



# **Adfree Cities response to proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework and other changes to the planning system**

September 2024

## **Question 5**

**Do you agree that the focus of design codes should move towards supporting spatial visions in local plans and areas that provide the greatest opportunities for change such as greater density, in particular the development of large new communities?**

We would hope that any new large community developments carefully consider the need for unnecessary advertising infrastructure and include a presumption against this to ensure that neighbourhood and pavement spaces are maintained for people and communities, nature and the environment.

We lend our support to Playing Out's more detailed submission on the specific needs of children and families which must be addressed in the NPPF, the National Model Design Code, and other central Government guidance.

## **Question 59**

**Do you agree with the proposals to retain references to well-designed buildings and places, but remove references to 'beauty' and 'beautiful' and to amend paragraph 138 of the existing Framework?**

We agree that the term 'beauty' is subjective and unhelpful when making planning decisions. We also know that there is a disproportionate concentration of outdoor advertising in the most deprived areas. [*Unavoidable Impact: How advertising placement relates to health and wealth inequalities*. Adfree Cities, March 2024

<https://adfreecities.org.uk/unavoidable-impact/>] Billboards are mostly placed next to busy roads which are usually in lower income neighbourhoods; while wealthier neighbourhoods have greater social and political capital to oppose new advertising planning applications, and are better able to make use of heritage and preservation orders to resist new ad sites. Some Business Improvement Districts are also opposed to billboards on the basis that large roadside adverts give a sense that an area is to be driven through, rather than somewhere people should stop to spend time.

[Bedminster Business Improvement District opposition to billboards Adfree Cities, May 2020

<https://adfreecities.org.uk/bristol/bedminster-business-improvement-district/>] Therefore, planning policy should ensure that all communities can positively influence what their local area looks like, including restricting outdoor advertising, regardless of whether the area is considered traditionally 'beautiful'.

We agree that the National Model Design Code should be the primary basis for the preparation and use of local design codes. Current paragraph 96 of the NPPF states that "*planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places*" and the Code reinforces this by highlighting the importance of nature; creating a sense of place and local character; and maintaining the use of public spaces. For example, ensuring that pavements have at least 2m unobstructed width for pedestrians and that public spaces reduce the risk of crime.

However, advertising units often block pavements and make them inaccessible to those with mobility issues or with pushchairs. Advertising units can also increase crime and anti-social behaviour. Create Streets found that traditional phone boxes are used primarily for advertising rather than as a community service and new 'communication hubs', which include considerable digital advertising space, are often used by drug users and dealers, while both types of structure are constantly vandalised. [*Box Blight: How to banish ugly, outdated and unnecessary phone boxes that needlessly clutter our streets.* Create Streets, July 2024

<https://www.createstreets.com/employees/box-blight/>] We agree with Create Streets that the provision of communication equipment cannot be taken as a justification for the installation of an advertising screen, and that there should be a requirement for applicants to prove that there is a need for a telephone kiosk in the area, with reference to OFCOM requirements. We also support the recommendations in the submission from Dr Elizabeth Nixon and Dr Robert Cluley that would require Ofcom to review all companies granted electronic communications code powers and remove advertising agencies misusing code powers. Also to support local authorities in extending Ofcom's (2024b) rules regarding the removal of BT phone boxes to all public call boxes owned by code operators.

The National Manual Design Code also states that lighting should not cause a nuisance or harm wildlife, but digital advertising screens create unnecessary light pollution and are a threat to local biodiversity [*Digital advertising and light pollution*, Adfree Cities (2021)

<https://adfreecities.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Advertising-and-Light-Pollution-Adfree-Cities-Briefing.pdf>] as well as causing issues for local residents. [*Anger over illuminated billboard in Otley*, Wharfedale Observer (June 2021)

<https://www.wharfedaleobserver.co.uk/news/19409663.anger-illuminated-billboard-otley/>] For those suffering with photosensitivity, the glare from LED lights used in digital screens can have a significant impact on their quality of life. [*A Bright Idea? Report on LED street lighting*, LightAware (2021)

<https://lightaware.org/a-bright-idea-adverse-health-social-and-environmental-impacts-associated-with-led-street-lighting/>] It is also interesting to note that the Code does not

mention outdoor advertising although this is common in current developments, and none of the images of example and best practice design include advertising infrastructure.

National planning regulations on outdoor advertising should be updated to take into account issues specific to digital billboards, and to enable councils to respond to applications according to their current priorities, not just the narrow grounds of 'amenity' and 'public safety' that the 2007 Town and Country Planning Regulations (England) legislation currently permits. This ignores the multiple additional impacts of outdoor advertising. These grounds also do not take into account the particular problems with digital billboards, including:

