



The Parish of Niton and Whitwell

Age Friendly Communities Report



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Community Action
Isle of Wight
at the Riverside

As the older population on the Isle of Wight increases, Age UK IW's Age Friendly Island project funded by the Big Lottery is seeking to ensure that the Isle of Wight is an age friendly place to live, work and grow old. This report reviews the age friendliness of the Parish of Niton and Whitwell and is based on the World Health Organisation's¹ eight Age Friendly Communities domains of housing, outdoor spaces and building, transport and mobility, civic participation and employment, community support and health services, communication and information, respect and social inclusion and social participation.

The report also assesses Niton and Whitwell's age friendliness against the Ageing Better Programme 'Age Friendly Island' four outcomes of:

1. Older people will feel they have improved connections within their local community and reduced isolation.
2. Older people will feel empowered to co-produce local policies and services which become more responsive to their needs, now and in the future.
3. Older people will feel the Island is age friendly; those under 50 years will see older people as an asset, recognising their contribution to the community.
4. Older people will feel an increased sense of health, wellbeing and quality of life.

The Villages of Niton and Whitwell



Niton and Whitwell
PARISH COUNCIL

The villages of Niton and Whitwell are two distinct settlements situated 1.5 miles apart on the southern tip of the Island. They comprise 1300 hectares of mainly agricultural land. The civil parish of Niton and Whitwell encompasses both villages.

From the 2011 Census the population was 1,781 with 32.3% of the population aged over 65. Forty two per cent of the head of households for Niton and Whitwell are retired.^{2,7}

An Age Friendly champion has been nominated by the Parish Council to champion older people's needs and requirements in the Parish.

Executive Overview Recommendations

- Celebrate volunteering of older people's in the Parish with an awards event.
- Monitor and maintain the No. 6 bus winter service in collaboration with neighbouring Parish Councils and other stakeholders.
- Develop a programme of social trips for older residents.
- Continue to collaborate with The Ramblers Association and others to promote Age Friendly footpaths around the Parish.

Outdoor Spaces & Buildings

This domain is important because:

- Around 50% of people aged 65 and over **face problems getting outdoors**
- People living in care homes or sheltered accommodation are **more than 3 times less likely to get outdoors for more than 5 hours a week** than people living in their own homes
- Those living within 10 minutes' walk of a local open space are **twice as likely to be satisfied with life** compared with those whose open space is further away
- Access to natural environments and, particularly, green spaces, **directly correlates with improved sense of well-being and quality of life**
- Uneven road and pavement surfaces can inhibit access for older people, particularly those who use wheelchairs, and can **contribute to falls, fear of falls and social isolation**⁴

The Parish Council working in partnership with the Isle of Wight Ramblers Associations have replaced old broken stiles with new gates under the 'Donate a Gate' scheme. This has improved access to open spaces and footpaths for older people in the centre of Whitwell. The Parish Council and local residents have worked hard to ensure communal outdoor spaces are clean, tidy, well-presented and welcoming. However, residents have expressed concerns regarding the condition of roads around the Parish, particularly the number of pot holes and condition of pavements.³

Niton residents support the call for a 20mph speed limit within the village to reduce the risk of accidents. This is to give older residents more time to cross roads, as there are no pedestrian crossings and in some areas no pavements.³

Both villages are well lit in the main residential areas, which improves older peoples' sense of safety and willingness to go out after dark to access services and social activities. There are low levels of crime, which encourages older people to go out, stay independent and participate in the community.

Outdoor Spaces - Outdoor Safety

Niton and Whitwell are surrounded by countryside designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty. To improve local connections, a safe, wheelchair and mobility scooter-friendly footpath / cycle path has been established between the two villages away from the main road. Public benches are available around the Parish including midway between the villages on the main road.



Outdoor Spaces - Community Assets and Buildings

The availability (or lack) of public toilets can affect older residents' willingness to leave their homes. In Niton, toilets which were threatened with closure are now maintained by the community. A local resident cleans them twice a day with materials donated by a local business.



Case Study:

Whitwell Village Hall is run by a committee of local volunteers, who have taken on the responsibility of keeping the historic school building in use for the benefit of the village. At least 80% of the committee members are over 50, and contribute their skills and experience, as well as their time and energy, to enhancing village life for everyone. Their main focus is on fundraising to maintain the building so that it is available for hire to the community – preferential hire rates are available to those who live in the village. Regular activities include table tennis, Women's Institute meetings, yoga, tai chi and dog training, as well as Parish Council meetings and one-off events. These activities contribute to attendees' health, wellbeing and quality of life. The hall has its own car park and is accessible to wheelchair users by way of a ramp at the side door – it also has a toilet which is designated for wheelchair access, though this is outside.

