

Health Impact Assessment Workshop held at Wellington Road Community Centre, Rhyl

27th January 2014

Introduction - What is Health Impact Assessment?

Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a process which supports organisations to assess the potential consequences of their decisions on people's health and well-being. The Welsh Government (WG) is committed to developing its use as a key part of its strategy to improve health and reduce inequalities.

Health impact assessment provides a systematic yet flexible and practical framework that can be used to consider the wider effects of local and national policies or initiatives and how they, in turn, may affect people's health. It works best when it involves people and organisations who can contribute different kinds of relevant knowledge and insight. The information is then used to build in measures to maximise opportunities for health and to minimise any risks and it can also identify any 'gaps' that can then be filled. HIA can also provide a way of addressing the inequalities in health that continue to persist in Wales by identifying any groups within the population who may be particularly affected by a policy or plan.

Background

The West Rhyl Greenspace Project (WRGP) comes at a time when there is renewed focus on the benefits to public health that a green space can deliver. The Landscape Institute has recently published a position statement that sets out the benefits that landscapes can bring to health and sets out five principles that capture the positive links between landscape and health as follows:-

1. Healthy places improve air, water and soil quality, incorporating measures that help us adapt to, and where possible mitigate, climate change
2. Healthy places help overcome health inequalities and can promote healthy lifestyles
3. Healthy places make people feel comfortable and at ease, increasing social interaction and reducing anti-social behaviour, isolation and stress
4. Healthy places optimise opportunities for working, learning and development
5. Healthy places are restorative, uplifting and healing for both physical and mental health conditions

Capita's team of landscape architects was appointed in November 2013 by Denbighshire County Council to design and deliver the West Rhyl Greenspace Project. As Chartered Members of the Landscape Institute, the team supports the position statement and approach as advocated by the Landscape Institute and will embrace this approach in the design and delivery of the West Rhyl Greenspace Project.

A Workshop was undertaken and completed on 27th January 2014 to inform the designers and the decision makers about the Green Space and ensure that issues surrounding health were integrated into the design process prior to a planning application being submitted.

Evidence

The natural environment, including city parks and green spaces, open countryside, gardens, rivers and mountains has a well known role in promoting and maintaining good health and mental well being. Evidence available supports this and describes how it can contribute to enhancing both individual and community health.

Studies have shown that open spaces can contribute to promoting physical activity and well being and can help to reduce being overweight and obesity by encouraging walking and cycling and can improve mental wellbeing for all age ranges. It is essential in childhood for social development and in older people for increasing social interaction and mental wellbeing. At a community level, it has also been shown that green space in a neighbourhood can similarly promote and increase social interaction and reduce social isolation. Green spaces in an urban area offer the opportunity for the community to find calmness, be sociable, take exercise and escape to the pressure of urban life. (1, 2, 3, 4)

Despite this, not all local authorities have reflected the importance of green spaces in some local community strategies but this is now changing and indeed in Wales the use of HIA as a process to consider health and wellbeing has been included in the new 2013 Regeneration Framework 'Vibrant and Viable Places' (5). The importance of the link between the built and natural environment and being physically active is also recognised within the NICE public health guidance 8 - 'Promoting and creating built or natural environments that encourage and support physical activity' (6). In addition Planning Policy Wales produced a Technical Advice Note 16 in January 2009, Sport, Recreation and Open Space (7) which advises on the role of the planning system in making provision for sport and recreational facilities and informal open places in both the urban and rural environment.

The quantity and quality of green space is important too. Poor quality green space may have a negative health impact and be depressing if it is poorly maintained, litter strewn or bleak. Other negative impacts include that they can be places for anti-social behaviour, have associated community safety implications which can inhibit access to and the use of green space or lack of public transport to natural environments further afield (2, 3).

In terms of trees and forests, much of the research looks at the health benefits of forestation and trees from the point of view of climate change and clean air. These are important factors for health but papers from the forestry commission (8, 9) have also highlighted positive impacts from trees with respect to reducing noise levels in urban areas; providing shade from UV radiation; reducing air pollution and wind speeds and also relieving stress.

Several questionnaire studies have also described the importance of having plants visible to people and flowers and plants provide a reason for visiting and enjoying recreational sites both urban and rural. Local greenery and landscapes are essential contributors to satisfaction with places of residence and plants and trees are regarded as calming and relaxing (3).

There is evidence from the literature (10) that low income earners, disabled people, and minority ethnic communities have the lowest participation in countryside and green space recreation. Some barriers to participation are:

- lack of appropriate interpretative information at sites, inadequate signage and lack of publicity;
- lack of awareness of local initiatives,
- lack of confidence and negative perceptions on the environment, such as feelings of vulnerability and fears for personal safety
- lack of public transport to sites
- lack of appropriate site facilities

Very few HIAs have been completed on projects or proposals relating to the natural environment in Wales - indeed only 2 others are known to WHIASU (all unpublished) apart from the West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project - Green Space Element. This is reflected across the rest of the UK - with only 5 completed in total in recent times (11).

