

Towards Common Ground



**The Help the Aged manifesto for
lifetime neighbourhoods**

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In 2001 the Government released its far-reaching plans for neighbourhood renewal which brought about burgeoning funding for regeneration across the country.¹ This was followed in 2003 by a Sustainable Communities Plan,² which, despite mentioning older people in only three paragraphs out of its 70 pages, provided a helpful starting point by defining what was meant by 'sustainable communities' – places where people want to live and work, now and in the future:

- they meet the diverse needs of existing and future residents, are sensitive to their environment, and contribute to a high quality of life
- they are safe and inclusive, well planned, built and run, and offer equality of opportunity and good services for all.

These are good principles that are hard to disagree with, as have been the aims of the regeneration across the UK and of some of the discussions of 'liveability'.

What has been missing, thus far, is some specificity on how the lofty principles of the Government's work on place apply to older people. The characteristics that make a place desirable to work and live in change as people get older. In terms of everyday living, quality of pavements, availability of public toilets and provision of benches all gain increased significance. Incidence of incontinence increases with age: currently 3–6 million people across the UK suffer from this.³ These people want to live somewhere where they do not have to fear leaving their home for lack of toilets. Equally, many older people are unable to use free bus passes because impaired physical mobility prevents them from getting to the bus stop or to cope with getting on and off, and no transport alternatives exist in most areas of the UK. This could be simply remedied by providing people with tokens to use on dial-a-ride schemes or with private taxis.

While many older people remain active into older age, for others health decline, poverty and bereavement can leave them isolated and cut off within their neighbourhoods. Help the Aged believes that more could be done to ensure that the physical design of places both empowers and enables people to be active in older age.

That is why we are launching a new ten-point manifesto for lifetime neighbourhoods, entitled *Towards Common Ground*. For places to be truly sustainable, they have to work for everyone. The manifesto is not intended to be a comprehensive list of what makes a place good to live in; rather, it proposes ten components that should be the minimum requirement for successful neighbourhoods and communities.

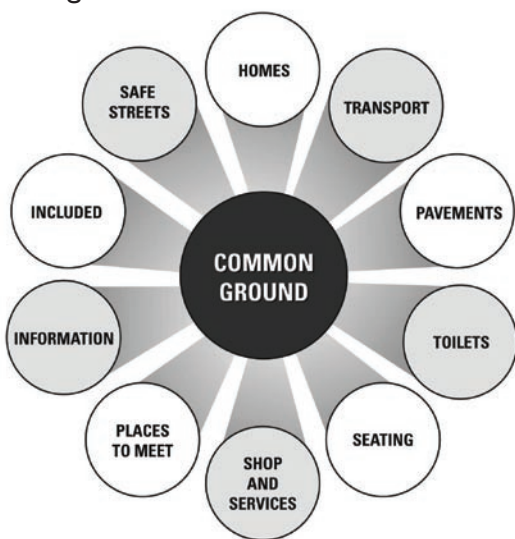
- (1) **Access to basic services** – while everyone needs access to money, healthcare and some shops, neighbourhoods and communities that do not provide these can leave older people isolated.
- (2) **Safe, secure, clean streets** – this matters to all age groups but older people are particularly likely to fear crime. Good lighting, well-kept, clean streets and a police presence should all be prioritised, to help people feel more confident about getting out and about.
- (3) **Realistic transport options for all** – while older people are given free bus passes, many are still unable to get around because physical impairment prevents them from using buses, or because there are simply no routes. Transport options should be available for all.
- (4) **Public seating** – should be made available in many more places: having somewhere to rest means that older people can remain mobile for longer in their communities and that they can enjoy public spaces.

¹A New Commitment to Neighbourhood Renewal, Cabinet Office 2001

²Sustainable Communities: building for the future, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 2003

³NHS Direct

- (5) **Information and advice** – if no one knows about them, services might just as well not exist. Good advice and information on everything ranging from social care to local volunteering opportunities are essential for older people’s well-being.
- (6) **Lifetime homes** – new homes should be built to Lifetime Homes standards and people in existing homes should have access to necessary repairs and adaptations to make their homes last for a lifetime.
- (7) **Older people’s voices heard** – older people must be involved in local decisions that affect them, and their voices heard.
- (8) **Places to meet and opportunities to participate** – whether it be a public park, a shared community centre or a village hall, spaces for people to meet are vitally important to all of us and all ages.
- (9) **Pavements in good repair** – all pavements should be repaired if reported to be dangerous, so that older people are less likely to fall or to have a fear of falling in their local neighbourhood.
- (10) **Public toilets** – clean, safe, accessible public toilets should be available in every local area, to help prevent older people becoming isolated and excluded in their neighbourhoods.