- they use an excessive amount of electricity; a conservative estimate on the energy requirements of a typical large new screen (usually 6.4 metres wide x 3 metres tall) is the equivalent of 11 average UK homes; [*The electricity use of digital billboards*, Adfree Cities (2022) <https://adfreecities.org.uk/2022/12/the-electricity-costs-of-digital-out-of-home-advertising-screens/>]
- they cause light pollution, affecting people (particularly those with photosensitivity) and wildlife; [*Digital advertising and light pollution*, Adfree Cities (2021) <https://adfreecities.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Advertising-and-Light-Pollution-Adfree-Cities-Briefing.pdf>]
- they are extremely intrusive, being glaring and unavoidable;
- they expose us to more and more unwanted commercial adverts in public space where they are impossible to avoid, showing up to six ads per minute;
- they are extremely distracting to drivers, causing unacceptable risks to safety (it can be argued that all digital billboards should be refused on this basis);
- they raise questions over privacy, as some structures incorporate surveillance technology;
- they encourage unnecessary and wasteful overconsumption of goods and services (consumption beyond levels needed to meet decent quality of life standards), which is reckless in a time of climate and ecological crisis. [*Advertising's role in climate and ecological degradation*, Badvertising (2020) <https://www.badverts.org/s/Advertisings-role-in-climate-and-ecological-degradation.pdf>]

The majority of the grounds above cannot be formally considered by planning authorities. Therefore, local residents are disempowered to object and communities continue to be blighted by an increase in digital screens resulting from inadequate planning regulation. Additional regulations are needed to allow councils to refuse applications based on wider grounds than just 'public safety' and 'amenity' and the revision of the NPPF provides the perfect opportunity for this.

'Public safety' grounds must also be updated in relation to the particular harms caused by digital screens. Peer-reviewed evidence shows that digital billboards are

substantially more distracting for drivers, particularly younger drivers, causing severe additional concerns over road safety for all road users.[*The Impact of Road Advertising Signs on driver behaviour and implications for road safety: A systematic review*, Oviedo-Trespalacios et al. (2019) <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tra.2019.01.012>]

We support the recommendations in the submission from Dr Elizabeth Nixon and Dr Robert Cluley that:

- Local authorities include a 'Right to Remove' clause in contracts with outdoor media owners where privately-owned street furniture is no longer serving the community (e.g. installation of cycle lanes, carbon neutral goals, public complaints). This could be preceded by an audit of privately-owned structures that display paid-for advertising to evaluate how well they serve the community, similar to the five year review process of Areas of Special Control in current Control of Advertisements (2007) legislation.
- Strengthen the existing express consent regime to require planning applications for street furniture to 1) declare if the intended primary revenue-generating purpose of the structure is for advertising and 2) include evidence that the proposed secondary facility (e.g. payphone, internet services, defibrillator, mobile phone charging, wayfinding) remains valued by the community in light of this information.
- Amend guidance for Areas of Special Control to explicitly include the protection of urban public space from advertising structures that harm the local character (e.g. street clutter). Alternatively, support local authorities in protecting urban areas perceived as having lower levels of visual amenity from clutter caused by street furniture and billboards owned by outdoor media companies.

We propose the suggested wording of the revised NPPF (138) be amended as follows. From:

*The quality and character of places can suffer when advertisements are poorly sited and designed. A separate consent process within the planning system controls the display of advertisements, which should be operated in a way which is simple, efficient and effective. Advertisements should be subject to control only in the interests of amenity and public safety, taking account of cumulative impacts.*

To:

*The quality and character of places is rarely improved by the addition of advertising, which is often objected to by local residents. The consent process controlling the display of advertisements should therefore prioritise the views of nearby residents. Advertisements should be subject to control in the interests of a broad range of factors including alignment with council priorities such as climate, nature, public health, light pollution, safety, amenity, placement (including the avoidance of a disproportionate concentration of advertisements in more deprived communities), and the impact on local businesses. Further, details of the consent process,*

*including grounds for refusal, should be open to revision by local planning bodies to ensure that control of advertisements is aligned with Local Plans.*

## **Question 61**

**Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter? [Delivering affordable, well-designed homes and places]**

The proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) present a unique opportunity to ensure the planning system is fit for people, nature and the climate.

Adfree Cities is a network of local groups across the UK who are concerned about the impacts of outdoor advertising on our health, wellbeing, environment, climate, communities and the local economy. We welcome the elements of the proposed revised NPPF which seek to deliver community needs to support society, the creation of healthy places, and support the environment. The focus on healthy communities and ensuring every place has an up to date local plan is also key to improving individual health and wellbeing and supporting local ecology.

We particularly welcome the revision of the NPPF as we are increasingly concerned about the scale and growth of planning applications for more intrusive digital out-of-home advertising (OOH) sites. Our key concern is that current Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations dating back to 2007, were not designed with new digital billboard technology in mind, and are not enabling councils to make decisions in line with new policy goals including public health, climate and net zero. Advertising structures have significant impacts on local neighbourhood and national climate targets, including the Climate Change Act 2008, our 2050 net zero carbon target, our binding Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement, and the detailed provisions of the Sixth Carbon Budget.

