

## **Question of the Month Findings: August/September 2021**

During August and September this year, we gathered the views of over 100 older people from right across the county on the question:

***Can you tell us what practical steps could be taken to make your local high street easier for you to visit so it feels more welcoming and accessible?***

Most of conversations were held with individuals but in a couple of areas a small group contributed together and were able to reflect on each other's viewpoints in group discussions.

Physically being able to access the high street was a clear theme for many – the need for improved parking and accessible public transport suitable for older and less able people was clearly important to many of those who contributed. Several people mentioned having a free parking day for older people and enough parking and bus stops located near to facilities was a common theme:

***“If there was free parking for over 60's then it would make it easier and more accessible to visit the local high street”.***

***“Free car parking all day on a fixed day to allow relaxed shopping with no pressure would be great”***

***“We need car parks nearer to the shops. Good bus service but I have lost confidence going on the bus on my own since COVID”.***

***“I am more likely to use shopping parks, when necessary, where I haven't got far to walk to the shop and so not far to carry back any shopping”.***

Once older people have managed to get to the high street the condition of the footpaths and the pedestrian areas in town centres were clearly important to accessibility, especially to those who use wheelchairs or mobility scooters:

***“I use a mobility scooter and there a very few places where I can cross (the kerb needs lowering). It's easier to use the crossing by the Brewery, but there aren't many other places on the High St in Cheltenham. Some of the kerbs are quite awkward to use. Pedestrian crossings could be remodelled so it's clearer where they are”.***

***“My husband has a mobility scooter, pavements are bad, and I am afraid of tripping”***

Whilst a wide variety of useful shops were important to many, the overall environment and facilities in many town centres and on local high streets were often mentioned as influencing older peoples decision to visit a specific area. It appears that older people in Gloucestershire are very keen to see clean, tidy and green high streets:

***“clean up the town - pavements, gutters, etc. so that it looks cared for - encourage existing businesses to mend broken guttering which leaks badly when there's heavy rain. Clean and - or - paint existing exteriors that look drab so that it looks as if some care has been taken”.***

***“Hanging flower baskets like Wotton under Edge for example!”***

***“The park staff are doing a great job with all the planters in town and the rest of the town should reflect that cared for look as well”.***

Many of the older people we spoke to mentioned the lack of choice of useful shops on some high streets; mentioning how they missed some retailers such as Woolworths, Timothy Whites and family run bakeries, butchers etc. Older people enjoyed the personal connections with shop keepers which doesn't seem to happen now with too many hairdressers, nail bars and charity shops:

***“More local shops please and low rents to encourage local start-ups, I am sick of all the charity shops”.***

While some mentioned individual shops could be more accessible with staff that are more willing to help and easier opening doorways etc. it was the actual facilities on the high street that came up most often as an issue. Over 60% of people mentioned the need for improved toilets, more seating and even more defibrillators. Many reflected they would spend more time in town, and therefore contribute more to the local economy, if they could access better toilet facilities and take a rest on more suitable seating:

***“I definitely think there should be more toilets in town - I need to go to the loo often and have to limit the amount of time I stay in town”***

***“Definitely need more seating - my knees aren't good so being able to sit down on occasions would mean I would stay out longer & probably go in more shops”.***

***“Nicer toilets with proper disability facilities and for families with an autistic child it is useful to be able to lock your selves into the main part of the building and then have an inner toilet the parent can use knowing the child will not be able to run off”.***

Overall it would appear that older people enjoy being out in their community and are keen to participate in the activity of local town centres, but need some more consideration of Age Friendly facilities. Cleaner, well cared for and easier to access high streets with good seating and toilets could encourage a more Age Friendly and vibrant Gloucestershire for all.