

Planning Application Response Template for Local Health Boards – Guidance Notes

Introduction

These notes have been produced by the Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (Public Health Wales) to guide the production of a response by a local health board to a planning application for development in a local area. These notes provide the background and guidance for using the accompanying template (Appendix 1).

The mechanism for responses and the template used for comments will need to be agreed locally, and it could be useful to have a working agreement drawn up between the local authority and health board for this purpose. A system for signing off and submitting responses will be needed within the health board.

Under planning legislation in Wales, local health boards are non-statutory consultees in the planning application process. However, they may be included as a consultee on certain applications where there is likely to be significant health and well-being impact upon a local population, or the application is for a health or social care facility. Health boards may also comment upon applications for which they are not directly consulted, if they identify negative health implications or to have an opportunity to build in health-promoting elements to a development.

Local Development Plans and Supplementary Planning Guidance

All local planning authorities must produce a Local Development Plan (LDP). This plan guides the development of a local area over a period of time, and provides the policies which any development must be compliant with in order to be approved. This is shaped by national and regional development plans which are: [Future Wales, the National Plan 2040](#), [Planning Policy Wales](#) and Strategic Development Plans (SDP). LDPs should be available on local authority websites, but if there any difficulties in finding or reading them, policy planning officers should be contacted. When health boards are submitting comments on planning applications, they should be familiar with the Development Plan.

The LDP may have policies around healthcare provision, reducing health inequalities, community facilities and strategic sites. They may have specific policies on health and well-being, or reference to health may be woven through the LDP policies (taking a Health in all Policies approach).

Planning authorities also produce relevant Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) which provide more detail about LDP policies, and may be particularly relevant for a health board to reference in a response for example active travel, housing, developer contributions, green space or play areas.

Pre-application consultation (PAC) processes

The pre-application stage of a planning application is an ideal opportunity to discuss the implications of a development on health and well-being. Pre-application consultation is a statutory requirement for major developments¹. Developers follow [guidance](#) on which projects need to have a PAC process and how they should consult effectively. Health Boards are not a statutory consultee in the PAC process, but it may be possible to engage in discussions with developers around both healthcare service provision in a new development and the population level impact on health and well-being for the community. Health boards can engage in the PAC process if see notifications of the PAC, or they are informed of it or requested to be involved. The pre-application is also the ideal time to undertake a Health Impact Assessment of the development (see section below).

Coordinated response from a local health board to planning applications

Comments on a planning application from a health board should incorporate both healthcare service and public health responses, covering issues from the provision of infrastructure to support a population to the wider determinants impacting on health and well-being.

The response can be coordinated by any officer in the health board/ local public health team with a remit around planning and health, but they should be jointly developed by appropriate officers with responsibility for the issues above.

Planning application response template (Appendix 1)

The template can be used by health boards to make responses to planning application, and it is intended to provide guidance on the type of response and the evidence that can be utilised for different developments. The use of the template sections will depend on the type of development being considered, and so it can be amended as required.

It is important to complete the summary section of the template so that the planning officer receiving the recommendations can have these in one place.

Local Public Health response

Population health and well-being is impacted not only by individual behaviour, but by the wider determinants such as the built and natural environment, housing and streets, as depicted below:

¹ Further information can be found in the Development Management Manual - [development-management-manual.pdf \(gov.wales\)](#)



It is important that public health involvement in the planning process is built in to processes and procedures to ensure that the health board can comment upon matters which impact upon public health and well-being.

Every health board has a local public health team, and a Director of Public Health who has the responsibility for the health of the local population and provides specialist public health support. Local public health teams plan, develop, implement and evaluate a wide range of programmes in health improvement, and lead the production of local population needs assessments.

A local public health team can provide expertise knowledge about the health status of a local community, the levels of health inequality and deprivation, and provide data around current and future population health needs. They can provide evidence around the impact of the environment on health and well-being, and of how planning can improve health and well-being.

