

# Age-friendly communities

## (England)

July 2019

Everybody should be able to live in an age-friendly environment that enables people of all ages to lead independent and fulfilling lives.



### Introduction

Where we live and our immediate environment set the daily tone for our everyday life. The importance of a community that allows people of all ages to play an active role has been recognised in the Age-friendly communities' movement.

### What are age-friendly communities?

There is no single agreed definition of Age-friendly communities, but in simple terms, it

### Key statistics

**24%**

of people aged 50+ living in England feel lonely some of the time<sup>i</sup>.

**46%**

increase in older people living in England by 2040.<sup>ii</sup>

**Over 1.2 million**

people living with dementia by 2035.<sup>iii iv</sup>

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means designing an inclusive environment for all ages to lead independent lives. The Dublin Declaration for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities<sup>v</sup> states that the 'Age-friendly city and/or community encourages active ageing by optimising opportunities for health, participation and security in order to enhance quality of life as people age'. An age-friendly community is also likely to benefit other groups. For example, measures to make communities accessible to an older person with limited mobility are likely to also help someone pushing a pram.

## Why are age-friendly communities needed?

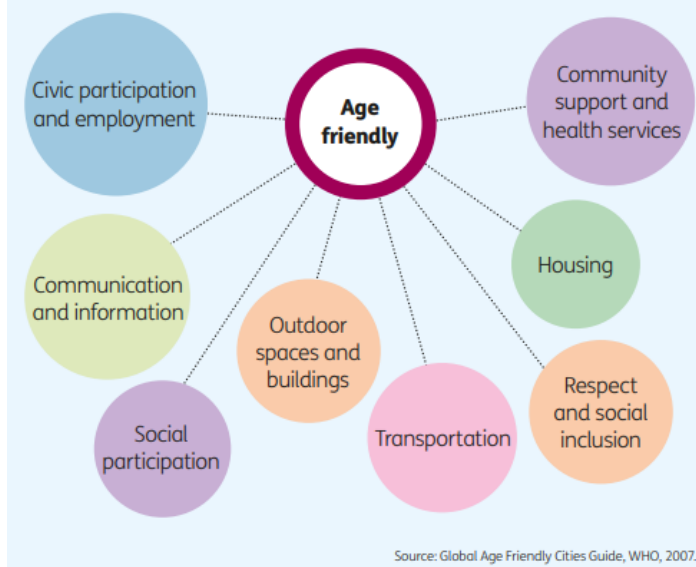
Problems with mobility, vision and memory can make navigating neighbourhoods difficult. Lack of public transport, somewhere to sit down, or access to clean public toilets limit how far people are able to get around. Poor quality pavements, poor street lighting or fear of crime can lead to people not feeling confident enough to go out. A failure to tackle these issues makes poor social and economic sense because older people are deterred from visiting local high streets.

The decline in local services over the past few decades, characterised by closures of banks, post offices, pubs, garages and local stores has also caused problems for many older people, particularly those living with declining mobility, poor health, low incomes, digital exclusion and limited social contacts. The Post Office network has around 11,500 branches currently, but this has the potential to dramatically drop over the coming years as issues around viability and future sustainability rise<sup>vi</sup> - a particular concern as many bank branches have closed (see the *Financial Inclusion* policy position).

## Progress so far

While national government can set the framework for age-friendly communities, local government is the main driver. In 2011 a number of cities from around the world signed the Dublin Declaration including Manchester and Newcastle in England, agreeing to work to meet actions based on the WHO Age-friendly Cities Guide. All the cities that signed the Declaration agreed that older people had to be at the heart of the initiative. The Centre for Ageing Better is working with the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities to share learning and support places to become more age-friendly<sup>vii</sup>.

The World Health Organization (WHO)'s Age-friendly Cities model provides a useful framework for urban and rural place shaping that supports health, wellbeing and active living:



### Communities working towards age-friendly status in England now include:

- Greater Manchester
- Leeds
- Newcastle
- Liverpool
- London

In 2016 House of Lords Select Committee on the Built Environment<sup>viii</sup> recommended a range of measures to ‘create better places, promote design quality and enhance the resilience and sustainability of new developments.’ Following on from this the Women and Equalities Select Committee<sup>ix</sup> said the Government must use its powers to promote accessible environments. It also said that all local authorities should have a planning strategy to achieve inclusive design in the built



environment. The Government accepted this recommendation from the Women and Equalities Select Committee in part, committing to making sure the existing framework to promote accessible environments is effective rather than developing a new strategy.<sup>x</sup>

In relation to housing, the Lifetime Homes Standard was developed in 1991<sup>xi</sup> making it easier to adapt homes throughout the life course, however the Government’s Category 2 regulation based on this standard is still optional for all new homes being built. Lifetime homes can bring younger and older generations together in the same community – rather than expanding specialist schemes designed exclusively for older people. Encouraging greater contact between generations and fostering intergenerational solidarity benefits everyone. Particularly for older people, intergenerational relationships reduce loneliness and isolation resulting in better health and overall wellbeing.

In 2018 Government set out its Inclusive Transport Strategy<sup>xii</sup> which is an important aspect of making places age-friendly. The strategy imposed a moratorium on the development of shared spaces, which remove features such as kerbs, road surface markings, traffic signs and controlled crossings, which disability campaigners had previously expressed concerns over.

