

**Local Transport Plans, Strategic Environmental Assessment and Health:**

A review of the health component of some of the SEAs carried out on LTPs in England

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**Introduction**

This paper presents the early findings of a review of the health component of Strategic Environmental Assessments (SEAs) carried out on the Second Local Transport Plans 2006-2011 (LTP2s) for sixteen local authorities in England. Our findings show that human health was considered in LTP2 environmental reports and of those examined there was broad consensus on some key public health themes in relation to transport networks and infrastructure. Key among these was the recognition of the need to improve community health and reduce health inequalities, in particular, through improving accessibility for individual's and communities to healthier and more sustainable forms of transport.

**Methodology**

This research identified all the counties and districts in the UK (England, Scotland and Wales but not as yet Northern Ireland) that had produced an LTP2 and then determined via an internet search how many of these had accessible LTP2 environmental reports on their websites. Of these accessible reports, sixteen authorities in England were examined in more detail as they provided the easiest access and the greatest diversity within the same legal and planning context. We have only been able to examine five of our key objectives to date. These are:

- examining what the SEA Directive and UK guidance says in relation to human health;
- carrying out a rapid overview analysis of LTP2 environmental reports available on the web;
- examine what, if any, definition of health was used;
- undertake a keyword analysis of the sixteen English LTP2 environmental reports; and
- analyse the SEA objectives of the sixteen English LTP2 environmental reports in relation to health.

The three elements of the SEA environmental reports that were examined were the non-technical summary, the main report and any appendices.

### **What the SEA Directive says about health**

The *SEA Directive (Directive 2001/42/EC)* on the assessment of the effects of certain plans and programmes on the environment states that the SEA environmental report will provide information on:

*“(f) the likely significant effects<sup>1</sup> on the environment, including on issues such as biodiversity, population, human health, fauna, flora, soil, water, air, climatic factors, material assets, cultural heritage including architectural and archaeological heritage, landscape and the interrelationship between the above factors;*  
*(g) the measures envisaged to prevent, reduce and as fully as possible offset any significant adverse effects on the environment of implementing the plan or programme;”<sup>2</sup>*

### **What UK guidance on SEAs and LTPs says about health**

The *A Practical Guide to the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive* mentions health (and words derived from health e.g. healthy and healthier) 114 times. It makes six references to health inequalities and seven references to health impact assessment. Paragraph 2.27 describes how HIA could be of value in SEA;

*“2.27 The SEA Directive requires consideration of the likely significant effects of a plan or programme on human health. Responsible Authorities may find it helpful to draw on the methods of Health Impact Assessment when considering how a plan or programme might affect people’s health, and how positive effects could be enhanced and negative effects reduced. Information on HIA and health matters is included in Frequently Asked Questions, and Appendix 4, Figure 10 includes sources of baseline information on health.”*

The Guide, in Appendix 5, provides some examples of possible population and human health objectives and indicators;

- *create conditions to improve health and reduce health inequalities*

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<sup>1</sup> These effects should include secondary, cumulative, synergistic, short, medium and long-term permanent and temporary, positive and negative effects.

<sup>2</sup> Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Directive, Annex 1

- *promote healthy living*
- *protect and enhance human health*
- *reduce and prevent crime, reduce fear of crime*
- *decrease noise and vibration*
- *increase opportunities for indoor recreation and exercise*

It also has a specific question in the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) that advises on contacting local Directors of Public Health to obtain further information on health issues. Specifically;

*“They can provide advice on the health of the local population, sources of information and evidence at local level, and setting objectives.”*

There is also specific SEA guidance for transport plans and programmes by the Department for Transport, *Transport Analysis Guidance (TAG) Unit 2.11 on the Strategic Environmental Assessment for Transport Plans and Programmes*. This guide mentions health (and words derived from health e.g. healthy and healthier) 17 times. The aim of the guidance is to show how SEA integrates with transport planning in general and the New Approach to Appraisals (NATA) in particular. It makes no reference to either health inequalities or health impact assessment. Table 1 shows how the NATA objectives and sub-objectives align with those of the SEA Directive.

