

Leadership for healthy people and planet

An invitation to
accelerate integrated
policy and action
on health and
environment



SPACE

SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS FOR
PHYSICAL & SOCIAL ACTIVITY,
HEALTHY AGEING & COGNITIVE HEALTH



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SPACE

The aim of the SPACE (Supportive Environments for Social and Physical Activity, Healthy Ageing & Cognitive Health) research programme is to investigate the impacts, and possible mechanistic pathways, of urban environments on healthy ageing and cognitive health, through the novel integration of multi-omics, lifestyle behaviour and environmental exposures from urban environments. The research is led by the Centre for Public Health, Queen's University Belfast, and involves an interdisciplinary team of researchers from across the university, working alongside stakeholders from policy, practice and the 3rd sector.

For further information, please visit:
www.qub.ac.uk/sites/space/



Involve

Involve is the UK's leading public participation charity. We develop, support and campaign for new ways to involve people in decisions that affect their lives.

Since 2003, we have been working with governments, parliaments, civil society, academics and the public to create and deliver new forms of public participation that re-vitalise democracy and improve decision-making.

We work across the UK and internationally, with offices in Belfast, Edinburgh and London.

We worked closely with the team at SPACE to develop a collaborative process that enabled different perspectives on healthy people and planet to come together and begin building an integrated policy agenda. We designed and facilitated the workshops and have co-authored this report.



Foreword

As part of the SPACE research project, Queen's University Belfast were proud to host a policy workshop series on *Leadership for Healthy People and Planet: An invitation to accelerate integrated policy and action on health and environment.*

Queen's University Belfast has been leading research to understand how the environment in which we live causes ill-health and cognitive decline among our rapidly ageing population.

Environmental factors such as air quality, green space, congestion, noise, and other pollutants can contribute to poorer health outcomes, especially as we age. Often concentrated in areas of deprivation, these factors can widen health inequalities too. We know that the causes are complex, and the solutions are even more complex.

Addressing the root causes of poor-quality environments – such as poor transport infrastructure, lack of good-quality green space, and poor housing – will be beneficial across a range of policy areas. Solving issues connected with ageing, health and cognitive decline will also resolve other important challenges we face in public health, liveable communities and environment.

Working in partnership to find solutions can save money, resources and lead to better, more sustainable outcomes. To better integrate how we can find policy solutions to many of these interconnected problems, we brought together a range of stakeholders.

This included researchers, health professionals, activists, organisations delivering practical solutions, policy makers, advocates, and members of the public. The three workshops explored in depth how the issues are being addressed (and how they are not), and identified how we can combine forces across agendas and disciplines, to deliver successful outcomes for communities, health, ageing, planning, the environment and our planet.

Ultimately, our aim was to help shape future policy in Northern Ireland on the Environment and Health and agree an ambitious agenda for integrating policy and action on linking environment and health.

Foreword by Prof Ruth Hunter, QUB

Introduction

The number of people worldwide living with dementia and cognitive impairment is increasing, mainly due to people living longer, and thus we want to better understand what affects dementia and brain health as we get older.

Some research suggests that where we live might influence our brain health.

For example, poor air quality in towns and cities can lead to a decline in brain health. Poor quality environments are also commonly found in our most deprived communities, widening health and social inequalities. As more of us now live in towns and cities, it is important that the environment where we live is scientifically designed and improved to maximise our brain health.

There is currently too much focus on hospitals and treating ill-health, with prevention receiving very little policy attention. This co-design process aimed to bring together policy makers, implementers, researchers, advocates, campaigners, and the public to set a policy agenda and pathways to improve the environments where we live with a focus on prevention, healthy ageing and brain health.

The process to engage with multiple stakeholders on the question of integrating policy and action on environment and health was inspired by the work being undertaken in the SPACE programme of research at QUB. Three years of integrating research carried out across a range of disciplines including urban planning, public health, geospatial mapping and epigenetics produced a body of evidence that reflects the systemic nature of environmental factors affecting health, and in particular brain health and cognitive impairment.



Overview and structure of the workshops

The workshops took place across three consecutive Wednesdays in September 2023, in the MAC Belfast.

The purpose of the workshops was to:

- Bring together diverse perspectives connected to the issue;
- Bring participants on a journey of discovery where they learned by sharing knowledge and experiences;
- Focus on what a shared policy agenda that addresses the systemic relationships between environment and health might look like.

Perspectives represented were:



Day 1. Making Connections – Establishing what this agenda meant to each perspective (page 14)

Day 2. Discovering policy agendas – what is currently being done; finding the opportunities for action. (page 21)

Day 3. Agreeing Actions – and discovering what can sustain the connections. (page 29)

The main outcome of the workshops is the emergence of six areas of focus for leadership on environment and health. They are summarised on the next page.

Emerging Topics for Leadership for Healthy People and Planet

6 TOPICS

emerged from the workshops to reflect the insights and aspirations of those participating.

Topic 1

Knowledge Sharing

Major conclusion:

Knowledge sharing is essential for effective translation of data and evidence into policy decisions.

Knowledge sharing involves bringing the knowledge that is in the system already, including academic research, or that will be produced in the future, into the hands of decision makers in a way that they can use to make more informed decisions on policy and programmes and vice versa.