Outdoor Spaces - Post Office

In Niton, the Post Office is located in a popular tearoom and shop, which has recently diversified into opening as a pub too! The Post Office provides postal services, access to pensions and banking facilities. There are no high street banks in the Parish and many older people are unable or unwilling to use online banking (AGE UK). The future of the village Post Office is under review by Post Office LTD and there is concern within the village that this essential service could be lost. The Niton Post Office operates an outreach service in Whitwell from the St. Mary and St. Rhadegund Church Hub. If the Niton Post Office closed it is likely that the services at the church will also cease.

Case Study:

The Church of St. Mary and St. Rhadegund in Whitwell has been established as a community hub on Monday and Friday mornings. The Niton Post Office offers a satellite service within the building, where older residents pop in for a cup of tea and a chat. There are also stalls selling items such as eggs and cakes. Hampshire Constabulary holds regular Police surgeries in the Church, enabling local residents to raise matters of concern. In addition, the Church has plans to build a toilet with disabled access, which will be of great benefit to older people in the community as there are no public toilets in Whitwell.

Transportation and Mobility

This domain is important because:

- As people grow older, **their reliance on both walking and public transport increases**
- Older people find their **mobility, and the regular distances they travel from their home, decreases** with age
- **Two thirds of all trips** made by older people **are restricted to the local neighbourhood**
- Older people are at **greater risk of serious and fatal injury** from traffic than any other generational group
- **Fear of falling** is a major barrier preventing older people from getting outdoors
- **Social participation** is in many situations dependent on access to appropriate transport ⁴

Car ownership is high in Niton and Whitwell however, this information is not broken down by age and we know that as people grow older, they are less likely to drive. Older people report they are particularly uncomfortable driving in the dark. Public transport is therefore a key issue. People aged 65 or over are able to use their Islander cards to travel for free on Southern Vectis buses after 9.30am. During the week the bus service through Niton and Whitwell runs approximately every two hours, summer and winter. The last bus to the villages leaves Newport, the main town, before 6pm, which restricts older people's access to social activities during the evenings. Sunday bus services are more limited, with 3.5 return trips each day in the summer and next winter's service uncertain. Frailty is a significant issue in relation to public transport for older people.

Pleasingly, feedback from local public forums confirms that local bus drivers are age friendly: 'Drivers stop at designated stops and beside the kerb to facilitate boarding and wait for passengers to be seated before driving off'⁸. However, for many people, bus stops are some distance from their home, which makes buses less accessible than they might otherwise be. The bus route has been altered to enable people to use the bus shelter, and to walk downhill rather than uphill.

Niton and Whitwell Parish Council recognises the importance of public transport and has invested in transport to try and improve services for residents. It collaborated with Chale Parish Council and Chillerton and Gatcombe Parish Council to jointly fund winter services including bank holidays over the Christmas period when these would otherwise not run. This enabled people dependent on public transport to participate in family and social activities, and reduced the risk of social isolation. The summer service is now under threat and the Parish Council continues to work to maintain this service.

The Parish Council has also previously trialed a community bus scheme (NitWhit) which was well received but unfortunately not financially justifiable due to usage.

One notable example of the Parish Council's efforts in this area is the trip it arranged for residents, laying on a bus to collect people from Niton and Whitwell and take them to a popular garden and shopping centre to enjoy its Christmas World event. This activity funded by the Parish Council, enabled residents to complete some Christmas shopping in a fun, festive atmosphere.

Housing

This domain is important because:

- **Time spent at home indoors increases in older age:** 80% of a day for those 65 and over and 90% for those aged 85 and over
- Older people are more likely than any other age group **to live in homes that are in a poor state of repair**, that lack reasonable bathroom and/or kitchen facilities, that are not sufficiently warm in winter, and that poses a significant risk to health
- **Risk of falls and winter deaths** are closely related to poor housing.⁴

A Housing Needs Survey for the period 2014-2019 was completed by the Parish Council and the Isle of Wight Council Planning Department. The results identified a need to plan for a supply of housing which meets the needs of an ageing population – particularly single person households.⁹

Within the ward of Chale, Niton and Whitwell, less than 10% of housing stock is social housing.¹⁰ There is a very limited supply of smaller properties available to rent, and a snapshot of accommodation for sale on Rightmove in October 2016 showed that almost half the properties available for sale were 3 or 4 bedroom homes with an asking price of over £500,000. Older people requiring smaller properties are likely therefore to need to leave the villages and seek alternative accommodation elsewhere.

