrock.

Other key documents

Thurrock Climate Change Strategy - In 2019, Thurrock Council declared a Climate emergency. In response to this, the Local Plan team has commissioned Consultants to develop a Climate Change Strategy for Thurrock. This focuses on six key topics, namely: transport; energy; industry; waste; land use and food systems and; buildings and public estates. The Public Health team has fed into the development of this strategy, highlighting that the health of the planet is inextricably linked to human health and wellbeing and that a healthy planet provides us with our most basic needs:

- fertile land for food production
- safe water to drink
- clean air to breathe

Air Quality Strategy - There are currently 18 Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) across the Borough. Development of a refreshed Air Quality Strategy will commence in 2023 following submission of the Annual Status Report on air quality. The Council has commissioned consultants to carry out a borough-wide air quality model to provide a full and up-to-date image of the distribution of air pollution in the Borough as well as how that is expected to change over the coming years. This modelling exercise will inform the Air Quality Action Plan, enabling targeting of the areas most in need of improvement.

Thurrock Council Transport Strategy 2013 – 2026 is based on a robust evidence base and feedback from residents and key stakeholders. It sets out the aims, objectives and a series of policies for delivering transport improvements in Thurrock. (12)

Aligned to this strategy is *Thurrock Active Travel Needs Assessment*. This Needs Assessment examines the potential for active travel by exploring how the situation currently looks, identifying local needs, and describing factors that should be addressed. It outlines the actions needed to be taken to ensure Thurrock provides a coordinated and effective approach to delivering the physical infrastructure, information and support that will generate the necessary changes required to increase levels of active travel. Linked to this and driven by central Government *"Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs) are used by Local Authorities to identify and prioritise investment for cycling and walking schemes from local funds and relevant national funding streams…"*

The Government has produced guidance for local authorities on preparing Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPs). These plans are intended to help local transport authorities take a long-term approach to identifying and delivering interventions fit for their own local areas. Local authorities are not required to adopt an LCWIP, but the Government has said that it is "keen that as many areas as possible do so". (13) In Thurrock, the LCWIP has been commissioned and is currently under development.

Thurrock Council Housing Strategy 2022 – 2027 sets Thurrock Council's direction and ambitions for housing support and services for the next five years. Through this strategy, the council aims to provide a housing service that delivers on its targets in a human and empathetic way. It recognises that housing and health are intrinsically linked and its vision aligns with the aims and objectives of Domain 5 of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. It sets out eight core principles: What is important to you?; right time, right place, high quality; supports health and wellbeing; minimises bureaucracy; local strength-based solutions; doesn't break the law and meets statutory duties; flexible and adaptable; and focuses on partnership working and collaborations. (14)

Active Place Strategy 2020 identifies a clear strategy to develop improved facilities for residents. It seeks to ensure that Thurrock is connected in such a way that residents can be active in their daily lives and that local communities are connected with key physical activity and cultural destinations. The Strategy is based on a suite of documents including Open Space and Play areas study, Indoor and Built Sports Facilities Strategy, Playing Pitch (and outdoor sport) Strategy, and the Active Travel Strategy. A key aspect of the combined Active Place Strategy is to guide infrastructure developers in understanding the wider needs and opportunities across Thurrock when developing new housing and infrastructure projects. This seeks to ensure that as much as possible, a holistic approach to delivering health and wellbeing outcomes is achieved from new development in the Borough. (15) A refresh of this Strategy is expected imminently.

A framework for creating change

Neighbourhood Design
Healthy neighbourhood design is facilitated by land use decisions which prioritise complete, compact and connected and sustainable communities.

What is the issue?

Neighbourhoods are places where people live, work, relax, and play and have a sense of belonging. The design of a neighbourhood impacts on the health and well-being of the people living there. Several aspects of neighbourhood design can maximise opportunities for social engagement and active travel. Neighbourhood design influences our day-to-day perceptions, abilities, and decisions and therefore have a significant role in shaping our health behaviours.

Improving neighbourhood character and infrastructure designed to promote cycling, walking and wheeling was found to be associated with numerous positive health outcomes, including increased physical activity levels and improved social engagement among older adults. Furthermore, areas of mixed land use (i.e., neighbourhoods that include green spaces), diverse housing types and high-quality public transport were found to be associated with increased physical activity levels, reduced risk of pedestrian injury and road traffic collisions, and increased social participation of older adults, among other positive health outcomes. (16)

Nineteen per cent of the population of England live in rural areas which make up 85 per cent of the land. Overall, health outcomes are more favourable in rural areas than in urban areas. But broad-brush indicators can mask small pockets of significant deprivation and poor health outcomes. There is an absence of detailed statistical information on health outcomes in rural areas, as national statistics often do not reveal differences within small areas. Rural communities are increasingly older and experience higher levels of multiple or long-term health conditions, higher levels of financial poverty and have greater need of health and care services. (6)

FOCUS ON: Climate change & sustainability

KEY ISSUES

Climate change should be the top priority for planning across the UK because the impacts of flooding, overheating and other consequences stand in the way of everything else we want to achieve in terms of the creation of vibrant communities and a sustainable and just society. The damaging outcomes of climate change continue to have the most severe impacts on the most vulnerable and those least able to respond.

Whilst it is important to ensure new development is resilient, there is also a need to address risks to existing building stock since 80% of it will continue to exist in 2050.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

The core purpose of planning is the creation of healthy, sustainable and resilient places that are fair for everyone. It is not possible to achieve this aim without addressing both climate change mitigation and adaptation. Many of the adverse impacts of climate change, such as extreme heat, flooding or water scarcity, vary spatially but will result in costs to businesses and householders. Solutions to these problems need to be developed locally. There are four shared messages for planners and the wider community:

1. *Ensure that tackling the climate crisis is at the heart of the vision for the future of our communities, recognising that actions to tackle the climate crisis are also key in creating healthy, ecologically rich, prosperous and beautiful places for us and for future generations*
2. *Recognise how vital planning is to securing that vision through facilitating the extension of renewable energy generation, and strategically, through practical nature-based solutions and design actions that can promote sustainable travel, urban cooling, or natural flood defence.*
3. *Encouraging a wide range of behavioural change, such as enabling people to make personal choices through, for example, the creation of green and walkable streets.*
4. *Building retrofit programmes designed to consider adaptive interventions, ideally alongside energy efficiency or other types of upgrades and improvements. Retrofitting nature-based solutions (such as green roofs and walls) is a good example. Effective siting can provide health benefits, support biodiversity, improve air quality and reduce carbon emissions as well as help manage flood risk and excess heat.*

*Source: **TCPA**, 2021 and **ADEPT/Defra**, 2019*

What is the picture locally?

Thurrock is a place of contrasts, some areas are more urban in character, some are suburban, and others are rural. Most people in the Borough live in either urban or suburban neighbourhoods. In 2017/18 only 41% of people aged 16 and over living in Thurrock felt a sense of belonging to the neighbourhood they lived in which is significantly lower than the national average of 60%.

With a growing and ageing population it is important to consider the health and wellbeing needs of older adults (aged 65 and over) now and in the future. It is predicted that by 2035, nearly 3000 residents aged 65+ will be living with dementia, an increase of 75% since 2017. (17)[2] The percentage of older adults who live alone (an indicator of potential isolation) is 31%, similar to England although this varies by Ward with Belhus, Ockendon, Aveley and Uplands, Stifford Clays, West Thurrock and South Stifford, Grays Thurrock, Little Thurrock Rectory; and Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park experiencing significantly higher percentages than both Thurrock and England. Changes in demography can present challenges (social cohesion and integration) for place makers but also opportunities (vibrant, inclusive, multigenerational places).

Feeling safe in the place that you live is an important factor in determining how people view and use local spaces. The percentage of residents who feel safe going out in their local area after dark varies depending on where in the Borough they live. On average, 58% of residents across Thurrock report feeling safe going out after dark. Grays Thurrock is the ward where the lowest proportion of residents' report feeling safe after dark (40%) with the highest percentage of residents living in Orsett (87%). (18) In terms of reported crime, Thurrock experienced high levels of certain types of offences in 2019/20 including violence and sexual offences (406), anti-social behaviour (267), vehicle crime (125) and criminal damage and arson (115). (19)

> **SPOTLIGHT on emerging practice: School Superzones**
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> **School Superzones** was originally piloted in London, with the aim to protect children and young people's health and promote healthy behaviours using place shaping to implement environmental actions and reduce harmful exposures in the built environment. It is a place-based intervention that creates healthy zones in the immediate vicinity around a primary or secondary school often located within the most deprived wards, or in areas with poor health outcomes. Approximately half of the Superzones in the London pilot boroughs were ranked in the most deprived 30% nationally. Focus is on the conceptual areas detailed in the infographic.
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> The 18-month pilot explored, tested and developed the Superzone concept in a 400m vicinity around the selected schools. The pilot established six fundamental principles that underpin the Superzones approach:
>
> - Put children and young people at the centre
> - Take a flexible approach
> - Target the greatest need
> - Address multiple issues
> - Consider local assets and harms
> - Co-produce action plans with partners
>
> *Source: School Superzones, **PHE, TCPA, London Councils,** 2021*

The quality of the local environment is impacted in part by anti-social behaviour in Thurrock. Examples include littering, nuisance vehicles, vandalism, and drug dealing and use. These factors impact on perceptions among the community of safety and the interest in communities to enjoy their local area. Residents who have a high perception of fear are likely to experience negative impacts such as poorer

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[2] It is worth noting that there will be some people with dementia or depression who have not received a formal diagnosis, and therefore, the number could be much higher.

mental health, social isolation and lack of willingness to engage in health improving activities outdoors. (2) The Council has installed solar lights in Koala Park in response to young people's fears about safety. (20)

What do Residents' say?

Resident consultation was undertaken to inform the new Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2022- 2026). Feedback received on priority 6B[3] and how it might be achieved included acknowledging the impact of the fear of crime and the importance of police or authority visibility in addressing the fear of crime. There was a suggestion (a view reinforced by the Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee) that fear of crime has increased in the Borough with many people scared to go out at night, especially in town centres and estates. Respondents acknowledged the impact of anti-social behaviour on health and wellbeing and the importance of designing out crime in new developments. (21)

Feedback also acknowledged the importance of ensuring that residents are provided with opportunities for sports, leisure, cultural and arts activities as part of supporting their health and wellbeing; particularly if services or facilities are closed or are relocated.

Furthermore, consideration of the importance of creating sustainable, future proofed developments including, for example, the provision of electric charging points was raised by residents. This was reinforced by Housing Overview and Scrutiny Committee. (21)

The Your Place Your Voice (YPYV) events which took place in 2018 as part of the Local Plan consultation process, gathered a range of key themes raised by residents in relation to neighbourhood design. These included the need to:

- Ensure that infrastructure is appropriately phased in relation to new development
- Focus on social infrastructure especially facilities for younger people as a way of reducing crime and antisocial behaviour
- Plan strategically for the provision of health facilities across the Borough and protect essential strategic facilities such as Orsett Hospital (22)

SPOTLIGHT on good practice: Health Impact Assessment

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is "A systematic, objective and yet flexible and practical way of assessing both the potential positive and negative impacts of a proposal on health and well-being. It suggests ways in which opportunities for health gain can be maximised and risks to health minimised."

