

SDS Scoping Engagement
Health and Wellbeing Discussion Paper

The health question this engagement is asking you to help us with:

How should Gloucestershire plan future growth so everyone has a fair opportunity to live well, be healthy and thrive?

Gloucestershire COUNTY COUNCIL

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We welcome your views on the strategic issues, evidence and outcomes for health and wellbeing matters that should inform the future Spatial Development Strategy (SDS).

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Executive Summary

Health and wellbeing are shaped largely by the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. The location and form of development influence access to supportive communities, decent homes, jobs, education, health and care, healthy food, green space, community facilities and sustainable transport. These factors also influence exposure to fuel poverty, poor air quality (outdoor and indoor), noise, road danger, climate risks, and social isolation. Strategic planning is therefore an important form of preventative health action.

Gloucestershire is generally a healthy county, but outcomes are not shared equally. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment identifies marked and avoidable differences between communities and population groups. Healthy life expectancy in 2021–2023 was around 64 years for both males and females, while historic analysis shows an approximately 11-year gap between the most and least deprived areas. People with severe mental illness face substantially greater premature mortality, and deprivation is associated with poorer early-years, weight and housing outcomes.

The county is also growing and ageing. This will change the type and location of demand for accessible housing, primary and community care, transport, digital access and legible, inclusive public spaces. Rurality, dispersed settlements and uneven public transport can make access to services more difficult, while growth in urban areas can place pressure on health infrastructure unless it is planned and delivered alongside development.

The health discussion paper explores how a future SDS can reduce health inequalities by ensuring growth is accessible and resilient, coordinating health and community infrastructure, supporting active travel and everyday physical activity, securing healthy and adaptable housing, and creating inclusive places with strong social connections and access to nature.

Health and wellbeing Matters of Strategic Importance

- HW1 Creating healthy, inclusive and resilient communities that reduce health inequalities and support social connection when making spatial choices for growth.
- HW2 Delivering homes for everyone and supporting changing needs for life-long, physical and mental health and wellbeing, from the best start in life to healthy ageing.
- HW3 Enabling physically active lifestyles with access to nature, healthy food and sustainable travel choices.
- HW4 Planning for equitable access to Health and Care services and facilities with planned growth.
- HW5 Embed health and wellbeing considerations across strategic planning, design and delivery.
- HW6 Improve access to employment, education, skills and life-long opportunities to support healthier lives and reduce inequalities.

Introduction

Health and wellbeing are fundamental to the long-term success and sustainability of Gloucestershire's communities. The places we plan today will influence how people live, work, travel and access services for decades to come. Supporting good health outcomes and 'designing out' the things that create health inequalities is a key consideration. Decisions about the location and form of future growth affect access to homes, employment, education, healthcare, green space, community facilities and sustainable transport, while also influencing exposure to environmental risks such as air pollution, climate impacts, and social risks such as fear of crime and social isolation. As a result, spatial planning has a critical role to play in creating the conditions for healthier lives and preventing avoidable health inequalities from being built into new development.

Gloucestershire benefits from many strengths, including high-quality natural environments, strong communities and an attractive network of cities, towns and rural areas. However, health outcomes are not experienced equally by all communities. Significant differences exist between places and population groups, shaped by factors such as deprivation, housing conditions, access to services, access to good food, fear of crime, transport connectivity and opportunities for education, employment and social participation. At the same time, the county's population is expected to grow and age, creating new demands for the design of housing, the availability of health and care services, infrastructure and accessible environments. These challenges extend beyond administrative boundaries and require a coordinated, long-term strategic approach.

This discussion paper explores the health and wellbeing matters of strategic importance that should help inform a future Spatial Development Strategy. It considers how the SDS can support healthier, more inclusive and resilient places by reducing inequalities, coordinating health and community infrastructure with growth, enabling active lifestyles, improving access to jobs, education and services, delivering healthy homes, strengthening environmental resilience and creating places where people can thrive throughout their lives. The paper is intended to stimulate discussion and gather views on the health priorities, outcomes and strategic interventions that should help shape Gloucestershire's future.

Policy and Legislation

This health discussion paper is informed by a range of national and local information, evidence and guidance. National policy expects planning to promote healthy communities, whilst local health evidence and strategies show where prevention, equity and action on the wider determinants of health are needed. The main sources of information are listed below.