We recommend that three parallel and complementary approaches should be explored:

- As part of revising the NPPF, regulations on outdoor advertising should be updated to take into account the unique problems with digital billboards, and to enable councils to respond to applications according to their current priorities, not just the narrow grounds of 'amenity' and 'public safety' that the 2007 legislation currently permits.
- As part of developing Local Plans councils should be enabled to adopt planning policies on digital outdoor advertising. For example, this could take the form of a presumption against planning applications for digital billboards on the grounds of increased carbon emissions, light pollution, biodiversity loss, impact on local residents, placement (seeking to reverse and avoid the current

disproportionate concentration of outdoor advertising in areas of greater deprivation) and road safety.

- In line with the commitment to meet the needs of communities, enabling pre-application engagement should be required before a planning application for advertising is submitted. This should include a requirement to carry out pre-application written consultation with nearby properties, equal to that required for development of any land under section 122 of the Localism Act 2011. This is to ensure that residents who will be impacted by proposed new advertising billboards, and particularly digital screens, are aware of potential planning applications and have an opportunity to comment on them.

We are concerned that many of the welcome and needed revisions to the NPPF are dependent upon an effective and well-resourced planning system to deliver them, but are aware that a legacy of cuts has left local planning authorities under-skilled and under-resourced. Therefore, giving councils the opportunity to implement more far reaching policies on outdoor advertising would also reduce the administrative burden on local authorities currently dealing with a large volume of individual planning applications on a case by case basis.

#### **Question 67**

#### **Do you agree with the changes proposed to paragraph 100 of the existing NPPF?**

We absolutely support the need for public service infrastructure when new developments are proposed. We would like to make clear that this should be infrastructure that meets an actual community need. Advertising companies continue to use public infrastructure such as bus stops, 'communication hubs' and phone boxes as a trojan horse for more corporate advertising and digital screens in public spaces. Increasingly items such as defibrillators and equipment for measuring pollution or the weather are included in these structures as a way to make them seem like a community asset when in fact they are purely designed to increase corporate profit. Councils are then financially dependent on the companies to maintain essential infrastructure, such as bus stops, as well as unnecessary infrastructure, such as phone boxes. [*Box Blight: How to banish ugly, outdated and unnecessary phone boxes that needlessly clutter our streets.* Create Streets, July 2024 <https://www.createstreets.com/employees/box-blight/>] There are occasions where genuinely useful public amenities such as cycle racks have been moved to make way for digital advertising screens, for example. [*Anger as Broadmead bike racks removed to make way for digital advertising hoarding,* Bristol Post (2018) <https://www.bristolpost.co.uk/news/bristol-news/anger-broadmead-bike-racks-removed-1738976>]

We also support Playing Out's submission highlighting the importance of the proximity of public services to children's homes - connected by safe walking and

cycling routes - if they are to benefit from these services and to access them independently from a reasonable age (with all the health, developmental and social benefits this brings).

## **Question 70**

### **How could national planning policy better support local authorities in (a) promoting healthy communities and (b) tackling childhood obesity?**

We lend our support to the Obesity Health Alliance's detailed submission. There is a lack of consistency across planning guidance on this subject. This is why we welcome this consultation on amending the NPPF to incorporate clear direction to local authorities that improving health (through interventions on areas like obesity) and reducing health inequalities are a key purpose of the planning system and in line with national priorities.

We also support the submission from Playing Out which calls for the NPPF to start with a clear statement that the role of planning is to support population and planetary thriving with the explicit aims of creating health and wellbeing and reducing health inequalities, and that all planning policies and decisions must be directly influenced by local health priorities and strategies. Stating this at the start of the NPPF would ensure that everyone involved in planning – from local communities to planning inspectors – would be clear that creating places that support good health is an essential part of the purpose of planning.

The existing wording in the NPPF states that planning policies should “enable and support healthy lifestyles”, with examples given of “safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling”. This does not include any reference to giving a priority to preventing ill-health from health-harming products. This can lead local authorities to believe that their responsibilities are solely to provide services to help people be healthier (e.g cycle lanes or community allotments), and not taking action to limit factors that cause health harms (e.g advertisements for unhealthy food).

We would recommend a ban on advertising for unhealthy products on all forms of advertising that cannot avoid being seen, e.g. outdoor advertising on billboards, digital screens, bus stops and public transport. Advertising can have significant impacts on physical and mental health and wellbeing [*Because you're worthless? How corporate outdoor advertising makes us feel bad, to sell us stuff we don't need*, Adblock Bristol (2018) <https://adfreecities.org.uk/resources/advertising-mental-health/>] and so reducing ads in public spaces can have a positive impact on public health and equality. [*Junk food advertising restrictions prevent almost 100,000 obesity cases and is expected to save the NHS £200m*, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine (August 2022)]

<https://www.lshtm.ac.uk/newsevents/news/2022/junk-food-advertising-restrictions-prevent-almost-100000-obesity-cases-and#:~:text=Restrictions%20for%20junk%20food%20advertising,Behavioural%20Nutrition%20and%20Physical%20Activity>] Advertising can also undermine local councils' public health goals. For example, Car companies' adverts are commonly seen on outdoor advertising space, selling new cars to passing drivers and reinforcing the dominance of car culture when many councils are working to tackle air pollution and encourage a shift towards public transport and active travel.

