



# Northumberland County Council

Health and Well-being Board

Thursday, 11 January 2024

## Healthy Neighbourhoods Paper - Housing and Planning as Building Blocks for a Good Life in Northumberland

**Report of Councillor(s)** Cllr Veronica Jones, Cabinet Member for Improving Public Health and Wellbeing, Cllr Colin Horncastle, Cabinet Member for Looking After our Communities

**Responsible Officer(s):** Simon Neilson, Executive Director - Place and Regeneration, Gill O'Neill, Executive Director – Public Health, Inequalities and Stronger Communities

### 1. Link to Key Priorities of the Corporate Plan

This report is relevant to the following priorities in the NCC Corporate Plan 2023-26:

**Achieving value for money:** Creating conditions for everyone to live their best lives is typically highly cost effective and can yield lifelong costs savings such as increased earnings and productivity and reduced use of health and social care services.

**Tackling Inequalities:** To create a society where everybody can thrive, our residents need all the building blocks in place: a stable job, good pay, safe, affordable, and warm housing and good education. For some of our residents these foundations are weak or missing which create inequalities.

**Driving Economic Growth:** Ensuring that all our residents have access to building blocks of a good life, will help them to remain health and independent and pay an important part of the infrastructure contributing to Northumberland's future prosperity.

This report is also relevant to:

**Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (refresh) - Building Blocks of a Healthy Life Priority Theme 1 – Healthy Neighbourhoods**

#### **Northumberland Inequalities Plan**

Living conditions, reducing the gap in communities.

Quality and length of life; Healthy Life Expectancy (HLE) & Life Expectancy (LE).

#### **Northumberland Local Plan (2022)**

Includes policies supporting Health and wellbeing and healthy and sustainable homes.

## 2. Purpose of report

This report is intended to provide an overview of how Housing and Planning can contribute towards the tackling of inequalities in Northumberland and contribute towards Healthy Neighbourhoods.

The report seeks support, suggestions, and an ongoing involvement of the board as we work together to further healthy approaches to Housing and Planning.

## 3. Recommendations

The Health and Wellbeing Board are recommended to:

1. Receive the content of this report.
2. Attend the Health and Wellbeing Board prepared to reflect their organisations responses to the 3 Key Questions outlined below.
  - a. How can the member organisations of the Health and Wellbeing Board input to the development of a Housing Strategy prioritising healthy outcomes for our residents?
  - b. Should the Planning and Public Health Teams bring Full HIAs presented as a part of the planning application process for consideration by the Health and Wellbeing Board?
  - c. What more can we do to become exemplary in the development and delivery of housing within Northumberland?

## 4. Forward plan date and reason for urgency if applicable

N/A

## 5. Background

### 5.1 Key Issues and Opportunities

#### a) Issues

- Northumberland County Council is one of the largest Social Landlords in the county with 8326 properties.
- Resident voice tells us that communities do not have access to suitable affordable housing.
- There is under reporting of poor conditions in the private rented sector, resulting in a lack of comprehensive data on the condition of private sector housing stock.

#### b) Opportunities

- There is an opportunity to write a new, collaborative Northumberland housing strategy, focusing on healthy housing for our Northumberland residents,

including an opportunity for a systems approach to prioritisation of healthy housing initiatives through the Health and Wellbeing Board.

- Northumberland County Council and HWB partners as Anchor Institutions have an opportunity to lead by example in the development and delivery of high-quality housing schemes, becoming exemplars for other deliverers in the county.
- The introduction of Design Codes as a part of the new [Levelling up and Regeneration Act \(2023\)](#) presents an opportunity to develop design codes specifically to build on the Local Plan and support healthy developments across the county.
- There is an opportunity to work with the North East Mayoral Combined Authority (NEMCA) and with developers to create consistent messaging around a desire for 'Healthy Schemes'.
- The Northumberland Local Plan requires major schemes above a certain size to present a Health Impact assessment for review by the Local Authority. There is an opportunity to require the largest schemes (400 residential units or 40,000 square meters of non-residential development) to bring Full Health Impact Assessments to the Health and wellbeing Board for consideration.