To improve the lives and living spaces of those living with dementia so they can participate in society, the Government has also been promoting the idea of Dementia Friendly Communities with 346 communities working towards becoming dementia-friendly.<sup>xiii</sup>

The Healthy New Towns initiative from NHS England and Public Health England worked with ten housing developments<sup>xiv</sup> across England to build healthier places and prevent illness. The NHS Long Term Plan seeks to improve health through influencing the shape of local communities. NHS England has also released a guide for how local communities and can plan and design a healthy built environment.<sup>xv</sup>

Older people are significant contributors to the economy through work and volunteering. Having age diversity in these settings reduces older people’s isolation and dependence on public support as well as enabling them to continue contributing to the economy both socially and financially, sharing knowledge and bringing together a mix of ideas.

As this suggests, there are now many opportunities for local government to commission services that support older people to remain active and independent in their neighbourhoods. However, the continuing reductions to local authority budgets present a challenge to how much local authorities can realistically achieve.

## Public Policy Proposals

- Every local authority should be working towards achieving age-friendly status – communities that offer a good quality of life to all generations, reflecting the priorities of the WHO Age-friendly Communities framework.
- Older people contribute to and shape their communities. Local activists and older people's forums should work with the voluntary sector and community groups to challenge national and local government to listen to older people and invest in age-friendly communities.
- Everyone in a community should be able to have their say. National and local government need to involve older people throughout the process of making communities more age-friendly, including the co-design of key services that affect them. Officials and councillors should introduce systems to ensure older people's voices are heard, particularly those that are socially and digitally excluded, and initiate change that enables older people to lead independent lives as active citizens.
- Local authorities and key stakeholders should work with the voluntary sector to co-design services that promote good intergenerational practice in meeting policy objectives such as: stronger, safer communities; a robust local economy; environmental sustainability; improved adult health and wellbeing and tackling isolation.
- The Government should use its powers to ensure that all local authorities have a planning strategy that includes inclusive design in the built environment.
- The optional 'Category 2' standard for new homes based on the Lifetime Homes Standard should be made compulsory.
- Local planning, regeneration and street management teams should be aware of the implications of demographic change and the views of older residents in order to design and maintain communities for all ages.

- The future of the Post Office and other essential local services must be safeguarded. The Government must recognise the social importance of the Post Office as part of the community and ensure that it meets the principles of trust and accessibility.

## Want to find out more?

Age UK has policy positions on a wide range of issues, covering money matters, health and wellbeing, care and support, housing and communities. There are also some crosscutting themes, such as age equality and human rights, age-friendly government and information and advice

### Further information

You can read our policy positions here; [www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policypositions/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/our-impact/policy-research/policypositions/)

Individuals can contact us for information or advice here;

[www.ageuk.org.uk/informationadvice/](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/informationadvice/) or call us on 0800 169 8787

### Further information

Also see policy positions on: loneliness and isolation, public transport, financial inclusion engagement and volunteering, housing design, adaptations and support.

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<sup>i</sup> Age UK, All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life, 2018. Available online: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/reports-and-briefings/loneliness/loneliness-report.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> ONS, 2016-based National Population Projections, Table A2-4, Principal projection - England population in age groups, 'enppsumpop16.xls', 2017. Available online: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationprojections/datasets/tablea24principalprojectionenglandpopulationinagegroups>

<sup>iii</sup> Kingston, A., et al., Projections of multi-morbidity in the older population in England to 2035: estimates from the Population Ageing and Care Simulation (PACSim) model, Age and Ageing, Volume 47, Issue 3, May 2018, Pages 374–380, 2018. Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ageing/afx201>

<sup>iv</sup> Public Health England, Fingertips: Public Health Profiles, *Estimated dementia diagnosis rate (aged 65 and over) 2018, 2019*. Available online: <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/search/DEMENTIA#page/3/gid/1/pat/6/par/E12000004/ati/102/are/E06000015/iid/92949/age/27/sex/4>

<sup>v</sup> Further details available online: <https://extranet.who.int/agefriendlyworld/the-dublin-declaration-on-age-friendly-cities-and-communities-in-europe-2013/>

<sup>vi</sup> Further details available online: <https://www.nfsp.org.uk/news/view?name=nfsp-response-to-the-beis-select-committee-inquiry-into-the-po-network>

<sup>vii</sup> Further details available online: <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/age-friendly-communities>

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viii House of Lords Select Committee, National Policy for the Built Environment, Building Better Places, 2016.

Available online: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldbuilt/100/100.pdf>

ix Women and Equalities Select Committee, Building for Equality: Disability and the Built Environment, 2017.

Available online: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmwomeq/631/631.pdf>

x Government Response to the Report of the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, Building for Equality: Disability and the Built Environment, 2018. Available online:

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xi Further details available online: <http://www.lifetimehomes.org.uk/pages/lifetime-homes.html>

xii Department of Transport, The Inclusive Transport Strategy: Achieving Equal Access for Disabled People, 2018.

Available online:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/728547/inclusive-transport-strategy.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728547/inclusive-transport-strategy.pdf)

xiii Department of Health and Social Care, Dementia 2020 Challenge: 2018 Review Phase 1, 2019. Available online:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/780777/dementia-2020-challenge-2018-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/780777/dementia-2020-challenge-2018-review.pdf)

xiv Further details available online: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/ourwork/innovation/healthy-new-towns/>

xv Further details available online: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/putting-health-into-place-v4.pdf>