

Newcastle – An Age Friendly City

**A summary of the views of older people
in Newcastle and how they are influencing plans and
developments**

Autumn 2010

THE ELDERS' VIEW OF AN AGE-FRIENDLY CITY

(with apologies to Jenny Joseph)

Having my say

When I am an old woman, I shall wear stout brown shoes so that the views I bring are grounded in my own and others' experiences. I shall wear blue tights to show that I have the imagination for the 'blue skies' thinking needed to create a positive future. I shall carry an orange handkerchief to wave at people who think my views can be ignored.

Enjoying my house and home

When I am an old woman, I shall wear a bright red jacket – the colour of my house and home.

I shall not be afraid to think ahead and adapt my home to my changing needs. I shall **demand** good, independent advice to help me make decisions about staying put or moving on. I shall be independent seeking services which support me to maintain and enjoy my home. I shall learn the new tricks that technology offers me. But I shall still seek opportunities to get out and about and enjoy life. Don't let the warm brick red of my home turn to the grey prison walls as I get older and frailer.

Keeping in touch

When I am an old man I shall wear a brilliant white scarf that sparkles with flashes of colour – the colours of the Millennium Bridge at night. This will remind me to build bridges and social networks; to keep up with new ideas, services and great possibilities. Like the bridge this will keep me strong, connected and resilient in times of change.

Doing my bit

When I am an even older man, I shall wear a deep purple shirt to show the world the richness of my contribution to family life; friends and neighbours; my local community and my city. I shall be husband, father, grandfather, carer, book club organiser; school governor; friend; Silver Singer and Elders Council member.

Getting out and about

When I am an old woman, I shall wear a jade green top – the colour of my concessionary bus pass. I shall carry a gizmo in the pocket which alerts me to dodgy pavements; and alters the timing of the ‘green man’ so that I can get across the road safely and which gives me access to loos in shops and cafes. I shall give a cheery greeting to the bus driver and know he will wait for me to sit down before moving off. I shall lobby Nexus and the bus companies to keep my service, which is a lifeline. When I am older still, I shall need a door-to-door service so that I can ‘hop to the shops’ and my exercise class.

Enjoying a well-built city

When I am an old woman I shall wear a raspberry pink pashmina to wrap around me to remind myself of the glow of a well-built city whose design promotes neighbourliness and safety and where neighbourhoods have essential shops and services close at hand.

Being part of my community

When I am an old man I shall wear a ‘forget me not’ blue shirt, so that I am a visible and valued in the community. I shall seek opportunities to keep in touch with those younger than me so that I can stay connected and share my experiences. If I become frail, I shall **expect** others not to forget my vibrant blue and to go that extra mile to include me.

Being financially secure

When I am an old woman I shall wear gold and silver, the colour of money – money that I earn; money that I spend; money that I save through the contributions that I make and through looking after myself and thinking ahead. But I shall also want to be valued and to have some money spent on me.

Enjoying life

When I am an even older man, I shall wear all the colours of the rainbow. These will reflect the many different ways in which I spend my time and the shining array of services and facilities which are there to enable me to stay independent and involved. Don’t let my brilliant patchwork fade to grey, or become transparent by taking these opportunities away, or making it hard for me to reach them because I am now frail.

Introduction

This 'poem' was developed by members of the Elders Council based on conversation with older people at the Elders Council AGM in June 2010; the on-going work of the Elders Council working groups; conversations with older people at outreach sessions; and research in which Elders Council members have participated.

The time and effort which older people have given to this is to ensure their views and experiences influence the way in which our city is designed and services develop, with the aim of making Newcastle a good city in which to grow old. This work represents a significant contribution by older people to the commitment by Newcastle's Older People's Strategic Board to make Newcastle an age-friendly city.

The following sections of this report give more detail on the key issues raised by older people on the following key topics:

People are informed and empowered to shape the future of Newcastle and its neighbourhoods;

People have appropriate support to find and stay in a suitable home;

People have good quality services, facilities and activities within their neighbourhoods;

People are included in their communities;

People contribute to their communities;

People get out and about easily;

People have fair and equal access to places, buildings, services and opportunities.

