

Explainer

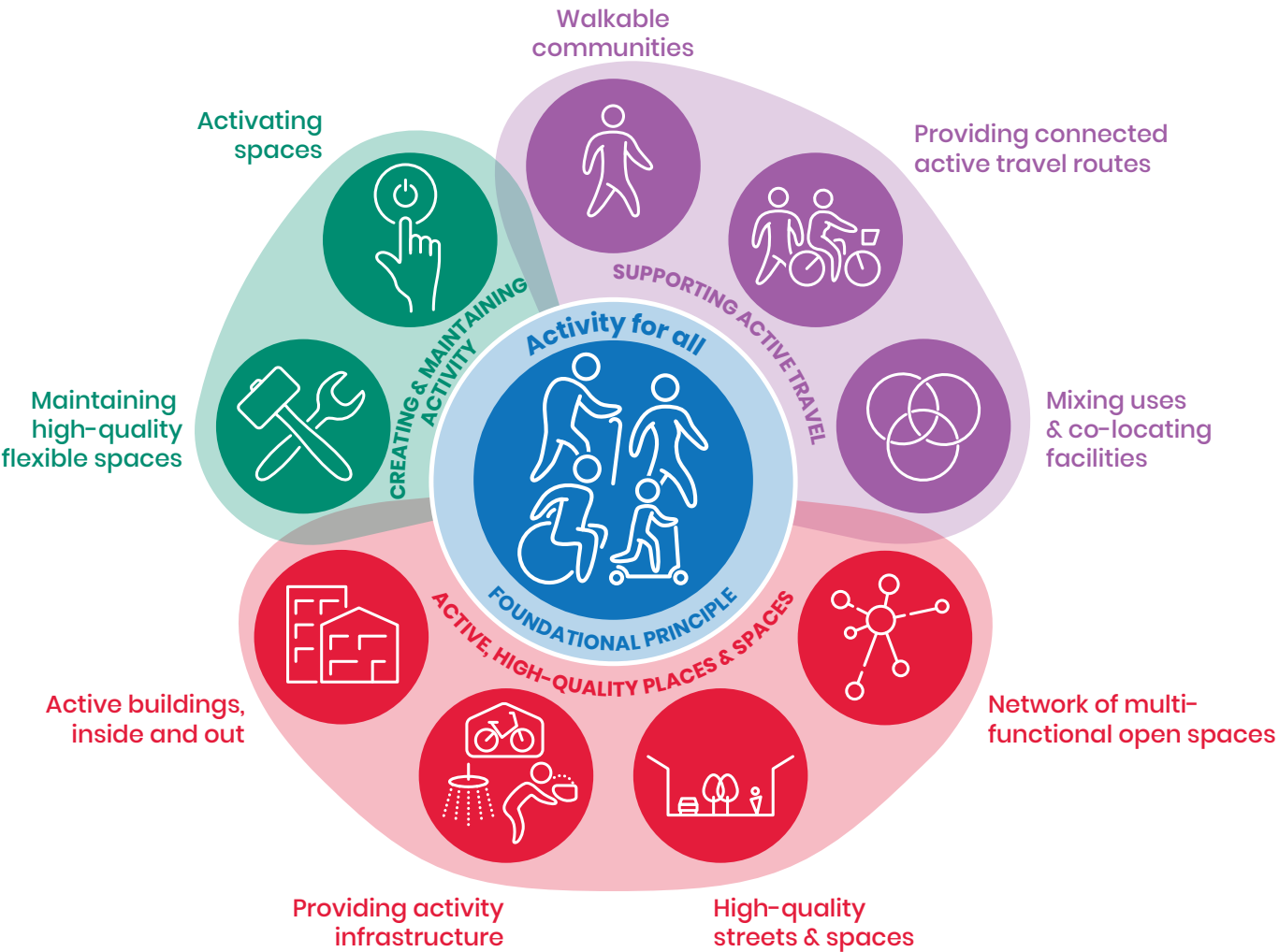
ACTIVE DESIGN IN LOCAL PLANS AND POLICY



What is Active Design and why is it important?

The design of the environment can help people to lead more physically active and healthy lives. [Sport England's Active Design](#) is about helping to create 'active environments' - homes, streets, places and spaces for everyone to be active everyday.

Active Design covers 10 principles, based on the foundational principle of 'Activity for all', that can be integrated into the planning and design of the built and natural environment.



Places that provide opportunities for people to lead physically active lives positively impact physical and mental wellbeing. But the opposite can also be true, where the design of a place creates barriers that make it difficult, unpleasant or inconvenient for people to be physically active. They also help people to meet the recommended weekly physical activity levels set out by the UK Chief Medical Officers (see box below). Physical inactivity is associated with one in six deaths in the UK (OHID, 2022).

