



## **Consultation Response**

### **Easy access to listed buildings in Wales**

#### **Welsh Government**

**July 2019**

#### **Introduction**

Age Cymru is the leading charity working to improve the lives of all older people in Wales. We believe older people should be able to lead healthy and fulfilled lives, have adequate income, access to high quality services and the opportunity to shape their own future. We seek to provide a strong voice for all older people in Wales and to raise awareness of the issues of importance to them.

We are pleased to respond to the Welsh Government's consultation on 'Easy access to listed buildings in Wales'. Being able to take part in community life, with good access to local services and facilities, is a lifeline for many older people. There are already high levels of loneliness and social isolation amongst older people in Wales and an inaccessible built environment that deters people from taking part in community life can contribute to this.

An age friendly community is one that has the capacity to support older people to enjoy the best possible quality of life. It includes facilities, services and amenities that are accessible and that accommodate the needs of older people to help them enjoy health and wellbeing and to fully participate in society.

In considering access to listed buildings and their surroundings, it is vital that the built environment enables, rather than prevents, older people taking an active part in their communities.

#### **Statement of purpose (Page 1)**

We agree that easy access to listed buildings in Wales is especially relevant for those listed buildings that offer services, such as catering, banking or shopping, or which people visit for leisure, work or education purposes.

For example, access to banking is an important issue for older people, since over 130 bank branches have closed in Wales over the past 5 years,<sup>1</sup> and hence being able to access those existing banks is important. Post offices have the potential to provide a useful access point, but many post offices have closed or are under threat of closure.

In a recent survey by Age Cymru (2018/19; publication in preparation) older people raised the issue of the lack of access to banks:

“Loss of only bank causing problems for older people”

“Older people miss their bank in the town”.

### **3. Planning Better Access**

We welcome the proposal that older people’s needs will be taken into account in the Access Audit (3.1.2) and Access Plan (3.1.4), and that focus groups will be involved in testing proposals before they are incorporated into the access plan. We believe it is important that older people are included in the focus groups. Older people have told us that it is becoming increasingly difficult to be involved in town planning, as consultations are often only available online which excludes a high number of older people. It was felt that local planning departments should make services available to ensure that details of new planning applications are accessible in other ways.

Digital exclusion is a major challenge for older people. As more information and services are made available mainly or exclusively online, there are real risks of excluding older people. It is essential that older people feel empowered to speak up about their own choices and views (see Age Cymru’s 2019 edition of the *EnvisAGE*<sup>2</sup> discussion journal, focusing on ‘Keeping voice, choice and control in growing older’).

### **4. Making access a reality**

We welcome the inclusion of features to facilitate safe access, including accessible entrances, ramps, handrails, lifts, non-slip flooring, routes through buildings to be free of trip hazards, good lighting and clearly and easily visible signage, although we are unable to comment on technical specifications. The provision of comprehensive information about access, in accessible formats and available in advance, is important.

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<sup>1</sup> BBC Wales news (2016) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-35708714>

<sup>2</sup> Age Cymru (2019) *EnvisAGE: Keeping voice, choice and control in growing older* <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/our-impact/policy-publications/envisage/>

## 4.6 Street Furniture and Seating

We welcome proposals that ‘Service providers should think carefully about the design, location and justification for street furniture...’ as such items on pavements can inhibit access for older people.

In a recent survey by Age Cymru (2018/19; publication in preparation) some older told us:

“I use a walker and can't get pass the bins left outside for the rubbish which should not be out there”

“Very difficult to get about on mobility scooter, overgrown hedges, recycling bins blocking path [...]”

The provision of benches and internal seating to improve accessibility is very important, as older people have told us that there is a general lack of seating in public places. Accessing community areas and facilities can present a substantial challenge for older people if there is nowhere to rest or to sit down.

In the above survey by Age Cymru (2018/19; publication in preparation) some older people raised the issue of a lack of public seating and places to rest in public spaces:

“Not much seating around area”

“There is no public seating”

“[...] the one bench that was available near the entrance to the park has been fenced off so is inaccessible for the community”

“The seating in shops is very poor”

Barriers in the built environment can exclude older people from becoming fully inclusive members of society.

### Q6: Related issues

A related issue regarding accessibility to public buildings in Wales that we feel should be addressed is the provision of accessible toilets for public use. Public toilets and toilets for public use are essential to making communities age friendly and a lack of them can have a debilitating effect on older people, preventing people from accessing key services and increasing loneliness and isolation. Adequate toilet provision in buildings and communities is vital to enable older people to maintain their dignity and

participate in community life. Poor toilet provision and access disproportionately affects some groups including older people and disabled people.<sup>3</sup>

In the above survey by Age Cymru (2018/19; publication in preparation) older people raised the issue of a lack of public toilets in communities:

“Very limited access to public toilets”

“There are no public toilets”

“No public toilets exist, to the best of my knowledge”.

If older people need to access a listed building in order to access a service or an amenity, having an accessible toilet is an essential part of access. The availability of accessible toilets in public buildings in general for the public to use would add to the overall accessibility of communities.

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<sup>3</sup> Welsh Government (2014) Welsh Government White Paper. Listening to you: Your health matters. Consultation on proposal for a Public Health Bill. Number WG20703.