There are a range of benefits of HIA across three main themes:

- **Health knowledge and action:** Increases awareness across sectors of how decisions may affect health; identifies the connections between health and other policy areas and; co-ordinates action between sectors to improve and protect health
- **Organisational development:** Potentially reduces demand on NHS and social care services by investing in healthy policies, programmes and projects that prevent ill-health; makes the decision-making processes more transparent and; promotes evidence-based planning and decision-making
- **Communities:** Promotes greater equity in health; proposes actions to maximise health benefits and minimise the health risks; involves the communities who will be

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[3] Goal 6B: Work in partnership to reduce local levels of crime and opportunities for crime to take place, which will result in fewer victims of crime and make Thurrock a safer place to live

affected by a proposal; supports the development of environments and services that meet local needs and; enhances public/citizen engagement

Whilst there is currently no mandatory/legal requirement for developers to undertake HIA, there is an appetite for it to form an intrinsic part of planning policy, so this is likely to change in the future. The Public Health team are supporting embedding of HIA in response to planning applications in Thurrock. As part of this they are planning to use the Housing and Planning Advisory Group (HPAG) as a mechanism for strengthening a coordinated approach across council services/departments, and in conjunction with the NHS and Essex Police, for responding to planning applications aimed at improving the health outcomes of Thurrock residents.

In parallel to this, as part of our Health in All Policies approach, we are working with the Communities team to integrate Health Impact Assessment into the Community Equality Impact Assessment (CEIA) process. CEIA, like HIA, can assess and identify early on what impacts on communities (positive or unintended) might arise and therefore plan ways to mitigate or enhance outcomes. As a Council we have a legal duty to consider the impact of our policies, strategies, services and functions for the nine protected groups set out in the Equality Act 2010. This integration provides an opportunity to elevate the status of HIA.

*Source: **Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit,** 2012*

What does the guidance say?

There is a plethora of guidance, policy and research focused on the role of public health and health and wellbeing in the planning process as part of place-shaping. The most prominent documents key to place-shaping in terms of neighbourhood design are described below.

The key issues identified include:

- Enhancing neighbourhood design and character to support community belonging and active lifestyles
- Ensuring that neighbourhoods (existing and new) have a wealth of services and amenities, including green spaces, that are within easy reach
- Enhancing connectivity with safe and effective infrastructure

Building for a Healthy Life centres on the concept of creating places that are better for both people and nature. It is underpinned by 12 principles within three overarching headings:


- *Integrated neighbourhoods:* natural connections, active travel, facilities and services and homes for everyone
- *Distinctive places*: making the most of what's there, developing a memorable character, well-designed streets and spaces and wayfinding
- *Streets for all:* healthy streets, cycle and car parking, green/ blue infrastructure and back of pavement, front of house. (23)

Streets for a Healthy Life – A companion guide Building for a Healthy Life (Issue 2) has recently been published. See Selected Further Reading section below.

Active Design – Creating active environments through Planning and Design aims to create places and spaces which encourage people to move more, with more opportunities for everyone to increase their activity levels and lead healthier lives. The design of the places and spaces in which we live, work and play can have a significant impact on how physically active we are — either encouraging people to be more active, or by designing out the need or ability to be active. The guide outlines ten key principles for Active Design and provides useful case studies to illustrate how these principles can be successfully implemented in a variety of contexts. It has been developed with planners, urban designers and developers in mind but is relevant to anyone involved in delivering and managing the built environment.
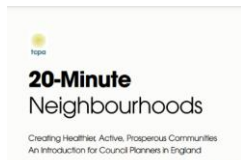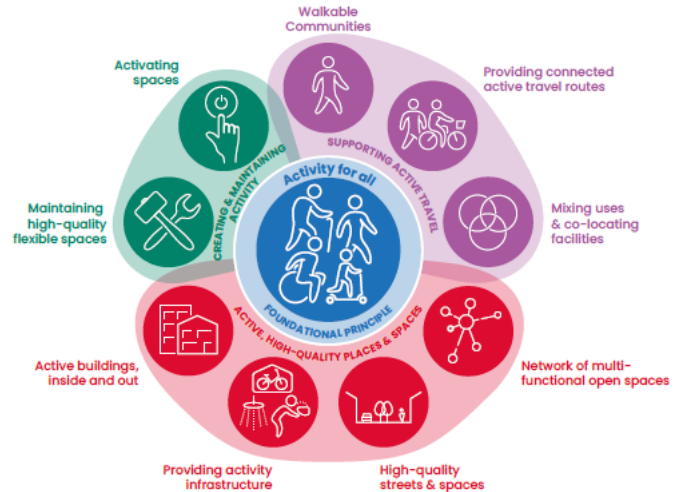
20-minute Neighbourhoods focuses on creating developments which enable residents to access amenities essential to daily living within a short walking or cycling distance. It promotes embedding of mixed-use developments to support this and centres on the liveability of places and spaces. The key features of 20-minute neighbourhoods are:

- Diverse and affordable homes
- Well-connected paths, streets and spaces
- Schools at the heart of communities
- Good green spaces in the right places
- Local food production
- Keeping jobs and money local
- Community health and wellbeing facilities
- A place for all ages (24)

School Streets – Reducing children's exposure to toxic air pollution and road danger is a practical and achievable approach to reduce children's exposure to toxic air pollution. School Streets, where traffic is restricted on roads outside schools at pick-up and drop-off times during term-times, makes it safer and easier for children to walk, scoot and cycle to school and it also encourages active travel, which brings multiple other benefits including reducing traffic and air pollution over a wider area, reducing road danger, and increasing physical activity. Evidence shows that School Streets do not simply displace traffic but reduce it overall. The report documents that high levels of air pollution in urban areas throughout the UK have a devastating impact on children's health which can be severe, long term and even deadly. The UK has a legal requirement to meet air quality limits as soon as possible. Yet achieving legal compliance is insufficient to protect children's health and we need to reduce air pollution throughout all areas as much as possible. (25)
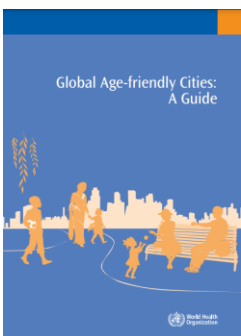
Global age-friendly cities identifies that age-friendly cities encourage active ageing by optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age. An age-friendly city adapts its structures and services to be accessible to and inclusive of older people with varying needs and capacities, across the thematic areas shown in the infographic. (26)

What is the way forward?

The recommendations below will support a generational shift towards healthier places and people.

- The Thurrock Local Plan should ensure that new and existing neighbourhoods are designed or regenerated to accommodate and support the diverse and changing needs of individuals throughout their life course, emphasising the need for safe, accessible, well-connected neighbourhoods and spaces that support community belonging and active lifestyles

- Integrate into local place-shaping the principles that contribute to a reduction in health inequality as detailed in:
  - Building for a Healthy Life
  - Active Design Guide
  - 20-minute Neighbourhoods
  - School Streets

- Implement the Health and Wellbeing Strategy priority actions pertaining to place-shaping and neighbourhood design

- Through cross-Council partnership and community engagement, pilot a place-based approach to improving health and wellbeing outcomes modelled on the London Superzones pilot

- Ensure that the Thurrock Superzones approach is integral to Local Plan policy and Design Strategy

Related indicators from Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing Strategy
1A: Work with communities to reduce smoking and obesity in Thurrock
• *Reducing the proportion of Reception, Year 6 children and adults in Thurrock who are obese and reducing the variation between community*
5D: Regeneration and future developments will seek to improve physical and mental health, reduce expose to air pollution and to build community resilience and reduce antisocial behaviour
• *Local Plan policies and Health Impacts Assessment for major new developments will consider a full range of health and well-being issues including for example, Active Travel and Public transport; access to green and open spaces; air quality; and the food environment*   • *All council-led new build schemes will comply with Secured by Design standards*   • *All regeneration and developments will increase physical activity, promote mental wellbeing, reduce exposure to air pollution, promote availability of healthy food options, enhance community resilience, and reduce antisocial behaviour*
6B Work in partnership to reduce local levels of crime and opportunities for crime to take place
• *Incorporating crime reduction approaches such as 'Designing Out Crime' and 'Secure by Design' within the council's Housing Strategy and the Local Plan*

- Ensure that a refreshed Health Impact Assessment model is embedded within the Local Plan / Design Strategy, integral to planning culture and mandated in policy

- Use the Housing and Planning Advisory Group (HPAG) as a mechanism for strengthening coordinated responses to planning applications, incorporating Health Impact Assessment principles

- Embody the 'Health in All Policies' approach through integration of Health Impact Assessment with Community Equality Impact Assessment

What is the issue?

Improved housing conditions can save lives, reduce disease, increase quality of life, reduce poverty, help avoid environmental damage and mitigate climate change. (27) The quality and affordability of housing can determine the health status of residents. Decent housing makes a fundamental difference to mental and physical health and wellbeing and can make a critical contribution to the value and effectiveness of the health and care system. It is estimated that 20% of the UK's housing stock does not meet decent home standards and that the cost to the NHS of poor-quality housing is £2.5 billion per annum.

An examination of the evidence on the influence of housing on health revealed that good quality housing (e.g., energy efficiency, housing refurbishment, and removal of home hazards) and affordable housing was associated with a variety of positive health outcomes, including improved social outcomes among older adults and reduced injury among older adults and children. Among vulnerable groups (e.g., substance users, homeless, disabled, LGBTQ+), provision of affordable and suitable housing was associated with improved quality of life, mental health and clinical health-related outcomes. (16), (27)

Source: **World Health Organisation**, 2022

FOCUS ON: *Climate change & sustainability*

| KEY ISSUES	KEY OPPORTUNITIES
*In a recent report **'UK housing: Fit for the future?'** the Climate Change Committee (CCC) warns that the UK's legally-binding climate change targets will not be met without the near-complete elimination of greenhouse gas emissions from UK buildings. The report finds that emissions reductions from the UK's 29 million homes have stalled, while energy use in homes – which accounts for 14% of total UK emissions – increased between 2016 and 2017.* *Efforts to adapt the UK's housing stock to the impacts of the changing climate: for higher average temperatures, flooding and water scarcity, are also lagging far behind what is needed to keep us safe and comfortable, even as these climate change risks grow. Around 4.5 million homes overheat, even in cool summers; 1.8 million people live in areas at significant risk of flooding; and average UK water consumption is higher than in many other European countries. Cost-effective measures to adapt the UK housing stock are not being rolled-out at anywhere near the required level.*	*The technology and knowledge to create high quality, low-carbon and resilient homes exists, but current policies and standards are failing to drive either the scale or the pace of change needed:* • ***Retrofitting existing homes.** Ensuring existing homes are low-carbon and resilient to the changing climate is a major UK infrastructure priority* • ***Building new homes.** New homes should be built to be low-carbon, energy and water efficient, and climate resilient.* *Householders can also make a big difference, even with small changes, the report shows. This includes setting boilers to the correct temperature, installing shading and increasing insulation, which helps to lower people's energy bills and improve the comfort of their homes.* *Source: **Climate Change Committee,** 2019*

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Homelessness specifically is complex and often reflects other vulnerabilities or circumstances related to health, justice or social services. Evidence tells us that the health of people experiencing homelessness is significantly worse than that of the general population, and the cost of homelessness experienced by single people to the NHS and social care is considerable. A recent audit found that 41 per cent of homeless people reported a long-term physical health problem and 45 per cent had a diagnosed mental health problem, compared with 28 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, in the general population. The last conservative estimate (2010) of the healthcare cost associated with this population was £86 million per year. Homelessness often results from a combination of events such as relationship breakdown, debt, adverse experiences in childhood and through ill health. Homelessness and ill health are intrinsically linked and professionals in both sectors have a role to play in tackling the issues together. (28)

What is the picture locally?