Age-friendly cities

This manifesto reflects and builds upon two recent reports that started to make the case

for looking at older people’s needs within the community. For the International Day of Older People in 2007 Help the Aged worked with the World Health Organization (WHO) to launch a new report bringing together research from 33 cities across the world on the factors that make cities ‘age-friendly’.⁴ The extent to which older people and expert thinkers from these disparate cities were able to find common ground was striking. The main body of the report comprises a series of eight toolkits summarising what cities can do to meet the needs of their ageing populations.

The WHO findings add weight to the argument that older people’s needs must be mainstreamed in the policy debate on communities, rather than treated separately. Older people who had taken part in the research strongly wanted housing which was integrated within the community, and services they could use alongside everyone else. Opportunities for intergenerational interaction were also considered important.

Simply put, what people seemed to want was ‘age equality’ in their communities – urban spaces and facilities designed so that they are suitable for all, not just a few. Parallels can be drawn here to the ‘social model of disability’, which holds that it is not people that are disabled, but environments that are disabling. In view of our ageing population, it is essential that our communities avoid having ageism ‘designed in’.

Designing-in ageism

Designing-in ageism can sometimes be inadvertent, but the impact is deeply felt. For instance, pedestrianisation of an urban space might be a good way to regenerate an area, but it is vital to consider the needs of older people when doing this – for example, by putting in benches so that people have places to rest, and ensuring that transport services have adequate drop-off points in pedestrian areas. Indeed, on all of the ten manifesto points, age discrimination

⁴Global Age-friendly Cities: a guide, World Health Organization 2007 (Help the Aged also produced a report on London as evidence towards the WHO publication which was published as *What Makes a City Age-friendly?* Help the Aged 2007)

legislation would go a long way to stamp out ageism in all its forms. Clearly, ageist attitudes lead to age discrimination and ageist policies and practices, and while ageist cultures can be tackled through a variety of means, equality mainstreaming through a public sector duty would be one of the most effective ways of achieving change. Age discrimination legislation would require public bodies to actively engage with older people and take into account their needs in planning public spaces and facilities such as toilets and benches, and would also require indirect, unintentional age discrimination to be addressed.

Help the Aged is therefore calling for age discrimination legislation in goods, facilities and services, and a public sector duty for age equality.

Finding common ground

Another new report,⁵ from the International Longevity Centre working with the Department for Communities and Local Government, revisits many of these themes. This report was republished as part of the Government's 'Lifetime Homes and Lifetime Neighbourhoods' strategy, which stands alongside new Public Service Agreements (PSAs) that focus on creating empowered, active and cohesive communities. In PSA 17 the government specifically tasks itself with improving older people's satisfaction with home and neighbourhood.

Given this level of ministerial commitment to older people's needs in the places where they live, now is a crucial time for forging a common understanding and establishing common ground on what this objective actually means. Help the Aged hopes that its manifesto will help define some essential components for lifetime neighbourhoods and will act as a catalyst for neighbourhoods, towns and cities that wish to become more age-friendly.⁶

The wide-ranging debate on how we can truly bring generations together and create that much-prized sense of 'belonging' looks set to continue long into the future. Ultimately it seems that these less tangible aspects of community will continue to be subjective – a matter of perception for the individual or groups involved. However, if we can find a 'common ground' on the physical elements which a place needs, this could provide a useful starting point for achieving wider aspirations in relation to place. A place that does not isolate individuals physically will be one with greater potential to bring people together.

⁵PSA Delivery Agreements, HM Government 2007

⁶Towards Lifetime Neighbourhoods: designing sustainable communities for all – a discussion paper, ILC and DCLG 2007



(1) Access to basic services

Everyone needs to have access to money, healthcare and basic food shops within a reasonable distance of their home.

