

# Active Design

Planning for health and wellbeing through sport and physical activity



## How to use Active Design

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The creation of healthy places requires the collaborative input of many different partners through many disciplines including planning, design, transport and health, along with developers working with local communities.

## How planners, transport planners and Neighbourhood Plan-making bodies can use Active Design

Active Design should be promoted through all planning activity, including Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans, using clear policy support within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and its supporting Planning Practice Guidance. Indeed, the original 2007 guidance has been referenced in Local Plans which have been found sound by the Planning Inspectorate, including Lichfield District Council's Local Plan Strategy 2008–2029<sup>75</sup>. Active Design can play a key role in the plan-making and decision taking process.

Many Active Design Principles are already implicit within overlapping disciplines related to open space and landscape, transport, access and design.

### 1. Plan-making

Working with local communities and stakeholders, Active Design can be explicitly promoted through Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans and has an important role to play in plan-making activity, in creating sound local and neighbourhood policies:

- **Developing the evidence base** – Active Design reflects national planning policy and can form part of the evidence base for plan-making activity. Planners can use Active Design to inform discussions with local communities, public health leads and health organisations, landscape professionals and with transport professionals to identify local policy priorities, local health and transport programmes and to build a proportionate evidence base. Active Design can also inform and complement other elements of the evidence base such as the assessment of needs and opportunities for sporting provision, Walking and Cycling Strategies etc.
  - **Developing planning policy** – Active Design can be used to help meet the requirements of the NPPF including the production of positively prepared, justified and effective local planning policies. Incorporating Active Design Principles within planning policy can assist Local and Neighbourhood Plans in contributing positively to the promotion of healthy communities and the requirement for good design, two key planning priorities of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
  - **Informing the approach to the Community Infrastructure Levy** – Active Design can assist in identifying the scope of infrastructure that might be supported by the Community Infrastructure Levy and therefore identified in the Regulation 123 list<sup>76</sup>.
  - **Monitoring and evaluating planning policy** – Active Design can inform the identification of appropriate indicators relating to sport and physical activity to monitor relevant planning policies.
1. The use of an Active Design related policy in its own right (see the model policy on following page);
  2. Reference to adhering to the Active Design Principles, in line with the model policy text, within:
    - wider planning policies promoting healthy lifestyles and high quality urban design;
    - policies which present the requirements for specific housing allocations;
    - relevant Supplementary Planning Documents (e.g. development briefs or area action plans which will guide the development of specific sites or wider areas).

Effective Local Plans should include strong objectives for the development of healthy communities and good design which reflect the needs of the local area. To aid the implementation of these objectives the Active Design Principles can be promoted within Local and Neighbourhood Plans in a number of ways, including:

Active Design can also be used to support the case for funding for local investment to Local Enterprise Partnerships and other organisations through the economic benefits of increased physical activity promoted by Active Design.

## Active Design: Model policy for Local and Neighbourhood Plans

The design and masterplanning of development proposals will embrace the role they can play in supporting healthy lifestyles by facilitating participation in sport and physical activity. To do so they will, as far as is relevant to the specific development proposal, adhere to the following Active Design Principles:

- **Activity for all**  
*Enabling those who want to be physically active whilst encouraging those who are inactive to become active.*
- **Walkable communities**  
*Creating the conditions for active travel between all locations.*
- **Connected walking, running and cycling routes**  
*Prioritising active travel through safe integrated walking, running and cycling routes.*
- **Co-location of community facilities**  
*Creating multiple reasons to visit a destination and minimising the number and length of trips and increasing the awareness and convenience of opportunities to participate in sport and physical activity opportunities.*
- **Network of multifunctional open space**  
*Providing multifunctional spaces opens up opportunities for sport and physical activity and has numerous wider benefits.*
- **High quality streets and spaces**  
*Well designed streets and spaces support and sustain a broader variety of users and community activities.*
- **Appropriate infrastructure**  
*Providing and facilitating access to facilities and other infrastructure to enable all members of society to take part in sport and physical activity.*
- **Active buildings**  
*Providing opportunities for activity inside and around buildings, rather than just between buildings.*
- **Management and maintenance**  
*A high standard of maintenance is essential to ensure the long-term attractiveness of sports facilities along with open and public spaces.*

Active Design, developed by Sport England and supported by Public Health England, provides a set of principles for creating the right conditions within existing and proposed development for individuals to be able to lead active and healthy lifestyles. It focuses on those ingredients of cities, towns and villages that offer individuals the opportunity to be active. The planning system as a whole, including individual development proposals, has a key role to play in creating such opportunities. Planning applications will therefore be assessed against how they embrace the role they can play in supporting healthy lifestyles by facilitating participation in sport and physical activity. The Local Planning Authority will use the Active Design Principles to aid this assessment.