We support the recommendation in the submission from Dr Elizabeth Nixon and Dr Robert Cluley that there should be a mandate that outdoor advertising companies publish details of which adverts are displayed, where and for how long to allow local communities to scrutinise what is displayed in their area. Local authorities should also be supported in obtaining the data gathered via privately-owned communications hubs and their usage statistics for greater accountability, transparency and crime detection and prevention.

The promotion of certain products to children, and others, have obvious harms attached to them, for example, junk food, gambling, alcohol and tobacco-related products. There is a current loophole in the law which means that it is possible to advertise vaping products on outdoor advertising sites even though this is banned elsewhere. [*Vaping ads banned for appealing to children*, Adfree Cities (2024)

<https://adfreecities.org.uk/2024/03/vaping-ads-banned-appealing-children/>] This should be remedied immediately in advertising and planning regulations.

We support the recommendation in the submission from Dr Elizabeth Nixon and Dr Robert Cluley that the ASA should be required to identify where outdoor advertising should be regulated as broadcast media, and extend existing scheduling restrictions to outdoor advertising content in public spaces to limit the exposure of harmful imagery to children and the vulnerable.

There is evidence to suggest a strong correlation between the locations of outdoor advertising billboards and areas with the worst rates of obesity and other health issues. Outdoor advertising is far more common in less affluent areas. [*Socio-economic differences in outdoor food advertising in a city in Northern England*, Adams et al. (2011)

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980010003332> and *Unavoidable Impact: How advertising placement relates to health and wealth inequalities*. Adfree Cities, March 2024

<https://adfreecities.org.uk/unavoidable-impact/>]

Poor childhood health disproportionately affects lower income households, and children from low income households tend to have more screen time so are likely to be exposed to more ads online as well as more ads in their local outdoor environment. This creates an unavoidable 'obesogenic' environment that promotes unhealthy eating and has been causally linked to obesity. [*Outdoor advertising: A major loophole in food marketing restrictions*, Obesity Health Alliance (2021)

<https://obesityhealthalliance.org.uk/2021/12/07/outdoor-advertising-a-major-loophole-in-food-marketing-restrictions/>] If lower-income communities are exposed to a greater number

of harmful ads than wealthier communities, this exacerbates existing socioeconomic inequalities in health and wellbeing. For example:

- In Newcastle, advertising space devoted to HFSS foods was more than three times greater in the least affluent parts of the city than in the most affluent. [*An analysis of food and beverage advertising on bus shelters in a deprived area of Northern England*, Boyland et al. (2021) [https://research.tees.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/35121532/An\\_analysis\\_of\\_food\\_and\\_beverage\\_advertising\\_on\\_bus\\_shelters\\_in\\_a\\_deprived\\_area\\_of\\_Northern\\_England.pdf](https://research.tees.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/35121532/An_analysis_of_food_and_beverage_advertising_on_bus_shelters_in_a_deprived_area_of_Northern_England.pdf)]
- In London, self-reported exposure to less healthy product advertising was more common among adults in lower socioeconomic groups. [*Sociodemographic differences in self-reported exposure to high fat, salt and sugar food and drink advertising: a cross-sectional analysis of 2019 UK panel data*, Yau et al. (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2020-048139>]
- Children living in more deprived areas in Scotland had greater exposure to unhealthy food and drink advertising, compared to those living in less deprived areas - due both to the presence of more ads overall and greater exposure to ads, e.g. at bus stops. [*Exposure to unhealthy product advertising: Spatial proximity analysis to schools and socio-economic inequalities in daily exposure measured using Scottish Children's individual-level GPS data*, Olsen et al. (2021), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2021.102535>]
- In Liverpool, billboards advertising unhealthy food are concentrated in poorer areas. [*A deep learning approach to identify unhealthy advertisements in street view images*, Palmer et al. (2021), <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-021-84572-4>]

Recent research from Adfree Cities has found that areas with the lowest levels of disposable income were home to 62,953 outdoor ads (82% of total outdoor advert sites), compared with just 13,384 in the more affluent half. [*Unavoidable Impact: How advertising placement relates to health and wealth inequalities*. Adfree Cities, March 2024 <https://adfreecities.org.uk/unavoidable-impact/>] Therefore, there is an inequality in exposure to advertising for unhealthy foods amongst populations that are already at risk of worse health outcomes.

Under the existing Code of Advertising Practice (CAP), HFSS product advertisements must not appear in a medium or context in which 25% of the audience is under the age of 16 therefore many marketing and advertising companies will not place adverts for HFSS products within 100m of a school acknowledging the detrimental impact that this can have. However, as advertising is often located on public transport infrastructure and in other areas frequently used by children, these restrictions are nonsensical. Therefore, more encompassing restrictions on outdoor advertising need to be in place.

