

## Scotland 2050: Healthy Places

The places where people live, work and play have an impact on their health and wellbeing. Over 150 years ago, recognition that environmental factors such as poor housing, contaminated drinking water and lack of sanitation were major determinants of disease gave rise to the professions of town planning and public health. While the health challenges currently facing the UK are different, there is once again increasing attention on the role planning can play in shaping environments conducive to improving health and wellbeing.

There is a growing body of research that demonstrates the role of the environment in shaping the social, economic and environmental circumstances that determine health. For example, neighbourhood design impacts physical activity levels, travel patterns, access to healthy food, social connectivity, quality of life and mental and physical health outcomes. While the relationship between the environment and health is often complex and works alongside other factors, planning decisions have a significant and lasting impact on the social and economic conditions within neighbourhoods.

People living in more deprived areas tend to have on average worse health and live in poorer quality environments. They are more likely to experience poor quality housing (and the resulting health issues this gives rise to), vacant and derelict land, poor quality greenspace, public spaces and streetscapes, a lack of access to affordable healthy food and employment opportunities, and are at an increased risk of injury or death from traffic. Isolation and depression are also more prevalent. Planners and other built environment professionals can help to reduce health inequalities by improving the environments of those living in the most disadvantaged areas.

Climate change is a major threat to health. It is also a threat multiplier in that existing social, environmental and economic stresses are likely to be exacerbated, particularly for the most vulnerable in society with fewer resources to cope. Planners can help to facilitate actions necessary to mitigate climate change. These include ensuring flood defences are upgraded, increasing the number of permeable surfaces within built-up areas and employing integrated 'green' and 'blue' infrastructure that serve to manage the flow rate and volume of surface run-off to reduce the risk of flooding and water pollution. Planners can also help by supporting local food production and reducing levels of harmful transport and industrial emissions through encouraging the switch to cleaner energy sources and providing a networked infrastructure that enables active travel.

The built and natural environment can help to foster inclusion and bring people together. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and the subsequent revised National Standards for Community Engagement aim to increase participatory democracy and allow people more of a say in developments in their local area. Involving communities in decision-making processes can help to increase satisfaction with outcomes, improve mental wellbeing and help to build community capacity.

Leadership is crucial and by highlighting the role of planning in improving health and reducing inequalities, NPF4 could become the driver for developing health considerations into local plans in Scotland, as is the case with the *National Planning Framework* in England. Tools and resources are available in Scotland to support innovative approaches across realistic timeframes, including *Designing Streets*, *Designing Places*, the *Place Principle* and the *Place Standard*. Collaboration with a range of other professionals and practitioners to achieve healthy communities is also important.

As part of public health reform in Scotland, several priorities have been agreed, including creating a Scotland where we live in vibrant, healthy and safe places and communities; and a Scotland where we have good mental wellbeing. Planning, therefore, can play an important part in a whole-systems approach to improving health and reducing inequalities.

### **Author Biography**

Russell Jones is a Public Health Programme Manager at the Glasgow Centre for Population Health. He co-leads the programme on 'Sustainable and Inclusive Places' which focuses on supporting processes of change to help Glasgow become a more inclusive, resilient, sustainable and healthy city.