Local healthcare services and strategic planning response

Health boards have a responsibility for the provision of healthcare services in their local area, and therefore play a key role in the local planning process with regards to the requirements of services such as GP practices, dentists, pharmacies, hospitals, and community healthcare services. They should be involved in the planning processes at the stage of producing Development Plans to ensure future service provision that will meet the needs of the population. Health boards should also be involved in responding to planning applications where there are implications for services for example due to a potential population increase which will directly result in additional pressure on the healthcare infrastructure.

It is not appropriate for a health board to make comments in a planning application response about workforce capacity issues in relation to a new development as these are not relevant to the planning process. Service provision is the health board's responsibility and cannot be resolved through the planning process. It is appropriate to comment if provision of the infrastructure for healthcare services needs to be considered, for example the number of new homes being proposed would require a new GP practice, or the extension or upgrading of other service buildings in order to accommodate the new patients.

A health board may wish to seek developer contributions (Section 106 or Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)) towards the improvement or mitigation of the pressures as a result of a major development, and therefore should comment as such on the planning application response.

Developer contributions/planning obligations

The Local Development Plan will outline the procedures for the local authority obtaining contributions from developers towards offsetting any adverse consequences of a development or to provide for new, upgraded or extended local facilities and infrastructure. The LDP will usually have Supplementary Planning Guidance which sets out how developer contributions are calculated and what they can be requested for. These contributions are either through the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) or Section 106 Agreements.

A developer contribution SPG may specify that developer contributions may be sought towards the provision of healthcare services where the need generated for healthcare by a proposed development cannot reasonably be met by existing premises and demand will exceed provision. The SPG should outline how and when these would be sought, for example the scale of a new residential development. Contributions could be in-kind, and a new facility could be provided on-site by the developer, or they could be a financial contribution to the upgrade or extension of an off-site facility.

The need for developer contributions (as outlined by the LDP) for healthcare facilities should be discussed with the planning officer dealing with the planning application, and should be included in the response from the health board on the application.

Additional consultees

In preparing a response to a planning application, depending on the type of development being proposed, it may be appropriate to consult with others to ensure a consistent response, and to gain additional information. At a national level, Public Health Wales provide consultation responses through the Environmental Public Health Service on environmental issues, and the Wales Health Impact Assessment Unit can advise on Health Impact Assessments. There may also be opportunities to liaise with other organisations such as Natural Resources Wales to explore maximising outcomes, delivering cross-sectoral priorities and avoiding duplication.

Environmental Public Health Service

The [Environmental Public Health Service](#) (EPHS) is delivered collaboratively through Public Health Wales' Health Protection Team and UK Health Security's Radiation, Chemicals and Environmental Hazards Directorate (Wales). EPHS is a national consultee for major planning applications (local and national applications) in regards to environmental public health issues, so they may provide a direct response to certain applications (e.g. waste disposal or transfer sites, poultry farms, energy and industrial plants or quarries). This may be in addition to any response that the health board submits.

EPHS will copy local health boards into any responses they submit, and they should be contacted for any relevant major planning applications. EPHS provide specialist environmental public health risk assessments on actual or potential health risks from environmental exposures to chemicals, noise and extreme environmental events such as flooding. Other wider elements of environmental health such as air quality of other development sites may be included within this response.

To ensure consistency of response and to cross check responses, the team should be contacted via the following emails:

ChemicalsCardiff@phe.gov.uk

PublicHealth.Environment@wales.nhs.uk

Natural Resources Wales

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) are statutory consultees in the planning system, providing an [evidence informed](#) response to planning applications regarding the impact of development on the environment, whilst also highlighting the important role of the environment on health and well-being. NRW co-produce [Area Statements](#) which are material considerations for planning and provide an opportunity to incorporate public health evidence alongside the environmental issues and opportunities in a planning application.

NRW also produce the [State of Natural Resources Report \(SoNaRR\) for Wales 2020](#) which identified the close links between well-being and the environment.

