



ambition
for
ageing

What Makes an Age-Friendly Neighbourhood Briefing



Introduction

Twenty years from now, 1.1 million people in Greater Manchester will be over the age of 50, representing 37% of the population.

This reflects a substantial demographic shift taking place, as the proportion of older people is set to rise significantly in the coming years.

The Ambition for Ageing programme aims to discover what works in reducing social isolation by taking an asset-based approach to creating age-friendly communities.

This briefing is one of two looking at the findings of the programme so far to discover a) what makes an age-friendly neighbourhood and b) how to build an age-friendly neighbourhood.

The complementary briefing **How we Build Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods** takes the findings of what older people have told us and offers practical guidance for practitioners as to how we can work with older people to build age-friendly neighbourhoods.

This briefing uses research and learning gathered from the Ambition for Ageing programme exploring what over 3000 respondents across Greater Manchester told us makes an age-friendly neighbourhood.

Their responses can be grouped under six main headings, all of which are further explored throughout this briefing:



Ambition for Ageing is a £10.2 million Greater Manchester level programme aimed at creating more age-friendly places and empowering people to live fulfilling lives as they age.

We do this by providing small investments to help develop more age-friendly neighbourhoods in Greater Manchester in addition to funding larger scale work across the city-region.

As a research project, we are committed to sharing the learning we gain from the programme to help influence local, regional and national policy.



For a place to be age-friendly, the most important thing older people told us is the need for positive social interactions between residents, whether through weak or strong ties.

For those who felt their neighbourhood was age-friendly, they talked about friendly faces, looking out for one another, and respecting each other.

Rather than referencing a need for strong social connections, respondents often considered neighbourhoods to be age-friendly if there were weak but positive social ties with light touch support.

These brief but positive interactions created a sense of familiarity, trust and belonging, without being too overbearing.

The topics of belonging and social connection within neighbourhoods were commonly framed in the context of whether respondents felt they could relate to the other people in their neighbourhood. In the words of many respondents, whether there are “people like me”.

Tensions between the different and the similar were mentioned most frequently in relation to cultural and generational differences.

Our complementary briefing, [How we Build Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods](#) goes into further detail on how to tackle these preconceptions at a neighbourhood level.

“If somebody is needed, they will help, but you don't live in each other's pockets.”

Meeting and participation opportunities: Something I can be a part of

“I am new to Bolton and this group has given me chance to be involved in the community and meet new people. It has also helped me learn about other community activities and events.”

Having available events and activities was the second most commonly suggested theme for what makes an age-friendly community.

These activities provided things for people to do, reasons to connect and try new things, and opportunities to discover new interests or maintain existing hobbies.

Regular events and activities can enable people to construct their own communities based upon shared interests, supporting the development of social connections that individuals may feel are missing within their neighbourhoods.

For some respondents, the activities went further than simply providing a social connection; they also provided a way to contribute. These activities offered respondents the opportunity to have a meaningful role, give back, and have a voice.

“One voice often cannot be heard but many voices can. It's been lovely talking with friends and making new ones.”

Accessibility, facilities and transport: Things that let me stay independent

“

I wanted to help out at the luncheon club but thought that would never happen because I am [in a wheelchair] and have multiple disabilities.

Now I can take part in helping at the club I'm feeling like I am being included and have become an asset and not just a burden.

”

The third most common theme raised by respondents was the need for good accessibility, transport and facilities.

For many respondents, these features were important because they enable older people to engage with the outside world with dignity, allowing them to be as independent as possible for as long as possible.

For some respondents, the lack of accessible facilities such as toilets and seating in their neighbourhood had left them physically isolated or unable to participate in general day to day activities.

Community resources and spaces: A place where I can...

Complementing the other themes, is a need for usable spaces and places within neighbourhoods.

Respondents commonly referred to a need for green outdoor space and parks, gyms, swimming pools, local centres and services, and general spaces to meet.

These spaces were also important to many respondents as a site for information. With this age-group being more digitally excluded than younger cohorts, physical spaces they could depend on for key information was crucial.



