

Essential Guidance for Local Planning Authorities: Scoping and Undertaking Health Impact Assessments: A User and Validation Evaluation Guide

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A Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a tool used to identify the health impacts of a plan or scheme and to develop recommendations to maximise the positive impacts and minimise the negative impacts, through influencing the wider determinants of health, while maintaining a focus on addressing health inequalities. This note covers the planning application process.

While formally a voluntary process, it is now recognised that more health conscious planning and development is an important way to address current and looming public health challenges. The population continues to grow, as does life expectancy and the ageing population, yet the years spent in good health have plateaued, and in some areas, are declining. Coordinated and consistent high quality master planning and delivery of new developments is needed to ensure that they create a health enabling environment and reduce the years spent in poor health with its associated impact on health care demand, costs and inequality. This, together with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) guidance that “Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places”, National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) support for the use of HIAs, and Public Health England Guidance [Health Impact Assessment in spatial planning: A guide for local authority public health and planning teams](#), forms the rationale as to the inclusion of HIA as a local policy and validation requirement.

The purpose of this Essential Guidance document is to ensure that this objective is delivered on individual projects, and cumulatively across multiple projects to support healthy independent living for longer, and the delivery of vibrant and cohesive communities. By raising awareness and bringing such health considerations to the fore, HIAs add value to the planning process, and supports the delivery of Public Health Objectives.

Existing development plans may require HIAs to be undertaken to consider the impacts of developments on strategic sites and in the case of Oxford City for proposals for major development. Local policies and development briefs will indicate when a HIA is required – this is either linked to the number of houses being built or because of the sensitivity of the site such as its proximity to areas of high health inequalities. They should be completed **early** in the planning process so that they can inform scheme design and master planning; they are not checklists to be completed at the end of the design process, as this provides no value in informing and refining an application and misses the opportunity for development of bespoke healthy urban design tailored to local health circumstance, priority and need.

In order to support developers and their agents undertaking HIAs, and to inform the evaluation and Planning Officer response to HIAs submitted as a validation requirement, the Future Oxfordshire Partnership has produced a Health Impact Assessment Toolkit; its use has been approved by all the local planning authorities. The purpose of the toolkit is to deliver sustainable growth across the County. It aims

to positively impact on existing health inequalities and to create healthy, more resilient and sustainable communities. It provides a suite of tools for use by all those involved in the development process, including developers, land agents, planners and policy makers, as a mechanism for putting healthy place shaping principles into practice, and delivering improvements to health and well-being, whether as part of regeneration and development schemes in existing communities or in new settlements.

The full Oxfordshire HIA Toolkit can be accessed [here](#).

In order to complete a HIA, developers will need to identify and understand the local health and wellbeing issues that their scheme may affect. It is essential that specific data are used to understand how a development may impact on existing health inequalities. As an example, the Oxfordshire's [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment](#) (JSNA) provides a regularly updated summary of local health circumstance, priority and need, but also sets out the initiatives to respond to them. Projects can tailor design features to support the JSNA, but also link into these wider initiatives to greater effect to demonstrate Social Value.

It is particularly important that the Health Impact Assessment identifies how the proposed development addresses existing health inequalities. Differences in healthy life expectancy are an important indicator of health inequalities when comparing particular populations to district averages. The HIA needs to identify vulnerable populations most impacted by the development, and how it will minimise any negative impact and maximise opportunities to promote health and thereby address existing health inequalities.

Developers will also need to seek the views of local stakeholders on the potential health impacts of their scheme, this will include Parish/Town Councils, voluntary and community groups, health and social care, and of course residents. This is in addition to engagement with relevant practitioners, including environmental health officers and impact assessment practitioners in the private sector. If any engagement is planned with local communities, questions about the potential impact of the development on local health and wellbeing challenges should be included in such consultation so that they can be evidenced in the HIA.

HIAs in Oxfordshire are assessed by Oxfordshire County Council's public health team. The public health team is also to be engaged in the scope of any DCO to explore and address potential public health risks through the process and align with wider public health improvement and health care objectives.

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