Topic 2

Collaboration

Major conclusion:

Meaningful collaboration – from planning through to implementation – is the only effective way of improving outcomes for environment and health.

Collaboration means the way that different parts of the system plan and implement in partnership with an emphasis on different partners being enabled to work collaboratively – going beyond the barriers that prevent genuine shared work agendas from lasting to implementation.

Topic 3

Sustainability

Major conclusion:

Sustainability is an umbrella concept that offers a way to bring many different parts of the environment and health agenda into coherence.

Sustainability involves the understanding that social, economic and environmental actions and priorities are intertwined and that actions that harm the environment will end up harming the social fabric and the economy. Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a broad overview of the breadth of the sustainability agenda. Every country has signed up to implement the SDGs.

Emerging Topics for Leadership for Healthy People and Planet

Topic 4

Reducing Car Dependency

Major conclusion:

Our spaces and places have been designed to accommodate cars, we must change our culture of car dependency and design spaces around the people who live in them.

Reducing car dependency as a topic is the exploration of the impact of the car in the way we design our public and private spaces, make lifestyle choices, invest in infrastructure, and manage pollution.

Topic 6

Leadership for Change

Major conclusion:

Leadership is needed to enable all the necessary stakeholders to come together to play a coordinated role in tackling Environment and Health issues.

Leadership for environment and health requires people in lots of settings from public to private and voluntary sectors, to have skills of collaboration, bravery, long term vision and a capacity to manage complex realities.

Topic 5

Community Level Action Incorporating Urban Design

How We Design and Live in Our Communities

Major conclusion:

Plan places and spaces for and with the communities that live in and visit those neighbourhoods.

Community-level action is the concept of allowing people who live in a space to design it and shape it according to their needs and desires. Planning and development should be done with people. Community Planning was used as an example of what is needed when done effectively.

The Process and Workshop Design



The Process and Workshop Design

The planning group designing the workshops decided on a process that would build over multiple days –

three in total, where diverse perspectives connected to the issue would be invited to undertake a journey of discovery, learning by sharing knowledge and experiences and then to focus on what a shared policy agenda might look like that addresses the systemic relationships between environment and health.

Stakeholders participated representing six different perspectives:

1. Researchers
2. Policy Makers
3. Local Government
4. Community Voices
5. Practitioners
6. The Public

The Process and Workshop Design



A key design goal was to use the concept of 'multi-solvers' as a way to enable participants to connect agendas and arrive at strategic conclusions.

Multi-solvers had been identified as interventions in one policy area that would have many co-benefits, solving issues that belong to another policy agenda.

For instance, improving energy efficiency in a house by increasing the insulation will improve health outcomes while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Other benefits might include increased economic opportunities for installers. Some of the conclusions reached by participants did identify examples of 'multi-solvers'.

The Process and Workshop Design

Three workshops were held on consecutive Wednesdays at the MAC in Belfast.

The purpose of the workshops was to explore how to take a systems approach to integrating environment and health, especially in the work of public policy. The goal was not to create a strategy or action plan but to understand where this agenda fits in the policy environment and how it can be progressed in a way that acknowledges the joined-up nature of the issue.

To arrive there, a journey was necessary that would bring a diverse group of stakeholders (those who have a direct stake in the issues), through a series of explorations based on their own knowledge, experience and work. The explorations were broken down in these steps, found on the next pages.



The Process and Workshop Design

Making Connections

Establishing what this agenda meant to each perspective

The participants heard from experts in Urban Planning, Epigenetics, Air Pollution and other environmental factors

Prof Geraint Ellis, Queens University Belfast, provided an overview of the role of urban design and planning in health and well-being. Health is not just about lifestyle choices and health care.

The environmental and social determinants of health, urban health inequalities, and planning and place-making are all key drivers of urban health and well-being. Urban planning and design have historically acted as key promoters of public health, for example, cities designed with well-being in mind tend to promote good health outcomes in terms of cognitive health and mental well-being. Place, mobility, access to services, socio-economic status and deprivation, and environmental quality contribute to where and how we live, which has the potential to further contribute to urban health inequalities.

We need to design cities that cover all the needs of every group in society, for example, older people have specific needs, in what their activities are during the day, their physical abilities, mental abilities and also other special needs that they might have. Dependency on cars and other forms of motorised transport is one key source of poor environmental exposure (e.g., air and noise pollution). Reducing car dependency and increasing active travel can promote healthy cities, and ensure we can live and age well. Planning can also promote healthy cities through the delivery of key local services (e.g., green space, health facilities and healthy food options), clean air and water and adapting to climate change.

The Process and Workshop Design

Making Connections

Prof Jennifer McKinley, Queen's University Belfast, presented an overview of what we know about air pollution and other environmental factors. The World Health Organisation estimates that almost a third of all global deaths are linked to the environment, whether naturally occurring (geogenic) or formed through human activities such as industrial practices (historical and modern), atmospheric air pollution or traffic pollution. Therefore, with an ageing population understanding what's in our environment and how potential environmental toxins impact on human health becomes increasingly important. Soils show evidence of legacy and modern day pollution.