“ It used to be age-friendly but the local community centre and library are about to close. ”

Feelings of Safety: A place we feel safe and secure

A further theme of respondents' comments was the importance of safety and security in creating age-friendly neighbourhoods. This included the feeling of being safe and in control in addition to practical changes to place to keep people safe.

Common examples referenced were a need for good street lighting, the importance of keeping areas clean, clear and tidy, and issues of antisocial behaviour and crime.

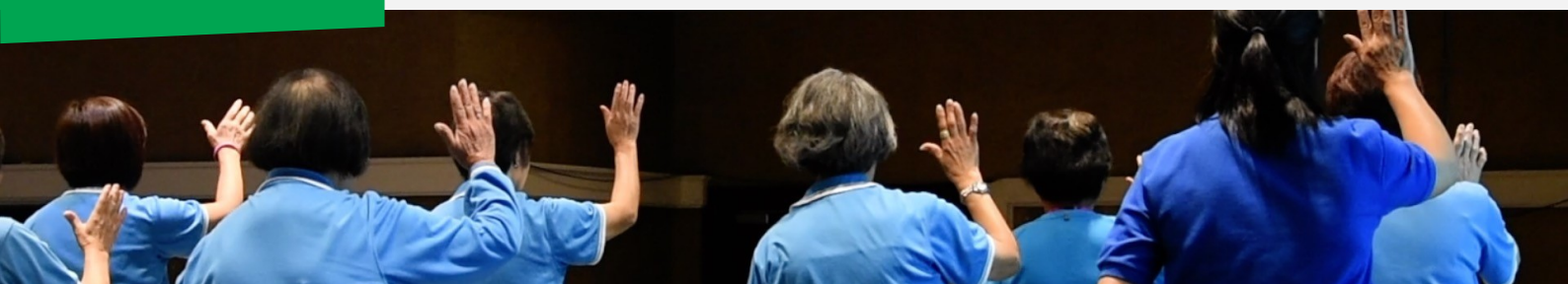
“

An age-friendly community is where you can grow older in a secure society amongst your friends.

”

Supporting older people to have a voice within their neighbourhoods has enabled these older people to feel that they have an element of control over the area in which they live.

Combined with social cohesion work, such as intergenerational and cross-cultural projects, this can help alleviate fears within neighbourhoods.





Information and communication: How do I find out what's going on?

For many respondents, not knowing what was available, or even where to go to find this information, was a key factor that made their neighbourhoods less age-friendly.

This theme arose more often for the respondents who'd been asked why they considered their neighbourhoods to be (or to not) age-friendly, rather than being asked what makes an area age-friendly.

This suggests that, whilst access to information is clearly important, its significance can be easily overlooked when thinking about age-friendly neighbourhoods in the abstract, or for those who already possess that local knowledge and information.

Unsurprisingly, there is no 'magic bullet' or one size fits all solution to communication, as people aged 50 plus are a very diverse population with different wants and needs.

“ Older people are not very visible, I'm not aware of activities for older people – there needs to be more advertisements. ”

This document is one of two briefings produced by **Ambition for Ageing** on the topic of developing age-friendly neighbourhoods. The second document, titled, **How we Build Age-Friendly Neighbourhoods** provides guidance on how to implement these findings, based on the work carried out by the **Ambition for Ageing** programme.

To read the full report and accompanying briefings visit www.ambitionforageing.org.uk/neighbourhoods

Please note that responses are not collected from a random sample of those partaking in the **Ambition for Ageing** programme, and as such are not designed to be representative of either all those taking part in the programme or all older people in Greater Manchester. Whilst the volunteer and participant surveys indicate an over-representation of white females, the anonymity of the feedback surveys mean the demographics of those completing the forms is unknown.

Led by Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation

St Thomas Centre
Ardwick Green North
Manchester M12 6FZ
www.ambitionforageing.org.uk

0161 277 1000
ambition@gmcvo.org.uk
[@afageing](https://twitter.com/afageing)



Registered charity no. 504542. Company limited by guarantee registered in England no. 08692084. Registered office as above.