Where Design and Access Statements are required to support an application they should explain how the design of the proposal embraces this role and reflects the Active Design Principles. Public Health leads for the local area should be encouraged to work with the planning department to engage at pre-application stage with applicants as they will be consulted on all relevant applications. The Local Planning Authority may use planning conditions and/or planning obligations where necessary to address issues where developments could, but do not, embrace this role and do not adhere to the Active Design Principles.

The Active Design guidance, which provides further details for each of the Principles along with a set of case studies, can be found on [Sport England's website](#).

<sup>75</sup> Core Policy 10: Healthy and Safe Lifestyles, Lichfield Local Plan Strategy 2008–2029 (2015), Lichfield District Council.

<sup>76</sup> Regulation 123, Further Limitations on use of Planning Obligations in The Community Infrastructure Levy Regulations 2010, HM Government.

## 2. Decision taking

Planners and other groups should also use Active Design, alongside other elements of their Local Plan and evidence base, to promote healthy active environments in the design of proposals and engagement of local communities, and when engaging with, assessing and determining planning applications through the decision making process:

- Active Design can inform initial discussions with applicants, communities and in pre-application advice on how a specific site or proposal can respond to Active Design Principles and in scoping out the content of planning application submissions.
- Active Design can form a key ingredient in the Design and Access Statement (as well as other appropriate documentation) required to be submitted with most major planning applications, which could set out how the proposed development responds to the Active Design Principles.
- The Ten Active Design Principles and the Model Planning Policy forms a useful tool for the assessment of planning applications, and taking planning decisions. This could include the scoping of appropriate conditions and planning obligations (commonly referred to as s.106 agreements) that might be required to make a development acceptable in planning terms.
- Active Design Principles can also inform the identification of indicators for monitoring and evaluating the impact of planning policy and decisions.

Active Design can help planners engage with health professionals and take into account strategies to improve health and wellbeing, a core planning principle (see NPPF paragraph 17). The health system can be complex for those who do not have experience operating within it. Public Health England has produced a Guide to the Healthcare System for Local Planning Authorities<sup>77</sup> which can be a useful tool to outline opportunities for involvement in the health system, and also explains the importance of the health focus within the NPPF.

Some authorities also promote the use of Health Impact Assessments to support appropriate planning applications to assess the likely health outcomes.

<sup>77</sup> *Health Building Note 00-08, Addendum 1 – A guide to the healthcare systems for local planning authorities* (2015), Department of Health.

## How health professionals can use Active Design

Planning can ensure that the right development happens in the right place at the right time, benefiting communities and the economy. The Department of Health has produced a guide to the planning system for health professionals<sup>78</sup>, and this should be referred to for further information on the planning system and how health professionals can engage in plan-making and decision taking. There are two key strands of planning activity:

### 1. Plan-making

Local Plans are the key documents through which local planning authorities can set out a vision and framework for the future development of the area, typically over a fifteen year period. Local Plans address needs and opportunities in relation to housing, the local economy, community facilities and infrastructure. They should safeguard the environment, enable adaptation to climate change and help secure high quality accessible design whilst promoting the delivery of healthy communities. The Local Plan provides a degree of certainty for communities, businesses and investors regarding the development of an area, and a framework for guiding decisions on individual planning applications.

Neighbourhood Plans are prepared by Parish or Town Councils or other neighbourhood forums. Neighbourhood Plans offer communities the opportunity to develop a shared vision for their neighbourhood and shape the development and growth of their local area.

It is highly desirable that health priorities and objectives are aligned with and integrated into Local Plans and policies given their central role in determining planning applications. Plan-making is a continuous and long-term process that requires ongoing engagement and collaboration between planners and health professionals. For maximum impact, health professionals and planners should engage at the earliest stages of the plan-making process, including inputting into related evidence such as Strategic Environmental Assessments.