The Thurrock Council Housing Strategy (2022-2027) suggests that there is likely to be an undersupply of housing compared to demand. This is one factor in the significant challenges for residents to find and secure suitable accommodation in Thurrock. Demand that exceeds supply contributes to the rising levels of housing unaffordability within Thurrock. In the private rental sector high demand has led to landlords seeking to increase rental costs, whereas in the property market demand has raised asking prices, putting first time buyers under further pressure due to the requirement for larger deposits. This undersupply has also led to fewer homes being developed to allow overcrowded families and those with adult children living at home to move into a property that is the right size for their needs and has also impacted upon the supply of new homes built with adaptability in mind.

Pressures exist not only in the private sector but also within social housing. Demand far outstrips supply for the council's stock and there is a disproportionately small amount of housing association properties within the Borough as an alternative. (14)

There are a number of health inequalities relating to housing which are important to address as part of the Local Plan, Regeneration programmes and Design Strategy. There have been significant changes in the housing market in Thurrock that have led to increased challenges surrounding affordability in the Borough for both residents attempting to find secure accommodation and for the council to fulfil its rehousing duty (29):
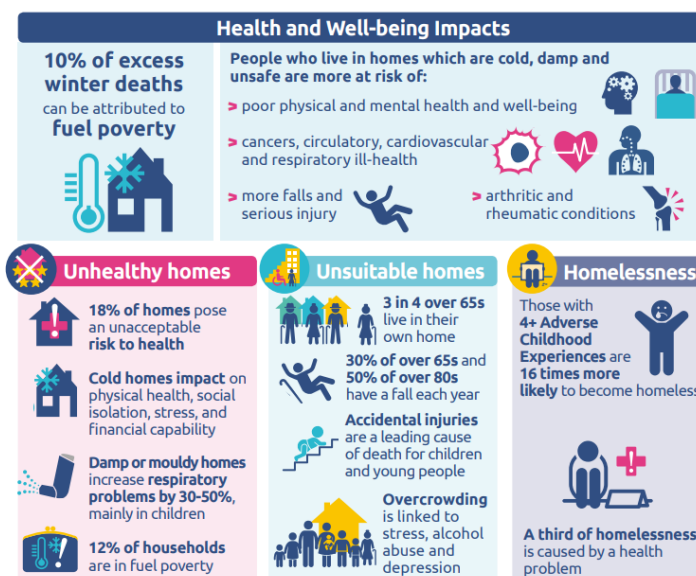
Source: Public Health Wales, 2019

- Between 2014 and 2019 the average house price increased by 50%, a greater rise compared to other parts of the East of England. This is exacerbated by the current cost of living crisis and leaves people at increased risk of debt, paying high rental prices and affording only poor-quality housing.
- Approximately 53% of Thurrock households do not meet the affordability requirements to purchase the smallest types of property available on the housing market.
- The average weekly cost to rent in Thurrock has increased over the past five years.
- A significant proportion of people are unable to afford their own homes or privately rent. This puts them at increased risk of home insecurity, increased risk of eviction, increased risk of overcrowding and an increased risk of homelessness.
- In 2021 there were an estimated 630 Houses in Multiple Occupation. (30) (31) [4]

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[4] A property is a house in multiple occupation if both of the following apply: at least three tenants live there, forming more than one household and you share toilet, bathroom or kitchen facilities with other tenants

- 9% of households are overcrowded in Thurrock, higher than the national figure (8.7%). (32)[5]
- There are an estimated 13.4% of households experiencing fuel poverty in Thurrock. (33) (34)[6]

Thurrock's 2018 Annual Public Health Report, '**Healthy Housing for the Third Age: Improving Older People's Health Through Housing**' highlights the need to understand the current and projected future health and wellbeing needs of our older residents to ensure our future housing offer keeps them as well and independent as possible. It summarises the current and predicted health and wellbeing needs of our older residents and discusses the implications for the council, health partners and the third sector. More in-depth analysis is presented in the report. (17)

Thurrock has a range of **sheltered housing** options across the Borough for older residents, including homes for social or affordable rent, and shared ownership. Additionally, older residents in Thurrock benefit from affordable, fully accessible council homes such as Beaconsfield Place in Tilbury. This development follows the **'Housing our Ageing Population: Plan for Implementation'** (HAPPI) principles for older people's housing, offering residents independence in a home that can adapt over time to meet changing needs, such as health or mobility problems, with the ongoing support of a sheltered housing officer. (35) This scheme offers residents private communal gardens including an allotment-style space, an outdoor gym, indoor communal room with fully fitted kitchen, mobility scooter storage and ample parking. A community room on the lower floor can also be used to hold activities to benefit residents or for community groups.

Thurrock Well Homes is a scheme to improve the housing conditions and the health and well-being of residents living in privately rented properties. The Well Homes scheme:

- offers help to make homes safer by reducing the risk of ill health or accidents – for example, unsafe stairs or wiring, or providing improvements to your heating system
- puts residents in touch with health and lifestyle services that can improve quality of life – for example, help to stop smoking, health checks, debt advice, housing adaptations (36)

The Council has a duty to ensure that Houses in Multiple Occupation are licensed in accordance with Mandatory Licensing scheme as stipulated by national legislation. The Council also operates an additional licensing scheme covering 11 out of its 20 wards to protect the health and safety of tenants, reduce anti-social behaviour and remove rogue landlords from the private rented sector. Properties in poor condition can be improved via the use of legal enforcement. The council has licensed 222 HMOs over the last four years and suspect there are 212 unlicensed HMOs in 2022/23. These properties house tenants in need of accommodation but are unable to either purchase their own property, rent a whole property or are not applicable for social housing. This can include persons who are either homeless or at risk of being made homeless. Licensing helps reduce the likelihood of illegal evictions which can cost the Council money in taking enforcement action and assisting in rehoming displaced tenants. The subsequent increase in young people renting and migrant workers, has resulted in shared accommodation (HMOs) being a more common form of tenure. These people are often desperate to obtain some form of accommodation in the Borough and therefore accept accommodation below decent standards which pose health and safety risks. These are often the most vulnerable people in our society and can have a debilitating effect on their physical and mental health. (37)

Homelessness is associated with poor health, education and social outcomes, particularly for children and young people. It often results from a combination of events including relationship breakdown, debt, ill health and adverse childhood experiences. (38) **Thurrock Council's Homelessness Prevention and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2020-2025** reported that since the introduction of the Homelessness Reduction Act in

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[5] A household is considered to be overcrowded if the property has one or more rooms too few in relation to the number of occupants living there.
[6] A household is fuel poor if they have required fuel costs that are above average, the national median level, and were they to spend that amount, they would be left with a residual income below the official poverty line.

April 2018 Thurrock Council has experienced an increase in the number of households which are homeless or at risk of homelessness. In 2018-19, the first year of the Homelessness Reduction Act, the number of households approaching the Housing Solutions Service increased by 15% compared to the year before. In the months between April and October 2019, the service saw a 41% increase in approaches compared to the same period in 2018-19, and a 53% increase in approaches compared to April to November 2017. (39)

Individuals or families who experience homelessness are sometimes placed in temporary accommodation while more long-term accommodation is found. A major factor currently experienced in Thurrock is the number of households being placed in the Borough by other local authorities, either within temporary accommodation or as a final placement. This impacts upon the availability of accommodation for the council to secure as accommodation for its own residents. (40) In 2020/21, Thurrock had the third highest rate of households in temporary accommodation across the East of England and the fourth highest rate when compared to our CIPFA comparators.[7]

The Homelessness Strategy goes on to emphasise the impact of sexual and domestic abuse on individuals and their families, significantly affecting both physical and emotional health and wellbeing. Those affected will often be deprived of safe, secure and suitable accommodation and will require highly specialised support as a result of the abuse which has been experienced. The Strategy made a recommendation to review and revise the existing joint protocol for supporting those at risk of homelessness as a result of fleeing domestic and sexual abuse. This is further noted in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy. (2), (39)

SPOTLIGHT on local situation: Buckles Lane

Buckles Lane site is one of the largest traveller sites in Europe and is home to over 1,975 people in 828 structures. It is known that there are many people living on the site with a range of health conditions, including: people who fell under the definition of Clinically Extremely Vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic; older persons with mobility issues; individuals registered with Long Term Conditions; and a likely greater number whose health conditions are not registered. 77% of the 1,975 residents are not Travelling Show People (TSP) nor Gypsy Travellers but people renting rooms in caravans avoiding the normal utility expense and council tax/business rates liabilities. There are 296 households of TSP at Buckles Lane and 634 units of Non-TSP accommodation with each equating to a household. The number of non-TSP units has increased from 467 in 2018 to 634 in 2021/22. The number of non-TSP units on site have varied with slightly higher figures between these dates. Although the number of plots occupied by TSP at Buckles Lane has slightly decreased since 2018, the number of households of TSP households has increased due to more concealed TSP households. The site is very complex and comes with a number of risks, for example, inadequate water and sewerage facilities and electrical supply issue and overflowing cesspits. In the winter period electric over-loading causes power cuts. The site is over-crowded and mobile homes and caravans are packed tightly into the plots.

In response to the findings of a recent Local Government Ombudsman investigation, the Council made a corporate decision to create a Buckles Lane Working Group, tasked with the following strategic aims:

- Continue to Safeguard all our residents, including those at Buckles Lane.
- Prevent crime & anti-social behaviour linked to the site and pursue those responsible.
- Stop the growth of unlawful development and/or additional housing of caravans and persons residing at Buckles Lane.

Activity to support and improve the site is ongoing across a number of Council teams; the establishment of the new Working Group represents an opportunity to reduce health inequalities

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[7] CIPFA comparators are used to compare local authorities with similar characteristics in terms of population and other demographics such as area density.

and improve public health across wider determinants as outlined in Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

Source: Buckles Lane Briefing Report, 2023

What do Residents' say?

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy consultation findings highlighted residents' and committee's (Housing Overview and Scrutiny) views about the need to ensure that all types of housing are of a decent, acceptable standard and the importance of ensuring that maintenance of properties and land is considered alongside repair services. Feedback highlighted the need to address poor housing conditions in Council Stock, recognising that damp has historically been difficult to address. During the engagement and development of this strategy, many residents were concerned that the right types of accommodation were insufficiently available to meet their needs. Affordability was cited as one of the most significant barriers to securing accommodation within Thurrock with growing inflation, increasing household costs and the continuation of welfare reforms placing incomes under pressure. Residents also highlighted difficulties in accessing adapted or adaptable properties in the Borough. (14)

In relation to the provision of safe and suitable accommodation for victims/survivors of domestic violence and/or abuse, feedback acknowledged that housing is one part of the solution alongside action to deliver a single route to reduce the need for victims/survivors to have to repeat their stories and to ensure that individuals are supported to navigate the system when fleeing domestic abuse while maintaining networks of friends and community relationships. (21)

Findings from Your Place, Your Voice events suggested that residents want the council to plan for a range of housing types that address and respond to local needs and priorities. For example, it was noted that there was a specific local need for further older people's housing, and new housing (renting and ownership models) should provide a range of housing types including affordable housing to allow local people to buy and rent in the Borough. (22)

What does the guidance say?