National Planning Policy Framework, August 2026, National Planning Policy Framework - GOV.UK

National Planning Practice Guidance Planning practice guidance - GOV.UK

Health and Social Care Act 2012 Health and Social Care Act 2012

Health and Care Act 2022. Health and Care Act 2022

Equality Act 2010 Equality Act 2010

Children Act 2004, Children Act 2004

Care Act 2014 Care Act 2014

10 Year Health Plan for England; 10 Year Health Plan for England: fit for the future - GOV.UK
Marmot Review and Marmot Places/Build Back Fairer; Building fairer towns, cities and regions: Insights from Marmot Places | Local Government Association

Sport England Active Design; Active Design | Sport England

NHS England neighbourhood health guidance; NHS England » Neighbourhood health guidelines 2025/26

UKHSA Health Effects of Climate Change in the UK; Climate change: health effects in the UK - GOV.UK

Key Gloucestershire sources

Gloucestershire JSNA, Health and Wellbeing | Inform Gloucestershire
Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020–2030 gcc_2596-joint-health-and-wellbeing-strategy_dev12.pdf
One Gloucestershire Integrated Care Strategy and Joint Forward Plan 2025–2030. One Gloucestershire
Population Health and Strategic Commissioning Plan 2025–2031. One Gloucestershire Joint Forward Plan 2025-2030
Gloucestershire Health and Care Infrastructure Strategy 2024–2034. C&P Estate Strategy

Matters of Strategic Importance - Context

HW1 Creating healthy, inclusive and resilient communities that reduce health inequalities and support social connection when making spatial choices for growth.

Health outcomes are not experienced equally across the county, and these differences are closely linked to place. While Gloucestershire performs well on many overall health measures, the county's evidence shows significant and persistent inequalities between communities. The Gloucestershire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) identifies healthy life expectancy of around 64 years for both males and females, alongside longstanding gaps of approximately 11 years between the most and least deprived areas. Poorer outcomes are also associated with deprivation, including childhood development, healthy weight, severe mental illness, overcrowding and access to opportunity. These inequalities are systematic, avoidable and geographically patterned, meaning that decisions about where growth is located and how communities are connected can either reduce or reinforce existing disadvantages.

The county's diverse geography creates different challenges and opportunities for healthy living. Gloucestershire's network of urban areas, market towns, villages and rural communities results in uneven access to jobs, education, healthcare, community facilities and public transport. The evidence highlights that deprivation is not confined to urban areas and that rural isolation, transport, fuel, food and energy poverty, poor housing, digital exclusion and limited access to services and green spaces can all affect health and wellbeing. Other factors, such as fear of crime, access to play and public realm, also influence health and wellbeing. As Gloucestershire continues to grow, there is a risk that poorly located or disconnected development could increase social isolation, car dependency and barriers to opportunity, particularly for those who are already

disadvantaged. Conversely, growth directed towards accessible and well-connected places can support local services, improve access to employment and education, strengthen community facilities and help create more equitable outcomes across the county.

Supporting social connection and community resilience is equally important. The Gloucestershire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy identifies loneliness, isolation and mental wellbeing as key priorities, recognising the important role that place plays in shaping people's quality of life. Access to welcoming public spaces, community facilities, green infrastructure, cultural activities and opportunities for everyday interaction can strengthen social networks, improve resilience and create a stronger sense of belonging. Because these issues extend beyond individual development sites and often affect multiple districts, they require a strategic and coordinated response. The SDS therefore has an important role in ensuring that future growth helps create healthy, inclusive and resilient communities, directs investment towards areas of greatest need, reduces health inequalities and supports stronger social connections across Gloucestershire over the long term.

HW2 Delivering homes for everyone and supporting changing needs for life-long, physical and mental health and wellbeing, from the best start in life to healthy ageing.

Housing is one of the most important factors influencing health, wellbeing and quality of life. The Gloucestershire JSNA identifies housing as a key determinant of health, alongside education, employment, income and the environment. People living in unsuitable, overcrowded, inaccessible, insecure or unaffordable housing are more likely to experience poorer physical health, reduced mental wellbeing and wider social disadvantages. Health inequalities in Gloucestershire are closely linked to deprivation, with housing playing a significant role in shaping life chances and health outcomes.

Gloucestershire faces significant demographic change, with an ageing population and a growing number of residents over the age of 65. The county's Integrated Needs Assessment highlights that the older population is expected to increase substantially over coming years, resulting in greater demand for health, care and support services and increasing numbers of people living with long-term conditions, frailty and multiple health needs. Ensuring that sufficient accessible, adaptable and specialist housing is available in the right locations will be critical to helping people maintain independence, remain in their communities and reduce pressures on health and social care services.

At the other end of the life course, providing appropriate homes is essential to giving children and young people the best start in life. The JSNA identifies the importance of early life experiences, health, education and family circumstances in shaping long-term outcomes. Good quality housing can support child development, educational attainment, physical and mental health, while poor housing conditions can contribute to adverse outcomes and widen inequalities. The needs of children and young people with additional needs, including those with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), further reinforce the importance of ensuring suitable and adaptable housing environments that support independence and wellbeing.