At a local level councils can introduce more ethical advertising policies that include restrictions on unhealthy food and drink, such as Bristol City Council's Advertising and Sponsorship Policy. [Bristol City Council (2021) <https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/s58004/Appendix%20A%20-%20Advertising%20>

[and%20Sponsorship%20Policy.pdf](#)] There are increasing numbers of councils who are doing this as they recognise the negative impact of outdoor advertising and that it conflicts with their own Public Health policy goals. For example Knowsley Council introduced such a policy in early 2024, as they recognised the link between junk food advertising and the prevalence of obesity among Year 6 children. [*Knowsley launches first healthier food advertising policy in the North West*, Sustain (2024)

<https://www.sustainweb.org/news/jan24-knowsley-advertising-policy/>] In Sheffield the city council introduced the most wide ranging policy to date which also acknowledges the impact of high carbon products on public health indicators such as air pollution. [Sheffield City Council Advertising and Sponsorship Policy 2024-2026

<https://democracy.sheffield.gov.uk/documents/s66761/Appendix%201%20-%20Sheffield%20City%20Council%20Advertising%20and%20Sponsorship%20Policy%202024-2026.pdf>] However, these policies only apply to limited advertising sites that the Council controls, mainly (but not always) bus stop advertising rather than large digital billboards, and so does not prevent most of the outdoor advertising for these harmful products from being seen.

A lack of clear national guidance making local authorities aware of the powers available to them, and encouraging the use of those powers to promote public health, is a major barrier to local leaders using available mechanisms to address public health issues in their communities. Council leaders have been calling for further powers to restrict advertising to children for some time [Councils need powers to ban junk food advertising near schools and nurseries, town hall leaders say, Independent (March 2016)

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/councils-need-powers-to-ban-junk-food-advertising-near-schools-and-nurseries-town-hall-leaders-say-a6935681.html>]

but current 2007 planning regulations for advertisements do not enable councils to make decisions in line with new policy goals, including public health, or to reflect current priorities in their planning decisions. There are increasing calls for the planning, public health and climate agendas to work together to achieve wider policy goals. For example, the British Medical Journal (BMJ) has called for multidisciplinary action in planning and health in order to contribute to more equitable communities and improved health and wellbeing. [Strengthening the links between planning and health in England, BMJ (2020)

<https://www.bmj.com/content/369/bmj.m795>] The impact of the Commercial Determinants of Public Health are increasingly being understood, with local and regional public health departments making statements on this, for example in Yorkshire and Humber [Yorkshire and Humber CDOH consensus statement (June 2024)

<https://www.adph.org.uk/resources/yorkshire-and-humber-cdoh-consensus-statement/>] and the Faculty of Public Health also including fossil fuels. [*Fossil Fuels, the Fossil Fuel industry and Public Health: the case for ending extraction and exploration to protect public health*, Faculty of Public Health (April 2024)

<https://www.fph.org.uk/news/fossil-fuels-the-fossil-fuel-industry-and-public-health-the-case-for-ending-extraction-and-exploration-to-protect-public-health/#:~:text=The%20Faculty%20of%20Public%20Health,associated%20with%20air%20pollution%2C%20energy>] Although

advertising unhealthy products is understood in this context, reducing the impact of public advertising is currently still an under-recognised opportunity.

Even where a local Advertising and Sponsorship Policy prohibits harmful ad content - on council-owned sites only - companies whose main business model is predicated on these products/services (e.g. McDonald's) are still permitted to advertise on these sites with so-called 'alibi marketing'. [*No Escape: How alcohol advertising preys on children and vulnerable people*, Alcohol Health Alliance (2021) <https://ahauk.org/resource/no-escape-how-alcohol-advertising-preys-on-children-and-vulnerable-people/>] For example, McDonald's may advertise non-HFSS food and/or drink on council-owned bus stops, reinforcing brand familiarity which has a powerful effect on dietary preferences. [*Outdoor advertising, obesity, and soda consumption: a cross-sectional study*, Lesser et al. (2013), <https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-13-20>] Therefore, restricting unhealthy advertising content is only partially effective in addressing outdoor advertising's impacts on health and wellbeing. An all-encompassing national ban on advertising for HFSS foods, vaping products, gambling, alcohol, and other harmful products such as polluting cars, would be most effective.

We therefore support the recommendation in the submission from Dr Elizabeth Nixon and Dr Robert Cluley that an opt-out system should be created in which outdoor advertising for HFSS, gambling, alcohol, high carbon and other harmful products, is banned unless a local community chooses to opt-in to these adverts through their local authority. This should be reviewed every five years in line with the Areas of Special Control review.

We propose the suggested wording of the revised NPPF (96c) be amended as follows

From:

*Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places and beautiful buildings which:*

*c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, access to healthier food, allotments and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.*

To:

*Planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places and buildings which:*

*c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, through both promoting good health and preventing ill-health, especially where this would address identified local health and*

wellbeing needs and reduce health inequalities between the most and least deprived communities. This includes reducing key preventable health harms from conditions such as obesity.

- Promotion of good health can be achieved via supporting access to healthier food (through local shops, markets, community food growing spaces and other services) and provision of services such as safe and accessible green spaces, active travel routes, sport and leisure facilities.
- Prevention of ill-health can be achieved via reducing the availability and visibility of health-harming products, particularly to children.