An evidence base is needed to investigate the impacts of urban pollution including soil pollution, air, noise and light pollution on cognitive impairment. Studies have shown that ultrafine particles (such as lead, molybdenum and antimony) may become blood-borne and translocate to other tissues such as the liver, kidneys and brain. Soils show the evidence of air pollution deposition and the potential impact of the modern pollutants. Therefore, urban soils combined with air pollution data may be used as a proxy for the availability of toxins for human intake from environmental pollution. Our findings from previous research support the argument that atmospheric pollution in the form of Carbon Monoxide (CO), Sulphur dioxide (SO₂) and PM_{2.5} exposure deposition and associated toxic metals may negatively affect chronic disease including renal disease. The environment also plays an important role in promoting brain health and preventing dementia through access to green/blue space, and promoting walkability and cyclability. Exposure analysis undertaken as part of the SPACE project explores how the local environment and pollutants synergistically affect our cognitive health outcomes.

The Process and Workshop Design

Making Connections

Prof Amy Jayne McKnight, Queen's University Belfast, introduced the concept of epigenetics. Our genes carry information that is passed from one generation to the next. The environment in which we live can impact how our underlying biology works.

The SPACE project is interested in exploring how environmental variables (e.g., light and noise pollution) can get under our skin and affect people's underlying biology. For example, two individuals might equally both have asthma, exactly the same type of asthma that responds to exactly the same type of drug. One person might be affected by high levels of pollution and another may not, and that is due to their underlying biology. If we can help understand what is causing that difference, then we can tease out how we can help those individuals and either create an intervention or therapy. Epigenetics adds a new dimension to urban planning and the important role that the environment plays in creating conditions for good health. If we can better understand what in our environment causes changes to our underlying biology, we can better help individuals who are impacted.

The Process and Workshop Design

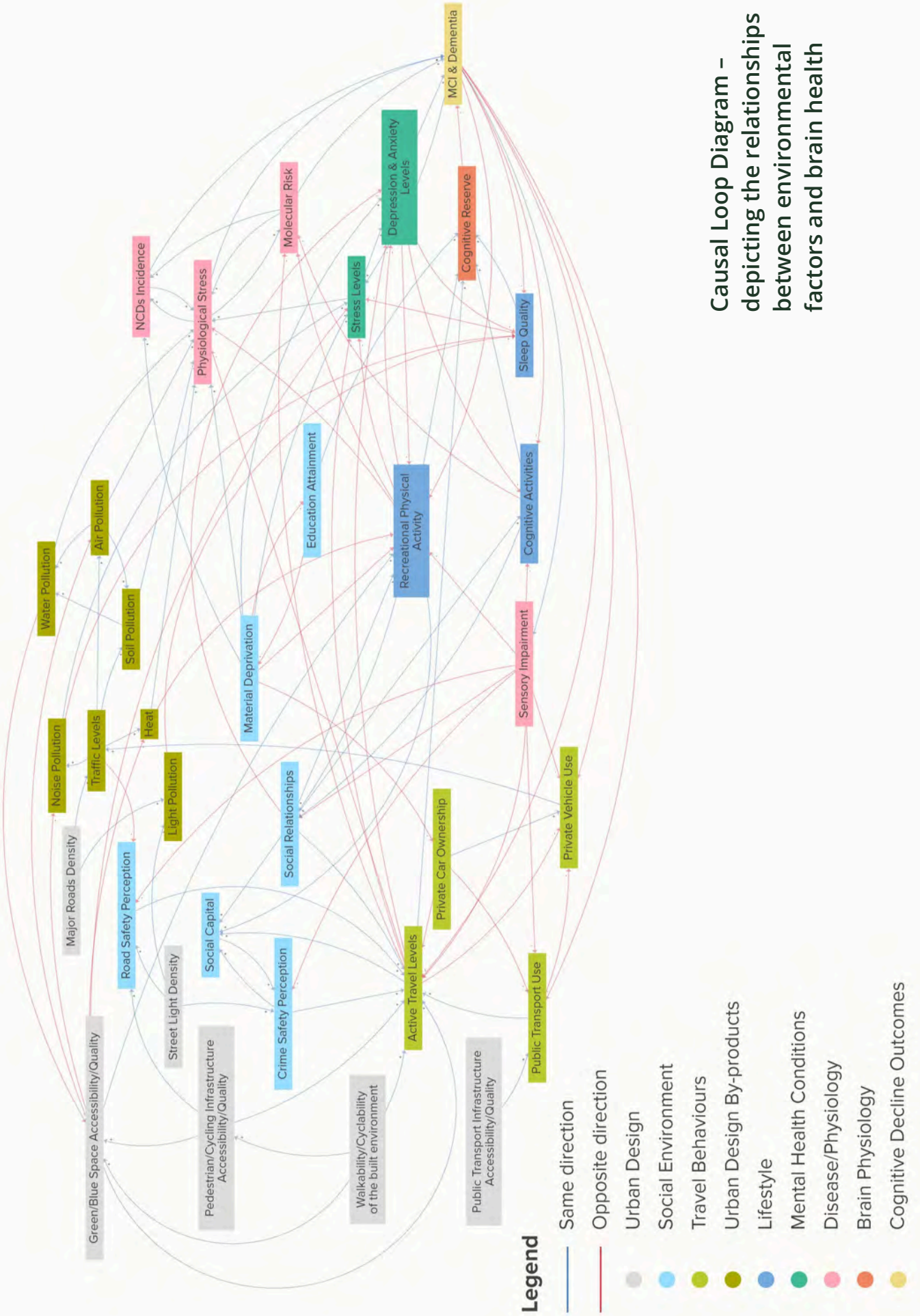
Causal Loop Diagram

Experts from Queen's provided an overview of a previously developed Causal Loop Diagram which depicts the relationships between various environmental factors and brain health.