Improved housing conditions can save lives, prevent disease, increase quality of life, reduce poverty, and help mitigate climate change. Housing is becoming increasingly important to health in light of urban growth, ageing populations and climate change.

The key issues identified include:

- Increasing provision of affordable, accessible and diverse housing
- Improving the quality of housing including indoor air quality and reduced noise pollution
- Improving the energy efficiency and climate resiliency of current and future housing stock

WHO Housing and Health Guidelines bring together the most recent evidence to provide practical recommendations to reduce the health burden due to unsafe and substandard housing. Based on newly commissioned systematic reviews, the guidelines provide recommendations relevant to inadequate living space (crowding), low and high indoor temperatures, injury hazards in the home, and accessibility of housing for people with functional impairments. In addition, the guidelines identify and summarise existing WHO guidelines and recommendations related to housing, with respect to water quality, air quality, neighbourhood noise, asbestos, lead, tobacco smoke and radon. The guidelines take a comprehensive, intersectoral perspective on the issue of housing and health and highlight co-benefits of interventions addressing several risk factors at the same time. The Guidelines aim at informing housing policies and regulations at the national, regional and local level and are further relevant in the daily activities of implementing actors who are directly involved in the construction, maintenance and demolition of housing in ways that influence human health and safety. The guidelines therefore emphasize the importance of collaboration between the health and other sectors and joint efforts across all government levels to promote healthy housing. (27)

Better housing is crucial for our health and the COVID-19 recovery suggests that the factors linking housing and health can be broadly described as follows:

Quality and condition: relating to the physical characteristics of homes, such as damp. Studies have linked damp to a number of health problems, including respiratory issues, physical pain, and headaches, particularly affecting children. Quality and condition can also include the suitability of the home, such as whether it would be considered overcrowded for the household living there. Less obvious aspects include whether the home has access to a garden or outside space, an issue brought to the fore during the lockdown. A range of studies have found health benefits to improvements in home quality, for example, a recent longitudinal study found a reduction in hospital admissions following a range of home upgrades.

Stability and security: relating to the extent to which people have control over how long they live in their homes, and how secure they feel. Owner occupiers can typically stay in their home as long as they keep up with payments (if they have any), whereas private renters typically have short tenancy agreements and can be evicted through factors beyond their control at short notice. Housing instability can act as a stressor harming health, while frequent moves can undermine engagement with health, other local services and weaken relationships in the local community.

Affordability: relating to the financial pressure caused by housing payments – both for housing itself and for utilities and maintenance. The effects of poor housing affordability are both direct (causing stress and anxiety, for example) and indirect – particularly through reducing the disposable income that people have available to spend on other things which may promote good health (such as quality food and exercise). Affordability problems can also contribute to overcrowding, as households seek to share the fixed costs of accommodation across more individuals. (41)

The impact of homelessness on health: a guide for local authorities identifies that homelessness is complex and often reflects other vulnerabilities or circumstances related to health, justice or social services. Successful homelessness strategies require all public services to contribute in a way that recognises the personal needs, strengths and assets of every household. The information and ideas in this briefing aim to support local authorities in protecting and improving their population's health and wellbeing, and reducing health inequalities, by tackling homelessness and its causes. To improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities, local leaders in health and social care systems clearly have a role to play in preventing, reducing and ending homelessness: in systems leadership and in enabling holistic responses that have the voice of people who have experience of homelessness at their heart. (28)

Housing our Ageing Population Panel for Innovation (HAPPI) principles are based on 10 key design criteria. Many are recognisable from good design generally - good light, ventilation, room to move around and good storage - but they have particular relevance to the spectrum of older persons' housing which needs to both offer an attractive alternative to the family home and be able to adapt over time to meet changing needs. (35) They reflect:

- *Space and flexibility*
- *Daylight in the home and in shared spaces*
- *Balconies and outdoor space*
- *Adaptability and 'care ready' design*
- *Positive use of circulation space*

- *Shared facilities and 'hubs'*
- *Plants, trees, and the natural environment*
- *Energy efficiency and sustainable design*
- *Storage for belongings and bicycles*
- *External shared surfaces and 'home zones'*

What is the way forward?

The recommendations below will support a generational shift towards healthier places and people.

- The Thurrock Local Plan and Housing Strategy should be used to enable adequate provision of affordable, accessible and diverse housing across the Borough to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse population, and that existing and future housing stock addresses issues related to indoor air quality, noise pollution, energy efficiency and climate resiliency

- Integrate into local place-shaping the principles that contribute to a reduction in health inequality as detailed in:
    - WHO Housing and Health Guide
    - Better housing is crucial for our health and Covid-19 recovery
    - Impact of homelessness on health – a guide for Local Authorities
    - Housing Ageing Population Panel for Innovation (HAPPI)

- Implement the Health and Wellbeing Strategy priority actions pertaining to place-shaping and housing

- Consider the best approach to understanding the existing living standards and health inequalities at sites housing vulnerable communities in the Borough

Related indicators from Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing Strategy
5A: Reduce homelessness and increase the supply of affordable housing in Thurrock
- *Improve residents' access to a range of affordable new build homes that prioritise providing housing for people with an established connection to the local area* - *Increase supply of good quality social housing for local residents*
5B: Facilitate and encourage maintenance of good quality homes in Thurrock to promote the health of residents, protecting them from hazards such as cold, damp and mould
- *Improving the condition of housing in the public and private sector - for example by increasing use of renewable technologies in council stock* - *Reducing fuel poverty - for example by investment in council housing, accessing Green Homes Grants for improvements in the private sector, and by improving Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) ratings across the Borough* - *Increase access to programmes such as Well Homes to benefit priority groups such as people with LTCs, physical or learning disabilities and mental health needs* - *Reduce the proportion of households in Fuel Poverty*
5C: Provide safe, suitable and stable housing solutions for people who have or who are experiencing domestic abuse / violence and/or sexual abuse / violence
- *Delivering expert advice through a single route to support regarding housing, skills, employment and other needs of people experiencing or who have experienced domestic and/or sexual abuse and/or violence.* - *Improve public awareness of how victims/survivors can seek housing support.* - *Streamlining support offer by combining three funding streams from Thurrock Women's Refuge, the Brighter Futures Programme and Safe Accommodation new burdens fund to create one service provider.*

What is the issue?

Local authorities are in a uniquely influential position to lead their communities and local partners to help improve the food environment and reduce inequalities. At the same time, there is potential to diversify the retail offer and help support a more vibrant high street. Many local authorities across England have already taken action, with at least 40 areas having developed policies to restrict the proliferation of excess takeaways and fast-food outlets on the high streets and around schools. (42) Local authority planners can play a vital role by helping to create a policy framework that will support sustainable food systems locally and also by integrating sustainable food into local planning and development decision making. They can enable community food growing through planning policies which support urban food growing by:

- Providing space for growing food within new developments
- Including edible plants and trees in planting schemes in new developments
- Encouraging local groups starting a community food growing space
- Protecting open space under threat from a proposed development
- Using land for food growing on a temporary basis e.g. pending its redevelopment. (43)

The food environment plays an important role in promoting a healthy diet. This is a complex system influenced by a range of factors, including affordability, accessibility and availability. Action is required across the food system to improve health and wellbeing and reduce inequalities across the population. The role of planning in creating healthy and sustainable environments, including the food system, is increasingly being recognised, specifically the need for land for both food growing and retail and encouragement for both commercial and non-commercial food enterprise. Urban food growing was found to be associated with improved attitudes towards healthy eating, increased opportunities for social connectivity and increased opportunities for physical activity. (16) Beyond planning, Councils have a role in procuring food for schools and other services, many manage waste and composting, have a role in local land use, farming and local food growing i.e. allotments, and they therefore have a significant role in shaping the diets of residents and the food available locally. (43)

FOCUS ON: Climate change & sustainability

KEY ISSUES

Farming and fishing, transport, food processing and waste is responsible for 20-30% of greenhouse gas emissions globally. In 2019, the Climate Change Committee (CCC) stated that climate change would make it harder for the government to ensure the resilience of the UK's food supply. More frequent weather extremes would cause damage to: crops, livestock and fisheries both in the UK and around the world and farming infrastructure, biodiversity loss adversely affecting productivity. Climate change is likely to result in further volatility in domestic food prices unless the UK adapts. Climate change could lead to a 20% rise in food prices globally by 2050.

74% of UK councils have declared a climate and nature emergency; acknowledging an urgent crisis and committing to taking steps to address it. However, most are not tackling food in a way needed to achieve net zero, or indeed restore biodiversity, halt deforestation and prevent antimicrobial resistance.

KEY OPPORTUNITIES

Some of the key actions that Councils should focus on include:

- *Finding local solutions to design-out food waste*
- *Ensuring planning policy allows local areas to protect and increase land available for growing sustainable food*
- *Supporting the normalisation of good diets in the public sector prioritising meals high in good quality, locally sourced fruit and vegetables, low in ultra-processed foods and meat*

Launched at the UN COP26, the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration is a commitment by local and regional governments to tackle the climate emergency through integrated food policies. More information on signing up to the Declaration is available here.

*Source: **Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration**, 2023, **Association for Public Service Excellence,** 2021 and **House of Lords Library**, 2022*

What is the picture locally?

There is a high correlation between obesity and poorer health outcomes. Obesity is linked to nutrition and physical activity, but also factors such as unemployment, low educational attainment, housing tenure and food environment. (44) One factor that impacts healthy eating behaviour is ease of access (via walking or public transport) to fresh food retailers who supply healthy food options. Walking and public transport accessibility to fresh food retailers varies across different areas of Thurrock. Urban and more densely populated areas such as Grays, Stanford, Tilbury and Ockendon have better access to healthy food retailers than more rural areas. (45)

The volume rather than the distance of fast food outlets appears to be associated with childhood obesity at year 6 (age 10-11). When year 6 data (age 10/11) was analysed with the fast food outlet data, there was a relatively strong relationship with excess weight in children, when considering all of the factors which cause and contribute to obesity. This may be because this age group are typically more independent from parents and carers with more flexibility to travel to/from school and spend pocket money on food items, in addition to this group expressing more readily their preferences for specific foods and the impact of peer pressure from their social group. When looking at this association between fast food outlets and adult obesity, there is no association visible at Thurrock level. This could be affected by the fact that adults often have takeaways delivered to them from outlets in different ward areas to their home residence. (45)

The proportion of the population (aged 16 and over) in Thurrock who eat the recommended 5-a-day of fruit and vegetables on a 'usual' day is 51%. This is significantly lower than the regional and national percentages (56.7% and 55.4% respectively). (46) There is a strong association between an area's Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) score and healthy eating; as deprivation increases, healthy eating behaviour decreases. (45) It was considered whether the location of allotments locally in Thurrock might impact on healthy eating behaviours. 27 allotment sites were identified in Thurrock in 2016, with 1011 plots, covering just over 31 hectares of land (0.19 hectares per 1000 population). When plotted against healthy eating behaviour there appears to be limited association between the locations of allotments and the prevalence of healthy eating behaviour, although this is also confounded by the relatively small number of allotments. It is assumed that residents may travel across wards to allotments. The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) suggests a national standard of 20 allotments per 1,000 households. Thurrock currently has approximately 75% of the NSALG recommended standard. From the perspective of affordability of purchasing food versus growing your own, and supporting people to live a healthy lifestyle, allotments provide the opportunity for physical activity, growing fruit and vegetables for consumption (increasing affordability), and also the social interaction and community benefits that being part of an allotment site provides.