Britain has seen profound changes within its communities over the last few decades. There has been a seemingly irreversible decline in local services encompassing bank branches, pubs, garages, pharmacies, convenience stores and other largely private sector activities. Older people are not the only group to face disadvantage as a result of these trends, but with the multiplicity of problems they face in daily living – such as declining mobility, poorer health, diminishing incomes, shrinking social contacts – they are uniquely affected. The Help the Aged campaign on post office closures showed that some local amenities are a lifeline for older people. Yet post offices have come under considerable threat in recent years, with 2,500 further cuts currently proposed.

These issues have been highlighted substantially by the government report *Sure Start to Later Life*, which suggests that the approach of Sure Start in galvanising communities and re-shaping children's services can work just as well for older people in terms of improving access and bringing together services that address the needs of older people. This report led to the development of eight LinkAge Plus pilots, which bring together central government, local authorities and other organisations in partnerships to provide older people with access to a wide range of more integrated, joined-up services.

It is vital that local amenities are not allowed to disappear. There should, for example, be a range of measures to meet the need for banking facilities, including community banks, which act as transaction agents for several banks, and community credit unions. Private companies such as local shops and supermarkets also have a duty to ensure that their services are accessible to older people.

Physical access to health and social care services is also of vital importance to older people. Everybody should be able to access a GP, pharmacist, community nurse, out-of-hours

GP care and emergency care, if necessary via a hospital A&E department. However, such care is not universally available, and in addition some older people do not understand what services are available locally. Digital television can already deliver a wide range of services for older people, such as the opportunity to book GP appointments or request repeat prescriptions, and government needs to make the most of switchover (and other new technologies) to publicise these facilities.

Help the Aged is calling for:

- **local authorities to provide joined-up services for older people based on the LinkAge model**
- **financial institutions to introduce shared banking facilities where the market cannot sustain separate branches**
- **government and PCTs to provide information to older people on their local health services and their entitlements through local promotion**
- **local authorities to make sure their Joint Strategic Needs Assessments pave the way to the creation of suitable health and social care services which are most needed for older people**
- **action within government to allow better data-sharing and cross-departmental working, to break down organisational silos.**

(2) Safe, secure, clean streets

All age groups want to feel safe in their neighbourhoods, but older people are particularly likely to fear crime. As well as being clean and well-kept, streets need to have good lighting and a police presence.

The proportion of households headed by people aged 65+ who have been victims of violent crime is relatively low. However, recent British Crime Surveys show that while less than 1 per cent of older people were victims of crime, this represents thousands of older, often frail, people. Many older people are also anxious about crime, and many do not believe official statistics which show that crime overall has fallen in recent years; fear of crime often leads to older people becoming isolated and frightened to leave the house, particularly after dark.

These findings were amplified by a 2003 Age Concern report, *The Fear Factor: older people and fear of street crime*, which found that 47 per cent of those over 75 years of age and 37 per cent of those over 50 no longer take part in social or community activities after dark because of fear of crime on the streets.

Surveys also show that local disorder and anti-social behaviour, including noise nuisance, graffiti, rudeness and rowdiness, litter and cycling on the pavements, cause a great deal of distress to senior citizens. Improvements in the layout and design of the built environment, better street lighting, reforms in allocation and management policies in housing estates, and enhancing 'guardianship' can all help to reduce crime and fear of crime for older people.

However, older people should not just be seen as 'fearful' potential victims of crime. Many are ready, willing and able to do their bit to tackle this problem in their locality. Every effort should be made to empower as well as assist older people in relation to crime. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have the potential to be the most effective possible vehicle for tackling crime, and anti-social behaviour, as described in the Home Office's publication *Delivering*

Safer Communities: a guide to effective partnership working. All wards now have neighbourhood police teams, but Help the Aged wants to ensure they are being effective and are including older people in their strategies. Attention should be paid in particular to older people who may be vulnerable to crime and anti-social behaviour, and may have anxieties which could be unfounded.

Help the Aged is calling for:

- **local authorities to fund the neighbourhood and street wardens initiative once central funding ends**
- **a requirement for wardens and neighbourhood policing teams to pay particular attention to the needs of vulnerable older people**
- **local authorities to fund and organise home security projects**
- **local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships to involve local older residents in crime-reduction schemes**
- **local authorities to ensure that rubbish and recycling initiatives are accessible to older people, and that weekly collections are maintained, especially in areas of multiple occupancy.**



(3) Realistic transport options for all

To enable older people with mobility difficulties to maintain their independence there should be an alternative to the bus pass.