In December 2021, the SPACE conducted a two-day workshop in which experts from different disciplines identified multiple factors and their interconnections contributing to mild cognitive impairment and dementia in urban populations. After refinement, we created a type of systems map called **Causal Loop Diagram**, with 34 factors and 109 connections represented.

The development of this diagram led to the identification of nine key themes under which all the factors were classified: urban design, social environment, travel behaviours, urban design by-products (e.g., air pollution, light pollution), lifestyle, mental health conditions, disease/physiology, brain physiology, and cognitive decline outcome. The diagram on the next page shows the nine themes and the number of interconnections that exist between them, represented by the numbers on the arrows. The creation of this Causal Loop Diagram helped to inform the environmental factors of interest to include in future research.

The Causal Loop Diagram is available to view online at [kumu](#) and on the next page.



Causal Loop Diagram - depicting the relationships between environmental factors and brain health

The Process and Workshop Design

Causal Loop Diagram

Participants were introduced to the Causal Loop Diagram – a systems map that describes the relationships between environmental factors and health factors in a series of feedback loops.

Participants reflected on the map and, in particular, were asked for examples of trends happening in the real world that demonstrated movement in the domain of environment and health.

A large blank map was placed on the wall with the five key factors in bubbles:

- Urban Design
- Urban Design By-Products
- Lifestyle
- Social Environment
- Travel Behaviours



The Process and Workshop Design

Causal Loop Diagram

Trends identified by participants were collected and written onto the map, together with linkages between the trends. Around 70 trends were named. Participants prioritised these trends on the map using sticky dots. Most of the dots were placed on the issue of Urban Design.

The major trends that emerged included:

- We still design communities by prioritising the car
- Reduction in application of sustainability principles in decisions
- Underfunding of urban design
- Poor at designing for people who live in the communities
- Increasing social isolation (social environment)
- Warming climate due to our lifestyle



The Process and Workshop Design

DAY 2

Discovering policy agendas

This day focused on asking questions like: What would an environment that supports brain health look like? What needs to change to make it a reality? Who can help create it? What is currently being done how might we find the opportunities for action?

Participants heard stakeholder perspectives on what is happening and what isn't, identified what would make a difference and created self selecting groups to work on priorities for action. Some of these perspectives are presented in the next few pages of the report.



Perspectives from practitioners



STAKEHOLDER
PERSPECTIVES
FROM DAY 2

There needs to be sustainable “rewilded” housing and green spaces for people.

The importance of the environment needs to start with education. The media needs to be educated on these issues.

We need civic and cooperate leadership to make effective green infrastructure change.

What can we do? We can be advocates for the changes that we want to see.



Perspectives from researchers academics



STAKEHOLDER
PERSPECTIVES
FROM DAY 2

4 key issues,
current neo-liberal
economic model a
big obstacle, a lot
of bureaucracy for
addressing or
starting work, a lot
of social barriers:
how do cocreate
research and
policy agendas
with stakeholders.

Cars are a big
problem, can a
citizen jury help?

Net zero targets, we are
leaving people behind,
what sort of solutions
are we aiming for,
as opposed to just
electric cars?



Perspectives from researchers



STAKEHOLDER
PERSPECTIVES
FROM DAY 2

Doesn't matter how many good ideas we have there will always be barriers to policy, there is a culture of short termism in science and politics, science follows trends, policy prioritises what is good for them at the time.

Science communication plays a key role, can we turn it into action?

Wide ranging conversation.

COVID was a good example of how balanced approaches are needed to address issues.



Perspectives from local government



STAKEHOLDER
PERSPECTIVES
FROM DAY 2

Mental health is a big issue, largely housing plays a key role, and has a massive impact on health.

Bringing people into the city centre is also an issue, an agenda to increase the population in the centre but there is very little infrastructure. There are huge challenges but not much leadership.

There is a lack of resources for house building. Renting, house building, all have separate policy agendas.

Public transport is also a big issue, temporary planning, how can effective changes be made, e.g. Covid be made permanent, perhaps more of a focus on active travel and sustainable working from home practices.

Homelessness also does not play a role in policy decisions.



Perspectives from **community** voices



STAKEHOLDER
PERSPECTIVES
FROM DAY 2

We focused on learning from each other and evidence --how can we learn from each other, and how is our lived experience informing policy, conjoined with academic research?

There are no quick fixes.

How can individual actions inform community level action?

Having conversations about walking groups, conservation, etc. though politics is currently at a standstill. Is there another strategy that we can take? Community ownership is very important, the consultation process can be a good opportunity for this.



Perspectives from advocates



STAKEHOLDER
PERSPECTIVES
FROM DAY 2

Sustainability is the most important thing because of the overarching concept.