The Health Impact Assessment

A rapid participatory HIA workshop was held on 17th January 2014 at the Wellington Road Community Centre, Rhyl. The health impact assessment built on a variety of evidence that had already been collated by the project team and was informed by a previous workshop with the Stakeholder Group in January 2013. This aimed to inform the Tender Brief for, and the future direction of, the Green Space element of the West Rhyl Housing Improvement Project; what would be needed by the local communities in and around the housing development; how they would be affected; and the level of community participation.

The HIA followed the systematic methodology described in the Welsh HIA guidance 'HIA: A Practical Guide' (12) and was qualitative in nature. Liz Green, Principal HIA Development Officer and Lee Parry-Williams, Public Health Practitioner, Public Health Wales (PHW) led the HIA with the support of Carol Evans, Denbighshire County Council. A number of local stakeholders were invited to participate in the HIA. Those who attended are listed below.

Participants

Carol Evans	Denbighshire County Council
Paul Smith	Welsh Government
Liz Green	Public Health Wales
Lee Parry Williams	Public Health Wales
Fiona Davies	Community Land Trust
Karen Beattie	Denbighshire County Council - Equality Officer
Nikki Jones	Denbighshire County Council - West Rhyl Housing Re-settlement Officer
Kath Hughes	Community
Les Jones	North Wales Police
Glen Charles	Communities First
Betty Smith	Rhyl Environmental Association
Ian Armstrong	Local Councillor
Sarah Baldwin	Clwyd Alyn Housing Association
Mark Evans	DCC Streetscape Officer
Jonathan Stoddard	Capita
Sian Griffiths	Capita

Vulnerable Groups and Equity

The HIA aimed to highlight not just potential positive or negative health and wellbeing impacts that the project may have but also to identify any key local client/vulnerable groups within the population who could be affected by it. These vulnerable groups were identified at the outset, using Appendix 2 of the Welsh guidance.

It was specified that the following groups could be potentially affected more than other population groups in Rhyl.

Vulnerable Groups

New Community:

- Over 55s - Extra Care Housing scheme will be built on the corner of the development
- Family housing (mix) (2-3-4 bed)
- Office workers
- Young People (YP)
- Group activity from surrounding area:
Mixed groups (Sea Cadets drill nearby/ vulnerable Young People Scheme)

Existing community:

- Single/couples (Houses of Multiple Occupation -HMO's)
- Young children
- Disabled - 2011 Census states that over 30% of the population in Rhyl identify as such
- Homeless
- Alcohol dependent adults and young people
- Vulnerable YP - school exclusions
- Ethnic groups (YP)
- Sexual orientation

Appraisal of Health and Wellbeing Determinants

After agreement on the above groups, the participants then worked through the wider or social determinants of health in order to assess the potential health and wellbeing impacts of the Plan (as listed in Appendix 1 of the Welsh guidance), identifying if they were positive or negative and if there were any gaps/unintended impacts contained within it or its planned projects.

As other statistical and academic evidence had been considered already, the aim of this workshop was primarily to gather community and organisational knowledge and evidence to identify any potential health impacts of the application. Many positive impacts were identified; a few detrimental were highlighted alongside other potential implications for the delivery of the Green Space element. These are all summarised in the table below.

Mitigation was discussed within the assessment, recommendations proposed which aimed to reduce any possible detrimental effects, maximise health gain and make connections more explicit within the final bid. These are listed at the end of each section.

1. Lifestyle

POSITIVE IMPACTS	NEGATIVE OR UNINTENDED IMPACTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages physical exercise • Dog walking - encourage healthy lifestyle • Will have a licence for community events • Aim to maximise cycling/running as much as walking - wide shared path for all 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dogs are proposed to be excluded • By-laws for dogs in place ie they are banned on beach for example at certain times • Enforcement required, implications on budgets • By-law requirement • Potential for increased drinking and substance abuse • Potential for crime - night time economy nearby
RECOMMENDATIONS/IMPROVEMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dog By-laws - dogs to be on leads and provide dog bins • Ensure clear signage in place • Ensure plenty of litter bin provision • Street drinking - Need for CCTV. Can also pre-empt this by working with support agencies - Outreach, substance abuse organisations • The park should ultimately become self policing where do's and don'ts are automatically understood • Need for clarification about DCC policy on signage and dogs and CCTV • Perhaps make an example of any perpetrators - name and shame? 	