PHYSICAL INACTIVITY IS ASSOCIATED WITH 1 IN 6 DEATHS IN THE UK

Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, 2022

The UK Chief Medical Officers' Physical Activity Guidelines recommend that:

- most adults should achieve at least 150 minutes of moderately intensive physical activity every week;
- children aged 5–18 should average 60 minutes per day;
- older adults (65 years and over) should aim to accumulate 150 minutes of moderately intensive physical activity a week;
- disabled children and young people should aim for 20 mins of physical activity per day.

The benefits of daily physical activity to the individual are clear. People who are more physically active are typically healthier, live longer and suffer fewer chronic diseases.

Equally, designing places that can help people be more active is positive for a wide range of current planning and societal priorities including reducing costs to the health system, lowering carbon emissions, improving air quality and improving economic productivity.

Active Design in Local Plans

The role of planning and Local Plans in shaping good population health and wellbeing is well evidenced and widely understood.

Including Sport England’s Active Design principles in Local Plan policy provides evidenced, clear and practical information for developers and planning applicants on how to design and create places and spaces that support physical activity, health and wellbeing. Many local planning authorities in England have already taken this step.

The use of Active Design can be justified by national and local evidence. Local data and evidence sources include local [Active Partnerships](#), Sport England’s [Active Lives data](#), local authority Public Health teams, the [Public Health Outcomes Framework](#) and local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments to help better understand the inequalities in people’s physical activity in your area.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVE DESIGN IN ADOPTED POLICY IN LOCAL PLANS

BASSETLAW LOCAL PLAN 2020-2038
Bassetlaw District Council
(adopted May 2024)
Policy ST33: Design Quality
1.All development must be of high quality design that:

a. has a clear function, character and identity based upon a robust understanding of local context, constraints and distinctiveness, while reflecting the principles of relevant national and local design guidance, including **Sport England’s Active Design principles**, the Bassetlaw Design Quality SPD and the Bassetlaw Design Code;

Supporting text:

8.1.13 Developers should also have regard to the principles and design criteria set out in Sport England’s Active Design principles and other relevant guidance including Conservation Area Appraisals and Neighbourhood Plan Character Assessments.

cont.

Policy ST42: Promoting Healthy, Active Lifestyles

The Council, with its partners will create an environment which supports healthy, active, inclusive and safe communities. Healthy, active and safe lifestyles will be enabled by:

e) creating high-quality, inclusive environments that incorporate **active design principles** and where practicable, increase opportunities for movement through a network of well-connected sustainable travel routes, public rights of way and towpaths to everyday shops and services;

Supporting text:

9.1.3 But healthy lifestyles cannot be delivered by the planning system alone. Other partners, such as the NHS Bassetlaw ICP, other health providers and Nottinghamshire County Council will also need to be proactive to help deliver healthy place-making responsive to the diverse needs of residents.

A range of Council and partner strategies will help implement Policy ST42 such as the Joint Health and Well-Being Strategy 2022-2026, Sport England’s Active Design principles, the Bassetlaw Playing Pitch Strategy 2019 and the Bassetlaw Open Space Assessment Update 2020.

MERTON LOCAL PLAN 2024-2037/38

London Borough of Merton

(adopted Nov 2024)

Strategic policy HW10.1: Health (including mental health) and Wellbeing

1. We will continue to improve and promote a more active and healthier lifestyle of our residents, tackle the causes of ill health (physical and mental), and health inequalities in Merton. This will be achieved by:

h. Improving the public realm in accordance with Transport for London (TfL), Healthy Streets Approach and **Sport England/Public Health England, Active Design 10 principles and guides**. To provide safe and convenient pedestrian and cycle routes that enable healthy and active travel choices, especially in areas identified as Air Quality Focus Areas in Merton’s Air Quality Action Plan.

Supporting text:

10.1.21. **Active Design principles** support the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Many Active Design principles are already embedded within overlapping disciplines related to open space and landscape, transport, access and design.

10.1.22. Embedding **Active Design principles** into the design and layout of a development at an early stage will meet a number of planning, transport and health objectives in an integrated and co-ordinated manner. This can assist in providing a smoother and quicker route through the planning application process and can help build support from neighbours and local communities for proposals resulting in more positive outcomes for applications.

Our local plan design policies have embedded Active Design and other recognised design principles.

cont.

Policy HW10.2: Delivering healthy places

- 1. We require development proposals to improve and promote strong, vibrant and healthy communities.
- 2. We will **require** development proposals to:
 - d. Incorporate **Sport England and Public Health Active Design principles** as part of development proposals.

Supporting text:

12.1.6. Development should pro-actively plan for health and wellbeing through sport and activity. Developers should consider following Sport England and Public Health England’s **Active Design 10 principles**, guides and checklist to help ensure their development’s layout and design helps to promote active lifestyles.