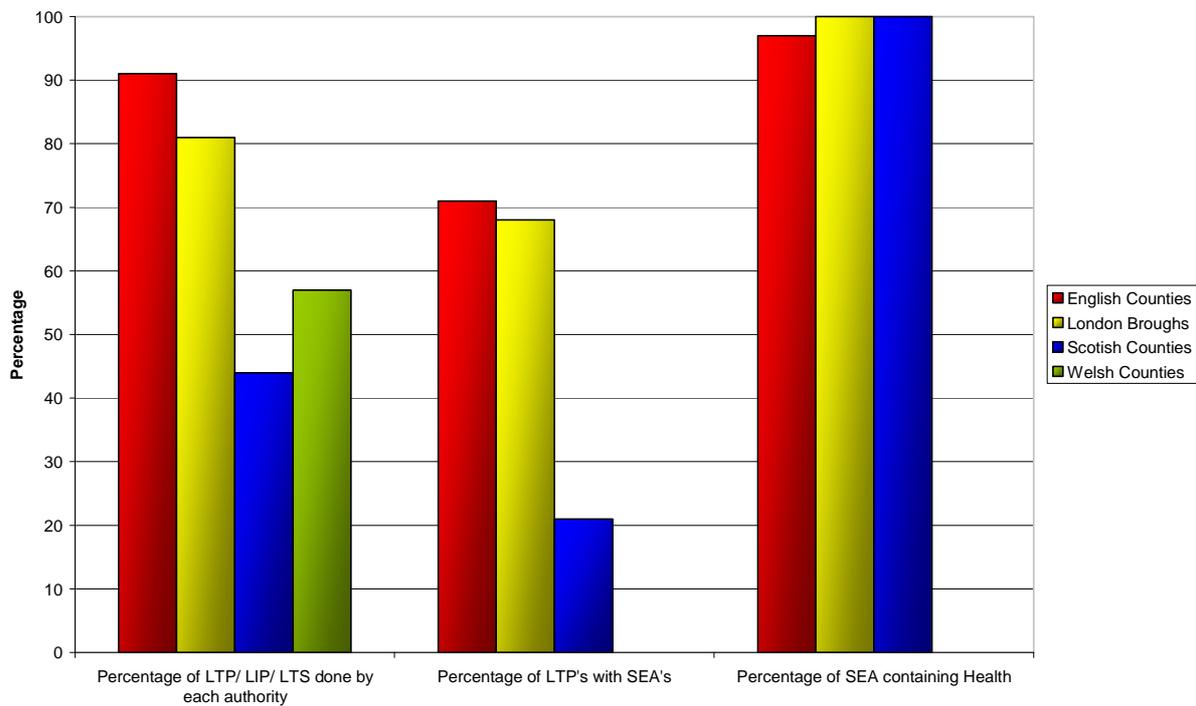
**Table 1: NATA sub-objectives and other topics to be addressed within an SEA (notes not included)**

NATA objective	NATA sub-objective	SEA topic (SEA Directive Annex 1f)
Environment	Noise	<b>Human health</b> , population, inter-relationships
	Local air quality	Air, <b>human health</b> , population
	Greenhouse gases	Climatic factors
	Landscape	Landscape
	Townscape	
	Heritage	Cultural heritage incl. architectural and archaeological heritage
	Biodiversity	Biodiversity, fauna, flora, soil
	Water Environment	Water
	Physical fitness	<b>Human health</b> , population
Safety	Accidents	<b>Human health</b> , population
	Security	
Accessibility	Community severance	Population
	Access to the transport system	
Economy	Public Accounts	Material assets
	Business users and providers	
	Consumer Users	

## Rapid overview of UK environmental reports available on the web

A rapid overview of all the environmental reports available on the web for England, Scotland and Wales found that over 90% of authorities in England had completed LTP2 reports available on their websites compared to 80% of London boroughs, 45% of Scottish authorities and just under 60% of Welsh authorities. Similarly, 70% of English authorities had completed LTP2 environmental reports available on their websites compared to 20% of Scottish authorities and none of the Welsh authorities. Of the environmental reports available, health was an almost universal element.

Figure 1: Percentage of LTP2s, LTP2 SEAs and SEAs containing health within England, Scotland and Wales



## Definition of health used

No explicit definition of health is used in the Directive, the two UK guidance documents, or the sixteen environmental reports examined.