What do Residents' say?

Residents who participated in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy consultation generally agreed with the goal of preventing ill health due to obesity. Specific suggestions included using social media and other communication activities to reinforce the impact of obesity on an individuals' wider health and wellbeing; the importance of providing safe, maintained spaces within which people can exercise including green spaces and gyms; influencing the number and locations of fast-food outlets; and the need to target hard to reach groups, working across geographical locations and communities of interest to truly level up prevention.

The views on limiting the number of or influencing the location of takeaway services across the Borough was also raised by residents attending community forums. It was felt that by doing so, this could support people to eat healthier and to halt or slow down the rise in home delivery for fast food which may be creating further challenges. (21)

The impact of the wider food environment was highlighted by the Resource, Place and Delivery Group through describing how health and wellbeing strategy goals can be aligned to the approach for regeneration. For example, creating vegetable gardens as part of regeneration to aid access to fresh fruit and vegetables. (21) Additionally, the Open Space Assessment found that there is a steady demand for the provision of allotment sites and plots across the area and demand outweighs supply. (47)

"An innovative pilot, thought to be the UK's first large-scale "fruit and veg on prescription" project, has been launched to help tackle health inequalities and food poverty. Alexandra Rose Charity, in partnership with public health teams in the London boroughs of Tower Hamlets and Lambeth, has launched Fruit & Veg on Prescription as part of a £250,000 pilot funded by local authorities and Impact on Urban Health to help tackle health inequality and food poverty.

Trials in the boroughs, which both have high rates of chronic disease, will explore the viability of fruit and veg on prescription as a long-term solution to tackling diet-related ill health and food insecurity. The project launches as food prices continue to soar and fresh food inflation has reached a record 13.3%. Each person will be prescribed Rose Vouchers for Fruit & Veg and will receive up to £8 per week in vouchers, plus £2 per week for each household member. Participants can spend their Rose Vouchers on the fruit and veg of their choice with local retailers and market traders. In Tower Hamlets, they will also be invited to take part in monthly healthy lifestyle group sessions to improve their understanding of nutrition and health.

"So many long and short-term illnesses deteriorate significantly with a poor diet. A healthy diet can often achieve far more than any medicines. Therefore, fruit and veg prescriptions are essential in reversing and preventing many illnesses. When I trained over 40 years ago, Type 2 Diabetes was a disease of the elderly. We are now seeing it in teenagers. Much of it is preventable with a healthy diet and good regular exercise. Fruit and veg should be part of every prescription." - Professor Sir Sam Everington

During the 12-month pilot, Rose Vouchers for Fruit and Veg will be distributed to a target group of 122 residents across both boroughs who are at risk of, or have, conditions such as high blood pressure, diabetes or mental health conditions and are struggling financially. When the pilot is evaluated, it could be rolled out across the UK subject to funding.

Alexandra Rose Charity has also called for the government to implement the recommendations of the National Food Strategy quickly. The strategy, which has been on hold, recommended a "Community Eatwell" programme which recognised the huge potential role of empowered local communities working with primary care to radically change eating habits and health."

Source: PRESS RELEASE: Fruit and Veg on Prescription pilot launched to tackle ill health and food poverty.
Posted on 7 November 2022 by Eloise Jarrett

What does the guidance say?

Historically, our towns and cities have been built around the supply and distribution of food. Today, planning can affect the food and farming system in a number of ways. Planners and associated professionals can help to create a more sustainable food and farming system that enables the general population to access healthy, affordable food.

The key issues identified include:

- Protecting and increasing both the number and the diversity of types of food retail outlets
- Creating and protecting food growing spaces in and around the locality
- Making the best use of our land for food and farming

National Food Strategy: An independent review for Government sets out government ambitions and priorities to create a more prosperous agri-food sector that delivers healthier, more home-grown and affordable diets for all, regardless of where people live or their income. It takes a close look at how the food system really works, the damage it is doing to our bodies and our ecosystem, and the interventions we could make to prevent these harms. It considers the characteristics of complex systems and the mechanisms that cause system failures, and sets out a strategy for the future, based not just on rigorous science but on the needs and wishes of ordinary citizens. The National Food Strategy review contains recommendations to address the major issues facing the food system: climate change, biodiversity loss, land use, diet-related disease, health inequality, food security and trade. These are grouped under four main National Food Strategy objectives:

1. Escape the junk food cycle to protect the NHS
2. Reduce diet-related inequality
3. Make the best use of our land
4. Create a long-term shift in our food culture

Transforming the food system will require change at all levels: structural, cultural, local and individual. The Strategy highlights how Local Food Partnerships have already brought together councils and partners from the public sector, voluntary and community groups, and businesses to reduce diet-related ill health and inequality, while supporting a prosperous local food economy. Further work will be undertaken to learn from their approaches and to understand and identify best practice in addressing food affordability and accessibility to healthy food. Defra will work with local authorities and food charities in these priority areas. (48)

Planning sustainable cities for community food growing brings together in one place examples of planning policies around the UK that support community food growing. It is aimed primarily at planning authorities to help them to use food growing as a way of creating healthy communities. The report is structured around the different issues that food growing helps to address, from sustainability to residential amenity via health and wellbeing, green infrastructure, regeneration and many other agendas. In each section, food growing has been woven into planning policies to meet these priorities in local areas and illustrated with examples of growing projects that have also been set up to help meet that particular agenda. The report ends with recommendations, firstly to planners with practical steps on putting these ideas into policy and practice, then more broadly recommendations to local groups about their potential role. **(49)**

Creating a Healthy Food Economy: A Policy Audit Tool for Local Authorities presents an audit tool the Food Foundation created for Birmingham Public Health on the extent to which their existing policies and programmes are creating a healthy food economy in the city. Based on existing evidence they created a conceptual framework showing the outcomes and policy outputs needed for Birmingham to have a 'Healthy Food Economy' and then used this framework to create an audit tool. To complete the audit, they interviewed 18 officials in Birmingham City Council and in a variety of other agencies and settings that have oversight and leadership on the food environment across the city and conducted a desk review of published documents and policies. The audit tool allows local areas to assess where they are making progress on food policy and where further action is needed. Completing the audit can be the first step towards creating a new food policy or strategy. (50)

Hot Food Takeaways: Planning a route to healthier communities is Sustain's guide for Councils which draws on the experience of planning authorities in collecting evidence to support and defend planning policies to restrict new hot food takeaways. Despite there being national targets for obesity reduction, there is only so much local councils can do with their existing powers. The report also calls for a series of actions to be explored on planning, design and licensing to tackle child obesity. These include:

- National Government support for local areas to increase the adoption of planning restrictions and defend existing policies by critiquing evidence regularly submitted by fast food chains.
- Explore the impact of restrictions on the sale of unhealthy food to under 16s before 6pm on school days.
- Reviewing residential space standards to ensure houses have sufficient space for food preparation, cooking, dining and storage.

The report contains recommendations for next steps for local authorities, government, campaigners and organisations. (51)

What is the way forward?

The recommendations below will support a generational shift towards healthier places and people.

- The Thurrock Local Plan should ensure that the number and diversity of food retail outlets and food growing spaces are protected and increased

- Integrate into local place-shaping the principles that contribute to a reduction in health inequality as detailed in:
    - National Food Strategy
    - Planning Sustainable Cities for Community Food Growing
    - Creating a healthy food economy: A policy audit tool for Local Authorities
    - Hot Food Takeaways: Planning a route to healthier communities

Related indicators from Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing Strategy
1A: Work with communities to reduce smoking and obesity in Thurrock
• *Reducing the proportion of Reception, Year 6 children and adults in Thurrock who are obese and reducing the variation between community*
1C: Continue to enhance identification and management of Long-Term Conditions (LTCs) to improve physical and mental health outcomes for all
• *A greater proportion of people will have their LTC diagnosed and treated*
5D: Regeneration and future developments will seek to improve physical and mental health, reduce exposure to air pollution and to build community resilience and reduce antisocial behaviour
• *All regeneration and developments will promote physical & mental wellbeing, reduce exposure to air pollution, promote healthy food options, enhance community resilience, and reduce antisocial behaviour*

- Consider how future Health and Wellbeing Strategies can support the food system as it relates to human health, place-shaping and climate change

- Consider the best approach to assessing progress on food policy and identifying where further action is needed as a first step towards creating a new food policy or strategy. For example, utilising '**Creating a Healthy Food Economy: A Policy Audit Tool for Local Authorities**', which considers as a minimum:
    - Accessibility to affordable and diverse healthy foods
    - Community food growing schemes such as allotments and school growing clubs
    - Density of unhealthy fast-food outlets
    - Addressing rising food poverty
    - Engaging schools and other public institutions in improving the food environment
    - Investment in and protection of local food infrastructure
    - Reducing food waste to support tackling climate change and improving food security

- Create a dialogue with key local stakeholders, including the CVS-led Food Network, to establish the motivation for a Thurrock Food Partnership which brings together partners from the public sector, voluntary and community groups, and businesses to reduce diet-related ill health and food poverty, while supporting a prosperous local food economy

What is the issue?

Contact and exposure to the natural and sustainable environment through provision of good quality open and green spaces, increases physical activity, promotes mental wellbeing, improves health outcomes (e.g., reduces CVD mortality risk) and reduces exposure to air pollution. Furthermore, high quality built and green environments can support net-zero ambitions, promote community resilience and social capital, and reduce antisocial behaviour. (2) In addition, provision of infrastructure to support cycling, walking and wheeling that improves connectedness is associated with increased physical activity and improved social engagement among older adults. (16)

Analysis undertaken by the Office for National Statistics during the COVID-19 pandemic found that people on lower incomes reported greater dissatisfaction with the quality of their green space than those on higher incomes. The study suggested the quality of nearby green space might have affected the way people spent their time during lockdown, including reduced participation in physical activity and increased time spent in sedentary behaviour. (52), (53), (54)

FOCUS ON: Climate change & sustainability	
KEY ISSUES	**KEY OPPORTUNITIES**
Our lives and livelihoods depend on our natural environment and the benefits it provides – from timber, food and clean water to pollination, carbon storage and the cultural benefits of landscapes, archaeological sites and wildlife. There are significant risks to this natural capital from the scale and rate of climate change, which may be too much for some natural systems to adapt to. *Changes to ecosystems due to temperature, sea level rise or extreme events, of which the latter are predicted to increase in frequency and severity are already occurring. Where species are unable to move in response to climate change there is a risk they will continue to decline. These issues all impact on the benefits the environment provides and are heightened because the natural environment is already under pressure. Pollution, habitat loss and fragmentation, diseases and invasive non-native species, the continuing drainage of wetlands and the unsustainable use of soil, water and marine resources all reduce the natural resilience of species and ecosystems and their ability to adjust and adapt.* *Green infrastructure is also potentially vulnerable to climate change; for example, a shortage of water could diminish the quality of green spaces and their ability to function as adaptation solutions.*	*Green spaces help to regulate temperature and water flow, reduce noise and air pollution. Nature can also play an important role in adapting our built environment, with nature-based solutions providing urban cooling and flood management as well as a range of other benefits for health, biodiversity, and the attractiveness of places.* *Local authorities can help ensure that natural capital assets in their area and the benefits and services provided by them are protected, valued and used sustainably to deliver a net gain in local natural capital. They also have a role in helping ecosystems adapt, providing new habitats that allow nature to migrate.* Source: **ADEPT**, 2019 & **Defra**, 2018

What is the picture locally?

