
HIYE (Health in Your Environment Voluntary Sector Forum) brings together voluntary organisations involved in health, social and economic regeneration and environmental issues in Greater Nottingham. It aims to increase integration of policies and practices across these issues to improve the health and environment of local people. To this end it responds to proposals and initiatives; sends representatives to decision-making bodies; holds events to develop thinking on the issues; and facilitates the exchange of information and good practice.

Planning for a Healthy Environment

Summary

The seminar was organised as part of Greater Nottingham Greenweeks 2007, as a response to a Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution (RCEP) report on The Urban Environment¹ which raises a number of key health issues, including:

- air pollution (particularly from traffic)
- obesity (importance of walking and cycling)
- traffic accidents
- green spaces (important for mental health and physical health)
- local services – to promote social interaction and walking/cycling

The seminar heard three presentations from²

- Helen Ross, Nottingham City Primary Care Trust
- Erin McDaid, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust
- Matt Gregory, Team Leader, Planning Policy, Nottingham City Council

Some of the key issues arising from the seminar include:

Accessibility Strategy

Accessibility is not just about transport strategy, but planning to reduce the need for journeys, to make walking and cycling the easier choice, and to make provision for disabled accessibility. This should lead to less pollution, less congestion, less stress and less obesity.

Value of urban greenspace

Green spaces can improve both mental and physical wellbeing. Trees and lakes reduce stress. Green areas also reduce the 'heat island' effect of urban areas which will become more of a problem as climate change causes hotter summers.

Development can provide solutions

If the Regional Plan requires 100,000 new homes in Greater Nottingham this will put great pressure on wildlife. But development can provide solutions as well as problems. The Wildlife Trust will work with developers to promote green space within developments, and opportunities such as 'brown roofs'. Planners can use 'section 106' agreements to help this process. There may be opportunities for the NHS Estate to support such activities.

Design of housing will also be important – e.g. 'Lifetime Homes' to allow adaptation for disabled people, and the 'Code for Sustainable Homes'.

Consultation and appraisal

For future strategies, such as the Sustainable Community Strategy, it will be valuable to carry out Health Impact Assessment alongside Strategic Environmental Assessment.

Health in Your Environment Voluntary Sector Forum

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HIYE is a member of the Greater Nottingham Health and Environment Partnership

Extract from the RCEP Urban Environment Summary Report, p4:¹

It should be a fundamental requirement of government policy that towns and cities become more environmentally sustainable and healthy places to live. However, such aspirations will not be met unless:

- urban management is guided by an explicit policy for the urban environment;
- health and wellbeing are recognised as being inextricably linked with environment;
- urban growth and renewal are planned within environmental constraints;
- the environment is placed at the heart of urban design, regeneration and management;
- there is an integrated approach to the urban environment that takes account of social, physical and economic factors;
- there are incentives to reduce negative environmental impacts; and
- knowledge, capacity and skills to reduce environmental impacts and promote health and wellbeing are increased and maintained.

To put these principles into practice we call for:

- a policy for the urban environment and its impact on health;
- an environmental contract between central and local government which also involves the private, voluntary and community sectors;
- a major programme to improve the environmental performance of new and existing buildings;
- promotion of the natural urban environment and green infrastructure through planning policy;
- driving up a range of environmental standards (through the Code for Sustainable Homes, utility pricing and incentives to reduce waste and traffic in urban areas); and
- provision of appropriate skills and information.

Helen Ross, Nottingham City Primary Care Trust

Helen focused on a number of health problems. In particular the health issues caused by current levels of obesity suggest that many of today's children may not live as long as their parents.

Busy roads provide opportunities for mobility but cause problems for people walking and cycling, split communities, add to air pollution, and cause accidents (304 people killed or seriously injured on roads in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire in 2006).

These problems can be addressed by the Greater Nottingham Accessibility Strategy objectives which include:



- *“Use the rights of way improvement plans to promote use of local services and locations which support healthy lifestyles eg leisure centres, parks, open spaces”*
- *“Ensure access to a range of essential services including a choice of healthy affordable food outlets by maintaining the viability of local and district centres.”*

These initiatives can help to promote exercise which is a key way of reducing obesity and the premature deaths it causes. They could also help to reduce energy consumption in the transport sector – a key issue raised by the Stern Report on tackling climate change.