## 5.2 **Housing and Planning as Building Blocks of a Good Life**

The concept of Healthy Neighbourhoods is broad and involves several of the wider determinants of health, including safe streets, green spaces, access to community spaces and local services, alongside housing and planning. This document focuses on housing and planning as building blocks of a good life. In this context, "housing" covers a broad range of functions including sector wide strategic renewal for example work with partners and landlords, policy development, place making, and housing management along with the decisions made by the Planning Authority about new/extended or changed homes in Northumberland.

The [Northumberland 2017 Director of Public Health Report](#) reviewed the wider determinants of health in Northumberland. It stated that a safe, settled, home is the cornerstone on which individuals and families build a good quality of life and access the opportunities and services they need.

The Kings Fund (2013) in their [Broader determinants of health: Future trends paper](#) suggest that improved housing conditions and greater access to green spaces should have a positive impact on health. They go on to suggest that cold, damp and 'non-decent' homes all impact on people's health, that overall social sector homes were in better condition than private sector homes. They also suggest that homeowners have better physical health outcomes, more positive mental health, and higher self-esteem, which all contribute to overall wellbeing. However, home ownership, especially cases where homeowners have high mortgages, could lead to increased levels of stress, which is detrimental to health.

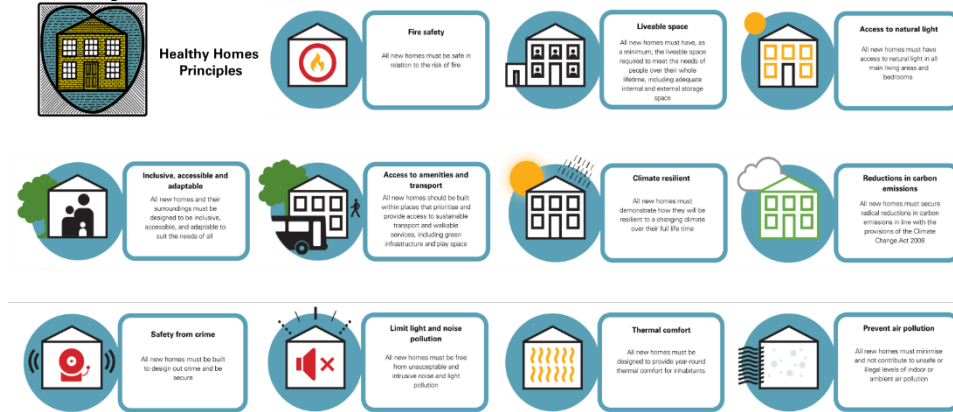
In the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy Review refresh on the Building Blocks of a Healthy Life Theme (December 2023) the following priorities were identified in the Healthy Neighbourhoods category:

- Priority 1: Supporting Healthy Neighbourhoods through Planning
- Priority 2: Blyth Deep Dive Housing and Healthy Housing Hub
- Priority 3: Hirst Housing Masterplan Phase One Implementation
- Priority 4: Available, Affordable, Quality Housing

## 5.3 **How does Housing Affect Health?**

The Town and County Planning Association in its [Campaign for Healthy Homes](#) (2023), suggest that too many homes and neighbourhoods built today undermine residents' health

and wellbeing. Standards for new homes and places are fragmented, complex and do not guarantee that all new homes provide for residents' basic human needs, such as access to green space and local services, and clean air. It also suggests that some homes built through Permitted Development even lack access to natural light, and thousands more have been built in office parks and industrial estates. It proposes a series of [Healthy Homes Principles](#) (figure 1). outlining the breadth of elements that work together to constitute a healthy home.



To find out more about the Campaign for Healthy Homes please visit: [www.tcpa.org.uk/collection/campaign-for-healthy-homes/](http://www.tcpa.org.uk/collection/campaign-for-healthy-homes/)

Figure 1 TCPA Healthy Homes Principles

In 2021, the government updated its 2019 [National Design Guide](#), presenting ten Characteristics of well-designed places. Most usefully presented in its graphic in figure 2 below.