Distinct lack of cooperation between government departments.

Use of the outcomes-based approach is likely the best option, which may allow the political process to be circumvented where long-term agendas apply.

There is currently a lack of decision making, for example energy has a lack of cohesion, six departments have responsibility, this does not allow for sophisticated planning.

We are not aware of any current successful government strategies for the problems currently confronting society.



Perspectives from policy-makers



STAKEHOLDER
PERSPECTIVES
FROM DAY 2

The need for travel behaviour changes – how do we improve infrastructure to promote sustainable behaviour change?

Will electric cars actually help with this agenda, and are we really changing the environment with retaining cars?

Generally, there is more collaborative working across government, there is increasingly cross-over between policy agendas – the policy environment is becoming muddier.

Encouraging collaborative work is key, but leadership is required to make this effective.

Do current targets work or just although for box-ticking? Better analysis outputs from research required.



The Process and Workshop Design

DAY 3

Agreeing Actions

This day focused on creating actions and conclusions on the priorities and topics and how to take this work forward, by using a café conversation.

A café conversation is where the participants discuss a question in small groups for a short amount of time (20 minutes in this case), and then participants shift to meet other participants and continue to share and add insights with a new question. These are explained in more detail on page 47.



Emerging Topics



Topic 1

Knowledge Sharing to Improve Decision Making and Outcomes

**Major conclusion:
Knowledge sharing is essential for effective translation of data and evidence into policy decisions.**

Knowledge sharing within the context of this report refers to the exchange of information (e.g., data, research, findings) between individuals and organisations across different stakeholder groups in order to benefit from shared learning.

Knowledge sharing was identified as a high priority for participants through the understanding that while a lot of research is being undertaken, it is often not with the intention of having it directly used by policy makers and those active “on the ground” to drive decisions.

The group explored the rationale for having both a culture of knowledge sharing but equally importantly – a mechanism for knowledge sharing. The gap between the data and research and how it gets used was described as a wasted opportunity and participants were able to demonstrate how multiple benefits would arise if policy makers knew what information was available and how to use it as evidence in decisions.



Knowledge Sharing to Improve Decision Making and Outcomes

These insights describe why it is important:

- Data is meaningless if we don't know how to interpret it.
- We have to learn what others are doing as we work in silos, we don't practise cross-sector action planning.
- A lot of data is collated but not necessarily publicly accessible.
- We sense that strategies are created without knowing what has already been put in place – we end up trying to reinvent the wheel.
- Knowledge sharing currently comes down to who you know and chance conversations.
- Researchers and public sector workers only know each other through working on collaborative research projects or committees – there is a lack of underlying connection.

Actions that will make a difference for Knowledge Sharing:

- Creation of a formal mechanism for knowledge sharing.
- Creation of a specific health and environment knowledge exchange seminar series.
- Incentives for researchers to engage in knowledge exchange (community of practice; acknowledgement of activity by employer).
- Streamlining/altering approval processes to speed up actions and exchange.
- 'Data dictionary' – agreeable, inclusive terminology for exchange of information.
- Outreach programme, all projects should do outreach in communities.
- Roundtable approaches.

Knowledge Sharing to Improve Decision Making and Outcomes

Other considerations:

- Shared language/glossary of understanding.
- Continuous communication to balance financial constraints and timelines.
- Long-term vision for international collaboration.
- Improving research design methodology.
- We need central research champion.
- A circle of sharing and learning.
- Whatever knowledge we create in academia is available for stakeholders.
- A mutually beneficial exchange between research and public sector.
- Creation of a research specialist in collaboration and innovation.
- Strengthen the collaboration.
- Ensure all voices heard.
- Shared and open data.
- Appropriate data sources.

Outcomes from improved knowledge sharing:

- Co-production from beginning to end.
- Input from those with lived experience.
- Civic forum.
- Knowledge exchange seminar series on environment and health.
- Transcends politics.
- Open accessible sources of data.
- Better joint understanding across sectors.
- Rewards/ incentives for place-based research for researchers.
- Data dictionary of inclusive accessible language.

Topic 2

Meaningful Collaboration for Environment and Health

**Major conclusion:
Meaningful collaboration – from
planning through to implementation –
is the only effective way of improving
outcomes for environment and health.**

Meaningful collaboration within the context of this report refers to successful and fruitful communication, co-operation, and joined-up thinking across individuals and organisations across stakeholder groups.

Collaboration emerged as a prominent theme throughout the three workshops. Collaboration has to extend from policy makers and decision makers all the way to the communities that are resident in an area. Participants had an understanding that collaboration is widely seen as being important but yet it is not yet being practised effectively.

There was an appreciation of the diversity of perspectives in the room, all of whom had a deep connection to the issue of environment and health. Participants expressed frustration at the missing voices, those who were invited but not present and who have a significant contribution to this work, underlining the importance of including the right voices when it comes to decision making.



Meaningful Collaboration for Environment and Health

Recognition of the diversity brought home the complexity and systemic nature of this issue. A key challenge of collaboration is the need to move beyond collaboration in planning to collaboration in implementation – longer term, genuine sharing of resources and decisions where leaders are involved.