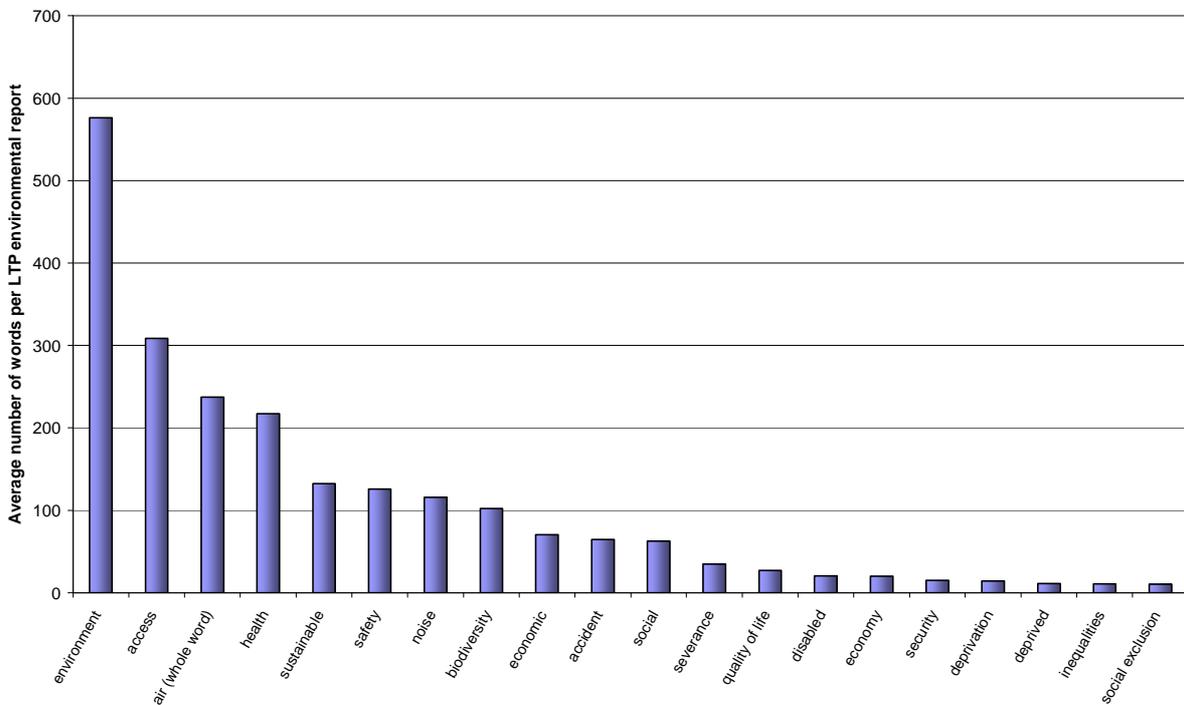
## Keyword analysis of sixteen LTP2 environmental reports

Sixty-eight keywords were searched for in the sixteen environmental reports, these were derived from experience and a review of the Directive and guidance. Though word counts are a fairly crude way of understanding how health is considered in SEA reports they do demonstrate

whether or not health is considered and how often it is considered compared to other keywords. The average number of times that the top twenty keywords appeared in environmental reports examined is shown in Figure 2.

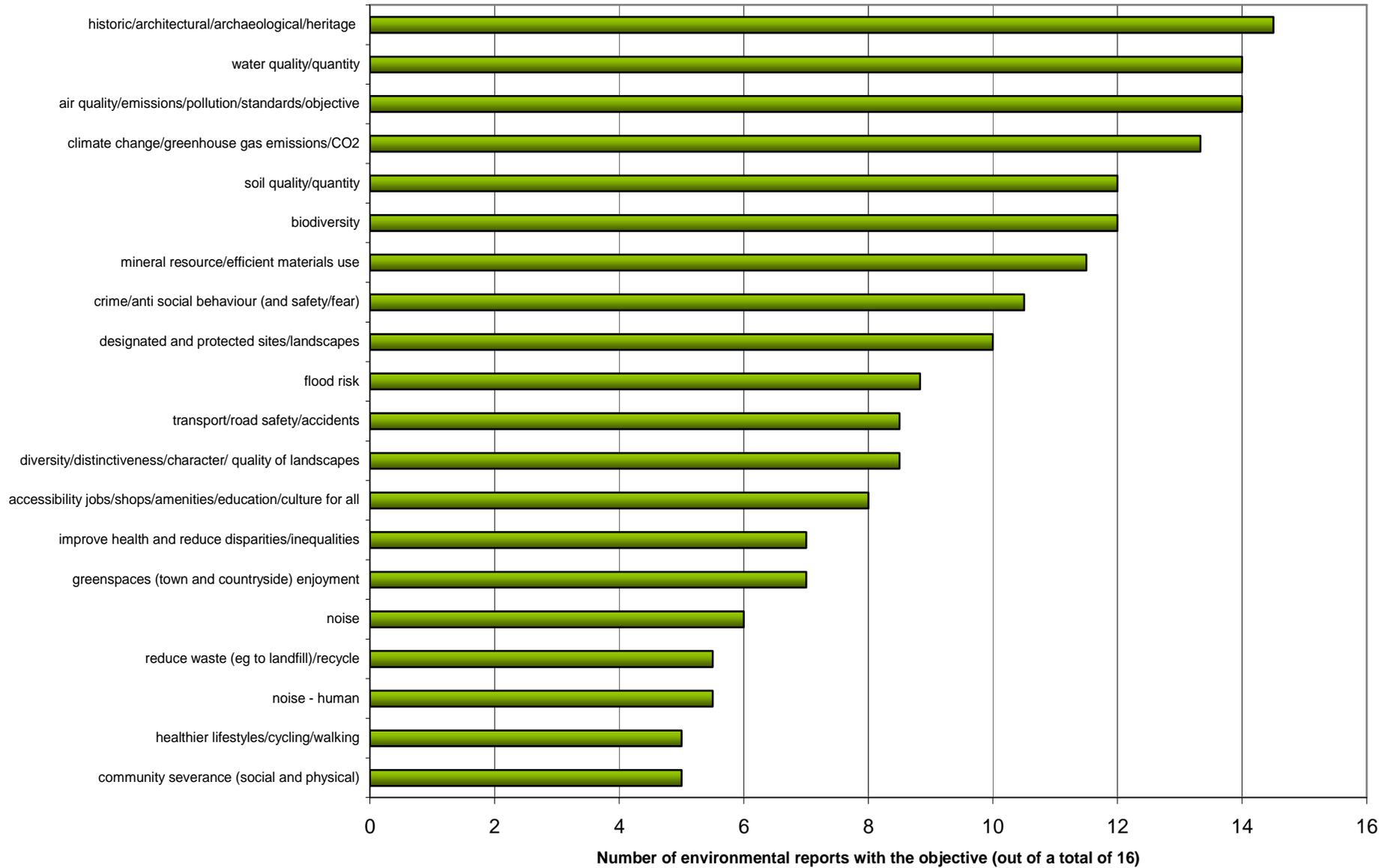
The graph in Figure 2 shows that, in the sixteen reports, examined the top five key words that appeared the most often were; environment and words derived from environment such as environmental and environmentally. This was followed by access and words derived from such as accessibility and accessible; air; health and words derived from health such as healthy and healthier; and sustainable.