2. Social and Community Influences on Health

POSITIVE IMPACTS	NEGATIVE OR UNINTENDED IMPACTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Space for community events, will enable people to come together • Space for new residents to engage with all • Will enhance area and be a desirable place to live • Intercommunity/generational events - hold at community green space • Story book of development opening event in collaboration of the Young Person project • Provide areas for cultural mix/sensitivities • Enhance local pride and a sense of belonging for all • Incorporate aspects of local culture and culture of local residents in infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local tensions within existing communities • And also incoming families - need to see area as for all and not just the new development • Potential envy of green park setting and the levels of investment • All groups need to support initiatives working together
RECOMMENDATIONS/IMPROVEMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who takes on role to deal with envy? Needs to be identified • All agencies must work in partnership • Have a future 'Friends of' management committee for the green space? • Hold a competition to name the space - local children • Involve the Community Land Trust • Hold an opening event - include memories of the area? Promote this with social networking/media include young people • Provide a community information pack/video for the incoming population - send them an invite to meet 	

3. Living/environmental Conditions

POSITIVE IMPACTS	NEGATIVE OR UNINTENDED IMPACTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The space will be positive against all areas relating to housing/environmental improvements • Parking permits for residents • Time limited for non-residents • CCTV is reassuring for families with children and other groups • Stakeholders have written to the Board asking for CCTV • CCTV is seen as reassurance - this is the clear view from consultation with the communities • Improvements to and additional infrastructure - 'greening' of additional streets and links with the Drift Park etc • New properties incorporating waste disposal areas for individual properties - removes the unsightly bins outside houses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCTV is BIG issue - Project Board are advocating for no CCTV? • What about vulnerable groups? Unlikely/won't use the area without CCTV? It is needed to enhance the use of the park and reassure all users. • Displacement of existing all day parking - unofficial currently - from the area to other streets and Rhyl locations • Risk that immediate streets may require the same consideration currently with regard to street bins??
RECOMMENDATIONS/IMPROVEMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CCTV issue - Stakeholders views at the workshop stated the need for CCTV • The issue requires clarity and the consultation highlighted the desire for CCTV - Compromise and install CCTV for first five years and to be reviewed/renegotiated • Current all day parking - need to consider displacement from the parking spaces in the area and its effect. • Only 6% of allocated parking is designated for disabled bays - Discuss with Transport Department of DCC and Equalities Officer. • Incorporate accessible and dropped kerbs - link with highway planning schedule and this project schedule • Incorporate additional 'greening' into surrounding area 	

4. Economic Conditions

POSITIVE IMPACTS	NEGATIVE OR UNINTENDED IMPACTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision for volunteering during the construction/maintenance period • Social clauses within construction contract • The Project is an Affordable Housing Scheme • The Land Trust are working with partners and have an agreement with Llandrillo College re training • Horticultural Group - botanical links could be made • Gardens provide opportunities for training/learning enterprise - new skills • Potential to lift aspirations of existing communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tensions could rise • Lower Super Output Area (LSOA) rating could improve - demographic of incoming population could affect the profile of area. May impact on funding streams i.e. Communities First • House price increase could force local people out of market place - meant to be an Affordable Housing Scheme
RECOMMENDATIONS/IMPROVEMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None Identified 	

5. Access and Quality of Services

POSITIVE IMPACTS	NEGATIVE OR UNINTENDED IMPACTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Near town, beach, other facilities • Alternative methods of travel to car - train/bus/active travel • Good access - access to GP's/Dentists etc • Community shop could be set up for healthy eating/access top fresh food - expanding on food bank • Inclusive design at beginning - if not done at beginning more difficult to incorporate later • Explore safe walking routes from development to schools • Charging point in local facility of community cafe with adaptors 'pit stop point' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not near schools - ten minutes walk - but can encourage active travel/Physical Activity • Ensure Safe Routes to School are mapped out etc. Find out where these are
RECOMMENDATIONS/IMPROVEMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure inclusivity of all in plan • Ensure Safe Routes to School are mapped out etc. Find out where these are 	

6. Macro - Economic etc

POSITIVE IMPACTS	NEGATIVE OR UNINTENDED IMPACTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Supports Healthy Urban Planning/Housing Regeneration aims and Plans• Assisting in reducing some elements of flooding - lessen discharge/run off from buildings and green space• Supports biodiversity and environment - planned in	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welfare reform - has led to a high demand for one bedroom accommodation - had to factor this in but these houses are multiple bed• Will not decrease coastal flooding
RECOMMENDATIONS/IMPROVEMENTS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welfare reform has led to an increased need for one bedroom accommodation and this must be addressed by Housing Associations	

Conclusion

The WRGP provides an opportunity to showcase the benefits open green space can bring to health and well being. West Rhyl, once densely occupied with many properties in multiple occupancy, is rapidly changing through various regeneration initiatives promoted by Denbighshire County Council and sponsored by Welsh Government. The green space is an important feature of this regeneration process and signifies the commitment to change that Denbighshire County Council and key stakeholders have made to the community of West Rhyl.

The Project Team is extremely grateful for the assistance and guidance provided by Public Health Wales in the preparation for and facilitating the Health Impact Workshop. It is widely anticipated that the new green space will prove to be hugely beneficial and act as a catalyst for improved well being and a highly valued space for the new neighbourhood, growing community and future generations of West Rhyl.

References

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