The other motivation for collaboration is because it is the only possible way to address the complex integrated challenges facing society. Our structures are fragmented today with competing interests and measures of success which works against the ability to work together across boundaries.

Community Planning was highlighted as an example of how collaboration was promoted but where it is not working as intended. Many of the potential actions suggested that Community Planning be reviewed, improved and made more collaborative to intentionally address the barriers to collaboration already mentioned. The term co-production has been around for a while and was intended to enable broad and meaningful participation in decision making, especially by groups who are traditionally excluded. It seems that varying definitions and expectations of what co-production means and how it is interpreted and used needs to be addressed for it to be meaningful. The Department of Health has the most comprehensive approach to co-design and could be a lead partner in sharing what works.

Topic 2

Meaningful Collaboration for Environment and Health

Actions that will make a difference for Collaboration:

- More organisations adopting a co-production (or co-design) approach to improve the environment.
- The creation of a “library” of successful case-studies of collaboration.
- Dissemination of co-production guidelines to develop commitment and resilience.
- Leadership for co-design and collaboration with a clear set of goals and outcomes – understanding definition and agreement on process (co-design).
- Creating an “interested party network” (people interested in collaborating).
- Reform of Community Planning to strengthen the structures and budgeting.
- Put Community Planning at the centre of space-based planning processes.
- Make collaboration a statutory responsibility.
 - Training and what it is to act under the principles of co-production.
 - Co-production document – Dept for Health -> replicate across other areas.
- Community development approach.
 - Co-production approach with communities – we need to use co-production to make equal relationships between communities and corporations.
 - Adopt an Asset Based Approach to working with communities.
- Create a long term seed fund without strings attached – to enable collaborative initiatives.





Major conclusion:
Sustainability is an umbrella concept that offers a way to bring many different parts of the environment and health agenda into coherence.

Sustainability within the context of this report refers to conservation of natural resources and protection of our ecosystem to support health and well-being.

Sustainable development was described as an overarching theme that can act as an umbrella to bring all the issues together into coherence. Fundamentally we want to live in a society that is sustainable. Some perceive that the concept of sustainability has been slipping down the agenda over the past number of years, maybe fragmented into lots of individual topics due to the fragmented way we do our work. Sustainability brings economic and social questions together with the environment and this can prevent a silo attitude from dominating. It permits a more integrated conversation where we can see social benefits from green spaces as also contributing to health, to reducing pollution and helping restore nature and biodiversity.

Climate breakdown is important as a design consideration. Climate Acts are already in place and have legally binding targets, so offer an already available policy commitment. There are serious conversations to be had: investing in better transport and improving our homes: focus for the future, and observations of inertia, with seemingly with very little happening.



Some suggest that climate breakdown should be the only thing on the agenda, some suggest we are sitting on the issue while others insist it should not dominate the agenda. Things like building health into climate action conversations, being prepared to look at changing the system, ask if social assets can be used in different ways, look at new forms of funds, encourage innovation in public spending and working with different sectors should be considered.

Many participants highlighted the Green New Deal, which was a conversation about how to build back better after Covid and to kick start a new era of investment into social and environmental actions that also create employment and raise productivity. Participants also explored the ways that we measure success in our society and the need to adopt different measures of success that acknowledge what a healthy society and economy feel like.

Conversations looked at sustainable decisions such as housing quality and retrofit – where there are multiple co-benefits like reduced energy consumption, increasing standard of living, increasing employment opportunities, creating local networks (extending to food and circular economy).

Another major insight in the sustainability conversation was the need to resource innovation through sustainable financing. Green banks, unrestricted funding and raising revenue from unsustainable behaviours were identified as drivers and enablers of sustainable actions.

Actions that will make a difference for Sustainability:

- Tax environmental damage for green bank.
- Retrofitting existing housing stock.
- Create green funds by 'various' taxation schemes.
- Climate change and transport policy + consumer supply chains.
- Use multiple economic and well being indices: not just GDP.
- Implement stricter building standards.
- Develop a cross-department sustainability strategy – Climate Act potentially a good model with accountability built into deliverables e.g., Programme for Government (PfG).
- Make sustainability a criteria for funding projects.
- Employ sustainability scientists.

Reducing Car Dependency

Major conclusion: Our spaces and places have been designed to accommodate cars.

We must change our culture of car dependency and design spaces around the people who live in them.

Car dependency refers to the over-reliance on cars rather than alternate forms of transportation (e.g., active or public) and the resulting impact on health behaviours, infrastructure, and environment.

From the first day of the workshops the role of the car in shaping society was highlighted as being a major factor in this agenda. The challenge for society is to reduce car dependency while offering the convenience and benefits that the car has brought to individuals. Participants recognised that this would be a major shift in culture and is not a short term project, but one which will require community and political buy-in.

Participants highlighted how we have designed our communities around the car and continue to do so, including the ongoing transition to electric vehicles (EV). It seems to be at the heart of so many of the issues related to environment and health – air pollution, climate causing emissions, safety, noise and light, end of life issues, economic well being, obesity and others. Getting people to not be so reliant on the car is a complex challenge but there are lots of ideas for how to achieve it. Solving how we move around our communities brings together active travel, economy, safety, air quality. There are major connections to any urban design decisions and reducing car dependency appears to be very much economically driven.