1. **The Views of Older People in Newcastle**

1.1 **People are informed and empowered to shape the future of Newcastle and its neighbourhoods**

We have the voice, do you have the ears? We are willing to give our time to share our views and offer our ideas, but we do resent it when we think our views have been ignored. We need to be assured that our contribution will make a difference. We are prepared to play our part by taking the responsibility to work with others to get results.

Getting research into practice: Many of us give our time to participate in research, undergoing tests for medical research or taking part in focus groups. But we'd like to hear the results of the research as they emerge and participate in discussions about how the research findings might change practice. Better still, we'd like to put forward our ideas of topics which would benefit from further research.

Please make it interesting! We know there are good ways of engaging us through informal and informative discussion. We're prepared to complete surveys if they are not too long and intimidating. We don't like sitting through long meetings when the language used is not inclusive. Some of us would welcome greater involvement in local decision-making mechanisms such as ward committees.

Older people are part of the solution – Through the work of the Elders Council we have demonstrated that we can undertake peer research, which provides valuable, qualitative data.

1.2 People have appropriate support to find and stay in a suitable home

If only I had known! We need good quality information and advice to help us to make good housing decisions at the right time. We need to think ahead. Many of us leave it too late, end up in crisis and find ourselves making decisions we later regret. We need time to talk through our options 1-1 with someone we trust; good independent financial advice and, if we do decide to move, some of us need practical help.

We want to live independently! Most of us want to go on living in our own homes for as long as possible. To do this we need:

Homes which adapt to our changing needs through good design to lifetime homes standards;

Access to advice, grants and quality tradesmen to help us to make adaptations where needed;

Information about what changes are possible in our homes. Little things such as lever taps and well placed sockets can make a huge difference;

Practical services which enable us to maintain our homes such as the Trades Register, handyman, gardening and home help/cleaning services;

Advice on how to keep ourselves warm and our energy bills low;

Technology, when it supplements and doesn't replace a person;

Advice, information and support for those of us living in general housing which is comparable to the services offered to people living in sheltered housing.

We need these services because, according to the 2001 census, in Newcastle, 40% of people aged 65+ live alone in their homes, often on low income and without resident family support coupled with high levels of poor health.

We need space too! We spend time at home and need space for hobbies, family and friends to visit and for carers when we need them. No bed-sits please!

General or specialist? Mixed or age-specific? Most of us prefer to live in general housing in mixed-age communities - *'you don't want everyone to be old – if everyone gets frail there is no support'*. But mostly we want choice. Some of us enjoy living in age-specific tower

blocks or sheltered housing or extra care housing where we feel safe;
have companionship from people our own age and on-site support.

1.3 People have good quality services, facilities and activities within their neighbourhoods

A curate's egg: Many of us are positive about the range of services and facilities available, but there are significant variations between areas. We need local shops for essentials; community centres/libraries that provide a hub for information and activities and GP practices/health centres.

Local Hubs: Many of us particularly value local community organisations where we can find out what is going on; get advice; join in activities and volunteer our time, particularly to support our peers and keep them informed and involved. We use these local hubs where they exist and we don't want to lose them.

Leisure, Pleasure and Learning! We want more opportunities to learn and enjoy ourselves through informal and good quality opportunities. We know it's good for us – our own experience and research tells us so. We want variety, from physical activity to arts and crafts to enjoying museums, galleries, theatres and cinemas and learning about how to stay healthy. We don't always need or want age-specific activity groups. We are happy to join in with others providing the sessions meet our interests and needs, and provide us with opportunities to socialise.

As we get frailer, it becomes harder to find activities which are provided in a way which meets our changing needs. So we stop going out and joining in. We need a bit more time from staff to help us to access and participate in activities and befriending and buddying schemes to help us to stay in touch.