Affordability remains a significant challenge across Gloucestershire. House prices and rents have increased faster than earnings in many parts of the county, creating barriers to accessing suitable accommodation, particularly for younger households, key workers and those on lower incomes.

The Gloucestershire Housing and Economic Needs Assessment identifies a continuing need for affordable housing and a diverse housing stock that can meet the needs of different communities and household types. Without sufficient housing choice, people can be excluded from employment opportunities, support networks and services, with wider consequences for health and wellbeing.

Housing also has an important role in addressing social isolation, supporting mental wellbeing and creating resilient communities. Well-designed neighbourhoods can improve access to services, employment, education, public transport, green spaces and opportunities for social interaction. By planning for a mix of homes, tenures and community infrastructure across Gloucestershire, strategic planning can help create places that support healthy living throughout people's lives and reduce avoidable health inequalities between different communities.

Taken together, demographic change, affordability pressures, health inequalities and the strong relationship between housing and health mean that delivering the right homes in the right places is not simply a housing issue. It is a strategic county-wide challenge that will significantly influence Gloucestershire's future health, wellbeing, independence, equality and resilience.

HW3 Enabling physically active lifestyles with access to nature, healthy food and sustainable travel choices.

Many of the county's long-term health challenges are linked to preventable causes such as physical inactivity, obesity, poor diet and wider inequalities in access to healthy lifestyles. The Gloucestershire JSNA and Integrated Needs Assessment identify prevention as a key priority, highlighting the growing burden of conditions such as cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and poor mental health. The built environment plays a significant role in shaping these outcomes through the location of homes, services, green spaces, walking and cycling networks, and access to healthy food opportunities.

Access to nature and opportunities for active travel are particularly important in supporting both physical and mental wellbeing. The JSNA identifies social connections, healthy places and the wider determinants of health as important influences on quality of life, while health inequalities are often linked to where people live and their ability to access services and opportunities. Strategic planning can help address these issues by creating well-connected communities where people can safely walk, cycle and access green infrastructure, reducing social isolation, encouraging everyday physical activity and supporting healthier lifestyles.

Gloucestershire's mix of urban centres, market towns and rural communities means that access to services, employment, education, healthy food and recreation opportunities can vary significantly across the county. Planning growth in locations that support sustainable transport choices and improve access to nature and healthy food can help reduce health inequalities, improve quality of life and support more resilient communities. As the county's population grows and ages, creating places that make healthy choices easier will be essential to improving public health outcomes and reducing future pressures on health and care services.

HW4 Planning for equitable access to Health and Care services and facilities with planned growth.

Planning for equitable access to health and care services is a matter of strategic importance for Gloucestershire because the county's population is growing, ageing and becoming more geographically dispersed. Evidence from the Gloucestershire JSNA highlights increasing demand for primary care, community healthcare, adult social care and specialist health services, particularly from older age groups who are projected to form a larger proportion of the population over coming decades. Without strategic planning, growth could place additional pressure on already stretched services, increase travel distances to healthcare facilities and widen existing inequalities in access between urban and rural communities.

Access to health and care services is not distributed evenly across Gloucestershire. The county's mix of urban centres, market towns and extensive rural areas means that some communities face greater challenges in reaching GP surgeries, hospitals, pharmacies, mental health support, care facilities and other essential services. These challenges can be compounded by limited public transport, deprivation, disability, ageing populations and car dependency. Spatial planning decisions therefore play an important role in determining whether future growth improves access to services by locating development in sustainable and well-connected locations, or whether it creates additional barriers to healthcare and wellbeing.

Health and care infrastructure is planned and delivered across administrative boundaries and often serves populations from multiple districts. As a result, individual local plans alone may not be sufficient to address future healthcare needs arising from growth. A strategic county-wide approach can help align housing and employment growth with investment in healthcare facilities, workforce provision, social care, transport and community infrastructure. This can support healthier communities, reduce inequalities in access to services, improve resilience within the health and care system and ensure that planned growth contributes positively to the long-term wellbeing of Gloucestershire's residents.

HW5 Embed health and wellbeing considerations across strategic planning, design and delivery.

Many of the factors that influence health are shaped by planning decisions rather than healthcare services alone. The Gloucestershire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment identifies housing, employment, education, transport, access to services, social connections and the quality of the environment as key determinants of health and wellbeing. Health inequalities across the county are strongly linked to where people live and the opportunities available to them, meaning that spatial planning has a critical role in improving outcomes and reducing disparities between communities.

