Author’s response to reviews

Title: The long-term health and wellbeing impacts of Healthy New Towns (HNTs): protocol for a baseline and feasibility study of HNT demonstrator sites in England

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Response to reviewer comments

Dear Editors,

Re: Reviewer’s comments on paper: “The long-term health and wellbeing impacts of Healthy New Towns (HNTs): protocol for a baseline and feasibility study of HNT demonstrator sites in England”.

We would like to thank the reviewer for their helpful comments. We have carefully considered the reviewer’s comments and revised the manuscript accordingly. The specific actions taken to address each comment are outlined below and the changes made have been indicated and highlighted in yellow in the revised manuscript.

Yours Sincerely
Paul Watts (corresponding author)

Reviewer: 1

“This is an important project with its focus on application of the (well known) research evidence for health supportive environments. This study when it gets underway and starts to produce results will be of significance to a global audience faced with the current epidemics of chronic disease. The 'how-to' implement the research in this area is the key question now!

So there is no doubt that it is important and useful to present this overview of the proposed longitudinal and comprehensive research. Nevertheless, for an international audience, and I suspect for many in the UK as well, the level of detail about the principles and nature of the research is lacking. I know there
are references given to other reports which detail this, but the basic information is needed in the current paper. I do not consider that the considerable information about the specifics of participant selection, data generation and data analysis, is so important to this paper. This information generally reads like a research grant and needs to be synthesised for the current paper. Higher level principles should be detailed so that the reader understands the nature of the HNT study and how the existing work will be expanded and built upon in the proposed research. This is an important project and will be of great interest to those working in healthy cities.

I have some specific suggestions for how the authors can address these identified issues.”

Many thanks for your comments and suggestions. We have revised the paper substantially to address these comments. In particular, we have provided substantial additional detail on the HNT programme, its priorities and planning principles. We have provided higher level detail on the principles and nature of the HNT programme where this is information is available. We have also clarified that the HNT programme is an ongoing and fluid programme involving multiple stakeholders at each site, often with different approaches and priorities.

We have also clarified the role of the research team (the authors) in relation to the HNT programme and the roles of other stakeholders. As the research team is not involved in the design, planning or implementation of the HNT programme, we have clarified that a central aim to the proposed research is to understand more fully how the developments are being designed and implemented, how the stated priorities and principles of the HNT programme are being applied in practice, and how application of these principles may differ between sites.

“Abstract: Clarify what is meant by 'protocol' in the abstract. Is this the aim of the paper?”

We have submitted this paper to Pilot and Feasibility studies with the article type ‘study protocol’. The aim of this paper is therefore to provide details of the procedures involved in the planned research. We have provided further information in the background section to contextualise and clarify the aims of the research described in this protocol.

“Background: Clarify / be consistent in relation to use of the terminology 'whole systems' (which is critically important in this work, as you so rightly state) - later in the paper you refer to 'systems theory / systems approach'.”

Thank you. We have edited the manuscript for clarity and consistency throughout, using the term ‘whole systems’, which is introduced and defined in the background section.

“P3 from line 57 - this statement is not clear to me - edit for clarity.”

We have edited this statement and the following sentence to clarify the scale of the sites within the HNT programme.

“P4 from line 3-4 - this needs further elaboration about the nature of the HNT programme - this might come later in the paper, and can be referred to in the background. More details about the nature of the developments to be assessed (images perhaps), geographical locations (a map would be helpful).”

We have added further detail on the nature of the HNT programme in the background section. In addition, we have provided a substantial amount of further information in subsequent sections in
relation to comments below. We have also provided an additional figure with a central map and individual maps for each site to illustrate the locations of the planned developments.

“Need more detail about the HNT programme priorities and better links between this section in the Background and the ones before and following.”

We have added further information about the HNT programme priorities and clarified the diversity across HNT sites in approaches to achieving these priorities. This information is provided in the background section and under ‘settings and interventions’.

“P4 from line 45 - the reference to 'how these effects come about' is not clear - what effects? This statement needs further information to be clear to the reader.”