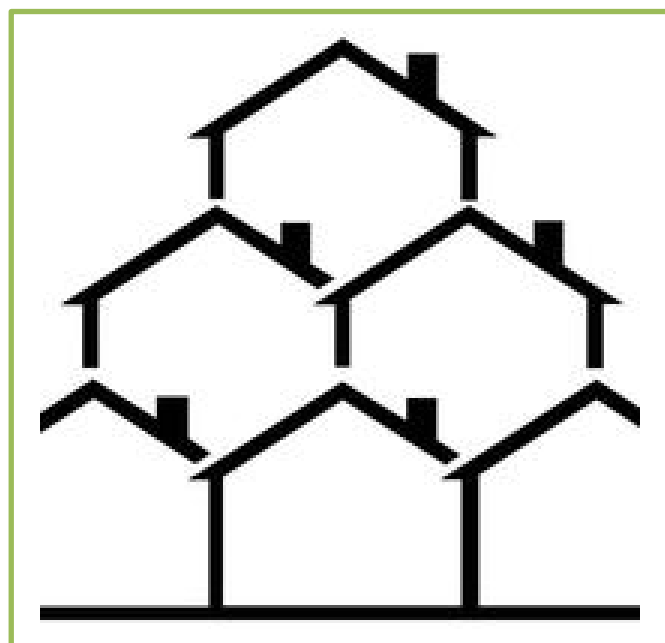
The Housing Needs Survey further identified that there is no sheltered housing or registered care facilities in Niton or Whitwell: therefore any older people requiring these services are forced to leave the villages and move to nearby towns.

Older people who wish to remain in their own homes access home modification assistance, the supply of minor aids and equipment such as grab rails through the Ageing Better Care Navigator.

There is some accommodation suitable for people with disabilities within the Parish but this is not always allocated to local people.

There is an active Age UK IW Good Neighbour Scheme which is promoted by the Parish Council. This scheme has been well received by individual residents. Mrs P said “they couldn’t do enough to help”.

The Footprint Trust provides advice and guidance on energy to residents in Niton and Whitwell which helps older people keep warm in the winter and therefore to stay healthy.



Social Participation, Respect and Social Inclusion

This domain is important because:

- The number and variety of **social interactions tends to decline** with advancing age, even as the need for social support and participation increases
- Social isolation is associated with a **higher risk of death** among older people
- **Negative attitudes** towards older people are still widespread, overlooked and accepted
- Structural inequalities (poverty, deprivation, material disadvantage) put older people at a heightened risk of **social marginalisation and exclusion** – more so than for any other age group.⁴

Case Study

The Edwards Edwards library in Niton is a charity which benefits from the contributions of 35 individual volunteers, of whom almost 95% are over 50 – this includes the counter staff, fundraisers and trustees, amongst other roles. They contribute to their community through volunteering and by influencing the direction and provision of services. Older people are certainly seen as an asset to their community in Niton!

The team have worked hard to empower older people, not least through their digital inclusion project which is run fortnightly and attended by people aged 50-90. Attendees learn to use tablets and laptops whilst socialising; some have become so proficient they now teach others what they have learned.

In addition, the library building is used as a community cinema, playing a different film every 3 weeks and providing drinks and refreshments for attendees, most of whom are over 50. Some have said they never thought they would go to the cinema again! Filmgoers enjoy the opportunity to make and meet friends, improving connections within their community and reducing social isolation. This in turn leads to an increased sense of health, well-being and quality of life.

The Parish Council promotes older people positively and makes financial contributions to various community groups and events which support social participation in the Parish. For example, without support to the village halls, many community groups would not have suitable facilities in which to meet.

There are a range of intergenerational activities taking place in the villages, for example, older volunteers support the local primary school, by helping to hear the children read. The catchment secondary school provides opportunities for children to learn about ageing and spend time with older people.



Civic Participation and Employment

This domain is important because:

- By 2021, **close to 32% of the working-age population will be aged 50-65**
- Older people experience **discriminatory attitudes** in the workplace which makes work difficult for them
- Volunteering in older age supports both **physical and mental health and well-being**
- Over time, the **more volunteering** older people do, the greater the likelihood of improved well-being
- **58% of people aged over 65 volunteer** in some way each year – this compares to 37% of the whole adult population⁴

Older people make a significant contribution to the community in Niton and Whitwell, through civic participation, paid employment or volunteering in a number of different roles.