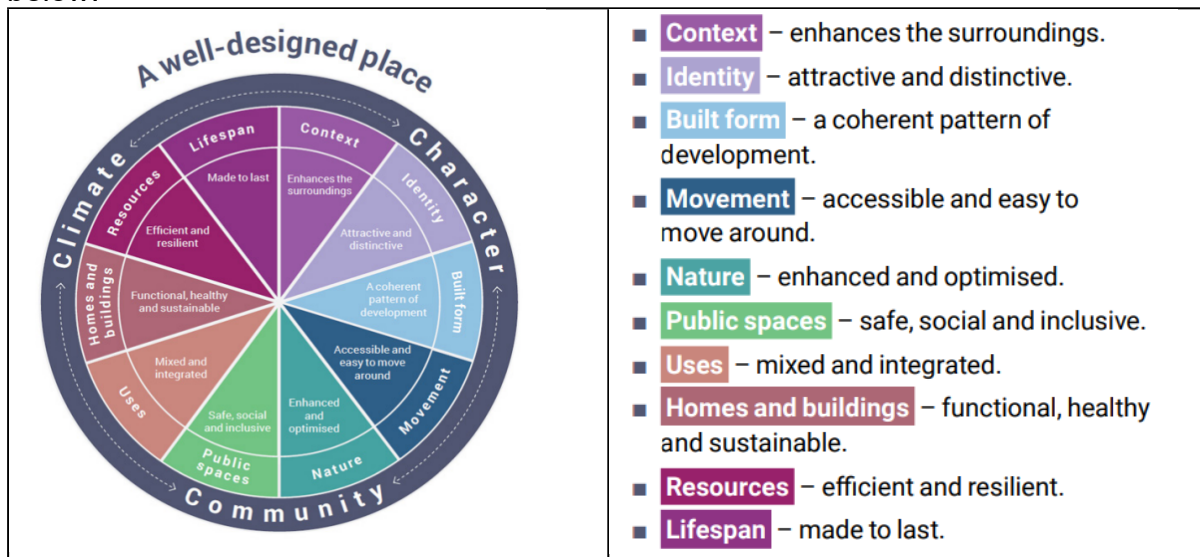


Figure 2 The Ten Characteristics of a well-designed place, MHCLG 2021

They suggest that well-designed places have individual characteristics which work together to create its physical character. The ten characteristics help to nurture and sustain a sense of community. They work to positively address environmental issues affecting Climate. They all contribute towards the cross-cutting themes for good design set out in the National Planning Policy.

## 5.4 Inequalities in Northumberland

It has been well documented that inequalities in Life Expectancy and Healthy Life Expectancy exist across the county, with a fourteen-year discrepancy of Life Expectancy

and a twenty-year discrepancy of Healthy Life Expectancy existing between our most and least deprived communities.

Opportunities in planning and the application of health-related policies to housing, help us to work towards the reduction in inequalities across the county.

Targeted housing interventions in our most deprived communities provide an opportunity to make a more direct and equitable impact in those areas where life expectancies and healthy life expectancies are lowest.

A commitment in the Northumberland Inequalities Plan states that residents voice is equal to data as we work within our communities. It is important that as we develop a strategy for housing in the county, and the projects to support that are developed with our communities, reflect the needs of our residents. We should continue to listen to resident voice in our communities and to understand the strengths that exist there; striving to build on those strengths and to understand what the community wants to do for itself, what it needs some help to achieve and what the community needs us as stakeholders to do for them.

## 5.5 Data

### a) Quantitative Data

The relevant national indicators to support an understanding of progress within this theme are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Relevant National Indicators

Healthy Neighbourhood Indicators	Northumberland	Northeast	England	Time Period	Trend
Affordability of home ownership *	6.5	5.4	9.1	2021	Not available
Overcrowded Houses	3.6%		8.7%	2021	Awaiting new census data
% of properties at band C and above	40%	42%	42%	2023	
Fuel Poverty	13.8%	14%	13.1%	2021	

### b) Qualitative Data

Roll out of the use of the Place Standard Tool across the county allows us to gather residents voice. Facilitators of the conversation strive to get a view from a wide cross section of the community and have a focus on those who don't always have a voice in their communities. Those involved are asked to score a series of fourteen categories about their place between 1 and 7 and then asked to explain their scoring by answering two asset-based questions:

- What is good now?
- How could we make it better in future?

So far this has been used to capture views from stakeholders and residents across the following (table 2). We are working with Locality Coordinators and the Voluntary and Community Sector to resource further community conversations. Many of the fourteen categories have an impact on how people feel about their home and its environment: for example, feeling safe, moving around, and access to natural space. However, for the purposes of this report the scores and narrative around housing and community are shown. Detail of resident voice gathered in conversation is shown in Appendix 1, including a Place Standard Tool spider graph of views across the fourteen categories.