Process for responding (Appendix 2)

Receipt of a planning application to comment upon

A letter may be sent to a named individual in a health board (for example the Director of Public Health), or to a specific inbox if one has been set up for this purpose, inviting comment upon a planning application. The letter will contain a link to the website where the planning application documents are located. The letter will specify the time period for responses.

Once this is received the lead officer should follow the process in Appendix 2 to complete the response.

Weekly planning application lists

Some local planning authorities publish weekly lists of applications. This could be sent to the lead officer in the health board to scan for any applications which may have implications for the health of the population or for healthcare service provision. The health board can make comment on these if relevant. It is recommended that contact is first made with the planning officer dealing with the application to confirm the timescale for responses and to discuss any specific issues for the development.

Planning application documents to review

There are often numerous documents uploaded to a planning authority's website related to any planning application, and not all of these will be relevant for a health board to review in order to make a response.

Key documents to look at are:

- Application form or planning statement: this provides the information about the application and the current use of the site.
- Pre-application consultation report: this will provide information about the results of the consultation process.
- Design and access statement (DAS): most applications will be accompanied by a Design and Access Statement (often split in several parts on the application webpage). This provides the detail and context of how the development has been designed, the process which was followed, and how the development accords with local, regional and national policies. The DAS outlines the proposed design for the development, site plans, usually including the number of homes proposed, nature of the development, travel routes and access into the site. This is a key document for health boards to look at in making a response.
- Environmental impact assessment (EIA): if an application has required an environmental impact assessment to be undertaken, it can include an assessment on the positive and negative impacts on the health and well-being of the community, and the developer/ consultant preparing the EIA should have referred to current

policy and population needs assessments. The EIA may include a section on health impacts.

Health Impact Assessments (HIA)

Currently health impacts of a development may be considered as part of an environmental impact assessment, as above. A Health Impact Assessment should be provided to accompany any application for opencast coal working, in line with Planning Policy Wales. An application for any type of development could include a separate HIA as one of the planning documents, and if so this should be considered when developing the health board's response. Regulations are to soon be introduced in Wales under the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 which could make HIA mandatory for certain policies, plans or programmes. It could include certain large scale planning applications, but details of the legislation will be subject to consultation.

HIA should be considered for major development applications as best practice, and should be recommended in the response. Guidance on carrying out a HIA can be found on the Wales Health Impact Assessment Support Unit (WHIASU) [website](#).

Type of development

The nature of the proposed development will determine how the response template is completed and how much of it needs to be used, for example:

- A major residential development (major can be locally defined in terms of number of homes) could have substantial implications for healthcare service provision through the introduction of new patient populations. It could also have an impact on the health and well-being of the new residents in terms of the way it is planned and designed, but also on the local community surrounding it. Most if not all of the template sections could be relevant for this type of development.
- A mixed use development (residential, retail, food and drink, leisure, employment etc.) could have a positive or negative impact upon the local community in terms of the service provision, the types of employment, accessibility or the type of food and drink (for example hot food takeaways could have a negative impact). The public health elements of the response could be most relevant for this type of application, depending if there is a major residential component.
- An application for a hot food takeaway may be the subject of a response from a health board in terms of the negative implications for health of the local community, taking into account levels of obesity and the health status of the population. However, this will depend on the local planning authority's policies within the Local Development Plan and any Supplementary Planning Guidance which specifically aims to control the number and/or the location of hot food takeaways.

Reference key policies in the LDP

When making a response to a planning application, it is important to reference relevant policies within Future Wales, the National Plan 2040, SDP and the LDP, and any relevant Supplementary Planning Guidance. Any response needs to align with the policies. For example, if making comment on the provision of healthcare service infrastructure, the policy in the LDP which covers healthcare services should be referenced. If there is a policy (and possibly SPG) around active travel, this should be referenced in any comments regarding the accessibility of a development for walking and cycling, and so on.