Approximately 50% of the Governors at Niton Primary School are aged over 50, along with 80% of the Parish Councillors. Decision-making bodies encourage and facilitate the participation of older people; however there is a gender imbalance whereby only one third of Councillors are female. Women, including older women, should therefore be encouraged and supported to consider standing for civic office to improve representation and enhance the balance of views.

Given the small size of the Parish, it has been difficult to obtain accurate figures on employment by age. The Parish Council reports that some older people are employed within the Parish for example at the Post Office, Norris' Store and Whitwell Garage, others run their own small businesses from home whether online or in the community. Whilst others commute to towns across the Island.⁵

Niton and Whitwell have achieved a phenomenal level of volunteering amongst their older population, which has enabled the community to maintain and enhance several services for public benefit which otherwise would have been lost. For example, older people are currently maintaining the public toilets, running the library, supporting teachers in school and maintaining local footpaths. All of these services benefit the community as a whole and demonstrate the value that older people bring through their skills, experience and commitment to the roles which they have taken on. Some services are particularly valuable to the older population – for example, the availability of public toilets encourages older people to spend more time out of their homes, participating in community activities and reducing the risk of social isolation. The library offers not only books but a safe environment to learn new skills, make new friends and build confidence.⁶



JOBS

Communication and Information

This domain is important because:

- Good quality information and communication provides older people with the necessary resources to **make informed decisions, secure rights, and act in their own best interests**
- Communication by **word of mouth is among the most effective** forms of communicating and generating opportunities for certain kinds of activities in older age
- Access to good quality information leads to **specific gains in health and wellbeing**
- Failure to access information and advice when it is needed can increase the risk of long-term, multiple problems, increasing the risk of **social exclusion** ⁴

As a close knit community informal word of mouth for older people who may not attend other social settings is important. This informal community exchange often takes place in local shops and services and is a vital part of village life.

Word of mouth information is also available from trusted individuals such as local volunteers and via the Care Navigator based at the doctor's surgery and any other professionals.



Communication between the Parish Council, community groups, doctors surgery and residents is good and takes a variety of forms, for example:

Articles and press releases in local newspapers and magazines, including the widely read Isle of Wight County Press.

The Parish Clerks' two page informative article which is included in the monthly churches' Parish Magazine and is displayed on the Parish Council website.

Parish Council and other community group meetings. Residents are welcome to attend the Parish Council meetings and ask questions.

Information can also be gained from:

- Noticeboards around the Parish
- Posters displayed around the Parish where local people go, for example in the library, village halls, churches and local stores
- Internet and social media. The Parish Council has a web site where news and information can be shared along with Parish Council meeting minutes.³ Internet connectivity means easy communication with friends and family that can alleviate the loneliness of physical isolation (Age UK 2012)

The consultation regarding the proposed changes in health services in Niton has been displayed in the village including in the Post Office and on local noticeboards. Older people have communicated their views on the proposed changes in local papers and at local meetings including the Parish Council Meeting.

Community Support and Health Services

This domain is important because:

- Over the next ten years there is likely to be a **significant increase in the number of people** aged 65 years and older. (IW Council Joint Strategic Needs Assessment) placing additional demands on health services
- **People are living longer** which brings other challenges around social isolation, the need for care, medical services and community support

Community Support

Support is offered by local church members who visit isolated and sick older people. Care Navigators based in the doctor's surgery support older people to access social activities, medical and care support enabling older people to remain in their homes. A local Good Neighbour Scheme provides support for older people by providing transport to medical appointments and help in the home.

Medical Facilities Including Doctors Surgeries

South Wight Medical Practice has GP surgeries in Niton, Brighstone and Godshill residents of Niton and Whitwell can access any of these surgeries. Older people reliant on the public bus service find it difficult to get to and from the surgeries in Brighstone and Godshill. There is a pharmacy in Niton and the GP surgery is able to dispense medications to patients if they live more than one mile from the chemist. However, under a review of GP surgeries on the Isle of Wight the rural surgeries are under threat of closure, potentially limiting access to medical services for older people particularly for those without transport. ²

Community Emergency Planning

As the hospital is over 10 miles away, a grant of £500 was given by the Parish Council for a second Community Responder. Dispatched by the ambulance service the Community Responder carries a defibrillator and is trained to give lifesaving support until the ambulance arrives. A further defibrillator has been donated by resident Dr. David Anderson and is located on the side of Norris Family stores.

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Written by Lisa Toyne from Community Action Isle of Wight

Co-produced with Vickie Ford, Niton and Whitwell Parish Clerk