It will require a change of mindset, for example developing travel plans to reduce trips by car and increase walking and cycling. Ridewise cycle training can support behaviour change from car to bike use, for example. Evidence suggests that cycling will avert more deaths, e.g. by reducing obesity, than the numbers killed in road accidents.

healthy TRAVEL
more people...more active...more often
No.8 Winter 2003

Get Set -
for travel plans in PCTs

Sustrans newsletter - with support of Dept of Health

Finally, Helen suggested that Health Impact Assessments could be carried out as part of Strategic Environmental Assessments of plans such as Local Transport Plans. This would be discussed by the Health and Environment Partnership.

Erin McDaid, Nottinghamshire Wildlife Trust

Erin focused on the value of urban greenspace for physical and mental health, contrasting the 'heat islands' created by much urban design with trees and lakes which can reduce stress.

People value green spaces and understand that they contribute to quality of life. English Nature has produced guidelines that everyone should have access to natural greenspace within 300 metres of their home.³

Access to good-quality well-maintained public spaces can help to improve our physical and mental health.⁴

Notts Wildlife Trust contributes by managing nature reserves, and also by monitoring planning applications, giving advice to landowners on including green infrastructure, and training sessions for planners.

Given that the Regional Plan is proposing another 95,000 houses in Nottinghamshire, this could cause a significant problem for wildlife. But development also provides an opportunity. Sympathetic design can provide solutions. Green space can be provided within developments. 'Brown roofs' create habitats. Examples include Trent Park Developments' River Crescent



River Crescent Project



Notts Wildlife Trust - keeping people healthy

Project, the Island Site, and Highfields Science Park.

Matt Gregory, Team Leader, Planning Policy, Nottingham City Council

Matt responded to a number of issues raised by the RCEP report and by Helen and Erin. Problems include:

- Air Pollution
- Climate
- Obesity
- Mental health
- Urban aggravating factors: vehicle emissions, poor housing, lack of green space

The Sustainable Community Strategy has a 20 year vision with priorities for development including health and environment. It is important to mainstream integrated solutions.

This includes the Accessibility Strategy - which is not just about more transport, it is about providing services and developments in more accessible ways. It is about physical and geographical accessibility of services, affordability, safety and information.

Accessibility analysis should mean less journeys but more walking and cycling, and so less pollution, congestion and stress and improved health and wellbeing. The tram reduces road capacity for cars (and 30% of passengers would use the car if not for the tram).

Green spaces are important for wellbeing, recognised in the Green Flag scheme.

Planners can use 'Section 106' contributions from developers to provide local space.



Arboretum Park, central Nottingham

Other important tools for planners include the 'Merton Rule' requiring developers to invest in renewable energy, the Code for Sustainable Homes and 'Lifetime Homes' to enable adaptation for disabled people.

There will be opportunities to discuss policy development on environment and health in forthcoming consultations on the Sustainable Community Strategy and the Development Framework Core Strategy 'Issues & Options'.

Discussion

There was wide ranging discussion around these issues, including:

- Support for the RCEP analysis of impact of urban environment on health.
- The 'view out of the window' is important.
- The need for better planning, particularly for regeneration schemes to be planned for future climate – energy efficient buildings, and cool areas with tree planting (using appropriate species), and also noting that construction is energy intensive.
- The importance of greenspace. A GP suggested green spaces would help the anxious depressed people who are a fallout from a society which doesn't benefit from the psychological effects of experiencing wilderness.
- The pressure on wildlife from additional housing means we need to be creative to support tree planting, brown roofs and green spaces within developments.
- Accessibility of green space, including

disabled access, is important. A cycleway next to green space in Loughborough is a good example.

- Notts Wildlife Trust manages many sites in partnership with owners – for example a wildlife corridor in the City Hospital site. In these cases ownership is not an issue.
- However, there are other cases, particularly allotments, where ownership is an issue. We need to defend allotments from developers because local food will be needed in the future.
- Better use could be made of housing, for example where single pensioners occupy four bedroom houses with large gardens, some form of collective management could allow them to stay while allowing a family to also make use of the house or garden.
- Section 106 agreements could be important in negotiating with developers who are risk averse and may know nothing for example about green roofs.
- There is also a skills gap for architects in understanding building communities.
- The new 'place-making policies represent a challenge for planners and will require new thinking and approaches. This may provide opportunities to give greater prominence to community involvement and to health and environmental concerns in the future.
- One concrete suggestion was for dialogue between Notts Wildlife Trust and the NHS on greening the NHS estate.



Ecoworks allotment at Hungerhill Gardens

¹ www.rcep.org.uk/urbanenvironment.htm

² Copies of the speakers' presentations are available at www.hiye.org.uk

³ <http://www.naturalengland.org.uk/campaigns/health/default.htm>

⁴ Manifesto for better public spaces, Cabespace 2004 (www.cabespace.org.uk)