Thank you, we have edited this and the following sentence for clarity.

“Sections on Aim / Research Questions / Objectives - these need further detail and linkages - they read as though they are straight from a research proposal, rather than a paper explaining all details of the research to be undertaken.”

We have edited this section and included further detail to include the context and rationale for the research questions and objectives. These are linked to the methods described later in the paper.

“Methods / Overview: at the end of this section there is an 'error' message regarding a reference. This needs to be fixed.”

Thank you, this error has been corrected.

“Establishing a research partnership with HNT stakeholders: this section starts to give further detail about the HNT sites, which is good and can be better linked to the initial mention of the sites in the background. This is also where it becomes critical to provide additional detail about the nature of the sites, the development, their geographic and demographic context, etc.”

We have edited this and subsequent sections to provide further information about the HNT sites, their location and the developments. We have also added further information about the need, through this feasibility research, to achieve clear geographic definitions of HNT sites. For example, there is a need to reach consensus on whether geographic definitions should include only areas where there are housing developments, or if definitions should include surrounding areas, and how these are to be defined.

“P6 - from line 17 / 18 - what sort of 'experiences' (of what?) - this is not clear and needs clarification.”

Thank you, we have edited this section for clarity.

“Also P6 - I found it difficult to follow the differences between the 5 and the 10 HNTs. Needs clarification.”

We have added information in the background section to provide context and background to the formation of the HNT Evaluation Collaborative and the 5 sites included in the Collaborative.
“The table on P6/7 - which of these are the 5 of the 10 sites (mentioned at line 34/35?). Further, this table is where much more detail about the HNTs can be revealed. The information needs to be consistent for each HNT (EG: nature of site - brownfield or other; location of new development - I certainly don't know where the John Radcliffe Hospital in Barton is - is this central to the town?). This needs to be thought out carefully so that the reader has a thorough understanding of what is proposed at each of the sites. We also need to know the type of housing proposed (including its tenure and construction type). Some images to demonstrate typologies would be helpful.”

We have indicated in Table 1 which HNT sites are part of the HNT Evaluation Collaborative. We have provided further information and context for the HNT developments in the background and ‘settings and intervention’ sections. We have restructured Table 1 to provide consistent information on each HNT site. We have also provided an additional figure including a map of the locations of HNT developments within England, and images to show the specific development areas.

“P7 - the 10 healthy design principles need more detail - some are clearer than others - but overall this list is very rudimentary and not very informative. The principles need some introduction and a context as well. The paragraph below the list does mention some examples of how the principles are 'illustrated' - the reader needs these examples clearly linked to each principle.”

We have edited the section on healthy design principles to provide further detail and context. We have included an additional figure to provide an example of how these principles are being applied at one HNT site. We have also edited the examples to link them more explicitly to the design principles.

“Participatory Systems Mapping: this needs a better link from the previous section of the paper. the latter part of this section (Participants, sampling and recruitment) needs to be better synthesised - the reader does not need this level of detail given the nature of the current paper. The following sections on data collection and data analysis need further work so that the broader principles are fully explained, as well as some of the specific terminology (EG: P9 - line 54/55 - 'standardised proforma'; P10 - line 7/8 - 'protected characteristics').“

We have edited this section to provide better links with previous sections of the paper which relate explicitly to the overall aims and objectives of the research and explain the broader principles of participatory systems mapping. We have also edited information on participants, sampling and recruitment, so that only essential details are included, and to clarify or remove unclear terminology.

“Page 10 - line 17/18 - need more detail on the nature of the data held by the different authorities listed.”

Thank you. We have added further detail and examples of the types of data held by these authorities.

“The entire section from P8-10 on data collection and analysis needs to be re-thought so that it is clearer in term of the broader principles of the evaluation study.“

We have edited this section on data collection and analysis to better contextualise proposed methods within the broader aims and principles of the study, linking each section in the methods to the stated objectives.

“P12 - Health economic evaluation: lines from 29/30 - need references for these data sources.”
Thank you, we have included references for each of these data sources.