Lots of practical ideas were raised on how we can go about enabling a shift from the car to more active travel options. These included trialling a range of ideas that offer a community spirit and those that gradually get people experimenting with not using a car.



Reducing Car Dependency

Actions that will make a difference for Reducing Car Dependency:

- A cost evaluation impact of car emissions as a preventative health measure.
- Subsidise monthly public transport for individuals or offer it for free.
- 20-mile per hour urban speed limit, particularly in areas where people could utilise active travel.
- Long-term sustainable planning of settlements.
- Reduce car parking: Physical infrastructure change to restrict parking and exchange active travel, including in residential design.
- Prioritise active travel; prioritise funding to active travel over cars/roads; responsibility to do so sits with central Government.
- Multi-user pool cars and other car sharing initiatives.
- Improved public transport.
- Introduce a congestion charge.



Reducing Car Dependency

Other considerations

Change culture for reducing car dependency:

- Secure political support.
- Create a car stigma.
- Public relations: promote alternatives.
- Give positive messages about the benefits of a cultural and infrastructural change – it is about bringing benefits, not taking things away.
- Campaigns with maps showing people the options to walk and cycle in the city.

Trial car free day – Sundays with:

- Entertainment.
- Free public transport.

Adopt Car Free Planning Options

- Planning (carrot vs. stick).
- Promote and incentivise City centre living.
- Density Planning.
- Car parking requirements.
- Remove peace walls (cuts down transport emissions etc.).
- Extend traffic light times, more cycle lanes and infrastructure.
- Create car free environments around schools and children – low emissions zones around schools, walking/biking buses.



Topic 5

Community Level Action incorporating Urban Design (How We Design and Live in Our Communities)



**Major conclusion: Plan Places and Spaces
for and with the communities that live
and visit those neighbourhoods.**

Community level action within the context of this report refers to community-led and community-focused initiatives, actions, and progress.

Community level action is seen as an important orientation for working on the environment and health agenda. This reflects the insight that given so much of the impact of poor health happens at the community level, it seems to be appropriate that solutions and actions are designed at the community level too.

Participants were presented with a Causal Loop Diagram of environmental factors and their impacts on health. They identified the important role of urban design and also urban design by-products (including car dependency) as the major source of both impacts but also for potential interventions.

In essence they identified that we don't design our communities around the people who live there and who use it for work, home, commerce, and leisure. This, it was felt, was the same in rural communities. This seems to be because of how people are invited into the decision making process, with many feeling excluded and processes not geared for genuine participation.



Community Level Action incorporating Urban Design (How We Design and Live in Our Communities)



When seen through this lens, local impacts and local solutions become visible. Participants identified that infrastructure would be developed with residents, better enabling the required changes to behaviour.

Participants reflected how cities in general are in decline as people's needs have shifted over time, and how there is a need for a redesign process to enable urban neighbourhoods to become cleaner, greener spaces that offer a diversity of life choices. Doing this requires the involvement of communities in a more structured way.

Actions to Enable Community Level Action:

- Build capacity.
- Connect to Programme for Government.
- Improve community engagement opportunities.
- Build support networks for communities.
- Learn from others.
- Evidence – longitudinal studies e.g NICOLA, and especially opportunities for learning from lived experience.
- Build Social cases/business cases.
- Inspire individual action such as looking after wildlife or planting trees.
- Greenways on the Connswater Community Greenway.
- Reform of how Community Action is structured.
- Local government reform.
- Make better use of existing funding streams, e.g. City Deal and Levelling Up funds.
- Bring in policies around community ownership, creates social cases as well as business cases for large funding.
- Lived experience panel.
- Strengthen structures to allow for people to be included in planning.
- There needs to be sustainable “rewilded” housing and green spaces for people.
- Use it or lose it law to address land banking.
- Progress community wealth building policy.
- Include long-term management and maintenance of new development in funding.
- Meaningful investment.
- Create place plans – communities developing for themselves.
- Remove graffiti.
- Establish community assets.
- Operate at a level that is more localised than Community Planning.

Leadership for Change

Major conclusion: Leadership is needed to enable all the necessary stakeholders to come together to play a coordinated role in tackling environment and health issues..

Leadership within the context of this report refers to those individuals, organisations, and structures willing to move us forward.

Leadership was seen as a critical component in ensuring that brave and innovative decisions were being made with good evidence, lots of participation and joining up, and overseen through to implementation. Leadership needs to emerge in lots of different spaces and levels including politicians, public servants, local government, in business, in academia and in communities.

Many participants highlighted the lack of political leadership in addressing modern challenges and this included securing the funding. Some suggested that the Government is actually behind where the public are in relation to transforming communities. Leaders need to lead the creation of vision but the responsibility for implementation lies with others and that is why better collaboration is needed including with communities. Leaders can hold the long term vision.



Leadership for Change

All were calling for action and not just talking about action or how difficult it is. There have been missed opportunities from Covid aftermath, the absence of a Green New Deal, a feeling of continual crisis management and chronic underfunding of priorities.

Key strategies are missing or not being implemented or resourced. Despite this, the size of NI and its government means we could move quickly and get things done if we put our minds to it. Leaders need to learn how to work with complexity and to permit innovation outside of siloes. Action rather than reaction is required: put people at the centre of what we do. Leadership means acting, implementing, joining up, funding, evaluating and learning.