Table 2 Place Standard Tool community conversations.

Where	Stakeholders / Residents	Details	Score for Housing and Community
Twelve localities across the county	Stakeholders (400)	Twelve locality events were held across Northumberland in the summer of 2022. Cumulative Northumberland results shown below in figure 6	3.9 / 7
Hirst, Ashington	Residents (118)	Community conversation held across the Hirst during summer 2022 to form the scope for the Hirst Masterplan.	3.6 / 7
Bedlington	Residents (72)	Community conversation held across Bedlington autumn / winter 2022 to inform the Borderlands Place Planning process.	4.3 / 7
Cramlington	Residents (532)	Community conversation held across Cramlington summer 2023 to inform a Cramlington Place Plan.	4.6 / 7

## 6. Options open to the Board and reasons for the recommendations.

### 6.1 Healthy Housing as a Building Block for Health

There currently exist several projects and opportunities across the county, working towards developing or improving housing, with the potential for positive health outcomes. Appendix 2 provides some examples.

The opportunities in table 2 could be considered as we work together on Healthy Housing as a Building Block for Health.

Table 2 Potential opportunities towards Healthy Housing in Northumberland

Topic	Context	Potential Actions	Resources
Affordable housing	Northumberland needs more affordable housing, better spread across the county (localities events, summer 2022, and residents voice in Place Standard Tool conversations in Cramlington, Bedlington and Hirst 2022 & 23) 14071 applicants currently registered with Homefinder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>County wide Affordable Housing needs assessment</li> <li>Work with partners to optimise the delivery of Rural Affordable Housing</li> <li>NCC will aim to be an exemplar as the biggest social landlord in the county.</li> <li>Working to drive up quality of housing and support tenants with healthy living initiatives.</li> <li>Affordable Housing conference</li> </ul>	Need to draw in further money / capacity.

Housing and Health conference	Opportunity to hold a housing and health conference with stakeholders to launch new housing strategy end 2024.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assumes all new housing strategy focusing on health.</li> <li>To include social landlords, private landlords, housing developers and elected members.</li> </ul>	New way of working / no additional resource requirement Already have investment to deliver
Delivering additional homes for Northumberland	Northumberland County Council has made £45m available to invest in the provision of new council housing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Opportunity for NCC to be an exemplar in healthy homes.</li> <li>Opportunity to work with other social landlords and commercial developers to ensure all new schemes are centred around healthy homes.</li> <li>Work with developers and the Registered Provider sector on increasing the supply of new homes in the right locations to meet local need.</li> </ul>	Already have investment to deliver
Health and Housing Forum	Opportunity to establish a Health and Housing forum (reporting to HWB) to lead on prioritising, project development, housing strategy etc	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Could include specialist offshoot partnership groups e.g., Affordable Housing</li> </ul>	New way of working / no additional resource requirement
Structure of NCC Housing Service	Do not have a clearly defined Strategic Housing Function and Private Sector Housing is split across two service areas of the Housing Service.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the structure</li> </ul>	New way of working / no additional resource requirement

## 6.2 Healthy Planning as a Building Block for Health

Planning can be used as a method of ensuring and regulating healthy developments across the county, for both residential and non-residential developments. The Northumberland Local Plan allows for this and has several policies relevant to developing healthy neighbourhoods. Several projects are already underway to ensure that planning contributes to the health of our residents, these are shown in appendix three. Further opportunities exist to build on these, and they are shown below.

The opportunities in table 3 could be considered as we work together on planning as a Building Block for Health.



Table 3 Opportunities for further work to support planning Healthy Homes and Neighbourhoods