Transport plays a vitally important role in maintaining older people's independence and well-being, as well as ensuring that communities are connected and services and amenities are reachable. With 7 out of 10 single people aged 65 and over lacking access to a car,⁷ the Charity is calling on central and local government to ensure public transport concessions meet the needs of all older people. The new national bus pass, introduced in April 2008, entitles older people to travel free on local bus services

anywhere in England; however, as the Help the Aged transport campaign 'All Change' highlights, 45 per cent of older people remain who, due to mobility problems, are unable to use buses, which means the bus pass is effectively useless for a large proportion of the older population.

As highlighted in our report *Local Bus Services and Travel Concessions*, many older people are put off using buses because bus drivers move off or stop too suddenly and often fail to pull into the curb, all of which can cause an older person to fall. Accessibility is a key issue, which government has started to address through local transport plans. However, our report *Travel, Access and Older People* showed that while accessibility issues have been widely noted, there is a lack of real action. Older people can also become very isolated because, for example, they have recently been forced to give up driving through disability; are unable to renew their driver's licence after reaching 70; or if the person who regularly acted as their driver has died.

Help the Aged is calling on:

- **local authorities to provide flexible alternatives to the bus pass such as taxi tokens, community transport or free dial-a-ride schemes**
- **central government, local authorities and bus companies to improve bus services more rapidly, with regard to both physical**

accessibility and the attitudes of the bus drivers

- **local authorities to ensure bus stops are regularly inspected and both lighting and seating are provided at all bus stops, with adequate shelter, in order to encourage older people to use buses more frequently.**

⁷National Travel Survey 2005, Department for Transport



(4) Public seating

Without benches or other seating to rest on, walking around a neighbourhood can become a real challenge for older people.

For older people who are becoming frail and less mobile, public seating can be the difference between living a full life and feeling cut-off and isolated. Going to the supermarket, queuing at the post office, waiting at the bus stop and taking a stroll in the park can become impossible for many if there is nowhere for them to sit down. Public seating is essential for any area that seeks to be 'age-friendly', but unfortunately much public seating is becoming degraded.

As society ages it is vital to ensure that older people are involved in the planning of their communities, so that issues such as public seating are not overlooked. However, there is little sign that local, regional and national policy is coming to terms with the full implications our ageing society. The majority of projects where older people have been included in regeneration planning are service-oriented, and although some have included older people in planning bids and in delivering programmes older people have tended to be mentioned primarily as the beneficiaries of care and support services.⁸ Older people are most in evidence in broader-based programmes with a health or intergenerational focus but they, or their representatives, are less visible in the context of projects that focus on the renewal of our cities and town centres.

Providing adequate public seating will not only benefit older people but will also help people with disabilities, mothers with small children, tired pedestrians and shoppers, which will in turn be to the advantage of local businesses.

Help the Aged is calling on:

- **local authorities to ensure that all bus stops are equipped with seating, and that the seating is suitable for older people who are frail**
- **local government to ensure that older people's needs are taken into account when regenerating large areas such as towns and cities, and also for smaller projects such as parks and pedestrian areas**
- **private shops and supermarkets to consider the needs of the older consumer, and particularly the requirement for seating.**

⁸Age Concern, *Now You See Me, Now You Don't*, 2003



(5) Information and advice

Older people need to know where to go for good advice and information on the services, facilities, support and opportunities available in their local area.

Information and advice services are key to helping older people access services, take up legal entitlements and make important decisions. Yet funding for these services is uncertain and fragmented and government has no overall strategy of provision. Local authority planning and support for information and advice are similarly disjointed, with initiatives often having to rely on short-term funding or the voluntary sector to deliver. The presence of public services at a local level is also changing as more information and advice are delivered predominantly online or over the phone rather than in local offices.

Opportunity Age, the government's strategy for an ageing society, aims to ensure that longer life is healthy and fulfilling and that older people are full participants in society, calling on local councils to develop older people's strategies. Research by the Audit Commission to be published later in 2008 has shown how many local authorities have no older people strategy, which if well delivered could work toward making better information available on them to older people.