Actions that will make a difference on Leadership:

- Round table not long table.
- Strategic decisions in government.
- Transport Plan.
- Long-Term Agenda.
- Embed and incentivise innovation.
- Evidence based policy.
- Grassroots Leaders (Community Leaders).
- Economic Investment.
- Leaders must be able to identify resources.
- Not all problems can be solved by money.
- "Commissioner" role.
- Transformative Leadership: programme/ structures for training.
- Train the future leaders – education on the topic in schools and beyond.

Café Conversations



How to Move Forward Ideas from Conversation Café

Participants took part in a Conversation Café at the end of the three workshops. The purpose of the conversation was to look forward to how the insights and conclusions from the previous sessions could be taken forward.

A café conversation is where the participants discuss a question in small groups for a short amount of time (20 minutes in this case), and then participants shift to meet other participants and continue to share and add insights with a new question. Doing so integrates different perspectives towards a shared understanding of the issue.



How to Move Forward Ideas from Conversation Café

In the next few pages, we capture some of the main ideas that emerged from the conversations.

Leverage the power of the universities:

- Queen's University Belfast (QUB) has a large untapped network of PhD graduates outside QUB and other academic institutions. Could it be the basis of a hub for change?
- Having someone assigned to drive the agenda forward.



How to Move Forward Ideas from Conversation Café

Share information and maintain connections:

- Bring project to close; publish findings; find a “champion” to keep it going;
- Develop an information campaign, using various channels such as social media and posters.
- Taking our collective learning, thoughts and suggestions to a broader audience outside this room.
- Can attendees to the workshop form an advocacy network for the health/environment issue?
- Keep people in touch!
- We all have a leadership role to individually drive this forward.
- Email exchanges to maintain the network of this group.
- Clear set of recommendations for change from this workshop.
- “Accessible” evidence to support policy and practice.
Translation and interpretation (not a journal article).



How to Move Forward

Ideas from Conversation Café

Engage others:

- Establish mechanisms for influencing decision makers.
- Co-production.
- Involve communities.
- Highlight evidence-based benefits to the communities.
- Community engagement transformational model.
- Rights based approach.
- Utilise existing community umbrella organisations e.g. Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), Community Development and Health Network (CDHN), Chief Officers 3rd Sector (CO3).
- Build a sustainability case using new metrics to make “different business cases” for investment.
- Broad and built on consensus/ screening out at earliest phase.
- Distil the message(s).
- Promoting local businesses.
- Farming / food sector.



How to Move Forward - Ideas from Conversation Café

Push for a government policy agenda

- Utilise government structures i.e. cross party groups to galvanise on the topic; have a sectoral approach, agreed terms of reference etc.
- Create a plan “programme for government”: define actions, timelines and who is accountable.
- Political briefings, engaging with head of civil service (e.g. alignment to outcomes).
- Could the Executive Office champion the issue?



Appendices



Appendices

Organisations represented

AECOM

Age NI Forum

Alzheimer's Society

Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough
Council

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Atkins

Belfast City Council

Belfast Healthy Cities

Department for Communities

Department for Infrastructure

Department of Health

Derry City and Strabane district council

EastSide Greenways

Geological Survey of Northern Ireland

Global Brain Health Institute

IMTAC

Involve NI

Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council

Marshall McCann Architects

Mid Ulster District Council

Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture
and the Built Environment

NI Environment Link

Northern Ireland Housing Executive

Nourish NI

Outdoor Recreation NI

QUB SPACE Healthy Ageing Advisory Group

Queen's University Belfast

Royal Society of Ulster Architects

Sinn Féin

The Paul Hogarth Company

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Evaulation of the process

Evaluation of the process

A total of 30 post-workshop evaluations were collected anonymously from participants.

They were asked to consider which of the objectives they believed to be met by the workshops that they attended. The majority of participants (93.3%) reported that they met or networked with groups and individuals they previously have not.

Most participants (73.3%) reported that they were happy with the outcome of the workshops and that they learned more about current research around health and the environment. A third (66.7%) of participants learned more about the groups and individuals with capacity to influence policy action. Just under a third (63.3%) reported that they plan to reach out to groups and individuals in the future to discuss policy action.

Around half of participants (53.3%) believed they learned more about the current policy landscape around health and the environment, and over half (60.0%) of participants plan to implement findings from the workshops in their work or advocacy, and plan to prioritise influencing policy action for health and the environment in the future.

93%

met or networked with groups and individuals they previously have not.

73%

were happy with the outcome of the workshops and learned more about health and environment

OVER HALF

of participants plan to implement findings from the workshops into their work or advocacy



When asked to provide comments on the experience, participants said:

Fantastic process to bring together different stakeholders to share insights and experience as a basis for policy action and other forms of action.

Learned a lot from other people. The value of the group was reinforced.

Great learning and networking experience.

Well structured and hosted event, with multi-sector input and discussion. Challenge now of moving to implementation.

Workshops really made me think and I will be implementing actions.

The mix of attendees was terrific – we should do more of this.

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UKRI Healthy Ageing Challenge



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