The natural environment can promote or inhibit opportunities for physical activity. Thurrock has a key challenge in relation to the amount and quality of open space across the area, with deficiencies and shortfalls in terms of quantity, quality and accessibility identified against provision standards. However, the key focus for the Council is to maintain current open space standards wherever possible and on improving existing open space for more multi-purpose outcomes. (15)

The ease at which residents feel they can be active coupled with satisfaction with local parks, playgrounds and open space is crucial to actual physical activity levels. Residents' perceptions of the ease with which

they can exercise outside was lower among those living with a disability than without (69% compared to 75%). This indicates that improvements to accessibility need to be considered in new developments, although improvements have been made since the survey was undertaken in 2016. (18), (45)

Significantly fewer adults are physically active in Thurrock (60%) compared to the regional and national average (66% for both). (55) Fewer than 10% of adults walk for travel at least three times per week and fewer than 1% of adults cycle at least three times a week for travel. Both walking and cycling levels for travel are significantly lower than the East of England and England as a whole. This may be reflective of the cycling environment in Thurrock. (56), (57) Specific data about wheeling is not available for Thurrock.

What do Residents' say?

Feedback from residents as part of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Your Place, Your Voice consultations recognised the need to provide, protect and enhance safe, maintained green spaces within which people can exercise and be active. Alongside this, residents wanted to safeguard and maintain the integrity of the green belt land. (22)

A Thurrock resident survey undertaken in 2016 indicated that resident's satisfaction with local parks, playgrounds and open spaces varied across the Borough. The survey found that whilst satisfaction in areas such as The Homesteads and Corringham and Fobbing is relatively high (77% and 66% respectively), satisfaction in areas such as Stifford Clays and East Tilbury is much lower (26% and 24% respectively). Perceptions about how easy Thurrock Council make it to exercise and be physically active in outdoor spaces were also captured within this survey. Eastern areas such as Stanford East and Corringham Town (90%), the Homesteads (87%) and Orsett (85%) were seen as easy whilst Tilbury St Chads, Tilbury Riverside and Thurrock Park have the lowest percentage of residents reporting that they find it easy to be active in outdoor spaces (63% and 49% respectively). (18), (47)

In summary, 26% of respondents are very satisfied with the amount of space for local parks yet only 12% are very satisfied with the quality of that space. Similarly, only 7% of people are very dissatisfied with the amount and availability of outdoor networks but 15% are very dissatisfied with the quality of them. (15)

Residents in Aveley, Bulphan, Corringham, East Tilbury, Horndon-on-the-Hill, Orsett and Stanford-le-Hope highlighted the need for improved infrastructure that supports and enables walking and cycling opportunities. Aligned with this, residents from some of these areas suggested the need to improve opportunities for children to be able to walk to school.

There were strong views on the importance of improving air quality and recognising the impacts of air pollution on health and wellbeing. The CCG Clinical Reference Group provided feedback on the importance of tackling air pollution in Thurrock. The group was concerned about the collective impact of multiple developments including the London Resort and growth of local Ports. Air quality was also major concern raised by Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee. (21)

Consultation feedback collated for the Alcohol and Substance Misuse Needs Assessment suggested that community activity open to a range of people with vulnerabilities and aimed at directly improving the environment, such as a green space for community projects, as a place to connect for support and health and wellbeing activities would be beneficial. This would bring people together, integrate people more into the community, build confidence and resilience in service users. It is important that when someone stops using a substance which has been their coping mechanism for so long that there is something positive that can fill the gap. (58)

The South Essex Estuary (SEE) Park plans include a continuous and accessible coastal path stretching from Tilbury Fort to Shoeburyness, ensuring every home will have easy access to high quality green space, creating new woodlands, restoring marshlands and completing a huge network of natural landscapes. This vision for South Essex to become an extraordinary parkland setting providing an attractive offer for modern living that supports residents, businesses, industry, tourism, and leisure activities.

The park will be a single, unified, regional parkland which will ensure that the natural wonders which abound throughout Essex are all connected as part of the same ecological community. This single park system will address the challenges of providing access to green spaces, improving health and well-being and air quality, mitigating the effects of climate change including flooding, boosting eco-tourism and green job creation, restoring biodiversity and helping the region achieve a net zero carbon footprint.

The park will serve as a standard bearer for place-making ensuring that residents across South Essex have even better access to a diverse range of natural green or blue spaces and get the advantages of all the health and well-being benefits that creates. It will also provide carbon offsetting opportunities for local businesses right on their doorstop. SEE Park will provide 200 km of enhanced continuous coastal paths and create over 550 km of greenways and cycleways. By ensuring a holistic approach to enhancing and maintaining our local green spaces and the ecosystem they sustain, we can help ensure that South Essex is a greener and healthier place for our residents.

*Source: **South Essex 2050**, 2023*

What does the guidance say?

Access to good quality greenspace has a range of positive health outcomes. They can help to promote healthy behaviours, support the development of skills and capabilities and improve social connectedness and gives people a sense of familiarity and belonging.

The key issues identified include:

- Improving access to and engagement with the natural environment for mental health and wellbeing
- Adapting to climate change
- Increasing participation in physical activity
- Reducing exposure to air pollution

Building with Nature's mission is maximising the benefits that high-quality green infrastructure can deliver for people when it is put at the heart of placemaking. By bringing nature closer to people, we not only build great places for people to live, work and play, but we make development a force for societal good. The purpose of the Wellbeing Standards is to take advantage of the opportunity that development offers to use green infrastructure to support people's mental and physical health and build a sense of belonging and encourage active stewardship.

CORE Standards
Standard 1 — Optimises Multifunctionality and Connectivity
Standard 2 — Positively responds to the Climate Emergency
Standard 3 — Maximises Environmental Net Gains
Standard 4 — Champions a Context Driven Approach
Standard 5 — Creates Distinctive Places
Standard 6 — Secures Effective Place-keeping

WELLBEING Standards
Standard 7 — Brings Nature Closer to People
Standard 8 — Supports Equitable and Inclusive Places

WATER Standards
Standard 9 — Delivers Climate Resilient Water Management
Standard 10 — Brings Water Closer to People

WILDLIFE Standards
Standard 11 — Delivers Wildlife Enhancement
Standard 12 — Underpins Nature's Recovery

Spending time in the natural environment – as a resident or a visitor – improves our mental health and feelings of wellbeing. It can reduce stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression. It can help boost immune systems, encourage physical activity and may reduce the risk of chronic diseases such as asthma. It can combat loneliness and bind communities together. For all these reasons, improving access to quality greenspace has the potential to improve health outcomes for the whole population. However, this is particularly true for disadvantaged communities, who appear to accrue an even greater health benefit from living in a greener environment. This means that greenspace also can be an important tool in the ambition to increase healthy life expectancy and narrow the gap between the life chances of the richest and poorest in society. (59)

Improving access to greenspace such as parks, woodland, fields and allotments as well as natural elements including green walls, roofs and incidental vegetation, are increasingly being recognised as an important asset for supporting health and wellbeing. This 'natural capital' can help local authorities address local issues that they face, including improving health and wellbeing, managing health and social care costs, reducing health inequalities, improving social cohesion and taking positive action to address climate change. Evidence shows that living in a greener environment can promote and protect good health, aid in recovery from illness and help with managing poor health. People who have greater exposure to greenspace have a range of more favourable physiological outcomes. Greener environments are also associated with better mental health and wellbeing outcomes including reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and fatigue, and enhanced quality of life for both children and adults. Greenspace can help to bind communities together, reduce loneliness, and mitigate the negative effects of air pollution, excessive noise, heat and flooding. Disadvantaged groups appear to gain a larger health benefit and have reduced socioeconomic-related inequalities in health when living in greener communities, so greenspace and a greener urban environment can also be used as an important tool in the drive to build a fairer society.

This report offers policy, practice and research recommendations for local government and those working in partnership with it. Local authorities play a vital role in:

- providing new, good quality greenspace that is inclusive and equitable
- improving, maintaining and protecting existing greenspace
- increasing green infrastructure within public spaces and promoting healthy streets
- improving transport links, pathways and other means of access to greenspace, and providing imaginative routes linking areas of greenspace for active travel
- creating cost savings - £2.1 billion per year could be saved in health costs if everyone in England had good access to greenspace, due to increased physical activity in those spaces (60)

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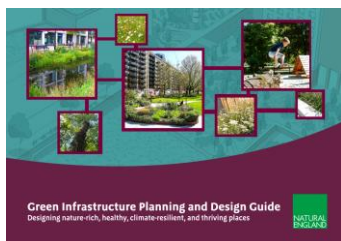
Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide provides evidence based practical guidance on how to plan and design good green infrastructure. It complements the **National Model Design Code** and **National Design Guide** and can be used to help planners and designers develop local design guides and codes with multifunctional green infrastructure at the heart. It will also be useful to landscape architects, urban designers, parks and greenspace managers and neighbourhood planning bodies. Restoring nature is one of the most important things we can do for the long-term health and prosperity of people, wildlife, and our economy. Using the Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide can support Government's 25 Year Environment Plan commitment to leave the environment in a better state than it was before and to making greener, healthier, climate resilient, distinctive, and thriving places to live learn work and play. (61)

Using Green Infrastructure to Protect People from Air Pollution summarises the current best practice for how green infrastructure can reduce public exposure to air pollution in the urban environment. The report acknowledges that there is not a 'one size fits all' intervention but the right green infrastructure in the right place can reliably reduce exposure to air pollution. It provides advice and guidance about how to embed green infrastructure into local places focused on different types of roads and considers green roofs and walls and green open spaces, as well as outlining general planting principles and links to further practical considerations. (62)

What is the way forward?

The recommendations below will support a generational shift towards healthier places and people.