WALTHAM FOREST 2020-2035

London Borough of Waltham Forest

(adopted Feb 2024)

Policy 53: Delivering High Quality Design
Development proposals **will be supported where** they:

S: For residential schemes of ten homes and above, address the Homes England Building for a Healthy Life (BHL) criteria, and for all major applications, address the ten principles of **Active Design, as published by Sport England** and supported by Public Health England;

Supporting text:

14.8 Exemplar design and high quality placemaking create environments that make active choices easy and attractive. **Active Design**, published by Sport England with support from Public Health England, is a guidance document intended to help unify health, design and planning by promoting the right conditions and environments for individuals and communities to lead active and healthy lifestyles.

EXAMPLES OF ACTIVE DESIGN IN OTHER PLANNING POLICY DOCUMENTS

Tendring Colchester Borders Garden Community Development Plan Document
(adopted Jun 2025)

GC Policy 3: Place Shaping Principles

Part I: : Creation of a Unique and Distinctive Place

The Garden Community will be a unique place with a distinctive character that takes a positive and innovative approach to architecture, urban design, landmarks, and public realm provision. It will adopt a landscape led approach to design and build, follow healthy new towns principles, in accordance with **Sport England Active Design principles, and achieving Active Design**, and secured by design certification.

cont.

GC Policy 6: Community and Social Infrastructure

Part E: Health

The Garden Community will create an active environment that promotes health and wellbeing and builds a strong community. The conditions for a healthy community will be provided through the pattern of development, good urban and public realm design, access to local services and facilities, opportunities for local employment, high quality open space and landscape design and safe places for active play, biodiversity and food growing, and which are all accessible by walking, cycling and public transport. Proposals **must** take account of the healthy new towns principles, the developing integrated neighbourhood model of working, as well as **Sport England's Active Design principles**.

GC Policy 7: Movement and Connections

All proposals **must** have regard to **Active Design principles** and the Building for a Healthy Life process when designing the public realm and streets and undergo a Building for a Healthy Life/Streets for a Healthy Life review.

LATTON PRIORY STRATEGIC MASTERPLAN FRAMEWORK
(adopted Jun 2023)

Mandatory Spatial Principles


Active Design Principles - To create a truly sustainable, healthy and socially integrated community, **Active Design Principles** promoting physical activity and well-being will be embedded at the heart of the new neighbourhood at Latton Priory. The Essex Design Guide 2018 places a strong emphasis on the importance of establishing **Active Design Principles** early on in the masterplanning process. These principles echo urban design best practice and these active principles have been a key component in establishing the design principles for Latton Priory The objective of these principles is to create an environment through design which encourages activity in daily life. This includes providing an environment which promotes and encourages sport and children's play and other active leisure activities such as food production. It also encourages active living by promoting sustainable, active, modes of transport. Creating high quality, safe streets and spaces is a key component of design to encourage active living

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE DESIGN GUIDE SPD
(adopted Aug 2023)

10.3 Health and Wellbeing

10.3.1 ...Health and wellbeing play a large part in the success of development no matter the size, location, or use. Integrating health and wellbeing principles can be through the physical design as well as provision and management of sites.

10.3.3 The Council encourages active travel as this increases regular activity. Access to safe and attractive routes for walking, wheeling and cycling is important in giving people the opportunity to be active regularly, which is necessary for good physical and mental health. By applying **Active Design principles** to built and natural environments, active environments can be created that encourage people to be active through their everyday lives.

 **A friendly reminder**
The plans and policies referenced in this document were up-to-date at the time of writing, Autumn 2025. Please check each local authority website for full details.

Further resources

Sport England and Active Design

The key Active Design documents including the full Guidance document and a summary of The 10 principles of Active Design can be found here:

[Active Design - Sport England](#)

The Active Design Checklist is a practical tool to ensure alignment of development designs and proposals with the Active Design principles. It is useful for planning applicants and design teams, local planning authorities, public health teams and design review panels: [Active Design Checklist](#)

A comprehensive mix of in-depth case studies and illustrative places show how the principles can be applied in a variety of places, from a city centre through to rural villages: [Case studies and Illustrative places](#)

A guide to help those drafting and responding to design codes on how to effectively embed Active Design principles into the coding process is here:

[Active Design Guidance within Design Codes](#)

A self-led training pack is also available which has been designed to help people learn more about Active Design: [Active Design self-led training pack](#)

Wider healthy planning and place-making

The **Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA)** provide a wide range to resources and support on [healthy planning and place-making](#) including [Planning for healthy places - a guide on embedding health in Local Plans and planning policy in England](#).

The **Quality of Life Foundation** and **Prior+Partners** have also produced [Creating Health and Wellbeing A partnership approach to evidence-led planning and design in our cities, towns and villages](#).

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