### Question 71

**Do you have any other suggestions relating to the proposals in this chapter?**

Outdoor advertising is a health and wellbeing issue for local communities. Research has found increasing evidence of the impact of both city planning on mental health, and the impact of commercial advertising and messaging on our psychological wellbeing.[*The High Price of Materialism*, Kasser (2003) <https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780262611978/the-high-price-of-materialism/#:~:text=Description,everyday%20happiness%20and%20psychological%20health>] The 'blind spot' of the planning system around public advertising is causing policy inconsistencies and undermining local public health strategies, such as around mental health.[*Planners know depressingly little about a city's impacts on our mental health*, The Conversation (July 2017) <https://theconversation.com/planners-know-depressingly-little-about-a-citys-impacts-on-our-mental-health-81098>]

As there are a higher number of outdoor advertising sites in more deprived areas, [*Unavoidable Impact: How advertising placement relates to health and wealth inequalities*. Adfree Cities (2024) <https://adfreecities.org.uk/unavoidable-impact/>] where there may also not be access to parks, playgrounds and green spaces, these images and messages make up a large proportion of the public outdoor environment. Advertising is also often located on public transport infrastructure such as bus stops, which are often found near schools and other facilities for children and frequently used by them.

Residents have reported that the placement of outdoor advertising makes their neighbourhoods feel unloved, neglected, as places to just pass through, and for corporations rather than people.[*Living next to digital billboards*, Adblock Bristol (2021) <https://adfreecities.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/living-next-to-digital-billboards-M32.pdf>] To ensure that neighbourhoods feel welcoming, accessible and healthy, outdoor advertising should be removed and replaced with green spaces, community art and playgrounds, or not introduced in the first place.

Currently when there is a planning application for outdoor advertising there is no requirement to consult with any local residents or those who may be impacted. Planning proposals for new advertisements should carry a requirement to carry out

pre-application written consultation for advertisements, equal to that required for development of any land under section 122 of the Localism Act 2011. This would include notifying nearby residents in writing of any planning applications submitted. This is to ensure that residents who will be impacted by new advertising sites, and particularly digital screens, know about potential planning applications and have an opportunity to comment on them. Otherwise residents must regularly check local authority planning portals or hope they see the small laminated A4 notice posted on a lamp post (the standard level of community consultation required for new outdoor advertising applications but which often is not even provided). Neither of these are sufficient to ensure residents are suitably informed about new advertising screen proposals that can be extremely detrimental to their wellbeing, home life and sense of pride in the community.

Circumstances have materially changed since 2007, demonstrated by the number of applications that are being submitted for digital screens and changing advertising technologies relating to facial detection and user tracking capabilities.[ *Bristol's new phoneboxes could end up spying on you*, The Bristol Cable (April 2018)

<https://thebristolcable.org/2018/04/opinion-bts-spy-kiosks-could-be-coming-to-bristol/>

Current policies and guidance are outdated and do not accommodate residents' legitimate concerns around climate and sustainability, environmental light pollution, the 'attention economy', mental health and the dominance of commercial messaging in public space. The emergence of digital screens has been such a dramatic change that it has been described as 'changing the face of London'. [*Rise of the digital billboards changing the face of London*, The Standard (Oct 2024)

<https://www.standard.co.uk/business/media/media-rise-of-the-digital-billboards-changing-the-face-of-london-9810062.html>]

Concerned residents are forced to fight an increasing number of advertising billboard applications on a case-by-case basis, which also increases the administrative burden on local authorities. Advertising firms can use their financial power and salaried staff to out-pace residents who volunteer their time to object to applications. However, when residents have missed submitting objections to planning applications for new digital advertising screens, these applications are more likely to be approved by planning officers. It is clear that this needs to be addressed at a policy level further 'upstream', and also when Local Plans are being formulated. However, current guidance does not enable the issue of outdoor advertising to be dealt with in this way.

The appeals process also ignores the voices of local residents. Councils find that even when they refuse an application based on serious concerns from their residents and councillors, advertising companies often appeal to the Planning Inspectorate and decisions are sometimes overturned. Appeals can be made against these decisions by the applicants through the Commercial Appeals Service (CAS) at which point there is no opportunity for further information or objections to be submitted by local residents who will be directly affected by the final decision.

Local councils should be able to adopt planning policies on digital outdoor advertising. For example, this could take the form of a presumption against planning applications for digital billboards on the grounds of carbon emissions, light pollution, biodiversity, impact on local residents, inequality and road safety.

We support the recommendation in the submission from Dr Elizabeth Nixon and Dr Robert Cluley that where new street furniture is required (e.g. public transport infrastructure), local communities should be allowed to input into the process and it should be opened out to tender with a presumption against street furniture provided by an advertising company in favour of alternative low carbon businesses. Alternatively, small-to-medium advertising companies who contractually agree to follow the local authority's ethical advertising policy should be considered.

We support the submission from Playing Out calling for the NPPF and related Government guidance to explicitly support the participation and engagement of children and parents, as part of a strategic focus on their needs, and a thoughtful, equitable approach to involving communities in decision-making. Children experience places differently to adults and have valuable insights to offer about their local areas (such as the impact of unhealthy advertising [BiteBack Youth Activists Take Over Westfield Billboard (Aug 2024) <https://www.biteback2030.com/our-activists/stories/bite-back-youth-activists-take-over-westfield-billboard/> ] ). Their effective participation brings these to the attention of decision-makers, injects creative, positive mindsets, and fosters community connection, democratic values and participation, and citizenship. It can be a catalyst for consensus, secure a focus on collective, long-term action, and acts as a counter to narrow, short-term interests and concerns.