- The Thurrock Local Plan, Public Realm, Regeneration and Recreation and Leisure teams should ensure that the natural environment is protected and enhanced to encourage access and engagement in physical activity and mental wellbeing, reduce exposure to air pollution and support adaptation to climate change

- Integrate into local place-shaping the principles that contribute to a reduction in health inequality as detailed in:
  - Building with Nature
  - Improving access to greenspace
  - Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide
  - Using Green Infrastructure to protect people from air pollution

> **Related indicators from Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing Strategy**
>
> *5D: Regeneration and future developments will seek to improve physical and mental health, reduce expose to air pollution and to build community resilience and reduce antisocial behaviour*
>
> - *Local Plan policies and Health Impacts Assessment for major new developments will consider a full range of health and well-being issues including for example, Active Travel and Public transport; access to green and open spaces; air quality; and the food environment*
>
> - *All council-led new build schemes will comply with Secured by Design standards*
>
> - *All regeneration and developments will increase physical activity, promote mental wellbeing, reduce exposure to air pollution, promote availability of healthy food options, enhance community resilience, and reduce anti-social behaviour*

- Implement the Health and Wellbeing Strategy priority actions pertaining to place-shaping and natural environments

- Consider commissioning **Green Infrastructure Training for local authorities** provided by Building with Nature which is recommended for elected members, directors / heads of public health, heads of place, heads of highways, local lead flood authorities, climate and sustainability leads, and all teams whose work influences green infrastructure provision

Transportation Networks
Healthy and sustainable transportation networks prioritise and support active transportation modalities.

What is the issue?

Transportation plays an important role in supporting daily activities. Active travel (cycling, walking, wheeling and use of public transport) can increase physical activity levels and improve physical and mental wellbeing. Prioritisation of active travel can also reduce over reliance on motorised transport, contributing to improved air quality and a reduction in road injuries. Evidence demonstrates that infrastructure for walking and cycling, installation of traffic calming measures, and public realm improvements (e.g., street lighting) are associated with increased mobility, increased physical activity levels, reduced Body Mass Index (BMI) and reduced risk of injury, among other positive outcomes. Furthermore, the provision of open and green space, high quality public transport and improved air quality is associated with numerous positive health outcomes, including increased physical activity, improved cardiovascular outcomes, and improved social participation. (16)

> ***** LANGUAGE MATTERS *****
>
> *The term 'wheeling' ensures we listen to, engage and better represent people who use wheelchairs and mobility scooters. Always use 'walking and wheeling' together as both represent the action of moving at a pedestrian's pace, whether someone is standing or sitting, walking or wheeling unaided or using any kind of aid to mobility, including walking aids, wheeled aids, personal assistants or support animals.*

Transport also plays a key role in facilitating people's access to health services such as GP surgeries, hospitals, dentists and pharmacies. This is particularly important for older people, disabled people and those living in rural areas, as public transport may be their only link to local amenities and services. In addition, transport allows medical professionals to access their workplaces or visit their patients, including emergency services' workers such as paramedics to access people in life threatening situations. Transport allows people to connect and maintain relationships with others, access work opportunities, education or leisure activities, live active lives and to be more autonomous. The impact of transport on wellbeing is also connected to the impact of transport on inequality. (63)

The quality of a transport system encapsulates a broad range of factors, including journey times, the availability of public transport, reliability and affordability of services as well as consistent active travel infrastructure. Investing in transport is one way we can help address widening health inequalities and reduce the impact of air pollution and climate change. (64) Furthermore, health-promoting transport systems are pro-business and support economic prosperity. They enable optimal travel to work with less congestion, collisions, pollution, and they support a healthier workforce. (65)

FOCUS ON: Climate change & sustainability	
KEY ISSUES	**KEY OPPORTUNITIES**
Transport is essential, but how we choose to move around has economic, social and environmental consequences. Transport is a key contributor to climate change, responsible for producing 24% of the UK's total greenhouse gas emissions in 2020. *Rail Freight is essential for helping reduce road congestion and carbon emissions. Yet less than five per cent of the UK's freight is transported by rail; this needs to change.*	*Decarbonising the transport sector has the potential to make significant improvements to air quality and public health.* *Moving to electric vehicles alone is not enough to solve climate change. A suite of interventions are needed which tackle emissions across all transportation modes including cars, buses, rail including freight and aviation.* *Active travel including cycling, walking and wheeling are key to this. Opportunities should focus on improving routes and infrastructure such as more bike storage and parking.* Source: Department for Transport, **2021** & **2022**

Electric vehicles give us cleaner streets making our towns and cities a better place for pedestrians and cyclists. Research has shown that they are better for the environment and emit fewer greenhouse gases and air pollutants than petrol or diesel cars, taking into account their production and electricity generation to keep them running. The major benefit of electric cars is the contribution that they can make towards improving air quality in towns and cities. With no tailpipe, pure electric cars produce no carbon dioxide emissions when driving. This reduces air pollution considerably. In just one year, one electric car on the roads can save an average 1.5 million grams of CO2. That's the equivalent of four return flights from London to Barcelona. (66) However, despite significant early progress, action is needed to go further, faster. The market for battery electric vehicles and the necessary charging infrastructure is growing fast, but the barriers of vehicle price and supply, infrastructure provision, and the consumer experience of using that

infrastructure, need to be addressed. (67) Electrification of vehicles is only part of the solution to tackling air pollution and in fact it is recognised that brake and tyre wear associated with electric vehicles contributes significantly to harmful pollutants (PM2.5). (68) A broader shift to a multi-modal transportation system is required to realise improvements in air quality.

What is the picture locally?

Thurrock's Active Travel Needs Assessment provides an overview of local data for walking and cycling:
- Levels of regular walking in Thurrock are similar to other areas (48% compared to 50% nationally).
- Levels of regular cycling is significantly worse than other areas (1.2% compared to 4.4% nationally).
- Cars are still the most common mode of transport, accounting for 62% of journeys.
- Only about 4% of Thurrock children cycle to school; contrast this with a figure as high as 59% in the Netherlands.

The majority of children within Thurrock live within 30 minutes walking or cycling time to a primary or secondary school, although many are travelling greater distances to schools outside their local catchment and therefore unable to utilise travelling by active means. (13) Evidence suggests that both primary and secondary aged pupils expressed a preference for travelling via walking or cycling modes, but that this did not always match up with their usual method of travel to school. (69)

According to Thurrock's Transport Strategy, there is generally good accessibility by public transport and walking to many services, but poor access to further education and hospitals which could exacerbate low skills and health issues, the latter being a particular concern with the ageing population. There are a number of sections of the interurban road network, both within and around Thurrock, where public transport services leave room for improvement and there is no viable rail option. In such places the option of investing in high quality bus and coach services will be considered, as this is unlikely to require new large-scale infrastructure. (12) Recently, due to strict limits on council spending, a decision was made by Cabinet in March 2023 to end funding subsidies for a number of bus services. This decision will now be reviewed, with the review proposed to take place in Summer 2023. Until the review is completed and a final decision made, the services will continue as normal. It is currently unclear what impact this may have on health and wellbeing although a Community Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken. (70)

High numbers of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) and high traffic flows on strategic and local roads adversely impact on local air quality, CO^2 emissions, and congestion. Economic growth could potentially make this worse. Exposure to high levels of air pollution is associated with a variety of adverse health outcomes including increased risk of respiratory conditions, heart disease and lung cancer. More severe impacts affect those who have existing health needs, children, young people and older people who tend to be more susceptible. (71) In Thurrock, the annual mean level of air pollution is higher than the East of England and England averages. Thurrock has the second highest level of annual air pollution compared with both our CIPFA comparators[8] and across the East of England region. All of Thurrock's AQMA's are declared because of an exceedance in NO2 emissions caused by transport.

Thurrock Council have provided strong opposition to the Lower Thames Crossing (LTC) proposals and have made sure that National Highways are in no doubt about our concerns for the impacts their scheme will cause, both in the construction phase and in the longer term as the new crossing goes into operation, and we deal with the significant change to the Borough's landscape and infrastructure which will be brought about by this major scheme. Whilst the scheme may bring a range of strategic connectivity benefits to the UK as a whole, it will negatively affect Thurrock's economy, restrict access and movement around the Borough (creating severance), delay growth, harm the environment, negatively impact health and wellbeing, increase air and noise pollution and offer very limited local benefits. The Council has, and will continue to, advocate for significant changes to the LTC scheme. (72)

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[8] CIPFA comparators are used to compare local authorities with similar characteristics in terms of population and other demographics such as area density.
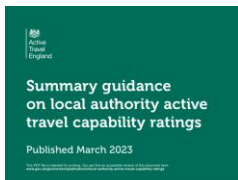
Summary guidance on local authority active travel capacity ratings developed by Active Travel England has been established to drive up standards of active travel infrastructure and support councils to deliver high-quality schemes that enable more people to walk, wheel or cycle for everyday trips. In this first ever review of active travel capability, each local transport authority self-assessed their capabilities and assigned themselves a rating. This was then subjected to a validation process led by Active Travel England. The resulting ratings will be used to guide the allocation of funding and other resources. They focus primarily on three areas: local leadership, plans and delivery record. 'Delivery record' also considers whether authorities require developers of new housing or industrial developments to include good facilities for walking, wheeling and cycling. Thurrock is currently rated one. (73)

Rating	Description
Rating 0	Local leadership for active travel is not obvious, no significant plans are in place, the authority has delivered only lower complexity schemes.
Rating 1	Some local leadership with basic plans and isolated interventions that do not yet obviously form a plan for a network.
Rating 2	Strong local leadership, with clear plans that form the basis of an emerging network with a few elements already in place.
Rating 3	Very strong local leadership, comprehensive plans, and a significant network in place with a growing number of people choosing to walk, wheel and cycle.
Rating 4	Established culture of active travel with successive increases in walking, wheeling and cycling, underpinned by a dense integrated network and highly supportive policies to give more people the choice to walk or cycle.

What do Residents' say?

A range of issues were raised as part of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Your Place, Your Voice consultations. It was agreed that transport can be an issue not only due to the movement of vehicles such as HGVs across the Borough but also in terms of accessing appointments. Feedback from attendees at one workshop suggested that the infrequency of public transport coupled with the cost is a borough-wide issue. It can impact on access to hospital and general practice referrals to community-based services. Related to this, residents reported the need to improve the sustainability of transport links and facilities and to consider how people travel across the Borough. Some respondents agreed that access to public transport and active travel may be an important factor for improving air quality and reducing pollution. (21), (22)

Residents in Aveley, Bulphan, Corringham, Horndon-on-the-Hill and Stanford-le-Hope, highlighted the need for improved transport infrastructure, that is safe, promotes improved connectivity, supports better management of HGV vehicle movements especially in the village areas, and addresses the need for improved affordable public transport links. They also highlighted the need for more, and improved walking and cycling routes.

SPOTLIGHT on evidence: What works to increase cycling?

A wide range of factors influence whether or not people walk or cycle, particularly environmental factors such as the design, quality, accessibility and availability of walking and cycling networks. In neighbourhoods where there are accessible, safe walking and cycling routes, studies consistently show communities are walking and cycling more. Areas that have successfully increased levels of walking and cycling have all prioritised people and place first, with cars being a 'guest' in the area. Attributes of successful infrastructure include:

- Routes designed with the continuity of the route in mind
- Routes that are legible and do not depend on signage
- Cyclists are segregated from traffic on busy roads or junctions
- Participatory design at a local level ensures that residents' needs and concerns are addressed

A coherent, convenient and safe network of routes is necessary but not sufficient to bring about change, while campaigns and behaviour change interventions are unlikely to be successful without the infrastructure to support them. An evidence assessment carried out by the Department for Transport identifies a mix of infrastructural improvements/provision, community-wide communications/campaigns, targeted (usually community-level) support and some individually-specific support. The most effective mechanisms for increasing walking and cycling comprise of a complementary package of measures, such as:

- Provision of dedicated cycling lanes (and bicycle parking)
- Personal travel planning (behaviour change)

- Walk/Cycle to workdays
- Cycle-hire/bike-share schemes
- Some school-based interventions
- Cycle maintenance skills training

*Source: **Thurrock Active Transport Needs Assessment,** 2021*

What does the guidance say?