Health professionals can use Active Design to stimulate and inform dialogue with planning colleagues, and in engaging with elected members to stimulate discussion and promote strong leadership on promoting sport, health and physical activity across the planning and wider political spectrum.

### 2. Decision taking

The planning system is plan-led and any planning application must be determined in line with the development plan (Local and Neighbourhood Plans and, where relevant, the London Plan) unless other material considerations indicate otherwise. Health professionals can use Active Design to inform joint working with planners, landscape and transport professionals to promote the positive application of Active Design Principles in detailed proposals and improved health outcomes.

Planning applications benefit from being informed by pre-application discussions between applicants and the local planning authority, the local community and relevant organisations. These can vary from informal discussions to formal screening and scoping of Environmental Impact Assessments.

Public Health leads for the local area should be encouraged to develop and/or enhance their relationships with local authority planners and relevant councillors (planning portfolio holders) in their area, and work with planners to provide comments and input to all relevant applications:

1. as part of any pre-application engagement undertaken (including the scoping of application material, including Environmental Impact Assessments);
2. as part of the consultation process once the application is submitted; and
3. as part of the consideration of the use of conditions or planning obligations.

Some authorities also promote the use of Health Impact Assessments to support appropriate planning applications to assess the likely health outcomes.

Health professionals should also consider including Active Design in future reviews of their Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategies. This can help to highlight the role of the built and natural environment and planning activity in promoting health and wellbeing, and to strengthen linkages between health and planning.

<sup>78</sup> *Health Building Note 00-08, Addendum 2 – A guide to town planning for health organisations* (2015), Department of Health.

## How developers can use Active Design

The promotion of the Active Design Principles in a development proposal has a number of significant benefits:

- Embedding Active Design Principles into the design and layout of a development at an early stage will meet a number of planning, transport and health objectives in an integrated and co-ordinated manner. This can assist in providing a smoother and quicker route through the planning application process and can help build support from neighbours and local communities for proposals resulting in more positive outcomes for applications.
- Active Design offers real and tangible benefits to the design and branding of a development which will enable a development to differentiate itself from competitors and will ultimately result in a stronger and more distinct market offer to customers. For example, case study evidence at Brooklands, Milton Keynes suggests a very strong market demand for new dwellings influenced in part by the strong design and community ethos<sup>82</sup>.
- There is a growing awareness that active places have broader economic benefits not just in terms of returns on investment in walking and cycling infrastructure<sup>79</sup>, but in terms of the value of homes<sup>80</sup>. Active places also achieve better returns for retailers and are more attractive to tenants and customers<sup>81</sup>. The integration of Active Design Principles may therefore have a positive influence on the overall viability of development.

The following points outline how Active Design should be used to help realise these benefits:

1. Active Design Principles should be integrated into the design concept from the outset of any master planning.
2. Developers should use Active Design to seek early engagement with the local planning authority, leisure and health professionals and local communities to identify health, sport and physical activity priorities within the area that need to be reflected in proposals.
3. Where Design and Access Statements are required to support a planning application, developers and their agents should specifically identify the response of development proposals to the Active Design Principles, to demonstrate how sport and physical activity has been embedded into proposals.
4. As well as the physical layout of hard infrastructure, developers should include appropriate details of the maintenance and management of open spaces in planning submissions, or clearly signpost them as matters to be addressed by planning condition or planning obligations.
5. Developers should seek to front-load open space provision and deliver community facilities as early as possible within a development. This will increase the opportunities for participation in sport and physical activity at the earliest point in construction (e.g. for the first residents of the development). It will also provide an established setting and an attractive environment for potential occupiers and/or users of the development.
6. Developers should maintain engagement with communities and new residents across the delivery of proposals making information available regarding the delivery of open spaces, facilities, foot and cycle links etc.

<sup>79</sup> *Making the Case for Active Cities: The Co-Benefits of Designing for Active Living* (2015), Active Living Research.

<sup>80</sup> *Does Money Grow on Trees?* (2005), CABE Space.

<sup>81</sup> *The pedestrian pound: the business case for better streets and places*, Living Streets and Just Economics.

<sup>82</sup> *Couples brave freezing temperatures in bid to secure homes* (2015), Brooklands.







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