The LinkAge Plus pilot projects are providing a model for what can be delivered in the community information context. These kinds of support services, which people know they can use for health information, financial advice, general community services and access to self-help groups, will play an important role in a fast-moving, fast-changing society where lack of information amounts to social exclusion.

Of course, new technology could offer significant opportunities for tackling the problems faced by older people in accessing information. Yet it remains questionable whether many of the technological innovations of recent years are actually delivering better or cheaper services. We have seen many public bodies moving

information and services exclusively online, yet only 29 per cent of older people have ever used the internet.

Everyone is currently entitled to an assessment of their care needs if they appear to be in need of care services. However, the services themselves are not free and the level of individual contributions from people is dependent on their income. Help the Aged believes, and has urged in its 'Right Care, Right Deal' campaign, that as a bare minimum there should be a universal entitlement to information, advice and advocacy, regardless of income or wealth. As most people are spending their own money this is of paramount importance; it is also vital to ensure they have sufficient information and independent advice to consider all the options available and buy the best product both in terms of value for money and relevance to their care needs.

Help the Aged is calling on:

- **government to provide a joined-up strategy on information, advice and advocacy, with a focus on helping people to use their rights and to take control of the services they use**
- **local authorities to provide joined-up services for older people based on the LinkAge Plus model**
- **government to produce a new digital strategy in 2008.**



(6) Lifetime homes

New homes should be built to Lifetime Standards and people occupying existing homes should have access to necessary repairs and adaptations to make their homes fit for purpose throughout life.

Housing stock is a fundamental pillar of a successful community. People need to live safe, independent, active and successful lives in their own homes. In *Housing Choices for Older People* (2007) Help the Aged highlighted that much of the ongoing housing stock was built by young people for young people; it is tempting to propose that new building should concentrate on older people, and thus free up existing stock for younger households; but this, of course, would contribute nothing to the objective of multi-faceted, intergenerational communities. We are left with the difficult problem of retro-fitting and upgrading our current housing to make it fit for our ageing society.

Government has in the past tended to regard the housing needs of older people as a peripheral policy issue. Regional housing strategies have rarely mentioned older people's needs. Our housing and social care agenda says that people ought to be supported to stay in their homes, yet we still make a big issue out of fitting something as simple as a grab rail in somebody's home.

However, in the Older People's Housing Strategy 'Lifetime Homes Lifetime Neighbourhoods' the government makes a definite commitment to Lifetime Homes standards for social and private housing. The Lifetime Homes standards ensure that all new homes are built and designed to facilitate independent living, making it easier to introduce essential adaptations as circumstances change. Lifetime homes are not a specialist form of housing exclusively designed for disabled people, but ones that will work for all of us throughout our lives. Opposed by house-builders, the standards promoted by Lifetime Homes are extremely modest but offer huge long-term benefits.

In its Lifetime Homes campaign, Help the Aged

is calling for all new homes to be built to Lifetime Homes standards. We are facilitating local campaigners to ask local house-builders, developers, providers and estate agents how many of the properties they deal with conform to the Lifetime Homes standards. If we can demonstrate greater consumer awareness of the issue it will encourage key players in the housing market to accept the principle that homes should be built to last a lifetime.

Help the Aged is calling on:

- **the new Homes and Communities Agency to take responsibility for promoting Lifetime Homes and accessible housing strategies**
- **house-builders to take greater account of the demographic changes and to consider the needs of older house-buyers**
- **central, regional and local government to promote the advantages of Lifetime Homes as a way of supporting more older people to live independently at home**
- **local authorities to establish the Lifetime Homes standards as a baseline for all new housing developments**
- **all local authorities to develop 'handyperson' schemes that can provide basic repairs and adaptations.**

(7) Older people's voices heard

Older people, alongside those in other age groups, should be involved in local decision-making and their views taken into account.

It is no longer feasible to make assumptions about older people's opinions and needs, especially when the consumer population is ageing. Public services will need to adapt to older people's lifestyles. The number of people aged 65 and over is expected to rise by nearly 60 per cent in the next 25 years, to over 15 million in 2031.⁹ An ageing population increases the need for public and statutory authorities to work with older people in planning future services to meet their needs. Therefore, in order for communities to adequately serve older people, they themselves must be engaged and their views and experiences mainstreamed in the design and delivery of facilities and services.