### **Question 78**

**In what specific, deliverable ways could national planning policy do more to address climate change mitigation and adaptation?**

The rise in digital advertising screens in recent years is pushing up and locking-in energy demand due to their high electricity usage. This goes against local authorities' efforts to deliver on their climate targets. This new digital infrastructure comes with a considerable impact on the environment.

Digital outdoor advertising screens use an excessive amount of electricity; a conservative estimate on the energy requirements of a large new screen (6.4 metres wide by 3 metres tall) is the equivalent of 11 average UK homes, which is not compatible with the energy demand reduction plans we need to see in the UK.[*The electricity use of digital billboards*, Adfree Cities (2022) <https://adfreecities.org.uk/2022/12/the-electricity-costs-of-digital-out-of-home-advertising-screens/>] Increasing temperatures due to climate change will require these units to use

their cooling functions more regularly during the day which uses even more unnecessary energy. They also cause light pollution, affecting wildlife and biodiversity.[*Digital advertising and light pollution*, Adfree Cities (2021) <https://adfreecities.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Advertising-and-Light-Pollution-Adfree-Cities-Briefing.pdf>] In addition, the advertising of products itself is designed to encourage greater consumption, and in the case of advertising for cars, flights, meat, dairy, fast fashion, and the fossil fuel industry, these particularly promote and normalise high carbon behaviours. Removing existing digital screens and refusing planning permission for any more would save unnecessary energy use, reduce light pollution, support wildlife and encourage demand reduction.

The increase in planning applications for digital screens goes against the objectives of the declaration of a climate and ecological emergency by the UK Parliament and many councils. Councils find that they are unable to reflect current priorities in their planning decisions; there is a contradiction between declaring climate and ecological emergencies, and introducing wasteful and unnecessary corporate advertising structures into our cities. For example, councillors in Bristol have expressed frustration that they have made a declaration of a Climate Emergency but planning rules undermine this.[*Advertisers are intent on taking over our public spaces – but Bristol deserves better*, Adblock Bristol (April 2020) <https://adfreecities.org.uk/2020/04/aggressive-advertisers/>]

There is also a serious increase in light pollution caused by digital advertising screens. These screens particularly affect insects and other wildlife which are already struggling for survival. We should not be allowing additional and unnecessary threats to wildlife and biodiversity presented by these bright screens as reflected in the previous Government's 25-year Environmental Plan which includes a commitment to cut all forms of pollution and ease the pressure on the environment, including ensuring that light pollution is managed effectively.

Planning policies and all planning decisions must be in line with the objectives and provisions of the Climate Change Act 2008, including the 2050 net zero carbon target, our binding Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement, and the detailed provisions of the Sixth Carbon Budget.

Children are the group whose lives will be most blighted by the long-term consequences of a warming planet, polluted air and water, damaged ecosystems, and depletion of natural resources. What is more, there is clear evidence from attitudinal science and behavioural psychology that a strategic focus on children and future generations builds support and consensus for sustained action on the climate.[*A Rising Tide: Strengthening public permission for climate action*, IPPR (2022) <https://www.ippr.org/articles/a-rising-tide>]

## **Question 92**

**Are there any applications for which the current fee is inadequate? Please explain your reasons and provide evidence on what you consider the correct fee should be.**

Advertising is a multi-billion dollar industry, global advertising spend was predicted to be more than \$1 trillion in 2024. [*Global advertising to top \$1 trillion in 2024, as big five attract most spending*, WARC Media (August 2023) <https://www.warc.com/content/feed/global-advertising-to-top-1-trillion-in-2024-as-big-five-attract-most-spending/en-GB/8558>] Outdoor advertising continues to be a significant part of this with a revenue in the UK of £901 million in 2021.[*Supporting UK Society: The impact of the Out Of Home advertising sector*, Outsmart/PwC (2023) <https://www.outsmart.org.uk/site/userfiles/File/OOH-Supporting-UK-Society.pdf>] The outdoor advertising industry is also undertaking a national project to replace existing paper billboards with digital advertising screens which are able to show more adverts in a more intrusive, distracting format, thereby generating greater profit at the expense of UK citizens, nature and the climate. The majority of adverts we see on billboards and bus shelters are for big multinational brands. In 2022-23 the top 10 companies using outdoor advertising were multinationals including McDonalds, Coca-Cola, Amazon, Unilever, KFC and Tesco. This kind of advertising is expensive and means that local businesses are undermined and not able to compete even though they return more money back into the local economy, supporting high streets and local employment. Therefore, corporate advertising hinders rather than helps local businesses and removing outdoor advertising would support resilient local economies.[*Why taking down billboards is good for the local economy*, Adblock Bristol (2019) <https://adfreecities.org.uk/local-economy/>] Furthermore, some Business Improvement Districts are opposed to billboards on the basis that large roadside adverts give a sense that an area is to be driven through, rather than somewhere people should stop to spend time and money.[*Bedminster Business Improvement District opposition to billboards* Adfree Cities, May 2020 <https://adfreecities.org.uk/bristol/bedminster-business-improvement-district/>]

Therefore, we believe that the current fee for 'other advertisements' does not reflect the reality of the large multinational companies who are making the majority of outdoor advertising applications. This is also not reflective of the revenue that they are generating through the advertising displayed.