We can help with organising activities for our peers and many of us have years of experience of doing so. We can also learn from the University of the Third Age (U3A) and Age Concern Newcastle. But we do need some support from staff to enable us to do this and make sure that what we offer is sustained and refreshed.

That bit of help: Good quality and reasonably priced services which enable us to maintain our independence are worth their weight in gold. We have some good examples in the Trades Register; handyperson and gardening services; 'Hop to the Shops' and mobile hairdressing. We need to make sure that we get the quality, price and sustainability of

these services right. And there is also a need for other services such as housework, laundry and nailcutting services.

Above all, we need **joined up services for joined up people** that enable us to be interdependent and maintain vital social networks.

1.4 People are included in their community

Frail and forgotten?: Those of us who through ill health, poor mobility, sensory impairment or changing circumstances find it harder to get out and about and stay involved quickly become isolated. There are not many places which offer us transport and the appropriate support to join in activities. We would welcome more time and support from staff or volunteers so that we can continue to participate. Some of us are fortunate enough to be part of befriending schemes/lunch groups or specialist support groups which bring companionship and keep us in touch, but these services are limited.

Importance of neighbours: We value good neighbours who are often key to making us feel safe and included in our neighbourhoods. When they are well informed, our friends and neighbours are a vital source of information about services and what's going on.

Intergenerational contact: We would like more opportunities for the generations to come together to share activities, get to know one another, build understanding and provide mutual support.

Bridging cultural barriers: We recognise that our communities are changing and becoming more diverse. We would welcome greater interaction with older people from other communities.

We're not all technophobes! We need to explore further the role technology has in helping us not only with keeping in touch but with driving or with our health – moving from 'bright ideas' to systems we can afford and use easily.

Feeling valued: Some of us feel that as we grow older we are no longer valued for who we are and what we do. We do experience discrimination and patronising behaviour.

1.5 People contribute to their communities

Good neighbours: We value having and being good neighbours, who look out for each other and offer companionship, friendship, support and information.

Care and Support: We support our families by caring for partners and relatives and looking after grandchildren. In 2007, HSBC's *Future of Retirement* study stated that 'more than £50bn worth of caring support is carried out by UK retirees every year.'

Volunteers and activists: We know how important it is to think about what we can do to contribute to the wider community. Things that the community itself has generated are good. Many of us are willing to play our part as evidenced by the

Communities and Local Government Citizenship Survey 2009-10 – Participation in Formal and Informal Volunteering

Age	Informal Volunteering	Formal Volunteering
50-64	29%	26%
65-74	33%	29%
75+	25%	21%

However, we do need support and facilitation, provided through local agencies to make the most of our efforts.

Sharing with younger generations: We welcome having opportunities to spend time with younger generations, sharing our experiences and knowledge. There are many ways in which this can be done from special projects to on-going opportunities such as mentoring young people.

Older people as trainers: The Old Spice drama group regularly runs training sessions with student nurses, social workers and therapists. This is just one example of how older people can offer their expertise and experience in training younger people.

1.6 People get out and about easily

We need good public transport particularly because over 50% of us do not own a car. We value the concessionary bus pass and Metro Gold Card. We constantly emphasise the importance of transport because small changes to the provision of bus and metro services, in particular to key facilities such as hospitals, shops and community services can have a very significant impact on our ability to get out and about. *'It's just one little bus, but losing it is a disaster!'*

Isolation creeps up on those of us who, through poor mobility, find it hard to continue using conventional public transport. We need 'door-to-door' services, often with an escort. The 'Hop to the Shops' service which enables us to get out and do our own shopping is a good example of the type of service needed.

The consequences of tripping on a badly maintained **pavement** can have a huge impact on our lives and result in significant costs for health and care services. We object strongly to people parking on pavements, blocking the way and damaging the pavements. We also are annoyed with cyclists who believe the pavement is for them – it isn't! We like our pavements to be gritted in winter so that we don't have to hibernate!