Even if the older population were to vote *en masse* for policies to benefit itself, voting is only one aspect of active citizenship. The way Britain is governed is changing, with ever greater devolution of powers away from Westminster and recognition at all levels in government that services need to be designed around the citizen. The government and Whitehall expect local authorities, in their role of community leaders, to play a leading role in encouraging community empowerment. A raft of government announcements and initiatives has aimed to more clearly set out local authorities' obligations in this area, such as the local government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities', and the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act. Later in 2008 a White Paper will be published that focuses on citizen empowerment and aims to put more communities in control. Together these documents set out a vision of further devolution to local authorities, and more robust opportunities for local people to influence local decisions.

However, councils are increasingly criticised for their inability to adequately represent the needs of older people, and their lack of varied and innovative approaches to engagement. In recent research, Help the Aged found that 54 per cent

of older people claim they are rarely or never asked their opinion on issues affecting them. Furthermore, one in three older people stated that their local council does not represent the needs of older people well.¹⁰

Help the Aged is calling on:

- **government to ensure that its forthcoming White Paper on empowerment takes account of the needs of older people, particularly those who are more vulnerable and disadvantaged**
- **local authorities to develop comprehensive engagement strategies which include action to break down the barriers to older people's involvement**
- **local government and local councillors to actively reach out and listen to the views of those older people who are excluded**
- **local authorities to ensure that local campaigning structures, such as older people's forums, are better equipped and resourced, especially to support more vulnerable members.**

⁹Government Actuary Department website, Period life expectancy, based on mid-2004 population estimates, and Eurostat New Cronos database

¹⁰Help the Aged, *Forgotten Voices*, 2008

(8) Places to meet and opportunities to participate

Whether it be a library, a community centre, a public park or all of these, spaces in which people can meet and take part in activities are vitally important to all of us.

Help the Aged believes that older age and retirement should be a time of enjoyment and fulfilment when we are able to participate fully in the community, learn new skills or take up a hobby. However, older people continue to come up against barriers that prevent their participation, and what should be an enjoyable stage of their lives can become a time of loss, loneliness and isolation.

Help the Aged believes that older age should be a time when people can learn about and participate in new activities. Opportunity Age, the Government's strategy for ageing, flagged up the importance of older people being full participants in society, and the strategy aimed to end the perception of older people as dependent; and ensure that longer life is healthy and fulfilling. This vision has yet to be realised. All 'lifetime neighbourhoods' should include places and opportunities for older people to participate in and contribute to the life and soul of the community. Such opportunities are greatly valued by older people and help to prevent isolation, loneliness and health decline.

Help the Aged is calling on:

- **local authorities to support communities to provide activities for older people, including social, education- or health-related activities**
- **local authorities to ensure that disadvantaged older people are included in outreach projects in art and other cultural or social activities**
- **local authorities and private care homes to provide residents with opportunities to take part in social and cultural activities**
- **local authorities to invest in**

befriending schemes to reach the most isolated and housebound older people in our communities

- **government, public sector and voluntary sector to meet the challenges set out in the Commission on the Future of Volunteering's manifesto concerning older people's access to volunteering**
- **government to remove the barriers that prevent older people from participating in learning, including the need for flexible access to respite care, the cost of transport, the timing of courses, or the need to take time off work to attend a course**
- **PCTs and local authorities to increase access to affordable opportunities for physical activity for older people.**



(9) Pavements in good repair

All pavements should be repaired if reported dangerous, so that older people are less likely to fall or to have a fear of falling in their local neighbourhood.

Dangerous pavements are a major cause of falls in the UK. A January 2008 study found that 24 per cent of pavements in the UK are unfit for use, and a Help the Aged survey (2006) found that 2.5 million older people reported having fallen on a dangerous pavement at some time.

For older people a fall can mean broken bones that take months to heal, leaving them not only physically restricted and socially isolated but fearful of falling again and reluctant to leave the house. About 30 per cent of older people living in the community fall each year, rising to approximately 50 per cent for those aged 85 and over. Over half of all those aged 75+ who have fallen say that their fall had a major impact on their daily activities for a month or more. After a fall, an older person has a 50 per cent probability of having seriously impaired mobility and a 10 per cent probability of dying within a year. The UK population is ageing and therefore the cost of falls incurred by the NHS and other agencies is expected to escalate; already falls cost our society almost £1.8 billion a year.