The NHS Gloucestershire Integrated Needs Assessment 2026/27 highlights growing pressures associated with an ageing population, long-term health conditions, obesity, physical inactivity and mental health challenges, alongside persistent inequalities in some urban and rural communities. Embedding health considerations throughout plan-making, site selection, infrastructure planning and place design can help ensure that growth supports prevention, healthy lifestyles, access to services and community resilience, reducing future demand on health and social care systems.

A strategic approach is particularly important because the decisions that shape Gloucestershire's settlements, transport networks, homes, employment areas and green infrastructure will have long-

lasting effects on population health. Integrating health evidence into planning policies, investment priorities and development decisions can help deliver healthier places, tackle inequalities, support independent living and ensure that future growth contributes positively to both physical and mental wellbeing across the county.

HW6 Improve access to employment, education, skills and life-long opportunities to support healthier lives and reduce inequalities.

Employment, education and skills are among the most significant wider determinants of health. The Gloucestershire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment identifies inequalities in health as being closely linked to differences in income, employment, education and opportunity. Access to good quality jobs, learning opportunities and skills development can improve physical and mental wellbeing, increase financial security, strengthen social connections and reduce the risk of poor health outcomes over a person's lifetime.

The NHS Gloucestershire: 2026/27 Integrated Needs Assessment highlights persistent inequalities within parts of Gloucester, Cheltenham and some rural communities, where poorer health outcomes coincide with deprivation, barriers to accessing services and reduced opportunities. At the same time, Gloucestershire's population is changing, with an ageing workforce and growing demand for new skills in key sectors. The Gloucestershire Housing & Economic Needs Assessment identifies the close relationship between homes, economic growth and labour market needs, while the county's Local Growth Plan seeks to improve productivity, support business growth and connect residents to employment, training and career opportunities. Ensuring that people can access these opportunities is essential to improving life chances and supporting inclusive growth.

Spatial planning has a direct role in shaping access to jobs, schools, colleges, training providers and employment areas through decisions about the location of growth, transport connectivity and digital infrastructure. A strategic approach can help ensure that all communities, including rural areas and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, can benefit from economic opportunities and life-long learning. Supporting equitable access to employment, education and skills not only contributes to a stronger economy but also helps reduce health inequalities, improve wellbeing and create more resilient communities across Gloucestershire.

Matters of Strategic Importance for Health and Wellbeing – Key Strategic Priorities

HW1 Creating healthy, inclusive and resilient communities that reduce health inequalities and support social connection when making spatial choices for growth.

Key strategic priorities

1. Reduce health inequalities by ensuring growth is directed and designed to improve access to services, community facilities, green spaces, transport and opportunities for disadvantaged and underserved communities.

2. Create connected, inclusive and resilient communities that support social interaction, community cohesion, safety, wellbeing and a strong sense of place throughout Gloucestershire.

HW2 Delivering homes for everyone and supporting changing needs for life-long, physical and mental health and wellbeing, from the best start in life to healthy ageing.

Key strategic priorities

1. Deliver a diverse supply of high-quality, affordable, accessible and adaptable homes that meet the needs of all communities and support health and wellbeing at every stage of life
2. Ensure new and existing communities provide housing environments that enable independence, support healthy ageing, and give children and young people the best possible start in life.

HW3 Enabling physically active lifestyles with access to nature, healthy food and sustainable travel choices.

Key strategic priorities

1. Create places where walking, wheeling, cycling and public transport are attractive and convenient choices for everyday journeys, reducing inactivity and supporting healthier lifestyles.
2. Improve equitable access to nature, green and blue infrastructure, healthy food opportunities and recreational spaces to enhance physical health, mental wellbeing and community resilience.

HW4 Planning for equitable access to Health and Care services and facilities with planned growth.

Key strategic priorities

1. Align the location and scale of growth with the timely provision of health, care and wellbeing infrastructure to meet current and future community needs.
2. Reduce inequalities in access to healthcare by improving connectivity to health services, community facilities and support networks across urban and rural communities.

HW5 Embed health and wellbeing considerations across strategic planning, design and delivery.

Key strategic priorities

1. Embed health and wellbeing evidence within strategic planning, investment and decision-making processes to maximise positive health outcomes and reduce inequalities.
2. Promote high-quality, healthy and sustainable place-making that integrates health considerations into the design, delivery and management of new development and infrastructure.

HW6 Improve access to employment, education, skills and life-long opportunities to support healthier lives and reduce inequalities.

Key strategic priorities

1. Locate growth and investment in places that are well connected to communities and labour markets, whilst facilitating access for less well-connected areas.
2. Support inclusive economic growth that improves life chances, reduces socio-economic disadvantage and enables people of all ages to participate fully in education, work and life-long learning.



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