Increasing cycling and walking can help tackle some of the most challenging issues we face as a society – improving air quality, combatting climate change, improving health and wellbeing, addressing inequalities and tackling congestion on our roads (74).

The key issues identified include:

- Increasing the provision of safe, easily accessible active travel infrastructure (cycling, walking, wheeling)
- Increasing the availability, reliability and affordability of public transport
- Reducing air pollution

How Transport offers a route to better health recognises that a good transport system is essential for a healthy society. The impact of air pollution on health is well-known, but transport affects the health of people across society, in multiple ways. Investing in transport is one way we can help address widening health inequalities and regional disparities in public health. The quality of the transport infrastructure and the adequacy of transport services directly affect health by, for example, enabling active modes of travel (such as cycling and walking) that have health benefits or reducing road accidents and harmful emissions. But wider, indirect impacts on health include enabling people to get to work, school, hospital and fresh food shops, as well as social events and leisure activities – aspects of life that are important for good physical and mental health. The growth in car ownership has revolutionised people's lives in the UK – providing comfort and increasing the geographical scope of employment and social interactions. But these benefits have not been shared equally across society, with access especially low among young adults and low-income families. Car-centric policies can lead to underinvestment in other forms of transport. While cars are likely to remain the best (or only) option for some people, particularly where health conditions can otherwise limit mobility, a lack of public transport alternatives can mean reduced options for people without a car. Consequences of a car-dependent transport system includes:

- Marginalised road users
- Reduced services
- Reshaped built environment
- Access to cars is limited for some groups in society (64)

Working Together to Promote Active Travel - A briefing for local authorities has been written for transport planners, others concerned with the built environment, and public health practitioners. It looks at the impact of current transport systems and sets out the many benefits of increasing physical activity through active travel. It suggests that while motorised road transport has a role in supporting the economy, a rebalancing of our travel system is needed. Key considerations when developing a healthy local transport strategy include:

- Physical inactivity directly contributes to 1 in 6 deaths in the UK and costs £7.4 billion a year to business and wider society
- The growth in road transport has been a major factor in reducing levels of physical activity and increasing obesity
- Building walking or cycling into daily routines is the most effective way to increase physical activity
- Short car trips (under 5 miles) are a prime area for switching to active travel and to public transport

This guide suggests a range of practical actions for local authorities, from overall policy to practical implementation. It highlights the importance of community involvement and sets out key steps for transport and public health practitioners. (65)

Gear Change A bold vision for cycling and walking sets the ambition for a modal shift towards active travel. The key themes are better streets for cycling and people, cycling at the heart of decision making, empowering and encouraging local authorities and enabling people to cycle and protecting them when they do. At the heart of this vision is the need to achieve:

- Healthier happier and greener communities -
- Safer streets
- Convenient and accessible travel
- Walking and cycling are at the centre of transport decision making (74)
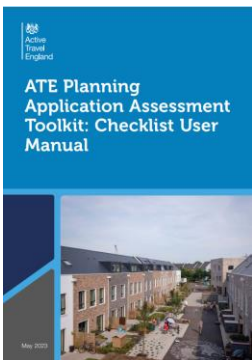
ATE Planning Application Assessment Toolkit: Checklist User Manual has been prepared as a desktop guide for users of the Active Travel England (ATE) Planning Application Assessment Toolkit. It includes brief instructions on how to use the toolkit and is supported by examples. Its purpose is to lead the assessor through the process required to assess planning proposals against existing policy requirements and technical guidance. Users are expected to use their professional judgement in providing an evidence-based recommendation. (75)

Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain brings together existing work to reduce emissions across all forms of transport, and for the first time lays out the scale of the additional reductions needed to deliver transport's contribution to legally binding carbon budgets and delivering net zero by 2050. This plan sets out how to deliver those emissions reductions and the associated benefits that will be realised from it across the UK. The strategic priorities are:
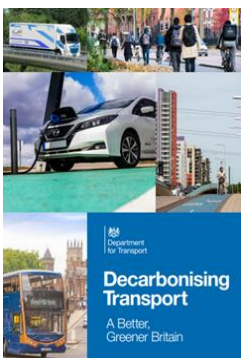
1. Accelerating modal shift to public and active transport
2. Decarbonising road transport
3. Decarbonising how we get our goods
4. UK as a hub for green transport technology and innovation
5. Place-based solutions to emissions reduction
6. Reducing carbon in a global economy (67)

What is the way forward?

The recommendations below will support a generational shift towards healthier places and people.

- The Local Plan, Transport Vision and Strategy, regeneration programme and Design Charter and Design Codes should be utilised to embed a commitment to accessible and safe transport infrastructure which supports a modal shift to cycling, walking and wheeling, as well as improvements (availability, reliability and affordability) in public transport, as a means to reduce both health inequalities and air pollution

- Integrate into local place-shaping the principles that contribute to a reduction in health inequality as detailed in:
    - Decarbonising Transport: A Better, Greener Britain
    - Gear Change: A bold vision for cycling and walking
    - How transport offers a better route to health
    - Working together to promote active travel: A briefing for Local Authorities

Related indicators from Thurrock's Health and Wellbeing Strategy
1A: Work with communities to reduce smoking and obesity in Thurrock
• *Reducing the proportion of Reception, Year 6 children and adults in Thurrock who are obese and reducing the variation between community*
5D: Regeneration and future developments will seek to improve physical and mental health, reduce exposure to air pollution and to build community resilience and reduce antisocial behaviour
• *Local Plan policies and Health Impacts Assessment for major new developments will consider a full range of health and well-being issues including for example, Active Travel and Public transport; access to green and open spaces; air quality; and the food environment*

- Implement the Health and Wellbeing Strategy priority actions pertaining to place-shaping and transportation networks

- Implement the recommendations of the Thurrock Active Travel Needs Assessment

- Deliver the Thurrock Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP)

- Identify a Senior Champion for Active Travel within the Council

- Building on the existing Cycle Forum, establish a Taskforce for Active Travel which will specifically focus on increasing cycling in the Borough. Membership could include representatives from:

    - Transport
        - Highways maintenance
        - LCWIP
    - Public Health
    - Environmental Health - air quality
    - Cycle safety
    - Leisure and Recreation
    - Climate change & sustainability
    - Communities
    - Communications
    - Planning
    - Local Plan
    - Regeneration
    - Design Team
    - Children's

Selected Further Reading

Neighbourhood Design
Healthy neighbourhood design is facilitated by land use decisions which prioritise complete, compact and connected and sustainable communities.

Housing
The design, quality, sustainability, and affordability of diverse housing options has a critical influence on health and well-being
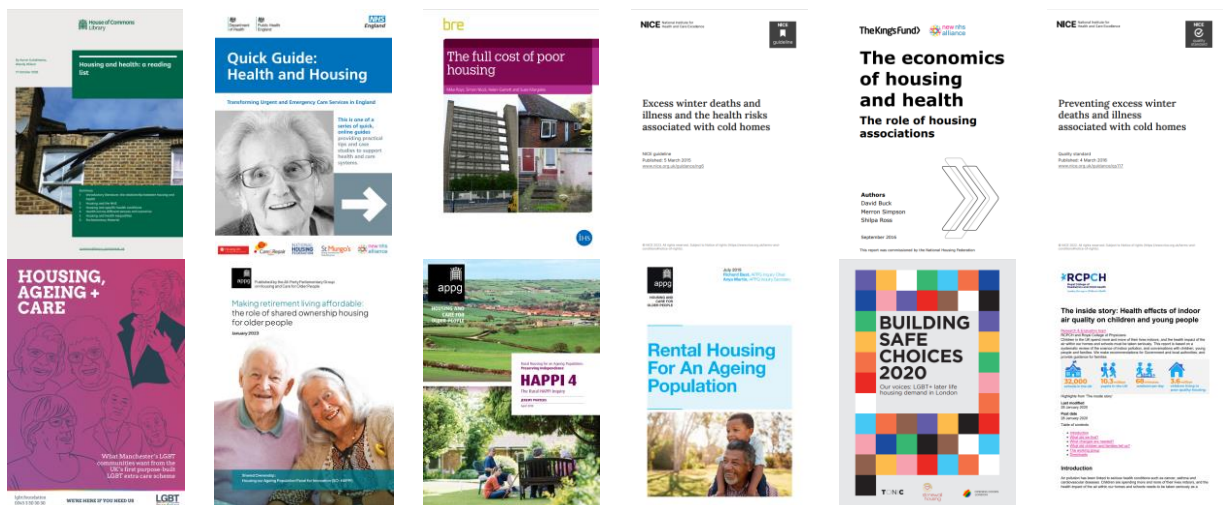
Food Systems

*Accessibility and affordability of healthy sustainable foods can be supported through land use planning and design*
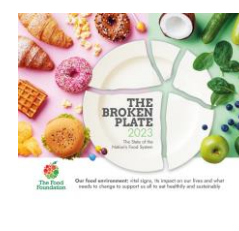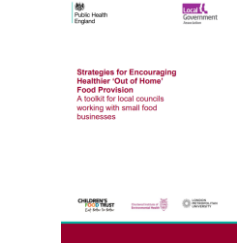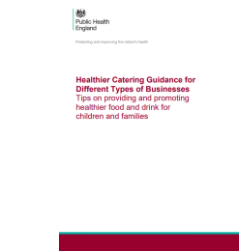
Natural Environments

Community planning which preserves and connects the surrounding natural environment and supports biodiversity can have significant health and well-being impacts.
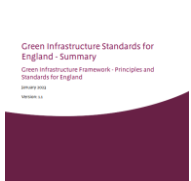
Transportation Networks
Healthy and sustainable transportation networks prioritise and support active transportation modalities.
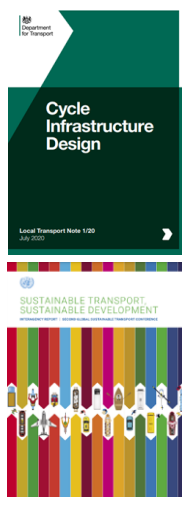
Climate change and sustainability
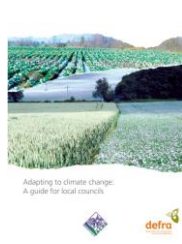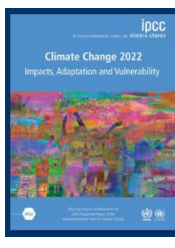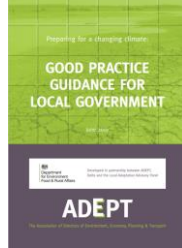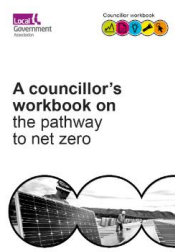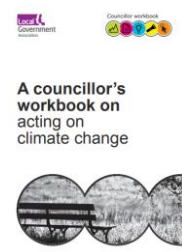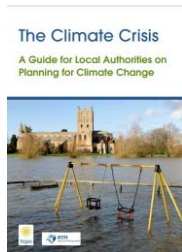
Wider determinants

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