However, falls are not an inevitable part of ageing and Help the Aged has been promoting falls prevention to older people since the Department of Trade and Industry's 'Avoiding slips, trips and broken hips' campaign in 2002. Since then, the Charity has extended its reach by commissioning research and resources for practitioners and older people, including advice leaflets, a book of exercises and a falls prevention exercise video. Falls represent the most frequent and serious type of accident in the over-65s, with one older person dying every five hours as a result of a fall. Falls destroy confidence, increase isolation and reduce independence. There must be greater consideration for older people and the safety of the environment in which they live and move about.

Help the Aged runs National Falls Awareness Day, an annual opportunity for the promotion healthy ageing and the prevention of falls that involves both health professionals and the general public. The Charity has also been campaigning since 2007 for local authorities to repair dangerous pavements to prevent falls and the fear of falling among older people. As part of this, the public are provided with postcards to report dangerous pavements to their council, with which the Charity follows up to check on repairs.

In 2007, in response to successful falls prevention campaigning, Luton Council introduced its own pavement reporting postcards for residents, and Liverpool Council passed a motion calling for key elements in the physical environment to form part of its performance indicators. In June 2009 Help the Aged will issue a report evaluating council responses to the campaign.

Help the Aged is calling on local authorities to:

- **repair pavements reported as dangerous in their areas, by June 2009**
- **ensure future pavements are better, and more regularly, maintained.**



(10) Public toilets

Clean, safe, accessible public toilets should be available at public places in every local area, to help prevent older people becoming isolated and excluded.

The number of public toilets in the UK has declined steeply in recent years. Until 2001 the Audit Commission carried out surveys of Britain's public toilet provision, which reported the rapid reduction. Since then, a campaigning organisation called the British Toilet Association has estimated that public toilet provision has dropped a further 40 per cent, to less than one public toilet for every 10,000 people in the UK, not taking visitors and tourists into account. Yet public toilets are essential to a neighbourhood being 'age-friendly', and without them many older people are isolated within their own homes.

There is no doubt that as we get older we become increasingly likely to develop continence issues, experiencing the need to use the toilet more often and with greater urgency. Many older people suffer from incontinence or have continence issues, caused by muscle weakness. As we age we become increasingly dependent on public toilets.

It is estimated that 3–3.5 million people suffer from urinary incontinence in the UK. However, as we reported in *Nowhere to Go*, 80 per cent of respondents stated that they did not find it easy to find a public toilet and 78 per cent of respondents found that their local public toilets are not open when they need them.

The impact of this cannot be underestimated and the lack of public toilets in a neighbourhood stops many older people from going out as often as they would like. Evidence suggests that there are large numbers of people who are tethered by an invisible 'bladder leash' which restricts their movements to within easy reach of toilets. Our report *Incontinence and Older People* also notes that there is a clear link between incontinence and social isolation and highlights how adequate public toilet provision can make an enormous difference to an older person, allowing them to retain an active independent life. The report

urges that action be taken to reverse the trend for the local authority-provided toilet facility to disappear.

The Communities and Local Government Department's *Strategic Guide: improving public access to better-quality toilets* sets out a new approach based on removing legal barriers to enable local government to raise additional revenue, by highlighting and exemplifying the local and strategic powers available, and by identifying new approaches that local government, the private sector and local communities can adopt to help achieve positive change.

Help the Aged is calling for:

- **a regular national mapping exercise on toilet facilities**
- **local authorities to involve local older people in monitoring standards of local facilities to ensure that their needs are being met**
- **PCTs to offer advice, information and services (beyond the provision of pads) to prevent and help treat continence problems**
- **local authorities to set standards to ensure the provision of accessible and well designed toilets in every public place in their area, with adequate numbers of cubicles, and hand-washing and disposal facilities, and which are cleaned regularly and well maintained**
- **no public toilet to be closed before consultation with local residents and without due consideration to providing an alternative.**

Action plan for local authorities

In one year:

- local authorities to take up the concept of a lifetime neighbourhood and publicise widely the results of targets set on NI 138 on the satisfaction of people over 65 with their home and neighbourhoods.

