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## The importance of health considerations in the preparation of and content of the new local plan

### Report summary:

This report sets out summary information around the subject of health and how and why it sits as an overarching subject matter applicable to the many aspects and detailed policy areas of the local plan.

### Is the proposed decision in accordance with:

Budget Yes ☒ No ☐

Policy Framework Yes ☒ No ☐

### Recommendation:

- 1) That Strategic Planning Committee endorse the overall importance of taking health considerations into account and promoting healthy lifestyles through the local plan.

**Reason for recommendation:** To ensure that Members are aware of the cross-cutting nature of health considerations in the preparation of and policies within the local plan.

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Portfolio(s) (check which apply):

- ☒ Climate Action
- ☐ Corporate Services and COVID-19 Response and Recovery
- ☒ Democracy and Transparency
- ☒ Economy and Assets
- ☒ Coast, Country and Environment
- ☐ Finance
- ☒ Strategic Planning
- ☒ Sustainable Homes and Communities

**Equalities impact** Low Impact

## Climate change Low Impact

**Risk:** Low Risk;

**Links to background information** – See links in the attached the report.

Link to [Council Plan](#):

Priorities (check which apply)

- ☒ Outstanding Place and Environment
  - ☒ Outstanding Homes and Communities
  - ☒ Outstanding Economic Growth, Productivity, and Prosperity
  - ☒ Outstanding Council and Council Services
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## 1 Introduction

- 1.1 There are many factors that influence people's health and wellbeing. Some, such as age and genetics cannot be changed, but there are other features within our environment, and therefore directly relevant to planning, that are of fundamental importance and can have significant impacts, whether for good or bad.
- 1.2 The design and functioning of our neighbourhoods, homes, places of work, streets and open space, at their best, can all help to support good mental and physical health. Poor quality development can, however, have the direct opposite impact. Therefore supporting, encouraging and promoting healthy lifestyles and positive health outcomes can be seen as a cross-cutting consideration that runs across a great many subject and topic matters that feature in the local plan.
- 1.3 There is also the need, in determining scales, levels and distribution of growth and development to consider the availability and accessibility of health services, to include hospitals, doctor's surgeries, dentists, opticians and other health providers. As the local plan develops we will need to consider both existing services but also if and how we can support and encourage additional new facilities alongside new growth, especially housing development.
- 1.4 In terms of preventative measures regular physical exercise has an important role to play in our physical and mental health, reducing levels of many major diseases including heart disease, cancer and diabetes and conditions such as obesity, hypertension and depression.
- 1.5 Mental health is now seen as significant within our communities. Although the main causes of mental illness are to do with personal life crises, the immediate living environment and surrounding neighbourhood can have a big impact on a person's mental wellbeing. For example, supportive social contact can help to lower a person's levels of anxiety and depression. In contrast, a lack of social contact and poor access to local services can lead to an increased risk of mental illness. Access to high quality education, training and employment are also important for health and wellbeing, with unemployment and low income sometimes contributing to poor health.

- 1.6 The quality of spaces shared by the public can also influence wellbeing, with well-designed streets, parks and squares helping to reduce the risk of crime, helping people to feel safe and encouraging them to meet. Notably, the natural environment and appealing green spaces can help significantly to increase levels of physical activity and mental wellbeing.
- 1.7 In this report we highlight some of the ways that health considerations should be taken into account and built into local plan production and policy. It is important to stress, however, that the report is not inclusive of every consideration and as local plan policy develops it will be relevant to consider health impacts as a cross-cutting concern for all policy areas in the plan.

## **2 Issues and options report feedback**

In the issues and options report consultation, to support local plan production and consulted on in early 2021, there was very strong support expressed for promoting health and wellbeing considerations throughout all of the local plan work. Many of the comments received highlighted the importance of preserving and maintaining open space and access to the natural environment with safe and well-linked cycle and walking routes also being seen as important.

## **3 Health and links between the local plan and wider council initiatives**

- 3.1 Members or the committee will be aware that across the Council there are a wide range of initiatives and actions geared around encouraging and promoting healthy lifestyles and outcomes. The environmental health service at the council, in particular, has a broad remit in respect of health considerations and this service leads in respect of the council's public health planning work.
- 3.2 Of key relevance in the environmental health service work is the production of the Council's [Public Health Strategic Plan - East Devon](#).
- 3.3 The Executive summary of this plan explains that *"Most people want to be in better health. Although people are living longer, many are often in poorer health. We believe we have an overarching responsibility to consider health and wellbeing in all our council activities. Everything we do aims to ensure that East Devon is a place where people want to live, work, visit and enjoy life, focusing on where there is greatest need."*
- 3.4 This overarching statement around the relevance of both physical and mental health neatly fits in with and provides a coherent steer in respect of planning policy matters and the local plan. The executive summary of the strategic health plan continues by advising:

*"Our strategic aims*

- 1. To help more people to be healthy and stay healthy*
- 2. To enhance self-care and support community resilience*
- 3. To integrate and improve support for people in their homes.*

*How we will approach our work, monitor progress and feed back - To approach our aims we will:*

- Tackle environmental and social conditions to promote good health*
- Encourage healthier behaviour so fewer people become ill*

- *Address loss of independence*
- *Promote wellbeing and self-care.”*

- 3.5 The strategic plan advises on a range of actions and initiatives that cut across a whole range of council activities and functions and many of these are directly related to planning, the local plan and policy outcomes that are likely to be sought.
- 3.6 The work of East Devon District Council directly references and links into the health work of Devon County Council drawing in data and information held and used by the County Council in their wider work, see for example [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment - Devon Health and Wellbeing](#)
- 3.7 In thinking about policy approaches in the local plan we can also specifically look to work and experiences gained at Cranbrook in respect of the healthy new town indicative.