We recognise the value of **pedestrianizing** areas or creating 'home zones' but remember that those of us with poor mobility, need access to our front doors and to shops and community facilities.

Many of us value using our **scooters** to get out and about, but there are limitations on where we can use them. As scooters become increasingly popular, this is an issue which needs consideration. We value the provision of scooters in shopping centres and supermarkets. For some of us, driving lessons would also be handy!

'A seat! A seat! My pension for seat!' Well designed and maintained public seating can make all the difference to our ability to get out and about. We need seats in lots of places such as bus stops; in shops shopping areas and galleries and museums. Seats can be places for a chat or informal exchange which can be so important.

Research carried out by the Elders Council's Older Person Friendly City Group has identified the need for more **public toilets**. The Group supports the 'Use our Loos' campaign which has the potential to make more toilets open to the public.

Do we feel safe? Some of us do feel safe, but for others fear of crime, and especially the fear of going out after dark, means that we stay at home. We are not always safe there either, as we can be particularly susceptible to bogus callers.

1.7 People have fair and equal access to places, buildings, services and opportunities

Our city is a good place to grow old in but we have to fight to keep it that way! We are generally satisfied with the quality of our built environment, but it does vary from area to area. We need quality local facilities such as shops, libraries, post offices, community centres, leisure centres and health centres. We also need good transport links to these facilities.

The presence of facilities does not always guarantee that they are accessible or are providing the range of services and activities which we seek. The Elders Council Older Person Friendly City work demonstrates an approach to auditing facilities and working with providers to enhance the offer for older people.

Community Hubs: We value local community hubs where we can get access to information and essential local services in one place.

Older person friendly shopping is a topic currently being investigated by the Elders Council Older Person Friendly City Group building on learning from the Kaiser shops in Germany who recognise the value of their older customers by improving the access to their shops.

Recent research by the Elders Council shows that older people welcome good quality **parks and open spaces**. This research recommends a number of improvements which would make parks more attractive to older people including better signage and information boards; more seating; public toilets; adult exercise equipment and activity days.

Fair and equal access also means access to **public toilets!** It would help us, but it would also help others, such as parents with young children.

Knowing about changes – we like to know about any proposed changes to our area and we like to have opportunities to contribute our views and ideas.

2. Working with others to bring about changes and improvements

In September 2010, the views of older people presented in this report were used to stimulate discussion with a range of partners at a workshop on 'Newcastle – an age-friendly city', hosted by the Older People's Strategic Board.

We are starting to see some results from this work and from the painstaking efforts of the Elders Council's Older Person Friendly City group in the following ways:

- A commitment from Newcastle City Council to introduce adult exercise equipment in three parks in the city – Newburn Riverside, Nunsmoor and Exhibition Parks;
- The launch by 1NG of a 'Use our Loos' scheme in the city centre

Other developments take longer, but the Elders Council has the opportunity to participate in shaping longer term work for the benefit of older people. Examples include:

- Participation in the 'Getting Out and About Easily' event (February 2011) which will contribute to shaping Newcastle's Movement and Access Plan;
- Participation in work on developing more housing choices for older people and services which will help people to make timely decisions about where they live.

Through all this work, it has become clear that whilst we know a great deal about the principles of what makes a city a good place to live and grow old in, in practice, older people's experiences vary enormously from area to area. For example, some people have access to good transport links and local facilities, and others don't. The Older People's Board is therefore in discussion with other partners in the city to see whether we might make more progress by taking a geographical approach to this work, testing out our ideas in one or two areas of city, so that we can learn about the changes we need to make to improve the quality of neighbourhoods for older people.

3. Conclusion

As we see changes in our population with more older people living longer, it is important that we continue to work for improvements which will make it easier for older people to live independently and to enjoy a good quality of life. The Elders Council will continue its efforts to ensure that older people make a significant contribution to this, both through their involvement in policy and service design and through more direct opportunities to engage in local activities which make the city a vibrant and supportive place in which to grow old.

If you would like to contribute to this work or find out more about the work of the Elders Council contact:

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