Opportunity	Further Context	Resources
Health Impact Assessments	Opportunity for a reporting requirement of Rapid HIAs to the board for information. Opportunity for HWB consideration of Full Health Impact Assessments	New way of working / no additional resource requirement
Develop a common narrative across NECMA	Opportunity to promote the narrowing of the inequalities gap through devolution, create NECMA healthy developments messaging which is consistent across the whole of the new mayoral authority. This could be through a new spatial plan or through individual authorities' local plans but in the interim some form of shared agreement.	New way of working / no additional resource requirement
Early engagement work with developers	Raise understanding of the benefits of addressing the wider determinants of health (and carbon reduction) as part of new developments, including via the pre application process.	New way of working / no additional resource requirement
Ensure the effective involvement of Public Health throughout the planning application process	Ensure that health considerations are given appropriate weight in planning decisions and that health is integral from the start. This will include input at the pre-application stage and in planning decisions and refreshing HIA (Health Impact Assessment) guidance as part of an update to the Planning Validation List.	New way of working / no additional resource requirement
Ensure effective engagement with communities and Public Health involvement in work in strategic plan making.	This could include planning guidance to supplement the Local Plan, support for Neighbourhood Plan making.	New way of working / no additional resource requirement
Supporting Infrastructure	Feedback from residents is that housing expansion is putting strain on existing infrastructure such as schools, GP surgeries and dentists. The Local Plan has introduced new policy approaches to help secure developer contributions. However, the economic viability of development in Northumberland can mean there is insufficient funding to address needs. We need to assess and explore alternative approaches to funding where there are such limitations.	Need to draw in further money / capacity
Design Codes	A Countywide Design Code has become a mandatory requirement because of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act.	Already have investment to deliver (potential for additional funding)



	There is an opportunity to use these to focus on healthy development e.g., access to outdoor space and active transport routes	requirement (depending on scope)
Benchmarking	Engage with national planning support organisations and other local authorities to review who is doing this well nationally. Be a part of networks sharing best practice and driving national change.	New way of working / no additional resource requirement
National Policy	Respond to government and other organisations' research and policy development to help shape and influence policy and guidance nationally.	New way of working / no additional resource requirement

## 7. Implications

<b>Policy</b>	This paper aligns with the revised 'Building Blocks of a Good Life' of the refreshed Northumberland Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. It considers and seeks to align with other organisational strategies and the corporate plan.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Each proposal has been categorised into one of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New way of working / no additional resource requirement</li> <li>• Already have investment to deliver.</li> <li>• Need to draw in further money / capacity.</li> </ul> No additional resources are being requested at this stage.
<b>Legal</b>	This report supports the Health and Wellbeing Board to fulfil its statutory duty to complete a joint local health and wellbeing strategy. It is not anticipated that the refreshed actions will have legal implications, however they will require additional action plans and each organisation will need to consider legal implications at this point.
<b>Procurement</b>	There are no specific requirements for procurement articulated in this report, however the actions will require additional action plans and each organisation will need to consider procurement implications at this point.
<b>Human resources</b>	No new recruitment is identified. However, system partners will need to devote resources in terms of staff / officer time to deliver these actions. It may be that as part of developing implementation plans, organisations will need to consider recruitment implications.
<b>Property</b>	There are no specific implications for estates. However, the document refers to the ongoing work of the housing team within the council.

<b>The Equalities Act: is a full impact assessment required and attached?</b>	No - not required at this point An equalities impact assessment has not been carried out. However, the actions included are specifically aimed at reducing health inequalities which include to people with characteristics protected by the Public Sector Equality Duty.
<b>Risk assessment</b>	A risk assessment has not been undertaken, though risk assessments may be needed as part of further implementation
<b>Crime and disorder</b>	No specific implications
<b>Customer considerations</b>	The proposals are intended to improve the lives of our residents.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	No specific implications, though the development and delivery of healthy housing should include carbon reduction measures
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	This report is explicitly intending to improve the health and wellbeing of the population of Northumberland and reduce health inequalities.
<b>Wards</b>	(All Wards);

## 8. Background papers

Appendix 1 – Resident View

Appendix 2 – Housing projects in process or development

Appendix 3 – Planning projects in process or development

[Levelling up and Regeneration Act \(2023\)](#)

[Northumberland 2017 Director of Public Health Report](#)

Kings Fund (2013) in their [Broader determinants of health: Future trends paper](#)

Town And County Planning Association in its [Campaign for Healthy Homes \(2023\)](#)

Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (2021), [National Design Guide](#)

[Social Housing \(Regulation\) Act 2023](#)

[New Homes fact sheets \(Homes England\)](#)

[TCPA Public Health in Planning Guidance](#)

Public Health England [Spatial Planning for Health](#)

## 9. Links to other key reports already published.

Joint Health and Well-being Strategy Refresh Build Blocks for a Healthy Life (14<sup>th</sup> December 2023)

## 10. Author and Contact Details

Anne Lawson,

Email: [anne.lawson@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:anne.lawson@northumberland.gov.uk)