In two years:

- every local authority to produce a Lifetime Neighbourhood toolkit and standard to be developed, advanced and monitored by a Lifetime Neighbourhoods group comprising Transport, Crime, Adult Social Services, Ward Co-ordination, Housing, Planning, Regeneration Teams, District Public Service Boards, and Children's Services departments.

The Lifetime Neighbourhoods group will also have a role recommending good practice, and age-proofing strategic planning and policy.

By 2012:

- the overall aim of Help the Aged is that all neighbourhoods should be lifetime neighbourhoods.

We want to see older people's quality of life improved and to radically reduce the social exclusion experienced by many older people;

We also want to witness a marked improvement in the level of satisfaction expressed by people over 65 with their homes and neighbourhoods.

Further reading

Help the Aged has commissioned and carried out extensive research on each of these areas. The following research reports cover each of the areas mentioned in this manifesto document.

Access to basic services

On My Doorstep, Help the Aged, 2008 (forthcoming)

Financial Exclusion and Older People, Help the Aged, 2007

Losing the Post Office Card Account, Help the Aged, 2006

Age-friendly Cities (London Report), Help the Aged/King's College London, 2007

Safe, secure, clean streets

Older People and Fear of Crime, Help the Aged, 2002

Growing Older in Socially Deprived Areas, Help the Aged, 2002

Tackling Older People's Fear of Crime, Help the Aged, 2002

Realistic transport options for all

Keeping on the Move, Help the Aged, 2008

Travel, Access and Older People, Help the Aged, 2007

Local Bus Services and Travel Concessions, Help the Aged, 2007

'Sic Transit...' *Hamble to Hospital: the hospital travel needs of older people in Hamble le Rice*, Help the Aged, 2004

Licensed to Drive at 85?, Help the Aged, 2004

In the Right Place, Help the Aged, 2005

Public seating

Social Inclusion: a call to action, Help the Aged, 2007

Age-friendly Cities (London Report), Help the Aged/King's College London, 2007

Growing Older in Socially Deprived Areas, Help the Aged, London, 2002

Too Old: older people's accounts of discrimination, exclusion and rejection, Help the Aged, 2007

Information and advice

Who Do We Trust? Review of the housing advice needs of black and minority ethnic elders, Help the Aged, 2004

Financial Exclusion and Older People, Help the Aged, 2006

Independent Advocacy and Older People, Help the Aged, 2002

Lifetime homes

Housing Choice for Older People, Help the Aged, 2006

Older People, Decent Homes and Fuel Poverty, Help the Aged, 2006

Housing Advice for Older People, Help the Aged, 2003

Older people's voices heard

Forgotten Voices, Help the Aged, 2008

Consulting and Engaging with Older People, Help the Aged, 2007

Social Inclusion and Older People: a call for action, Help the Aged, 2007

Places to meet others and opportunities to participate

Social Inclusion: a call to action, Help the Aged, 2007

Age-friendly Cities (London Report), Help the Aged/King's College London, 2007

Growing Older in Socially Deprived Areas, Help the Aged, 2002

Too Old: older people's accounts of discrimination, exclusion and rejection, Help the Aged, 2007

On My Doorstep, Help the Aged, 2008 (forthcoming)

Pavements in good repair

Falling Short, Help the Aged, 2008

Falls Prevention in Practice: a literature review, Help the Aged, 2007

Fall Stop: making falls prevention programmes more effective, Help the Aged, 2007

Don't Mention the F-word!, Help the Aged, 2005

Encouraging Positive Attitudes to Falls Prevention in Later Life, Help the Aged, 2005

Public toilets

Nowhere to Go: public toilet provision in the UK, Help the Aged, 2007

Incontinence and Older People, Help the Aged, 2007

Fighting for disadvantaged older people in the UK and overseas,
WE WILL:

COMBAT POVERTY wherever older people's lives are blighted by lack of money, and cut the number of preventable deaths from hunger, cold and disease

REDUCE ISOLATION so that older people no longer feel confined to their own home, forgotten or cut off from society

CHALLENGE NEGLECT to ensure that older people do not suffer inadequate health and social care, or the threat of abuse

DEFEAT AGEISM to ensure that older people are not ignored or denied the dignity and equality that are theirs by right

PREVENT FUTURE DEPRIVATION by improving prospects for employment, health and well-being so that dependence in later life is reduced