#### **4 Working with the National Health Service and health service providers**

- 4.1 We are increasingly looking at ways to work with the NHS in respect of seeking to ensure health service provision is coordinated with development planned and coming forward. Members will recall the meeting of this committee on 20 July 2021 [Agenda for Strategic Planning Committee on Tuesday, 20th July, 2021, 2.00 pm - East Devon](#) at which consideration was given to a paper entitled ‘Planning Obligations Securing Financial Contributions to Health Care’. This paper advised of discussions officers have been having with representatives of the Royal Devon and Exeter NHS Foundation Trust (RD&E) about securing financial contributions from development to address the impacts of development on services provided by the trust.
- 4.2 Provision of development contributions to support health provision, specifically in respect to the time period before Government funding is liable to be paid for health care, is likely to remain an ongoing consideration. However, going forward in respect of local plan making it will also be relevant to understand if and where development may be best directed to align with existing or planned health provision and also to make explicit policy provision that seeks to accommodate new health services. Securing new health provision could be especially important if large scale strategic developments are to be accommodated, perhaps for example another new town, and there will be valuable lessons to be learnt from experiences and challenges at Cranbrook.

#### **5 Designing for physical exercise and social activity**

- 5.1 Physical exercise has been proven to help improve our physical (cardiovascular) health and reduce the levels of many major diseases. It can also improve levels of mental well-being, by releasing natural chemicals to improve mood and bring benefits such as reducing tension, stress and mental fatigue, give a natural energy boost, promote a healthy appetite and improve sleep.
- 5.2 Through the design of our neighbourhoods, physical exercise can be encouraged, for example with provision of safe and accessible:
- Cycling and walking routes between homes, shops, services and employment;
  - Sports pitches and other recreation facilities; and

- Play parks and open spaces.

- 5.3 These are all matters that run to the core of good planning and where different facilities are located near each other it will often be possible to connect them with high quality walking and cycling routes, which should be direct, clear and safe. Secure cycle storage and facilities can help with securing easy access, whilst grass verges and trees can improve air quality and make routes feel more attractive and welcoming.
- 5.4 The interaction of people of all ages within a community, has been shown to be important for mental well-being. The provision of homes and facilities (for education, employment, shopping, sports, cultural activities and other community uses) close to each other helps to increase the opportunity for people of all ages to socialise, connect, create and share experiences. Good design means that everyone, regardless of their disability, age, gender, sexual orientation, race or faith can enjoy those facilities.
- 5.5 Where traffic speeds and noise are low, with vehicle traffic mostly limited to main routes, streets and other shared spaces can be a safe and pleasant place for communities to meet, walk, cycle and play.

## **6 Walkable neighbourhoods**

- 6.1 Building on the importance of high quality walking and cycling routes, one of the fundamental outcomes that planning can seek to deliver is a walkable neighbourhood, a living environment where people can access services and facilities to meet many of their day to day needs on foot without the necessity to use the motor car.
- 6.2 Planning policy already places considerable attention on the ease of pedestrian access to services and in development site assessment work will consider the physical proximity, especially for new housing, to facilities. However assessment should go further to look at matters around the quality of access routes and footpaths to include considerations such as the steepness of any hills or steps to manoeuvre, busy roads to cross, availability and quality of footpaths and surveillance and lighting on such routes.
- 6.3 A well designed neighbourhood will encourage people to increase physical activity and to meet with other members of the community, impacting positively on both physical and mental health. Where homes, schools, shops, community facilities, workplaces, play spaces, open spaces and sports facilities are within easy reach of each other there is more chance of people walking or cycling to them, and using more than one facility. In doing so they also increase the chances of interacting with other people. This is especially so where streets feel like safe and pleasant places to stop and linger.
- 6.4 The added benefits of a walkable neighbourhood include a reduction in noise and air pollution with less use of the car for short trips. This not only helps to improve the environment and lessen carbon emissions, but supports better health and wellbeing for its community.
- 6.5 During the Covid-19 lockdown, though not so much in East Devon as elsewhere in the country, travel restrictions meant that some streets were used in different, imaginative ways, and some people tended to shop more locally. We can potentially look to these recent experiences from elsewhere in managing existing spaces and perhaps more

importantly, especially from a planning perspective, planning for new spaces and developments.