**Figure 2: Average number of times the top 20 keywords used appeared in the sixteen LTP environmental reports examined**



So health, though appearing 50% less often than environment, does appear within the sixteen reports examined a relatively high number of times. This demonstrates that overall human health is being considered within LTP SEAs and environmental reports. This evidence is further strengthened by an analysis of the objectives developed for the LTP SEAs which is described in the next section. In contrast, keywords that demonstrate consideration of the broader dimensions of health such as deprivation, deprived, inequalities, social inclusion appear near the bottom of the top twenty listing with wellbeing coming even further down (not shown on Figure 1).

**Figure 3: Number of times key themes that appeared in the SEA objectives of the sixteen LTP2 environmental reports examined**



## **SEA objectives analysis of sixteen English LTP2 environmental reports**

The sixteen LTP environmental reports had between 7 and 25 objectives. These objectives were laid out in three different ways: as a straight list, under SEA topics or themes and as main objectives and sub-objectives.

Of the top twenty objectives (see Figure 3), that were most common among the sixteen reports, the particular human health focused objectives were: reducing crime/fear of crime and/or anti-social behaviour (8<sup>th</sup>), transport and road safety (11<sup>th</sup>), accessibility to amenities, services and opportunities (13<sup>th</sup>), improving health and reduce inequalities (14<sup>th</sup>), enjoyment of greenspaces/countryside (15<sup>th</sup>), noise impacts on humans (18<sup>th</sup>), healthier lifestyles/cycling and walking (19<sup>th</sup>) and community severance - physical and social (20<sup>th</sup>).

The analysis of objectives showed that a significant number, just under 50%, had improving health and reducing inequalities as an SEA objective, however the top-ranking objective in relation to the determinants of health and wellbeing was reducing crime and anti-social behaviour on transport networks followed by reducing transport-related accidents and injury. One interesting aspect of some environmental reports was the development of a noise objective whose focus seemed to be solely on the impacts on human health and wellbeing of transport noise.

## **Conclusion**

Human health has been considered in the SEAs of LTP2s in England and the UK as a whole. The environmental reports from England that were examined demonstrate that improving health and reducing inequalities especially through improving access, enhancing physical activity, and the improvement and enjoyment of the natural environment are key themes of the majority of the SEAs examined in this study. From a public health perspective this is very good news, and potentially shows that local authorities and SEA practitioners have taken on board the legislative and guidance push that human health should be considered in SEA. However, our study also shows that while legislation and guidance does influence practice significantly this influence is not uniform and there are important differences in how objectives have been set and the way in which health has been considered among the sixteen SEAs examined to date.