**Question 96**

**Do you consider that planning fees should be increased, beyond cost recovery, for planning applications services, to fund wider planning services?**

**If yes, please explain what you consider an appropriate increase would be and whether this should apply to all applications or, for example, just applications for major development?**

We would like to see the application fee for 'other advertisements' increased considerably as this may act as a deterrent for companies who submit a large number of applications to a single council which creates an administrative burden. Often multiple planning applications are submitted simultaneously. For example, in Bristol in two months (May- June 2022) 86 applications were received to digitise existing bus stop advertising. Between 2 April to 20 May 2024, 22 individual planning applications were received by Sheffield City Council for new digital advertising screens at bus stops, creating a high volume of work for planning officers and councillors. A higher fee may help to deter such a volume of applications from being submitted at once, reducing the burden on officers. The fee increase should go beyond cost recovery to acknowledge the capacity needed to process this number of applications and to hopefully reduce the number of unnecessary applications made.

#### **Question 97**

**What wider planning services, if any, other than planning applications (development management) services, do you consider could be paid for by planning fees?**

An increase in fees for 'other advertisements' could help to support councils to pay for appeals to the Planning Inspectorate. These can be costly and may deter some, particularly cash-strapped, councils from refusing outdoor advertising applications because they are concerned about the cost and capacity needed for an appeal. A specific budget for appeals which is created from planning fees could be a way to ensure that councils are able to make decisions on outdoor advertising applications without financial concerns.

We are concerned that many of the welcome and needed revisions to the NPPF are dependent upon an effective and well-resourced planning system to deliver them, but are aware that a legacy of cuts has left local planning authorities under-skilled and under-resourced. Therefore, giving councils the opportunity to implement more far reaching policies on outdoor advertising would also reduce the administrative burden on local authorities currently dealing with a large volume of individual planning applications on a case by case basis.

#### **Question 106**

**Do you have any views on the impacts of the above proposals for you, or the group or business you represent and on anyone with a relevant protected characteristic? If so, please explain who, which groups, including those with protected characteristics, or**

**which businesses may be impacted and how. Is there anything that could be done to mitigate any impact identified?**

We would like to again raise the issue of the inequality of outdoor advertising placement where areas with higher levels of pollution but lower levels of income and health outcomes have a disproportionate concentration of outdoor advertising.[*Unavoidable Impact: How advertising placement relates to health and wealth inequalities*. Adfree Cities (2024) <https://adfreecities.org.uk/unavoidable-impact/>] Billboards are mostly placed next to busy roads which are usually in lower income neighbourhoods. Many of these communities are already disadvantaged in terms of civic voice and influence because they may contain more diaspora and migrant communities where English is not spoken as a first language, or there are high levels of unemployment, and are further disenfranchised by feeling powerless about the decisions made about their communities and neighbourhoods such as the introduction of intrusive outdoor advertising. The advertising displayed is also highly aspirational but unaffordable to most of the people who see it on a daily basis (e.g. ads for new cars and expensive holidays) which has a mental health impact, or shows unhealthy products that exacerbate existing inequalities (e.g. alcohol, gambling and HFSS products).

The best way to mitigate these negative impacts is to grant councils the powers to remove existing outdoor advertising sites and other advertising infrastructure, such as disused phone boxes, and for councils to have wider criteria for refusing applications for further outdoor advertising billboards. Residents have expressed a desire to see many of these spaces used for community projects, art and nature instead.

Children's mental and physical health is hugely impacted by their physical environment. While it is good to see an explicit mention of child obesity in the consultation, the effects of poor planning go far beyond physical health, and extend to mental health, wellbeing and sense of connection and community belonging. On top of this, children in poverty and in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and those who are disabled, or in racial and other minority groups, are disproportionately affected. Hence improvements for these children will help to reduce health and other inequalities.

We support the position of Playing Out in highlighting that currently, children as a group are not considered as a matter of course alongside other equalities groups within planning. The fact that there is no explicit/clear public sector duty to consider children as an equality group in their own right on the basis of age underpins routine discrimination of children and failure to consider/meet their needs within the planning system and wider policy and services. Therefore, we call for the NPPF to give strategic support for a children's lens in planning, in keeping with the Labour Party's manifesto commitment that at the core of its mission will be "a bold new

ambition to raise the healthiest generation of children in our history." Children's physical and mental health, physiology, wellbeing, social development and sense of belonging are all strongly shaped by the places they grow up. Hence they are the population group who are most affected by poor planning, and have most to gain from well planned housing and neighbourhoods where their needs are fully considered.