## **7 Importance of public transport**

- 7.1 Whilst being able to walk to facilities can meet many of the basic needs of people and communities there will be some services that are too specialist, distant or just otherwise not available on a walkable basis. For many people the obvious choice will be to use a private car to access such facilities. However, those without access to the private car will frequently be reliant on public transport but the quality of services, the routes run and frequency are often poor and, especially for those on low incomes, prices can be high.
- 7.2 Where public transport provision is poor those without access to a car, which often includes many of the more vulnerable, such as many elderly people, disabled and children, may struggle to access facilities and services and this in its own right can disadvantage them with consequential mental health impacts. Whilst potentially more starkly adverse physical health problems can arise and worsen if such people cannot get to health services and facilities.
- 7.3 There are, as well, wider health benefits to public transport provision as users will frequently walk to bus or train stops and as such will gain benefits that more sedentary car based journeys do not offer. Furthermore the more people use private vehicles, and not use public transport, the more of a challenge it becomes to run viable and high quality public transport services. There are therefore wider societal health benefits (and carbon reduction outcomes) in encouraging public transport provision and use.

## **8 The quality of new buildings, especially housing**

- 8.1 One of the key jobs of the local plan will be to provide for new buildings in East Devon with housing being of fundamental importance. There are locational considerations that are of health importance, specifically in respect of walkable neighbourhoods, but also key concerns about the quality of living space that is created. The condition of housing is critical for good health with, for example, cold and damp contributing to circulatory and respiratory disease whilst a lack of daylight and exposure to too much noise can also impact on a person's quality of life and wellbeing. Energy efficient, warm homes need to be provided for all members of the community, irrespective of tenure or income. Energy efficiency of course is not just of relevance to health but also is cross-cutting in respect of the climate emergency and reducing carbon emissions.
- 8.2 It is clear, therefore that poor quality development can lead to physical health problems but the same is also true of mental health with sub-standard development potentially leading to depression and poor levels of privacy and comfort can also affect well-being. It is important to ensure that these factors are considered in the design of homes, by the means of layout, orientation and adequate space standards. There is scope to develop minimum space standard policy in the local plan.

## **9 Air quality considerations**

- 9.1 Air quality and adverse health impacts arising is an increasingly topical matter at the present time and it is an issue of direct relevance to development and planning policy. Poor

air quality is strongly linked to asthma and respiratory and cardiovascular illness. Exposure to harmful gases and particles in the air come from a range of sources, including exhaust fumes from vehicles, smoke from burning coal or gas, and tobacco smoke. In designing neighbourhoods there are ways to limit the effects of air pollution on health, by limiting vehicle use and having clear separation from polluting industrial uses.

## **10 Access to green space and physical activity**

- 10.1 Shared green spaces including parks, playing fields, woodlands, allotments, community gardens, cycle routes and footpaths all provide access to the natural environment. These can offer higher levels of peace and quiet for reflection, leading to reduced levels of stress anxiety and depression. Pleasant green spaces can also encourage physical activity and meeting socially, bringing further benefits to health and wellbeing.
- 10.2 It will remain essential that future planning policy continues to protect and enhance green spaces, recreation areas and sporting facilities whilst also securing new provision alongside new development and meeting shortfalls in poorly supplied existing built-up areas.

## **11 Access to wholesome, locally produced foods**

- 11.1 Poor diet and obesity contribute to poor health including cardiovascular disease and cancer. Research shows that allotments and community gardens can increase both social interaction and the consumption of affordable, healthy food. Growing food in allotments also promotes physical activity and is associated with improved mental health.
- 11.2 One detailed policy matter we may wish to look into is the issue of whether we might choose to limit fast food outlets in certain town centre areas of East Devon or perhaps in other selected areas, for example near to schools. Many fast foods, especially if eaten in large quantities, can have adverse health impacts. Some planning authorities have put policies in place that seek to limit or control the number, concentration or locations of new fast food outlets on the basis of adverse health impacts that (too much) fast food can cause. There will be relevance in considering whether this type of policy approach could be applicable across East Devon noting that there is restrictive policy provision in the Cranbrook Plan which is currently at examination. Though changes in permitted development rights could limit effectiveness of any such policy. It should also be noted that with the range of delivery services now available on-line, the effectiveness of policies affecting physical fast food premises to affect health outcomes is potentially more limited.

## **12 Education and jobs**

- 12.1 Having a secure job that pays enough (and more) to meet basic needs can have a fundamental impact on health and ability, for example, to ensure people can live in good quality housing. There will, therefore be links between economic policy and seeking to secure the right jobs in East Devon through planning policy and health impacts for our communities. These same concerns run through to and relate to education and training opportunities as well.

## **13 Relationships with neighbourhood plans**

- 12.1 The issues around health considerations for our new local plan will also have a relevance for future neighbourhood plan making. It is relevant to note that many neighbourhood plans already major on protecting and enhancing the quality of their local environments and the importance of green space. As such they are already recognising related and important health considerations.

### **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications requiring comment.

### **Legal Implications**

There are no legal implications from this information report.